Sprawl, low-density development contribute to Idaho's farmland loss

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Capital Press File

Sprawl and low-density housing developments are two ways Idaho is losing farmland, a report found.

Low-density residential development continues to contribute substantially to the loss of farm and pasture land in Idaho.

Continuation of recent development patterns in the state will result in losing, fragmenting or otherwise compromising 113,100 acres of farm and ranch land by 2040, the American Farmland Trust said in its "Farms Under Threat" 2040 report.

That is roughly equivalent to losing 700 farms, $72 million in farm output and 1,500 jobs. And 83% of conversions are expected on some of the state's best agricultural land.

Farmland loss in Idaho will be 29.3% higher by 2040, up to 146,300 acres, if "runaway sprawl" prevails in contrast to recent business as usual, the trust said.

The loss would be 42.7% lower, down to 64,800 acres, if policymakers and land-use planners promote a "better-built cities" approach that is more compact and aims to reduce sprawl.

The hardest-hit counties are Ada and Canyon in the greater Boise area and Kootenai in the Coeur d'Alene-Post Falls area.

"How Idahoans choose to develop will shape the future of farming," the report said.

David Anderson

Low-density residential development is of particular concern in the state. Substantial pressure comes from large-lot homesites and scattered subdivisions that are farther from town and affordable for many of the new in-migrants from other states.

"Rural areas are more affordable than where a lot of people are coming from right now," said David Anderson, American Farmland Trust Idaho program manager.

Agricultural land remains plentiful from a developer's viewpoint, he said. Many local codes are outdated and "we're no longer that quiet, rural state."

It is important "to get zoning codes up-to-date, protect working ag and make room for more people," he said.

The trust said problems with low-density residential development, along with adding relatively few residences per acre of land, include fragmenting the agricultural land base and in turn limiting remaining ag operations' production, marketing and management options.

Anderson said this type of development also accelerates fragmentation and contributes to future sprawl. After low-density projects fill, higher-density developments emerge nearby and also attract residents. Space runs out and sprawl resumes.

Meanwhile, the rising cost of housing drives "commuter development" farther from town, "and the vast majority of that is low-density residential," he said, adding that resort communities see this.

The trust said it encourages compact development to minimize sprawl, protecting farmland with voluntary conservation easements, and helping current and new generations of farmers run successful businesses.

Anderson said there are opportunities in "planning for ag, supporting a robust ag economy with better-built cities" and creating "a more resilient, sustainable community overall."

For example, counties could integrate farm succession planning into their forward-looking comprehensive plans, he said.

Curtis Elke, USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Idaho state conservationist, said that while there is no single solution to agricultural land conversion to other uses, partnership and collaboration are key. He said agencies could provide landowners with a menu of options for reducing conversion and provide more money for agriculture easements.

"No one is going to save ag land if they don't value it," Elke said.

U.S. capitalizes on global beef demand

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

U.S. beef exports have been robust thus far in 2022, with sales tracking 35% higher than in 2021.

January through May exports were valued at $5.1 billion, compared to $3.8 billion during the same period in 2021.

The National Cattlemen's Beef Association has been trying to capitalize on strong foreign demand for U.S. beef, said Kent Bacus, NCBA senior director of international trade and market access.

"When you see tight global supplies, you see opportunities for exports," he said, speaking from NCBA's Summer Business Meeting in Reno, Nev.

"We're able to capitalize on that demand, especially countries like Japan, Korea, China, because we have good trade policies in place that give us access there," he said.

NCBA has been trying to implement the terms of access into those countries but is also looking forward to being able to engage in new opportunities, he said.

The Biden administration is not as eager as previous administrations to talk about removing tariffs, but it is looking to engage in on some of the non-tariff issues. So NCBA will be looking for opportunities to remove more non-tariff barriers to capitalize even more on the strong global demand for U.S. beef, he said.

The Biden administration has also "kind of walked back" trade negotiations with the United Kingdom, he said.

"We think that there's still a lot of need and a lot of interest on both sides of the pond to engage in those discussions.

Kent Bacus

So we're taking the opportunity to reach out and find like-minded interests in the UK and to really educate them about our industry…," he said.

Turning to Southeast Asia, he said there's a tremendous amount of growth in potential protein exports there.

"We see a lot of opportunity, but we still have a lot of barriers in countries like Vietnam, Malaysia and Thailand.

NCBA is continuing to look for different trade policies that will help open those markets, he said.

Animal health issues, such as foot-and-mouth disease and African swine fever, make it hard for a lot of those countries to supply enough domestically produced protein to feed their growing consumer base, he said.

"This creates a great opportunity for U.S. producers, and so we really want to use trade policy to try to capitalize on that growth and to maximize our presence in those markets," he said.

Trade agreements aren't about immediate gains; they're about long-term advantages, he said. This year marks the 10th anniversary of U.S. trade agreements with Korea, Colombia and Panama, and a lot has changed over the years, he said.

"In each of those countries, we faced massively high tariffs and had very restricted sales, and now we're a growing source in a lot of those places," he said.

How will Ukraine, Russia export deals impact prices?

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Market analysts say the deals Ukraine and Russia signed with Turkey and the United Nations to export grain could push world wheat prices downward.

"It's going to allow wheat to more freely move out of the Black Sea," said Dan Steiner, grain merchandiser with Morrow County Grain Growers in Boardman, Ore.

Steiner estimated 10 to 20 ships were in Black Sea ports. Those ships will be able to load and depart quickly. The wheat has already been sold, Steiner said.

The agreements last 120 days, Steiner said.

"So this is not like the end of the war," he said. "...There's been grain leaking out of Ukraine since the war started," he said. "Some of it's going overland on trucks, some is going by rail. ... Russia's been stealing some of it. Who knows where it's all going?"

Soft white wheat ranged from $8.90 to $9.35 per bushel Friday on the Portland market.

The day the deals were announced, wheat futures dropped 50 cents, then rebounded about 40 cents, said Byron Behne, Northwest Grain Growers senior merchant in Walla Walla, Wash.

That demonstrates the volatility in the market, he said.

"We can't really seem to string together more than a couple days in a row of higher prices," he said.

The deals seem mostly focused on the ships that have been trapped since the war began, and not necessarily loading out new grain, Behne said.

Behne pointed to industry "consternation" about how the ships would be insured. He thinks insurance companies will likely be game, so long as there's official government backing of some sort for premiums.

"It doesn't really help that Russia continues to fire missiles at and around the ports that these things are supposed to be shipping from," he said. "The market's taking it as fact that this is going to happen — it might happen, but I don't think it will be at a pace that really significantly changes the global balance sheets."

Prices could still go down, Behne said, pointing to a large white wheat crop. A delayed start to harvest means farmers and landlords haven't yet begun selling their wheat, which would put pressure on prices, he said.

"If futures don't find a reason to rally, white wheat prices will probably be under some pressure at some point," he said. "As volatile as things are, you're talking a dollar either way, probably, depending on the headlines of the day."

Steiner recommends growers watch the cash market. The trade deals make good headlines, but don't necessarily translate into more sales, he said.

Legislation targets assistance for small cattle producers

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

House Agriculture Chairman David Scott on Friday introduced a bill to help small-scale family farmers and ranchers in the cattle industry with financial assistance, increased competition and market access.

The efforts are directed at producers with 100 head or less.

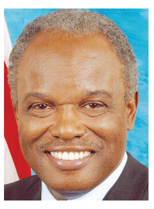
Among other things, the Small Family Farmer and Rancher Relief Act, H.R. 8590, would increase the premium subsidy for small cattle producers in the Livestock Risk Protection insurance program and create an indemnity program when a producer's share of the retail dollar drops below 51.7%.

"As I have said time and again, it is a crisis in this nation that we have lost an average of 17,000 cattle ranchers per year. The drivers of this loss are complex and multi-faceted, and I applaud many of the efforts my colleagues have taken to try and improve the cattle industry," Scott said in a press statement.

But he hasn't seen enough emphasis on direct help for small farmers and ranchers, he said.

The bill is perplexing to National Cattlemen's Beef Association.

"NCBA is committed to working with the House Agriculture Committee to protect our most vulnerable producers, and we appreciate the chairman's attention on this important issue,"



Rep. David Scott

Ethan Lane, NCBA vice president of government affairs, said in a press statement.

"Unfortunately, H.R. 8590, the Small Family Farmer and Rancher Relief Act, as introduced prompts more questions than it provides answers," he said.

Chief among those questions is "where did this 100-head figure come from?" Tanner Beymer, NCBA senior director of government affairs, told Capital Press.

What about producers that are also small, those that have 101 to 250 head or those who derive their sole income from 350 head? he asked.

"Where are we getting the idea a small producer is 100 head or less?" he said.

The bill would leave those other small producers by the wayside. NCBA has a long-standing policy that opposes giving advantage to one group of producers over another, he said.

NCBA also questions the trigger for indemnity payments — 51.7% of the retail dollar.

"Where did that come from … why is it the mark we're using on a program like this?" he said.

The bill provides a lot of things, but NCBA questions the numbers used to base the formulas on, he said.

"We want to have more of a dialogue with Chairman Scott and his team," he said.

Cattle producers of all sizes are still struggling with profitability. But it's no longer coming from cattle prices. Calf and feeder cattle prices are pretty strong, and fat cattle prices are improving. But input prices for feed, fuel and fertilizer are high, some are up 14%, he said.