

2016 meat exports end on strong demand

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Strong exports of U.S. beef and pork in December topped off a year of steady growth, according to the U.S. Meat Export Federation.

Shipments of beef in December were the largest ever for December and the largest monthly beef exports since July 2013.

At 116,847 metric tons, they were up 22,261 metric tons, or 24 percent, over December 2015 and accounted for 15.6 percent of U.S. production. At \$619.1 million the value of those exports increased \$111.1 million, or 22 percent.

Pork shipments in December were up 18 percent and 34,225 metric tons year over year to 222,635 metric tons. The value of those exports increased \$95.9 million, or 20 percent, to \$564.2 million.

A strong December put the finishing touch on healthy performance in 2016.

Demand from Mexico and China and Hong Kong led the way for increased pork exports, while the Asian markets drove the growth in beef exports, USMEF reported.

Pork exports reached a record 2.31 million metric tons in 2016, up 8 percent year over year and 2 percent above the previous record of 2.26 million metric tons in 2012. Value increased 7 percent to \$5.94 billion.

Export value per head slaughtered averaged \$50.20, up 4 percent, from 2015.

"A remarkable second half pushed 2016 pork export volume to Mexico to its fifth consecutive record at 730,316 metric tons — breaking the previous record by 2 percent. Export value to Mexico totaled \$1.36 billion, up 7 percent year-over-year and the second-highest on

record, trailing only the \$1.56 billion mark reached in 2014," USMEF reported.

"At this time of record-large pork production, it would be hard to overstate the importance of Mexican demand to the U.S. industry," said Philip Seng, USMEF president and CEO.

"This is especially true for hams, as we are locked out of Russia — once a large destination for U.S. hams — and China's demand for imported hams has moderated in recent months," he said.

Despite that moderated demand, pork shipments to China and Hong Kong set a new volume record of 544,943 metric tons, up 61 percent, and broke the \$1 billion mark for the first time at \$1.07 billion, up 53 percent.

Beef exports for the year were up 11 percent to 1.19 million metric tons. Value only increased 1 percent to \$6.34

billion. Shipments accounted for 13.7 percent of U.S. production.

Export value per head slaughtered averaged \$262.17, down 6 percent from 2015.

"Driven by strong demand for higher-value chilled cuts, beef exports achieved new value records in South Korea and Taiwan in 2016, and rebounded strongly in Japan," USMEF reported.

"In addition to the strength of the U.S. dollar, U.S. beef overcame other severe challenges in these north Asian markets and achieved remarkable results," Seng said.

"Despite facing higher tariff rates in Japan compared to Australian beef, U.S. beef displaced its competition and won back significant market share. And the investment the U.S. industry made to rebuild consumer confidence in Korea is paying tremendous dividends," he said.



Courtesy of University of Idaho

Matt Roth, left, the new greenhouse manager for the University of Idaho's nuclear potato seed program, and the program's manager, Jenny Durrin, work on mini-tuber production. Durrin was recently hired and Roth was recently made full-time, and UI has plans to expand the program's production.

UI to grow nuclear potato seed program

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — University of Idaho has hired a new director for its nuclear seed potato program and plans to build additional facilities to help her expand production.

The planned investments — which include construction of a new greenhouse and laboratory — would move the university toward its long-term goal of becoming a national repository for potato germplasm.

Jenny Durrin filled the director position vacated when Lorie Ewing retired last July. She conducted research in potato virus Y resistance in common Idaho cultivars while obtaining her master's degree in plant science under UI virologist Alex Karasev, and she spent two years studying pale cyst nematode at the university.

UI also promoted a part-time worker, Matt Roth, to be the program's full-time greenhouse manager.

The self-sufficient nuclear seed program maintains more than 300 potato crosses — including experimental lines, public and private varieties and the Potato Variety Management Institute's entire collection. The program also produces disease-free tissue cultures and pre-nuclear seed for seed growers, representing the first step in potato production.

Mark McGuire, director of the Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station, hopes the greenhouse will be complete by mid-summer to produce a fall crop. He said the program currently can't keep up with orders.

"The seed potato production is limited by the greenhouse space," McGuire said. "We're looking to really double the capacity."

McGuire said UI is in the early stages of planning and estimating costs of a new building to accommodate the nuclear seed program's laboratory, as well as office space for marketing UI cereal and oilseed varieties. UI plans to approach commodity groups and industry partners for financial support and hopes to start construction of the building some time after July 2018.

As a national repository, Durrin said her program would maintain USDA varieties and add 20 new lines per year on average from potato breeding programs throughout the U.S. Most U.S. potato lines are now stored at a Colorado laboratory, where they're frozen cryogenically, a storage method that significantly lengthens propagation time. Durrin said UI's plans for a national potato seed bank have "been put on hold, but we'll be moving forward with it in the future."

Roth, who served a tour of duty with the Air Force in Afghanistan before enrolling at UI, plans to start graduate school in the fall. His research will involve testing the feasibility of using hydroponics in the program. He explained with no soil, mini-tubers can be removed as they reach the ideal size for growers, many of whom have requested smaller, more uniform seed.

A continuous harvest, however, poses challenges as seed stored for longer periods behaves differently than newer seed.

Roth plans to research how exposing newer seed to warmer storage conditions may accelerate its aging, as a tool to homogenize hydroponic seed of varying ages. He's already tested a small-scale hydroponic system he developed and plans to try out a larger system this season.

Beekeeper develops 'smart bee' winter storage system

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — A love of bees and an entrepreneurial spirit have driven one Southern Idaho beekeeper to tackle storage issues that take a huge toll on the pollinators every winter.

Designing "smart bee storage" to revolutionize the industry has been a labor of love for Israel Bravo for the past 15 years — and it appears it's an idea whose time has come, given the success of a prototype facility this winter.

Bravo had looked for a system that could dependably control the climate in a storage facility to keep bees healthy during their winter respite from pollinating crops and producing honey for human consumption.

He finally found it in the expertise at Agri-Stor, a Twin Falls company that has been designing potato cellars for 60 years.

"I figured I would find that brain to control everything inside, but I didn't think I'd find it in my backyard," Bravo said.

Large commercial beekeepers park their bees in potato cellars all along Idaho's I-84 corridor every winter, but Agri-Stor had no expertise in bees.

It did, however, have engineers who could design Bravo's smart bee facility. Its owner, Eric Evans, had already developed the "brains" Bravo needed to be able to monitor storage facilities remotely — and he was able to see Bravo's vision.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Israel Bravo, bee storage consultant with Agri-Stor in Twin Falls, looks at a specimen to check for nosema ceranae spores at his office on Feb. 1.



Bees boxes are loaded onto semi trucks for transport to California almond orchards.

With almond orchards calling, that time has come — and the results look promising. Bees are coming out of storage healthier than they would in conventional storage. Frames are fuller, the bees are livelier and there's more honey reserve to nourish them, he said.

"They're in better condition for traveling to California orchards," Bravo said.

Perhaps the biggest measure of success is the death rate is only 6 to 7 percent, compared to 20 to 40 percent in conventional storage.

There are fewer stressors than in conventional potato-cellar storage, which doesn't do an adequate job of controlling climate, noise and lighting and builds up mold and pesticides in dirt floors, he said.

Bravo and Agri-Stor teamed up a year ago to design a building that would control temperature, humidity and carbon dioxide levels and allow for smart phone monitoring to keep those conditions stable, alert the beekeeper to any problems and give

the bees the quiet and the total darkness they need to stay healthy.

With off-site monitoring, "you don't have to disturb the bees. You want to keep things as quiet and dark as possible until it's time to go to work," he said.

Wine packaging competition getting keener

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — Global competition continues to impact quality, pricing and availability of wine bottles, says one of the largest wine packaging suppliers in North America.

New suppliers are in the game, traditional channels continue to change and some long-standing manufacturers are selling direct, says Andrew Bottene, senior vice president of TricorBraun WinePak in St. Louis, Mo.

Industry shifts can be confusing for customers but TricorBraun WinePak reaffirms its position as a supplier of value, Bottene said in a Feb. 3 news release.

"As our industry's leading wine bottle distributor, we have watched the industry grow and evolve, as we have continued to focus our efforts on delivering unique custom packaging solutions for our many customers," he said.

The company, a subsidiary of TricorBraun, has more than \$150 million in annual sales and a \$2 million, 360,000-square-foot automated repacking plant in Fairfield, Calif., where it repack-



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

Suzanne Fenton, vice president of brand marketing, TricorBraun WinePak of St. Louis, Mo., at a company bottle display during the Washington Winegrowers meeting in Kennewick, Wash., on Feb. 7. The company offers more than 900 sizes and styles of wine bottles.

ages bottles it sources from around the world.

TricorBraun WinePak has been one of the hundreds of vendors at the Washington Winegrowers Association annual meeting in Kennewick for the past 10 years.

At this year meeting, Feb. 7-9, Suzanne Fenton, vice president of brand marketing of TricorBraun WinePak, told Capital Press the company's outlook is still good because it provides useful one-stop shopping for wineries for bot-

tles, caps, capsules and cartons.

The company offers more than 900 styles and sizes of bottles, custom designs bottles and competes with 30 to 40 wine bottle suppliers west of the Rockies, Fenton said.

Bag-in-box packaging for wine has increased in the last several years, beginning with bulk wines and moving into higher-end wines, she said. Generally, medium and smaller-size wineries are sticking with bottles, she said.

TricorBraun WinePak sells some bag-in-box but far more bottles, she said.

Bag-in-box has been "a cost savings and a way to market wines to a larger audience including people who want to have wine on hand to serve at parties that was not the focus of the evening," Fenton said.

"It's an easy way to have a glass or two at a time and not worry about the wine losing tastiness once a cork is removed," she said.

Bag-in-box was developed and used before bottle screw caps took hold to secure tastiness, she said.

Fenton attends about 10 trade shows a year, including United Wine & Grape Symposium in Sacramento and Oregon Wine Symposium in Portland. It's a means of gaining new customers and touching base with existing customers to make sure they are getting the products and service they need.

TricorBraun, the parent company, is one of the world's leading suppliers of bottles, jars and other rigid packaging components with annual sales approaching \$1 billion and more than 41 locations in the United States, Canada, Mexico, Asia and Europe.

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

PATERSON, Wash. — The state Department of Natural Resources is seeking bidders to lease approximately 3,000 acres of agricultural land in Horse Heaven Hills between Paterson and Prosser.

The offering is unique for its size, atypical lease structure and the availability of 3.9 acre-feet of non-interruptible Columbia River water per acre, according to a DNR news release. Bids are due April 6.

The site is within 27 miles of processing facilities and distribution centers in Prosser and within 40 miles of facilities in the Tri-Cities.

The lease offering is unusual in that DNR is looking for the winning bidder to construct a system to deliver the water to the land. To that end, the agency will allow proposals with rental terms designed to reimburse the winning bidder's investment, such as a long-term lease of up to 35 years and reduced rates.

DNR is looking for the applicant's ability to perfect the agency's water rights, financial capabilities, plus environmental considerations such as use for organic crops or preservation of shrub-steppe as wildlife habitat.

"We know this is not a typical agricultural land lease,

but we also know that access to prime irrigated farmland is valuable. We want applicants to be creative and propose what can work for them, and us," says DNR Southeast Region Manager Todd Welker. "We've done a lot of work upfront. We think this approach will preserve a valuable water right, generate revenue for public beneficiaries and pencil out for someone."

To reduce risk, the agency has negotiated agreements and rights of way for the water supply system. It's also providing water pipeline and pump station engineering drawings, electrical drawings and a project cost estimate of \$11 million.

DNR is pitching the land as suitable for row crops, apples, mint, blueberries and wine grapes. It is within the Horse Heaven Hills American Viticultural Area. Upon full development and perfection of the water right, a minimum of 250 acres of orchard, vineyard or berries is expected, DNR says.

Some of the land has grown dryland wheat, and that could be continued until the water system is developed, said Carrie McCausland, DNR spokeswoman. DNR has owned it a long time and leased it in smaller segments and now wants to develop the water right before it expires in a couple of years, she said.