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Idaho

High school restarts its ag ed program after 50-year pause

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

CALDWELL, Idaho — After a five-decade hiatus, Caldwell High School has an agriculture program again. Caldwell, Idaho’s sixth largest city, is located in Canyon County, one of the state’s smallest counties in size but in the top five when it comes to farm cash receipts.

But CHS has not had an ag program since the Caldwell School District was split in the 1960s.

Ag industry leaders welcomed the news and offered to support the program and help it grow.

“I think it’s great that they’ve got the program going again. If they need it, I’ll be glad to help in any way I can,” said Darrell Bolz, a retired legislator and former University of Idaho agricultural extension agent who is involved with several farm-related groups.

Bolz was among a hand-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Kaycee Scherger, right, a Caldwell High School ag teacher, speaks to Darrell Bolz, a retired University of Idaho agricultural extension agent, and Christine Miller, a representative of Dargold, Oct. 3 at the southwestern Idaho school. CHS has restarted its ag program after a 50-year hiatus.

ful of ag industry members who showed up for an Oct. 3 advisory committee meeting at the school hosted by the program’s instructor, Kaycee Scherger.

All of them offered to assist the program.

The idea to restart the pro-

gram started last year when Shalene French took over as district superintendent.

French, whose father is a cattle rancher in East Idaho, said she couldn’t believe the school didn’t have an ag program.

“When I realized Cald-

well didn’t have one, I ... was surprised,” she said. “Why wouldn’t we? This is one of the main farming counties in Idaho.”

Caldwell farmer Sid Freeman helped French get the program started.

“It’s fantastic that Caldwell School District has re-established its ag education program,” said Freeman, the National FFA Alumni Council vice president for the western region of the U.S.

He said an ag program is not only for rural kids who are more likely to understand agriculture.

“It’s also for the city kids who don’t know anything about agriculture and where their food comes from,” Freeman said. “They need to know. It will give them an awareness of what’s driving the economy right there in their own back yard.”

Scherger, who was raised on a cattle ranch in Wyoming, moved to Idaho this summer to oversee the school’s ag

program and started teaching introductory classes in August.

“I’m very excited about this program and I have some students who are very excited about it,” she said.

The program has almost 200 students and about 15 are active in FFA.

Scherger said the school expects to get its FFA charter next spring and she hopes to have a greenhouse next semester. She is the lone teacher right now, but she plans to significantly expand the program.

“We’re going to have a big FFA chapter once we get it going,” she said.

French said there is a lot of industry support for the program.

“I do think it’s going to take off,” she said.

Scherger said she’s looking for guidance and ideas from local farmers and ag-related businesses. She can be reached by email at kscherger@caldwellschools.org.



Courtesy Bill Bitzenburg

Dry beans lie in windrows waiting to be picked up in a field near Twin Falls, Idaho, on Sept. 25.

Bean growers racing weather

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

Much of Idaho’s dry bean crop has been harvested and looks good, according to farmers and bean dealers who grow and distribute the state’s \$70 million bean crop.

But a series of recent rainstorms, coupled with a hard frost, has some bean growers worried about the remaining crop, most of which is in the field drying in windrows waiting to be picked up.

“For us, yields have been really good up to this point,” said Gina Loehns of Trinidad Benham Corp. “But last week’s turn of weather has us concerned about the remaining crop coming in.”

The low temperature in Twin Falls, near where the bean packaging and distribution company is located in the Magic Valley of southcentral Idaho, reached 22 degrees on Oct. 3, 20 degrees colder than normal.

“The quality from here to the finish line is going to be reduced,” Loehns said. “How much depends on the rain and cold.”

Twin Falls farmer Bill Bitzenburg is usually done with his bean harvest at this time but he’s only about halfway through with his 2017 crop, which he’s having a hard time getting in because of rainstorms.

He’s also concerned about how his beans still out in the field will fare.

“When it gets into October, your chance of damage from frost or rain just increases,” he said. “I’m giving our stuff a 50-50 chance.”

Doug Huettig, who farms near Hazelton in the Magic Valley, has harvested about three-fourths of his bean crop but he’s usually completely done with his beans by October.

“I should have been done by now,” he said. “Our beans are ready to harvest. It’s just been the weather that’s holding us up.”

But like other dry bean farmers and dealers in Idaho, Huettig said the crop that has come in looks good and at good yields.

“Our crop looks pretty good (and) I’ve had good yields,” he said. “Everything has been fine so far.”

“This year, everybody got fantastic yields,” Bitzenburg said. “There are some really good beans that have been harvested.”

John Dean, president of Idaho Seed Bean Co. in Twin Falls, said about 20 percent of his crop is still in the field.

“For the crop I’ve gotten in, the yields have been good and quality looks good,” he said.

In the state’s other bean-growing region, in the Treasure Valley of southwestern Idaho, the bean crop is 60-70 percent picked up and most of the rest of it is in windrows and ready to be picked up, said Don Tolmie, production manager for Treasure Valley Seed Co. in Homedale.

He said bean harvest in that region is about a week behind normal due to a wet, cool spring that delayed planting. Bean harvest in the Treasure Valley is typically wrapped up by the middle of October.

Bureau will ask water board to help fund water storage study

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is expected to ask the Idaho Water Resource Board this month to provide matching funds for a proposed study that would seek ways to store more water on the Boise River system.

The study would cost \$5.6 million and would require a 50 percent match from non-federal partners, such as the IWRB and irrigation districts.

IWRB Chairman Roger Chase told Capital Press that finding ways to store more water in the Boise River



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Lucky Peak reservoir is shown in this April photo. The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is working with state and local water officials to find ways to increase water storage capacity on the Boise River system. The raising of Lucky Peak and the system’s two other reservoirs by small amounts is one option.

drainage is a board priority.

“We’re working with the Bureau of Reclamation to

see if there is ... any way we can find some additional storage on the system,” he

said. “We can certainly use some more water if we can capture it.”

Creating more storage capacity is also a top priority for farmers and other irrigators in the region, said Roger Batt, executive director of the Treasure Valley Water Users Association.

He said only about 25 percent of the water that passes through the Boise River is stored in the system’s three major reservoirs, which have a combined storage capacity of just under 1 million acre-feet.

About 1.8 million acre-feet of water was sent downriver this year to prevent flooding in the Boise area.

“That’s water we’ll never see again,” Batt said. “We would have liked to have been able to capture at least some of that.”

The population of the Treasure Valley area in southwestern Idaho is projected to grow from about 650,000 now to more than 1 million people in the next 25 years.

“We’ll always be advocates for additional storage

capacity,” said Clinton Pline, president of the TVWUA’s board of directors and a farmer. “We may not need it today but we’re going to need it tomorrow.”

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials told water board members last year that the benefits of raising Arrowrock Dam by up to 70 feet was the best option for solving water supply and flood risk problems in the Boise River system.

But they also said the benefits of the project didn’t equal the cost and that \$3.5 million study has been discontinued.

The Bureau of Reclamation has proposed conducting a study that would look at the possibility of raising Arrowrock, Anderson and Lucky Peak dams by several feet each, which would add 60,000 acre-feet of combined storage capacity.

“The water board and Reclamation are now looking at whether to move forward with a feasibility study of these smaller raises,” said Cynthia Bridge Clark, the Idaho Department of Water Resources’ water project section manager.

Will Patterson, chairman of the Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District’s board of directors, said the district is working closely with the bureau to try to find ways to store more water.

“We think it’s very critical to find additional storage capacity on the Boise River” system, he said.

He said the district is willing to contribute a portion of the non-federal match that is required for a study to proceed.

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