

Demonstration farm to employ sustainable principles

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

KIMBERLY, Idaho — The Nature Conservancy in Idaho is teaming up with Twin Falls-area farmer Todd Ballard on a new 30-acre regenerative agriculture demonstration farm that will test cropping techniques in the Magic Valley.

The project also aims to expand public awareness of soil health and inspire wider adoption of regenerative agriculture practices across the state.

The demonstration farm builds on TNC's relationships with Idaho's agriculture community as part of its regenerative agriculture initiative. It brings together the ingenuity of local farmers and TNC's conservation experience to transform

agriculture for the benefit of people and nature.

"It's the first demonstration farm that we've done in Idaho," Neil Crescenti, TNC's agriculture program manager, said.

The farm has several goals, he said.

One is to help producers overcome obstacles to building soil health. It's a learning experience, and risks come with it, he said. The project is aimed at lowering the financial and practical barriers.

The project will also use some broader regenerative practices, such as cover cropping and no-till, test them on the farm and tailor them to the unique conditions in different regions of Idaho, he said.

Producers will be able to see the lessons learned



Drew Nash/TownNews.com Content Exchange

Brad Johnson, with The Nature Conservancy, will manage a new demonstration farm.

on the farm. It'll be a living classroom with field tours and workshops where producers can see the effects and start a dialogue, he said.

It will also include resources — including the University of Idaho, the Nat-

ural Resources Conservation Service and Simplot — to look at a suite of practices and make them more accessible to farmers, he said.

"We're really excited, and we think this is a really good program to commu-

nicate and demonstrate soil health practices," he said.

Regenerative agriculture is gaining attention as a strategy to improve water quality and soil health, protect the environment and reduce climate change impacts.

Ballard, who will farm the demonstration farm, began experimenting with soil health practices on his fields about eight years ago after conventional methods and gravity irrigation systems became increasingly expensive to maintain. He started planting cover crops and using minimum- or no-till practices that produced yields relatively even with conventional methods.

The demonstration farm will be managed by Brad Johnson, agriculture strategy manager at TNC.

"Regenerative agricul-

ture practices are not one-size-fits-all," he said.

"That's why we're excited for this demonstration farm to be a living classroom where innovative regenerative agriculture practices can be honed and shared with the farming community, expanding what is possible for Idaho agriculture," he said.

The farm will employ key principles of soil health to avoid soil disturbance, maximize water absorption, enrich biodiversity and enhance the soil's ability to store carbon.

The first crop, malt barley, will be planted soon. A second crop, dry edible beans, will be planted in late May.

TNC is planning tours of the farm in June and in the fall, as well as a workshop next winter.

Washington asks public to report Japanese beetles

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington State Department of Agriculture is urging the public to be on the lookout for Japanese beetles, a highly destructive pest that showed up in alarming numbers last year in farm-rich Yakima County.

Japanese beetles multiply and spread rapidly. Unlike Asian giant hornets, the beetles directly attack crops such as grapes, apples and hops.

"The Japanese beetle, I think, is a more immediate and serious threat," agriculture department spokeswoman Karla Salp said Wednesday.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has been battling Japanese beetles for several years, particularly in a Portland suburb, Cedar Mill. In Washington, the insect hadn't been much of a concern until recently.

In response to a department social media post about invasive species, a woman in Grandview, Wash., sent a photo of Japanese beetles eating her roses last July.

The department had trapped two Japanese beetles in another Grandview rose garden about two miles away. Plus, the department caught one near a retail store in the nearby city of Sunnyside.

The department, however, did not find anything like the number of beetles devouring the woman's roses. She reported picking off as many as 75 Japanese beetles in one day.

"That set off alarm bells," Salp said.

Grandview and Sunnyside are less than 10 miles apart in a county that, according to the 2017 census of agriculture, produces about one-fifth of agricultural sales in Washington state.

The agriculture department found out about the dozens of beetles in Grandview too late to investigate and possibly plan an eradication this spring.

The department does plan to put out more traps this summer. It's also asking for the public's help, as it has asked for aid in documenting Asian giant hornets in north-west Washington.

"The goal right now is to get the public to step up and report sightings," Salp said.

Sightings can be reported online at agr.wa.gov/beetles, by emailing PestProgram@agr.wa.gov, or by calling 1-800-443-6684.

Japanese beetles were found in New Jersey in 1916 and now infest the eastern half of the U.S. Partial infestations reach as far west as Colorado. The beetles likely spread by flying into westbound cargo airplanes, according to the USDA.

The beetles turned up in Oregon in 2016. Ever since, the Oregon agriculture department has been spreading a granular insecticide on lawns and ornamental beds in the spring. The department reported trapping 4,490 Japanese beetles last summer, including 4,218 in the Cedar Mill area.



Savage

The Savage Railport site at Union Pacific's railyard in Pocatello, Idaho.

Export-focused rail terminal planned in SE Idaho

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — An intermodal rail terminal planned in Pocatello is expected to help agricultural products reach export markets faster and more economically, sponsors say.

Savage Railport-Southern Idaho workers will place loaded containers onto railcars that Union Pacific Railroad will then transport to ports in Tacoma and Seattle.

Salt Lake City-based Savage, a global supply-chain company, announced it had entered an agreement with Union Pacific to build and operate the terminal at UP's railyard in Pocatello. The terminal is expected to be in operation by mid-year.

"We're excited to serve Idaho producers and shippers with intermodal export service," Savage President and CEO Kirk Aubry said in a release. "The ability to ship containers out of Idaho directly to the Pacific Northwest by rail will open up supply chains and allow more Idaho businesses to access global markets."

Savage said using a direct rail connection will be more efficient, cost-effective and environmentally friendly than trucking products across several states.

UP's Kari Kirchhoefer, vice president of premium marketing and sales, said the facility will be "uniquely focused on Idaho shippers' needs and the global economic impact Pacific Northwest exports

have around the world."

The partnership "makes the most of the container's round trip and saves truck drayage costs for the Idaho shippers by providing a direct rail option," Kirchhoefer said.

The potato-focused Idaho Grower Shippers Association in Idaho Falls has been a strong advocate of the project. President and General Counsel Shawn Boyle told Capital Press that IGSA and Savage have met with potato growers, shippers and processors to explore the project's benefits.

"We are convinced that this terminal will provide immediate benefit to Idaho's potato industry and to other commodities such as hay, grain and oilseed

as they seek to compete in global markets," he said. "The possibilities for future growth and transportation efficiencies, both internationally and domestically, are similarly very exciting."

Now, a commodity like compacted hay may travel in parts of multiple railcars, or by truck — adding cost and time.

"Moving commodities like hay can be done more efficiently in containers via intermodal transport," Savage spokesman Jeff Hymas said.

Plans call for employing four people initially, and moving about 150 containers per week to start and 250 by year's end, he said. Details about the facility's size, configuration and cost weren't released.

Idaho county commission tables proposed ag-to-residential rezone

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

The Canyon County commissioners on March 22 tabled an application to develop large home lots on agricultural ground northwest of Caldwell, Idaho.

The Planning and Zoning Commission in January endorsed Eagle-based Ridgeline Vistas LLC's proposal to rezone about 190 acres from agricultural to rural residential, with conditions and a requirement that Ridgeline follow a development agreement.

Plans call for 20 lots averaging 8.5 acres, each with structures on no more than 2 acres.

Dan Lister, a county planner, said commissioners want more information about irrigation on the development site as well as details

on water rights, which the state Department of Water Resources administers.

Commissioners also want to find out how the development would impact Middleton School District — including transportation to and from the remote site — and fire protection. Middleton Rural Fire District is requesting a secondary access road since the site is near an existing large-lot development.

Lister said the county commissioners are considering adding a condition barring secondary dwellings on lots — a right under the county code in certain zones — and development of a golf course.

The rationale "is to maintain it as ag land" where practical "and develop lots in a way that preserves ag uses," he said. Some neighbors expressed concern

about further development of agricultural ground and traffic impacts.

Lister said county commissioners are considering requiring the developer

to use pressurized irrigation and create a drainage plan.

Earlier, Ridgeline representative Todd Lakey wrote to county planners that the proposal would not take

prime farm ground out of

production and is not near other active crop-production operations. It would extend the existing large-lot residential development, where

a planned additional phase was scrapped in the late-2000s recession.

The site lacks city services and is not in any city's impact area.

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