



Sean Ellis/Capital Press
A dry bean field is harvested in September 2016. Idaho agriculture is growing at a much faster rate than U.S. agriculture as a whole, a University of Idaho agricultural economist told lawmakers.

Idaho agriculture growing faster than U.S. ag overall

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Total cash receipts and net farm income in Idaho declined last year, but not as much as many people predicted, and the state's farming sector has outperformed U.S. agriculture over the past several years.

Those were two of the messages that University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor delivered to lawmakers during an overview of the state's agricultural sector.

During a year in which prices for most of the state's main farm commodities were low, total farm cash receipts in Idaho declined 4 percent in 2016 to \$7.2 billion and net farm income dipped 13 percent to \$1.6 billion, according to projections by UI economists.

"That's no surprise to anybody," Taylor told members of the House and Senate agricultural affairs committees last week. "The surprise is that it's down as little as it was."

And compared to U.S. agriculture overall, Idaho's farming sector is growing much faster when it comes to net farm income and cash receipts recently over the long term, he said.

From 1980 to 2015, Idaho farm cash receipts have increased by 144 percent when adjusted for inflation while U.S. cash receipts have grown by 116 percent.

Idaho net farm income has

increased by 233 percent since 1980 on an inflation-adjusted basis compared to 140 percent nationwide.

"Idaho agriculture is on a far different track than the U.S. as a whole," Taylor said. "It's phenomenal that we're growing that much faster in Idaho than the U.S. as a whole."

The reason, he said, is that Idaho is now a livestock state, a trend that began with the explosion of the state's dairy industry in the late 1990s.

The dairy and cattle industries combined account for more than 60 percent of the state's total farm cash receipts and when feed crops such as corn silage, hay, beet pulp and potato waste are counted, that number rises to more than 75 percent, Taylor said.

On an inflation adjusted basis, Idaho livestock cash receipts have grown 215 percent since 1980 while they have grown 113 percent nationwide, Taylor said.

"Livestock are behind the growth of cash receipts in Idaho and it's principally dairy," he said.

Taylor also stressed how important agriculture is to the state's economy, pointing out that agriculture directly and indirectly accounts for 20 percent of the state's total sales, 14 percent of its jobs and 16 percent of its total gross domestic product.

The bulk of Idaho's farm GDP comes from farmers as opposed to food processing and other agribusiness, Taylor said. Farm GDP has grown more than twice as fast as total state GDP since 1997, while food manufacturing GDP is level, he said.

"It's not (agribusiness), it's farming," he said. "Grandma and grandpa on a tractor."

Sen. Jim Patrick, a Republican farmer from Twin Falls, said it was encouraging to see how Idaho's ag sector is growing compared with the nation overall.



Courtesy of Dwight Zimmerman
Uglies kettle cooked chips, made by Dieffenbach's Potato Chips in Womelsdorf, Pa., use rejected spuds, capitalizing on the ugly produce movement. Backers of the idea seek to put to use food that may not make grade for aesthetic reasons.

Chip brand finds higher purpose for off-grade spuds

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

Though Uglies kettle-cooked potato chips are made with unwanted and rejected spuds, consumers can't seem to get enough of them, according to an official with the unique brand's manufacturer.

Dieffenbach's Potato Chips of Womelsdorf, Pa., launched the intentionally flawed and light-hearted brand about a month and a half ago — providing a home for local growers' misshapen, high-sugar or oversized chipping spuds.

Uglies are the latest product to capitalize on the small but steadily growing ugly produce movement — marketing products at a discount from produce that fails typical industry specifications for aesthetic reasons, while appealing to consumers motivated to help reduce food waste.

Dwight Zimmerman, vice president of business development with Dieffenbach's, believes Uglies could set a chipping industry trend, based on the early response.

"They're flying off the shelf," Zimmerman said.

Uglies, which are discounted at least 15 percent, have also been a hit with area farmers.

"We're able to give them more money than the dehy plant," Zimmerman



Courtesy of Dwight Zimmerman
Uglies kettle cooked chips, made by Dieffenbach's Potato Chips in Womelsdorf, Pa., use rejected spuds, capitalizing on the ugly produce movement.

said.

The company, which produces about 250,000 pounds of finished chips per week, still does the bulk of its business in its Dieffenbach's and One Potato, Two Potato brands, made with flawless tubers. But a survey of Uglies customers found about half prefer the taste of a darker, imperfect chip, Zimmerman said.

He said the company is approaching large retailers, such as Walmart, about Uglies and plans to publicize the brand in early March at the Natural Products Expo West in Anaheim, Calif.

"They're good potatoes, and it's ridiculous that they're being thrown away," Zimmerman said.

The company has put off-grade chipping spuds to good use since the 1960s, when current owner Nevin Dieffenbach's grandfather sold Factory Seconds to locals in plain

bags. But the company never pushed the product. Recently, when ugly produce started to gain attention, Zimmerman suggested, "Why don't we create a brand and tell the story right on the bag?"

California native and ugly produce champion Jordan Figueiredo said the movement is growing as consumer awareness about food waste increases. Figueiredo cited a 2016 collaborative study, called the ReFED report, concluding the U.S. spends \$218 billion growing, processing and transporting food that is never eaten, and 20 billion pounds of food is simply left on the farm to go to waste.

In 2016, he said, seven U.S. supermarket chains started selling ugly produce — some in response to petition drives he organized — compared to a single chain offering ugly produce during the previous year.

U.S. House kicks BLM planning rule closer to curb

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The U.S. House moved quickly to pass a resolution that would repeal BLM's Planning 2.0 rule, which opponents say makes sweeping, harmful changes in how BLM develops resource management plans.

The House passed the resolution on Tuesday, just eight days after it was introduced by Rep. Liz Cheney, R-Wyo.

The Obama administration approved the rule in December. Under the Congressional Review Act, Congress has up to 60 legislative days to pass a joint resolution of disapproval.

"Planning 2.0 dilutes local and state voices and centralizes power here in Washington, D.C., ... This puts special interest groups above local elected officials, which is not the way it was ever intended," said Rob Bishop, R-Utah, chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee, during floor debate on the resolution.

"Counties all across the West expect their BLM officials to be responsive to their needs and manage their land with the best interest of the community in mind. Their livelihoods depend on it," he said.

The rule's disregard of local and stakeholder input, as well as its elimination of requirements for economic analyses, are serious concerns for the Public Lands Council and National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

But the agency also rankled ranchers in its intention to move away from managing for multiple use to prioritize social and environmental change in resource management planning.

"Planning processes are critical to the ability of grazing permittees to operate in the West," said Ethan Lane, executive director of PLC and the NCBA public lands division.

The shift in management focus and the elimination of stakeholder and local input makes the rule "unworkable for the more than 18,000 ranchers operating on BLM-managed lands," he said.

House passage of the resolution to repeal the rule is a "huge victory for America's cattle producers and a sign that some common sense is finally being restored in Washington," he said.

A concurrent resolution was introduced in the Senate on Jan. 30 by Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, chairwoman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee.

PLC and NCBA are hoping for quick approval in the Senate as well, which would send the joint resolution to the White House for President Trump's signature.

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