

Idaho's barley production expected to jump 43%

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Idaho barley production will be substantially higher this year, USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service estimates.

The agency in a July 12 report forecast production at 62.2 million bushels, up 43% from last year. Harvested area is expected to rise by 70,000 acres to 560,000, up nearly 14.3%. Yield is expected to be 111 bushels per acre, up 22 bushels or 24.7%.

NASS on March 31 estimated a 2% drop in planted acres from 2021. Snow accumulation stalled in much of this year's first quarter. Reservoir levels were low following the previous season's drought and heavy irrigation usage.

April, May and part of June brought unusually wet, cold conditions.

"Grains like barley love cool, wet conditions during the spring," said Laura Wilder, Idaho Barley Commission administrator. "Growers have planted more barley, and we are expecting significantly bet-

ter yields than last year."

Newdale-based grower Dwight Little said that in his area, irrigated barley looks good and dryland barley is starting to show stress. Dryland growers typically seed less densely so fewer plants compete for water and nutrients per unit of ground.

A heatwave arrived in early to mid-July, the impacts of which are yet to be determined, he said. Meanwhile, wind is making it tougher to irrigate efficiently.

Little is cautiously optimistic.

"It's not in the bin yet," he said.

Wilder said last year's production fell to a 10-year low due to drought and unusually high early-summer heat. Yields in 2020 hit a record high.

NASS said Idaho produced 37% of the nation's barley last year. The state Department of Agriculture says more than 75% of production is malt. Several major brewing companies operate in the state.

Idaho, Montana and North Dakota lead the U.S. in barley production.

Drought continues drain on cattle inventory

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

The July inventory of all beef and dairy cattle and calves in the U.S. was 98.8 million on July 1, down 2% from last year. That followed a 1.3% decline a year earlier.

The number of beef cows was down 2.4% after posting a 2% decline for July 1, 2021, and the count on beef replacement heifers was down 3.5% after a 2.3% decline a year earlier, according to USDA's mid-year inventory report.

While the industry has been in general liquidation about four years, drought has driven liquidation in the past two, said Derrell Peel, extension livestock marketing specialist at Oklahoma State University.

"The drought is making us liquidate more than we intended to," he said.

In 2020, drought was primarily in the Southern Rockies, specifically Colorado, and the Southwest.

"Then in 2021, the drought became much more widespread in the Northern Plains and contributed to beef cow culling. It's kind of moved out of the Northern Plains to the Southern and

July 1 U.S. cattle inventory

Class	2021 (Million head)	2022	percent change
All cattle and calves*	100.8	98.8	-2.0
Beef cow, heifers that have calved	31.1	30.3	-2.4
Replacement beef heifers	4.3	4.1	-3.5
Cattle on feed	13.4	13.4	0
Feeder cattle outside feedlots**	36.7	35.7	-2.7
Calf Crop	35.1	34.6	-1.4

*also includes dairy animals and bulls

**other heifers, steers over 500 pounds and calves under 500 pounds

Source: USDA-NASS *beef and dairy

Central Plains, and it's still very bad in the Southwest," he said.

Now it's deepened into the Southern Plains and into the Midwest, he said.

The percent of pasture and range rated poor to very poor is 85% in Texas, 58% in Nebraska and 55% in Arizona, according to the latest USDA crop progress report.

Cattle numbers are quickly shrinking now. They'll be even smaller in about a year and a half as cow-calf producers save heifers to rebuild, he said.

Eventually, that will be bullish for cattle prices. In the short run, the industry is putting more beef on the table, he said.

"Cattle numbers have been getting lower since 2018, but it hasn't really showed up in feedlots," he said.

Calves are going into feedlots early, and heifers that would normally be held for replacements continue to go into feedlots, he said.

"We're still putting heifers in feedlots instead of holding them out in the country," he said.

The number of heifers, beef and dairy, in feedlots on July 1 was up 2.9% year over year, and the industry is going to continue to slaughter more heifers for the next two to three months at a minimum, he said.

Heifer slaughter is up



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press File
Beef cattle are going into feedlots early as drought forces ranchers to shrink their herds.

3.9% year to date over 2021, and beef cow slaughter is up 14.1%., he said,

Two to four years out, there's going to be a tremendous squeeze on cattle numbers, similar to 2014 when cattle prices were unprecedented and record high, he said.

The price of a 500-pound feeder steer in Oklahoma averaged \$252 a hundredweight in 2014, with a peak of more than \$300 a hundredweight. That price has been running about \$189 in the past two or three weeks, he said.

Prices are relatively high and will continue to trend upward, he said.

"I don't know about profitability because inputs are really high," he said.

Despite smaller cherry crop, Oregon producer touts 'phenomenal' quality

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

HOOD RIVER, Ore. — With cherry harvest in full swing across the Mid-Columbia Valley, activity was buzzing July 25 inside the packing house at Hood River Cherry Co.

Freshly picked cherries arrived in 220-pound bins from the orchard, where they are unloaded onto a conveyor and run through a hydro-cooler, which uses near-freezing water to slow down ripening and extend their shelf life.

From there, the conveyor splits into three lanes past rows of workers meticulously sorting cherries by hand, culling shriveled, cracked or otherwise damaged fruit. Cherries that pass inspection are then packed into boxes, labeled and brought into cold storage.

Kristoff Fowler, field and warehouse manager for Hood River Cherry Co., said this year's crop is smaller than average due to an untimely snowstorm that blanketed the region in April, disrupting pollination after trees had already blossomed.

"Everything was at full bloom, bees were flying, and I woke up and it snowed 2 feet," Fowler said. "Just a freak weather event."

According to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, U.S. sweet cherry production was forecast to be 275,000 tons in June, down 27% from 2021. That includes a 19.5% decrease in Oregon, from 46,000 tons to 37,000 tons.

The vast majority of cherries grown in Oregon come from the Mid-Columbia area, including Wasco and Hood River counties.

Though yield is undoubtedly down, Fowler said what this year's crop lacks in volume it makes up for in quality, which he described as "phenomenal." That's because the tree is putting more energy into fewer cherries, resulting in bigger, sweeter, crunchier fruit.

"Instead of putting energy into 300 cherries, it's doing maybe 150," Fowler said. "The size of the fruit is just astronomical."

Hood River Cherry Co. was started by Fowler's parents, Brad and Katy, in 1993. Today, they have approximately 400 acres of orchards in the Hood River Valley, planted at varying elevations from 1,100 feet to nearly 3,000 feet.

Harvest in the lower elevation orchards began July 15. As the season progresses, fieldworkers will make their way to the higher elevation orchards — such as Bear Mountain, with its rolling hills and panoramic views of nearby Mount Hood.

It is here that Fowler said the farm faces another challenge. While fewer cherries on the trees does offer exceptional quality, it also means they ripen faster, shortening the picking window by several days before they spoil on the tree.

"Every orchard is timed by variety," Fowler said. "Now all of that is getting compressed, and it's getting

harder to pull all the fruit off."

To make matters more urgent, a blistering heat wave was in the forecast for the week, with Hood River expected to get five consecutive days of triple-digit temperatures.

Once the temperature exceeds 90 degrees, Fowler said they shut everything down to protect their workers. If they are going to get all the fruit picked, he said crews will have to start earlier before it gets too hot.

"As soon as it gets daylight, we get picking," Fowler said.

To protect the fruit against extreme heat, Hood River Cherry Co. also installed overhead misters two years ago in orchards with varieties that are particularly susceptible to sunburn, including Rainiers, Skeenas and Lapins.

Fowler said the system is capable of lowering the temperature in orchards by 10 degrees, but must be used with caution. It has to be hot enough for the mist to evaporate before it touches the fruit, otherwise the cherries might absorb too much water and their skins will split.

"You can't turn it on unless it gets to 100 degrees," he said. "Last year, when we had our huge heat wave, those overhead (misters) really saved us."

Even with a condensed timetable, Fowler said cherries are getting picked more or less on schedule.

"You gotta be prepared for anything," he said.



George Plaven/Capital Press

Workers inside the packing house at Hood River Cherry Co. hand-sorting fruit and culling shriveled, split or otherwise damaged cherries.



George Plaven/Capital Press

Skeena cherries nearly ready for harvest at Hood River Cherry Co.'s Bear Mountain orchard.

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