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# Idaho

## Irrigators consider leasing water from Power County

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

AMERICAN FALLS, Idaho — Plans to build a large fertilizer plant here have apparently fallen through, but local farmers may still benefit from the water rights secured by the project's backers.

Unable to secure nearly \$3 billion for construction, officials of Texas-based Magnida approached Power County shortly before the November election offering to sell the two senior groundwater rights they'd purchased for the proposed nitrogen fertilizer plant.

About 80 percent of county voters approved \$8 million in 30-year bonds toward the \$10 million purchase of the groundwater rights, which

have 1949 and 1951 priority dates, for a combined 6,153 acre-feet. An acre-foot is the amount of water needed to flood a football field a foot deep.

Magnida transferred the rights, formerly held by FMC Corp.'s phosphate plant near Pocatello, to its industrial park site in anticipation of building the plant.

Doug Balfour, an attorney representing Power County on the agreement, said March 1 is the anticipated closing date for the water rights purchase, but the county has already begun discussions with several parties interested in leasing the groundwater. He met with the Aberdeen American Falls Ground Water District's leadership on Dec. 15.

The district may lease

some of the water to help mitigate a roughly 12 percent annual reduction in groundwater use required under the terms of a 2015 water call settlement with the Surface Water Coalition.

The water could also help the cities of American Falls and Rockland compensate for groundwater use reductions required to satisfy the coalition's water call.

Some large farms and agricultural processors have also inquired about the water.

Balfour said the rights are appraised at \$13 million.

"It looks like it was a very good, timely purchase for Power County," Balfour said. "I just spoke with a person who sold his water rights in the area for \$4,500 per acre-foot. We paid a little under \$2,000 per acre-foot."

Power County Commissioner Ron Funk said the county's primary interest is having water available for any businesses interested in locating in the community.

"If we have another business come and it needs water, it would be pretty difficult to get a water right anymore," Funk said. "If you've been following water in Idaho, you know it's becoming more and more of a scarce commodity."

Tim Deeg, president of Idaho Ground Water Appropriators Inc., predicts more land in his area will be taken out of production because of the settlement. He believes leasing some of the water could curb lost acreage. Deeg said water leased by the district would likely be applied to help all members slightly reduce their cutbacks.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Farmworkers harvest wine grapes near Caldwell, Idaho, in August. The Idaho Department of Labor projects that the total number of farming jobs in the state will increase by several thousand by 2024.

## Number of Idaho ag jobs projected to increase by several thousand through 2024

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — The number of jobs in Idaho's agricultural industry is expected to increase by several thousand by 2024.

That's according to long-term industry and occupational projections released by the Idaho Department of Labor.

The IDL projects Idaho's overall job market will grow by 20 percent, to 831,024, by 2024 when compared with a base employment of 693,716 in 2014.

That works out to an annual job growth rate of 1.8 percent, which is three times the national projection of 0.6 percent over that same period, according to IDL.

The IDL projects jobs in the "ag, forestry, fishing and hunting" category will increase by 4,294 through 2024, with most of that job growth

occurring in the farming industry.

IDL economist Bob Uhlenkott said Idaho's rapid population growth is the main factor in the job growth projections. Idaho's population growth rate is greater than most other states and is projected to continue to outgrow them, he said.

"Economic growth is typically driven by population ... and we feel pretty bullish on Idaho's population growth," he said. "That's really what's driving it."

The IDL projects total jobs in the "ag, forestry, fishing and hunting" category will reach 27,755 in 2024, an increase of 4,294 over today.

The IDL projects crop production jobs will total 9,823 in 2024, up from 8,538 now, while animal production jobs will reach 11,452 in 2024, up from 9,728 now.

Uhlenkott said several different models, some sophisticated, were used to arrive at the projections and they include individual factors for different industries.

The IDL projections also forecast job growth by occupations within industries and the department projects the number of agricultural inspectors will increase by 48, to 265, and the number of graders and sorters of agricultural products is projected to increase by 197, to 1,823.

The IDL projects agricultural equipment operator jobs will total 1,617 by 2024, up from 1,219 today, and the number of post-secondary agriculture science teachers will total 27, up from 23 today.

It projects the number of buyers and purchasing agents of farm products will total 152 in 2024, up 23 over today.

## Value of Idaho ag exports down 15 percent through third quarter

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — The value of Idaho agricultural exports was down 14.9 percent through the third quarter of 2016 when compared with the same period in 2015.

Idaho ag exports were off 36 percent when compared with the same period in 2014, when Idaho farm product exports set an annual record of \$1.02 billion.

According to the state Department of Agriculture, the value of Idaho farm products exported to other nations totaled \$511 million through the end of September, down from \$600 million in 2015 and \$795 million in 2014.

University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor said a strong U.S. dollar, record world production of several major farm commodities, abundant stocks and Russia's boycott of some European Union farm commodities are factors contributing to a weak global agricultural export market.

"There are still very, very weak export markets ... and that's going to be here for a couple of years, at least," he said.

There was some good news in the ISDA's latest quarterly

Idaho ag export report.

The total value of farm product exports to Canada, the state's No. 1 foreign market for ag sales, increased 6.6 percent to \$134 million through the third quarter, and exports included under the "miscellaneous grain and seed category" increased 5.9 percent to \$93 million.

But the value of Idaho dairy exports through the third quarter totaled \$91 million, down 46 percent from 2015 and off 68 percent compared with the same period in 2014, when dairy export value totaled \$288 million.

The value of Idaho vegetable exports totaled \$81 million through the third quarter, down 7 percent from 2015, exports labeled under the "milling, malt and starch" category totaled \$69 million, down 12 percent, and preserved food exports totaled \$55 million, down 14 percent.

Besides Canada, ag exports to five of Idaho's next six biggest foreign markets were down.

Ag exports were down: 8 percent to Mexico (\$125 million), 13 percent to China (\$39 million), 48 percent to South Korea (\$25 million) 29 percent to Japan (\$21 million) and 2 percent to Spain (\$11 million).

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**SAGE Fact #136**

*The Coyote Springs cogeneration plant, operated by Portland General Electric, burns natural gas to generate both electricity and steam. Food processors and other businesses in the Port of Morrow purchase steam for use in their facilities reducing electricity and natural gas costs.*

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