

Meatpacker efforts reduce worker infection rates

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The North American Meat Institute is crediting meat and poultry processors for reducing the spread of COVID-19 among workers below infection rates in the general U.S. population.

The Meat Institute's analysis of data from the Food and Environmental Reporting Network found reported new COVID infection rates among meat and poultry workers in December were one-fifth the amount in May. Infection rates in the general population were nine times higher during the same period.

Using FERN's data, the Meat Institute calculated the U.S. meat and poultry sector had an average of 19.91 new reported cases per 100,000 workers per day in December, compared to an average of 98.39 new cases per 100,000 workers in May.

Using statistics reported by the New York Times, the Meat Institute calculated the average new case rate for the U.S. population rose from 7.11 cases per 100,000 people per day in May to 63.01 cases per 100,000 people per day in December.

"This new data further demonstrates that the more than \$1.5 billion spent on comprehensive protections implemented this spring reversed the pandemic's trajectory and is protecting the selfless men and women who have kept America's refrigerators full and our farm economy working throughout the crisis," Julie Anna Potts, the Meat Institute's president and CEO, said in a press release.

A Capital Press analysis of the FERN data found there were 2,465 new reported cases of COVID-19



Workers process beef at the Tyson Foods plant in Pasco, Wash.

Tyson Foods

among U.S. meat and poultry workers in December, compared to 15,243 in May.

The number of cases per day averaged 79.5 in December, compared to 491.7 in May. The longest stretch with no new cases reported was 18 days in December, compared to two days in May.

The Meat Institute estimates there are 500,000 meat and poultry plant workers in the U.S.

Since the start of the pandemic, meat and poultry processors have added temperature checks and health screenings before and during shifts and have provided face masks, face shields and personal protection equipment. They've incorporated social distancing where possible and physical barriers between work stations, according to the Meat Institute.

They've enhanced sanitation in break rooms, lunch rooms and other common areas and upgraded air

sanitation and ventilation systems. They've provided on-demand testing and increased access to health services and preventive care. They've also given workers information on safe practices at work, at home and in the community.

"Meat Institute members stand ready to work with the Biden administration to continue using these proven measures and moving forward to vaccinate frontline meat and poultry workers as soon as possible and even assist in vaccine distribution for all Americans," Potts said.

The Meat Institute and United Food and Commercial Workers in late December jointly urged state governors to follow CDC guidance that frontline meat and poultry workers should be among the first to receive COVID-19 vaccinations after health-care workers and people in long-term care facilities.

Washington sheriff still ready to help trap wolves

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press



Sheriff Brad Manke

A northeast Washington sheriff said that he still wants to help the state Department of Fish and Wildlife trap and collar wolves, though talks so far have failed to produce an agreement.

Stevens County Sheriff Brad Manke said Jan. 8 a wildlife deputy shared by Stevens and Ferry counties could supplement state efforts. Fish and Wildlife has three wolf trappers for the entire state.

"I have full confidence in their abilities to trap wolves. What I don't have confidence in is the amount of time they have available for our county," Manke said. "I still feel we don't have enough collars out there."

Manke broached trapping and collaring wolves a year ago. Wolfpacks saturate northeast Washington, and Manke said fitting more wolves with radio collars would help protect people and property.

Manke said talks with Fish and Wildlife "kind of fell apart."

The department agreed to let Deputy Jeff Flood trap wolves, but only under direct state supervision and only during lethal-control operations, Manke said. "Our point is to get more collars on wolves," he said.

Fish and Wildlife spokeswoman Staci Lehman said the department is interested in working with the counties and that the department's Eastern Region director, Steve Pozzanghera, plans to meet with Stevens County commissioners.

The counties must be incorporated into an agreement the state has with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, she said.

Manke said he thinks his office could create its own agreement with federal authorities. He said the inability to reach agreement with the state was also "a territorial issue."

"We're absolutely still

interested in it. I think the department is still probably open to it," he said. Wolves are a "constant topic in our

community. More and more people are seeing wolves on a weekly basis up here."

At a meeting Jan. 7 of the department's Wolf Advisory Group, Fish and Wildlife wold policy leader Donny Martorello opposed recruiting help to trap wolves.

"I don't believe that we need outside trappers. We have the capacity. We have the expertise," he said. "I'll put our folks up against anybody."

Southeast Washington rancher Samee Charriere suggested Fish and Wildlife call upon outside trappers to help collar at least two wolves in packs that have a history of attacking livestock.

Using outside trappers will show ranchers that the department wants to collar wolves, she said.

"That trust in the (state) trappers and making that effort is absolutely broken in the northeast as well as the southeast," Charriere said.

"You need to understand the producers don't feel there's a good faith effort, and this is one thing we're trying to put in a document to hold the department's feet to the fire," she said.

Martorello said the department places top priority on collaring wolves in packs that attack livestock, but can't guarantee results.

"I just want you to know they bust their ass doing this stuff," he said. "The reality is we're talking about one of the most elusive critters on the globe."

To preserve battery life, collars only periodically transmit a wolf's location, maybe once every 12 hours. Over time, however, Fish and Wildlife and ranchers gain a picture of a pack's movements.

Idaho net farm income surges to record high

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Idaho's net farm income reached a record high in 2020.

"And we would have broken the record even without COVID federal government payments," University of Idaho agricultural economist Garth Taylor said.

He presented UI's annual Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture report Jan. 7 to a Legislature committee.

Net farm income grew in Idaho by 38% to \$3.5 billion, reflecting a roughly 10% revenue gain and a 2% drop in expenses.

The increase was 44% in 2019, to \$2.55 billion from \$1.77 billion a year earlier.

Government payments were 18% of net farm income in Idaho last year compared to nearly 40% nationwide, Taylor said. Idaho payments rose to \$646 million from \$165 million a year earlier, when they were about 6% of net income and included trade relief.

Agriculture remains a major force in the Idaho economy, helped by a big dairy herd, a sizable food-processing industry and a large, stable workforce, he said.

Idaho's farm Gross Domestic Product as a percentage state GDP ranks fifth nationally. Taylor said it benefits from the state's dairy herd, which adds 10,000 to 20,000 cows per year.

"That would be like adding 10,000 to 20,000 acres of farmland," he said. "We can grow not by adding acres but by adding cows."

Idaho's farm-GDP growth leads the Northwest "because of dairy growth," Taylor said.

Some commodity prices rebounded after COVID-19 produced extreme volatility from extraordinary demand-side shifts, he said.

The outlook partly depends on the extent to which foodservice rebounds, Taylor said. But higher land prices, and tight supplies of equipment and parts, indicate Idaho farmers are optimistic.

UI reported the state's inflation-adjusted cash receipts since 1997 have grown 80% — mostly driven by dairy — compared to 10% nationwide.

The milk-cow inventory in Idaho was about 635,000 head Jan. 1 after adding more than 16,000 in the past year. The state ranks third in U.S. milk production.

Cash receipts, reflecting production and price, in 2020 increased by about 29% for sugar beets, 17% for wheat, 13% for potatoes, 10% for barley and 2% for milk.

Receipts fell by 9% for

hay and by 6% for cattle and calves.

As for milk "prices fell to \$14 per cwt, forcing some dairy producers to dump milk before dramatic price jumps to over \$20 quelled the need," the report said.

Total cash receipts rose 6% to an estimated \$8.5 billion, 4% below the record set in 2014 when milk prices were higher.

From 2019 to 2020, crop revenues rose 15% and exceeded the 10-year average by 14%.

Livestock revenue was down 1% for the year and 5% above the average.



Cows at Long View Dairy in Jerome, Idaho, partake in a mid-day ration. The dairy industry helped push Idaho's net farm income to a record high last year.

Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press File

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