

Parrella: ‘We contribute and they contribute, and it’s a true partnership’

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ag programs. At the time, he said he expected to stay in Idaho about five years.

Projects underway

That fifth anniversary passed with little mention as projects such as development of the dairy-focused Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment — CAFE — and the planned renovation and expansion of the Parma Research and Extension Center reached key milestones.

UI lists more than a dozen projects and academic initiatives completed or substantially advanced under his leadership.

In addition to CAFE and the Parma facility, which will include construction of the Idaho Center for Plant and Soil Health, Parrella has played a key role in:

- The planned \$8 million Agri Beef Meat Science Center, the home of UI’s Vandal Brand Meats.
- The \$5.5 million seed-potato germplasm building.
- The Organic Agricultural Center opened in Sandpoint.
- The \$3 million Nancy M. Cummings Research and Extension Center classroom and outreach center near Salmon.
- Acquisition of Rinker Rock Creek Ranch southwest of Hailey.

Parrella attributes the progress on facilities and college initiatives to work by industry leaders, legislators, colleagues and other supporters.

“One person cannot move it forward,” he said. “You need a team of people. And you build confidence as you go along.”

High marks

Several Idaho agriculture leaders give Parrella high marks during his tenure and said they’re happy he plans to stay.

“He has brought excitement to projects like CAFE, Vandal Brand Meats and others that have a positive impact on the dairy industry,” said Idaho Dairywomen’s Association CEO Rick Naerebout. “We are pleased to see him extend his time with the University of Idaho and CALS.”

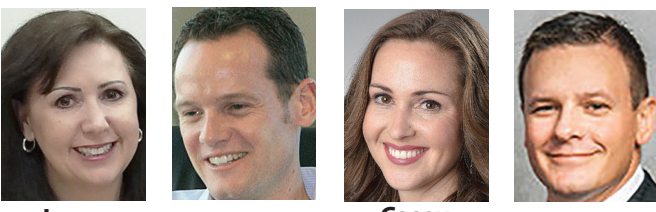
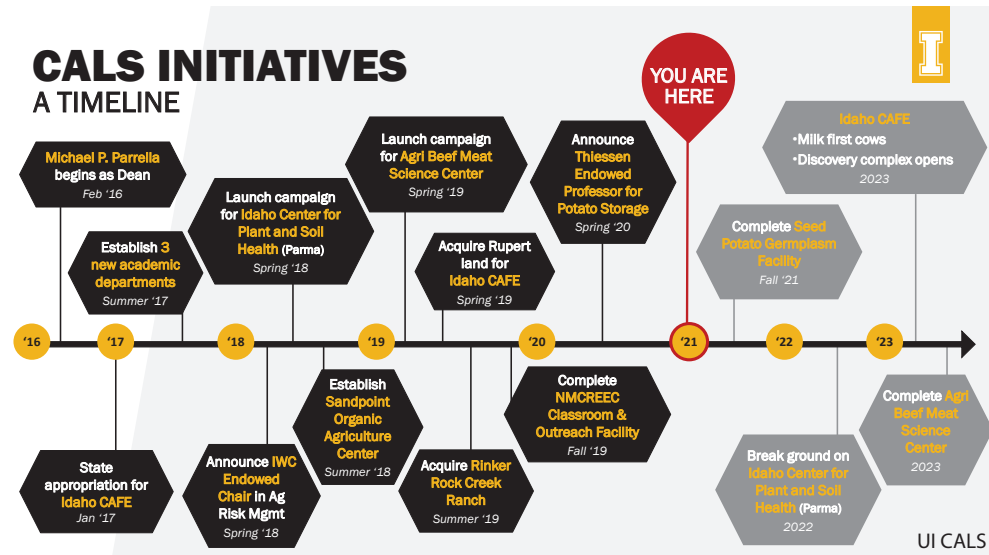
He said Parrella “brings a lot of excitement, and just spending time with him, you realize that. He talks 100 miles a minute with that excitement.”

Idaho Barley Commission Administrator Laura Wilder said Parrella’s leadership “has been highly valued and appreciated.”

She said the dean is a



CALS Dean Michael Parrella has prioritized meeting with constituents in their communities.



Laura Wilder **Rick Naerebout** **Casey Chumrau** **Zak Miller**

“driven and focused individual who has not only worked tirelessly to elevate CALS through badly needed facilities improvements and expansion, hiring top-notch faculty and researchers, and recruiting and retaining Idaho students, but also understands the importance of working closely with agriculture industry stakeholders to meet the needs of the citizens of Idaho and the agriculture industry here.”

For example, last year Parrella was instrumental in filling the barley commission’s endowed research agronomist post despite hiring freezes and budget cuts, Wilder said.

He “has made great things happen for CALS in spite of the tough budget situation at the university and COVID-19 setbacks,” she said. “He understands what it takes to get things

done, and has been willing to do whatever was necessary to ensure initiatives move forward and students and faculty are supported to the best degree possible.”

Idaho Wheat Commission Executive Director Casey Chumrau said Parrella “is very well respected, and the wheat industry is appreciative of all of his efforts on behalf of Idaho agriculture. We see him as a real friend and partner.”

The Idaho Farm Bureau Federation interviewed the dean about extending his initial five-year work commitment, and other developments.

“Farm Bureau was happy to hear that Michael Parrella will continue on as dean of University of Idaho’s College of Agricultural and Life Sciences,” CEO Zak Miller told the Capital Press. “It is amazing how much he has done

in just five years to help set CALS, and Idaho’s agricultural industry, up for success into the future.”

Miller said Parrella “has asked industry to step up to the plate and help contribute to several big-ticket research projects that will help farmers and ranchers succeed, and industry has done just that.”

“CALS and the state’s agriculture industry are true partners in these projects and that came about largely as a result of Parrella actively pursuing that partnership,” Miller said. “We look forward to continue working with the dean as he continues to propel the university’s agriculture college forward.”

Step by step

Parrella said facilities projects and program developments typically start with engaging industry to identify a problem or need. Faculty members help. As the plan and an understanding of its benefits develop, paying for it — with contributions from industry, the college and ultimately the Legislature — can become feasible.

“We contribute and they contribute, and it’s a true partnership,” he said. Industry and the college have an investment in the projects, “and that seems to have resonated here.”

One example is the \$7 million Parma upgrade and expansion, first discussed three years ago. This year, industry and the Legislature each contributed \$3 million to go along with UI’s \$1 million. Groundbreaking is planned for next year.

The \$45 million CAFE project as of mid-August had about \$25 million committed from stakeholders, the Legislature and university. Elements include a 2,000-cow research dairy near Rupert, an education and public outreach center near Jerome and a food-processing pilot plant in partnership with the College of Southern Idaho in Twin Falls.

Parrella said he won’t retire until at least “the first cows are milked at the dairy in Rupert” and the Parma project is finished, both targeted for 2024.

The Legislature appropriated \$10 million for CAFE in 2017, years after making the funding available contingent on industry support.

Naerebout of the Dairywomen’s Association said the industry had stopped believing the project would advance. But Parrella “recognized the need for it in serving the dairy industry and the benefits it would bring to the university. He did a great job rejuvenating it and making what had been a discussion and concept over a decade into an actual research center being built.”

Margie Watson, whose family owns onion packing

and hops operations, was Parma mayor when UI considered closing the research and extension center there during the late-2000s recession. It stayed open with support from industry. She is involved with the industry coalition that is instrumental in the expansion plan.

‘Endless energy’

Parrella has “endless energy,” she said, “and a razor focus of his vision for the University of Idaho. And it’s contagious.”

Watson said the UI ag dean “is so positive and has such good ideas, and is so accepting of other people’s ideas in incorporating all areas.” She said he’s comfortable with industry and the Legislature, has an all-inclusive vision for agriculture, strives to advance the sector and “wants to help.”

Parrella said CALS facilities ultimately are less important than the faculty working there and the constituents served. He mentioned Vandal Brand Meats, where a meat science advisory board will operate for the benefit of the students as well as the facility.

“It’s not just a building” but a long-term plan reflecting what the college wants to accomplish, he said.

CALS employs 220 faculty and 276 staff in permanently funded positions, not including temporary or seasonal help. The CALS annual budget of about \$75 million comes from state and federal appropriations, grants, contracts, fund-raising proceeds, and local service funds from revenue-generating activities such as Vandal Brand Meats sales and the college’s foundation seed program.

CALS has nine research and extension centers, six affiliated centers and county extension offices.

New Jersey native

Parrella grew up in Rahway, N.J. He earned a bachelor’s degree in animal science at Rutgers University, and a master’s degree and Ph.D., both in entomology, at Virginia Tech.

He said his Ph.D. adviser “was a master at talking to people. I learned a lot.”

Parrella started his career at UC-Riverside, doing floriculture and nursery work, and visiting producers all over California for eight years. He took the same approach to his work at UC-Davis.

“It was a people business,” he said. “That sort of experience helped prepare me for this job.”

Mandates: ‘It could very well be that for some folks that this won’t be much of a change from current practices’

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asked. “Are you going to terminate someone who says, ‘I’m not answering private medical questions?’”

Wood said coaxing rather than forcing workers to get vaccinated may be more effective in the current political climate. “It’s hard to get people to work together when government leaders continue to lose credibility,” he said.

Tyson Foods mandated vaccinations in early August. Since then, the percentage of vaccinated Tyson workers has gone to 72% from 45%, a figure touted by the White House to support Biden’s plan.

United Farm Workers organizer Elizabeth Strater said some farmworkers will balk at mandatory vaccinations, though they won’t have much choice.

“A part-time librarian can quit over this, but not a farmworker,” she said. “They won’t choose to lose their jobs. People are doing this work because they need to.”

An emergency rule may not be in place until after

peak harvest for much of agriculture. Once a rule is announced, workers will need up to six weeks to become fully vaccinated.

WAFLA executive director Dan Fazio said foreign seasonal workers should have little problem meeting the mandate. He estimated that 95% of the workers with H-2A visas are vaccinated.

Workers come to the U.S. knowing they will live with other farmworkers in group housing, said Fazio, whose organization helps farmers obtain H-2A workers.

“It would be a safety problem not to be vaccinated,” he said. “The H-2A workers, by and large, are all vaccinated.”

Northwest Horticultural Council senior vice president Kate Tynan said the rule details will matter, including who is responsible for testing unvaccinated employees.

Many agricultural employers, however, already have encouraged vaccinations, she said.

“It could very well be that for some folks that this won’t be much of a change from current practices,” she said.

Mutilations: Why is it farmers often don’t find footprints?

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study on. The one thing that makes people think they’re dealing with malicious intent is that they think they’ve got a surgical-like or even laser-like cut. What we’ve found in predations known to be from coyotes scavenging a carcass is they’ll bite and then pull back, leaving what appears to be a straight-line cut. There are also little bite marks, but you have to look closely for them.

CP: How do you know the cases you’ve studied have definitely been coyotes?

Nation: The incidents were captured on video camera, or we used eyewitness accounts where the owner saw coyotes mutilating the animals.

CP: So why is it farmers often don’t find footprints? Shouldn’t there be coyote tracks?

Nation: That’s fair game, a fair comment. My experience is that you seldom get a person bringing in an animal in wintertime saying it was mutilated. And the reason is that the paw prints are right there in the snow, so (farmers) know what happened then. In the summer, paw prints aren’t as easy to spot.

Now, in hindsight, after working with a coyote specialist, I also wonder if some of that seasonality is also because that coincides with when adult coyotes are teaching pups of the year how to hunt and eat, going for the ends of the body where the skin is softest.



Deputy Jeremiah Holmes
Officials are investigating the death and mutilation of this bull found in Wheeler County, Ore., in August.

CP: For the sake of your argument, let’s say coyotes are removing body parts. That still doesn’t explain how the animals died in the first place.

Nation: Well, people often miss that 24-hour window (to examine the body after death).

Ranchers also get so concerned about mutilation they sometimes won’t get a necropsy done. The cow might have died of plant poisoning, a disease or a subtle metabolic condition.

My take-home message would be, no matter what you think happened to the animal, get it into a state diagnostic lab or a veterinarian.

A dead animal can be seen as a loss, but it can be turned into an asset if the test hints at something like a parasite or nutritional problem you can deal with in the rest of your herd.

CP: Your theory isn’t as popular as theories of foul play. Why do you think that is?

Nation: Well, for one thing, coyotes and mice are not as exciting. If you can mix perversion and cults and the unknown, you can have a wonderful mix of a story there that people can let their imaginations run wild on. I’m not saying I have all the answers, but it’s sure more reasonable than Martians and ray guns.