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# Idaho

## Wet weather delays planting in much of Idaho

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Winter kill resulting from flooding is evident in a winter wheat field near American Falls, Idaho. Growers from the Magic Valley through Eastern Idaho anticipate widespread winter kill of fall grain because of flooding and delays because of the lingering wet and cool weather.

DECLO, Idaho — Last year, Mark Darrington was busy planting barley by early March.

This year, near the end of a wet and cold winter, the Declo farmer still has snowbanks in his fields, and the soil remains mucky and cool.

A lot can happen during the course of a growing season, but it's already clear to growers across Southern Idaho that they won't benefit from the early start to spring planting that contributed to last year's bumper grain and potato crops and record sugar beet harvest.

"It's certainly reasonable

to say (grain planting) delays of two to three weeks at this point are not an un-

realistic expectation," Darrington said. Darrington noted sur-

rounding mountains are still snow-covered, and current soil temperatures aren't conducive to growth.

"Last year was the best emergence I'd ever seen, and we had warm temperatures headed into March," Darrington said. "Just looking at the current weather forecast and conditions out there, I would expect that emergence would be a little slower."

In addition to soggy soil, American Falls grower Kamren Koopin believes the season's start will be delayed by replanting of winter kill in fall grain resulting from flooding.

He also expects growers may wait on custom fertilizer applications, as farmers in areas that normally plant at

different times might have to plant simultaneously.

"Right now, the best-case scenario in the Pleasant Valley area would be a week behind," Koopin said, adding delayed planting of spring grain could have a "domino effect" and push back potato and beet planting.

University of Idaho Extension cereal pathologist Juliet Marshall advises growers to use seed treatments on spring grain planted in cold and wet soils. She also recommends that they have seed available for replanting winter kill.

Marshall said challenging conditions may not be over for some farmers, as some fields near Idaho Falls re-

cently flooded again.

"I do think we're going to be late planting because of the wet, cold conditions and extra snow that's been here," Marshall said. "We're looking at a couple of weeks we could be delayed very easily."

The weather has been warmer and somewhat drier in southwest Idaho, enabling growers to start planting spuds.

"Our neighbors are planting (potatoes), and we're going to be planting Monday," Mountain Home grower Jeff Harper said on March 9.

Harper said the manager of his Twin Falls County farm told him wet field conditions will significantly delay planting there.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Connie Stopher, the new executive director of the Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization, talks with SIEDO chairman Dan Olmstead during the board's quarterly meeting in Twin Falls on March 9.

## Economic development director settles in

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — The new executive director of the Southern Idaho Economic Development Organization, Connie Stopher, is busy getting to know her new community and meeting with the people behind its success.

The first order of business is visiting with city and county officials in the region, as well as local economic development groups and businesses to find out their vision for the future, she said.

In that mix is the agricultural sector.

"Certainly it's been a critical component of the economic success the Magic Valley has seen," she said.

She's eager to work with the ag community on ways to continue that success and learn about the innovations being made by agribusinesses, she said.

She has long been impressed with the success the Magic Valley has been able to build through agriculture and food science and is excited to come to the community and continue working in that realm.

Stopher comes to the new position after having served since 2014 as executive direc-

tor of the South Coast Development Council in Coos Bay, Ore.

In that position, she was responsible for launching the council's business retention and expansion program and assisting with numerous business start-ups, expansions and relocations, which have added hundreds of new jobs throughout the region.

Coos Bay is surrounded by agricultural communities and while agriculture there is a little different from the Magic Valley, it was always a strong component of the area's successful economic development strategy, she said.

She and her husband, Pat — an aircraft mechanic by trade but working as a park ranger in Oregon — are both natives of Idaho and wanted to get back, she said.

"It takes leaving to realize how great Idaho is," she said, adding that Oregon is great, too, but here they'll be closer to family.

She wanted to remain working in economic development and is thrilled to have the opportunity to work with SIEDO, she said.

In her new position, Stopher will be responsible for leading the economic development activities in southern Idaho to develop and grow the region by

working closely with SIEDO's executive board, member cities and counties, the College of Southern Idaho, Business Plus (a regional private business nonprofit organization), regional and state agencies and site selectors.

She will focus on talent attraction and business recruitment, expansion and retention.

"The region has seen tremendous success over the last several years, and I'm excited to be working with the talented individuals and communities that have supported that growth," she said.

Stopher brings extensive skills in all areas of economic development, having run a successful similar organization in Oregon, said Dan Olmstead, SIEDO chairman.

"She offers the ability to develop a vision for the region to move the organization and economic successes in southern Idaho forward," he said.

Stopher has also served as an economic development specialist for Bannock Development Corp. and human resource workforce training instructor at Idaho State University.

She received a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor of arts degree in political science from ISU.

## Value of Idaho ag exports falls 8 percent in 2016

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — The value of Idaho agricultural exports totaled \$724 million in 2016, down 7.7 from 2015 and 28 percent from the record year of 2014.

The decline in value is tied to a decrease in commodity prices, and the strong U.S. dollar relative to other major currencies isn't helping, said Laura Johnson, who manages the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's marketing division, which tracks the numbers.

During a global export outlook event sponsored by ISDA March 8, keynote speaker Joseph Glauber said a strong U.S. dollar would continue to be an issue that weighs on exports for the next three or four years.

"A strong dollar ... presents a challenge for U.S. goods sold abroad because that means those goods are more expensive," said Glauber, a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute.

According to ISDA data, Mexico was the top destination for Idaho food product exports in 2016.

A total of \$176 million worth of Idaho ag products were sold in Mexico last year, a 7 percent decline from 2015. About \$171 million worth of Idaho ag products were exported to Canada in 2016, a 10 percent increase.

China ranked third at \$54 million, a 12 percent decline from 2015.

South Korea was fourth at \$37 million (down 34 percent), followed by the Netherlands (\$30 million, up 15 percent), Japan (\$30 million, down 21 percent) and Spain (\$24 million, up 19 percent). During the outlook event, Fabiola McClellan, Idaho's trade office manager in Mexico, said that country remains a promising market for the type of innovative food products Idaho produces.

Consumer confidence and employment are both up and the initial uncertainty over



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Cows feed at a southwestern Idaho dairy in this 2016 photo. The total value of Idaho agricultural exports in 2016 was down almost 8 percent compared to 2015. Idaho dairy product exports were down 30 percent.

what the new U.S. presidential administration might mean for trade between the two nations is subsiding, she said.

"Mexico is in a very healthy situation right now to continue bringing in Idaho products," she said.

A total of \$137 million worth of Idaho dairy products were exported last year, a 30 percent decline from 2015 and a 61 percent decrease compared with 2014, which was a record

year for Idaho dairy exports.

However, Idaho exports under the "sugars" category, which is mostly dairy lactose, were up 18 percent to \$24 million.

Idaho exports under the "miscellaneous grain and seed" category totaled \$127 million in 2016, a 4 percent increase, and "vegetable" exports totaled \$116 million, up 0.4 percent over 2015.

Exports under the "milling, malt and starch" category totaled \$94 million, a 13 percent decrease from 2015, while "preserved food" exports were down 12 percent to \$79 million.

Exports under the "miscellaneous food" category increased 16 percent to \$31 million.

University of Idaho Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor said U.S. farm exports are facing several challenges, including the strong U.S. dollar, Russia's embargo on some food products and record high crop production in many countries.



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