

# Strong market, agri-tourism help elk rancher succeed

## Elk herd the main attraction

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
EO Media Group

DRIGGS, Idaho — Rancher Kent Bagley and his sons Greg and Stephen derive almost a third of their income from agricultural tourism, and their farm-raised elk are the main attraction.

The Bagleys bought their first 15 elk in the late 1990s, seeking to diversify their beef and dairy business. They've since given up the dairy, focusing on elk and beef cows.

As with the dairy market, elk prices have ebbed and flowed — and while values of most farm commodities have declined lately, Stephen said elk meat, antlers and bulls raised for penned hunting operations have all risen.

But even when the economy crashed in 2008 and elk ranches were closing in Idaho, domestic Cervidae continued to earn their keep for the Bagleys, thanks to tourism. Through [www.elkadventures.com](http://www.elkadventures.com), their ranch offers over-



The Bagleys vaccinate an elk at their facility in Driggs, Idaho. They say the market for elk is up, and elk have also provided an attraction for agricultural tourism.

night trips and day rides, which make stops by the elk pastures, and they take the public on paid bus tours of their elk operation. They also have a

gift shop and rent cabins.

"People love to see those baby elk, and we can get them right up close," Stephen said, adding his proximity to Jack-

son Hole, Wyo., and Yellowstone National Park ensures a steady supply of visitors.

Stephen explained raising elk requires investing in

separate handling facilities. The animals are skittish and slower to develop than cattle, requiring more than four years before they're ready to sell.

The industry is also heavily regulated. The Idaho State Department of Agriculture charges a \$10 per head fee on domestic elk to fund its Cervidae program, including inspections and investigations into escapes. Furthermore owners must test 10 percent of their elk post-slaughter, and all of the elk that die unexpectedly.

According to the department's most recent estimates, the state has about 50 commercial elk ranches that produce about 6,000 calves per year.

"(The elk industry) has crept up a little bit in the last couple of years," said deputy state veterinarian Scott Leibse, noting the easing of regulations on elk importation has contributed to the increase.

The Bagleys have about 240 elk. They sell dropped antlers for craft-making, dog chews and use as anti-inflammatory supplement in Asian countries. Antlers cut while still in velvet are the most valuable. They've paused their

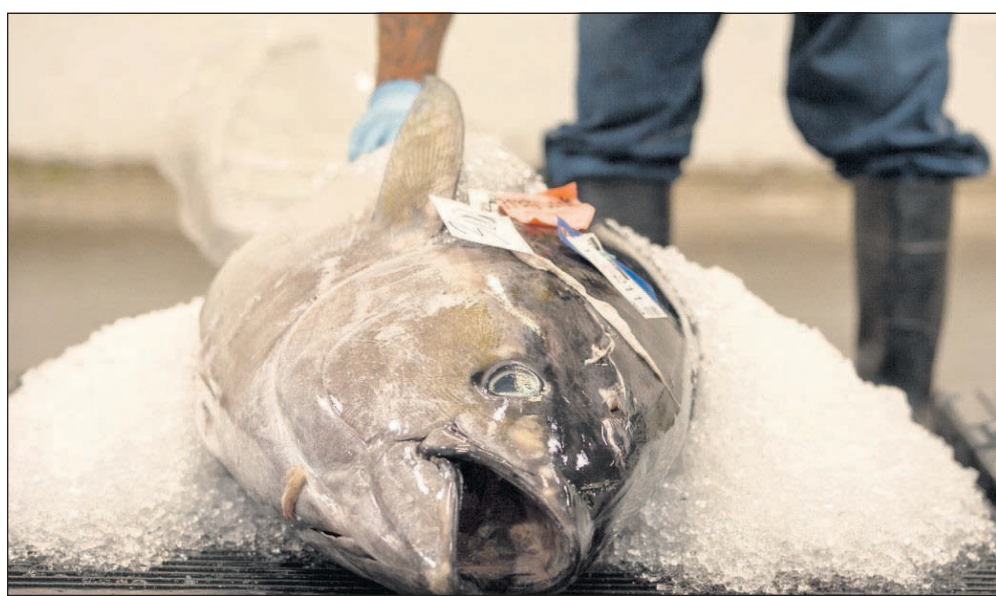
meat sales in recent years to build their herd but plan to resume supplying meat to customers, such as Jackson Hole restaurants, this fall.

Bull elk sold to Idaho's many penned hunting operations — controversial private operations where hunters are guaranteed success — fetch the best prices, upwards of \$6,000 per animal, depending on antler size.

"Definitely the shooter-bull market right now is where the elk market is," Greg said. "Now I can supply 15 bulls per year, and I have demand for 100 bulls per year."

Jeff Lerwill, who serves on the Idaho Elk Breeder's Association, and his wife Alana, operate a fenced hunting preserve in Sugar City, comprising 5 miles of rugged, private terrain where trophies include elk, buffalo and Texas dall sheep. They raise some of their own elk and host about 50 elk hunts during a busy year.

"We've been hunting for 10 years," Alana Lerwill said. "In the beginning, we could buy shooter bulls for \$2,000. We're lucky if we can buy them now for \$5,000."



AP Photo/Caleb Jones

An ahi tuna sits packed in ice waiting to be auctioned at the United Fishing Agency in Honolulu in 2015. The Obama administration is issuing new rules it says will crack down on illegal fishing and seafood fraud by preventing unverifiable fish products from entering the U.S. market.

## US issuing new rules to curb illegal fishing, seafood fraud

### Program will focus on 'priority species'

By PATRICK WHITTLE  
Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine — The Obama administration is issuing new rules it says will crack down on illegal fishing and seafood fraud by preventing unverifiable fish products from entering the U.S. market.

The new protections are called the Seafood Import Monitoring Program, and they are designed to stop illegally fished and intentionally misidentified seafood from getting into stores and restaurants by way of imported fish.

The rules will require seafood importers to report information and maintain records about the harvest and chain of custody of fish, officials with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration said.

The program will start by focusing on "priority species" that are especially vulnerable to illegal fishing, such as popular food fish like tuna, swordfish, Atlantic cod and grouper. The government hopes eventually to broaden the program out to include all fish species, NOAA officials said.

"It sends an important message to the international seafood community that if you are open and transparent about the seafood you catch and sell across the supply chain, then the U.S. markets are open for your business," said Catherine Novelli, a State Department undersecretary.

Estimates of the economic damage of illegal fishing vary, but conservation group Oceana reported in a 2013 study that illegal fishing causes more than \$10 billion in global losses every year. Some other estimates are higher.

The rules will help make sure that importers are able to supply "the who, what, why, when, how of fishing," said

Beth Lowell, a senior campaign director with Oceana.

"For the first time ever, some imported species will be held to the same standard that domestic wild caught species are," Lowell said.

The new rules are an outgrowth of a presidential task force established in June 2014 to crack down on illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and seafood fraud. NOAA officials said the new requirements will allow regulators to trace seafood from its point of entry into the U.S. to the point when it was harvested from the sea.

The information submitted by importers to comply with the rules will be kept confidential, and there is not a consumer labeling component.

The National Marine Fisheries Service, an arm of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, will administer the program, NOAA officials said. The rules

go on the books Jan. 9 and compliance from importers is expected by Jan. 1, 2018.

Shrimp and abalone are included in the plan, but implementation for those species will come later because of gaps in availability of information, NOAA officials said.

## Dungeness crabbers on strike from California to Canada

By JANIE HAR  
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Some consumers may have to settle for not-as-fresh Dungeness crab and others could wait a little longer for their first taste of the season as fishermen from Northern California to the Canadian border strike after wholesale buyers sought to lower the purchase price.

The strike was extended Friday to include markets in San Francisco and Half Moon Bay, where customers have been able to buy the holiday dinner staple since November due to a season that opened in phases.

In northern Oregon, crabbers who were set to start fishing Sunday will not do so until a deal is reached, said John Corbin, chairman of the Oregon Dungeness Crab Commission. In southern Oregon, crabbers who had been fishing have tied up their boats, he said.

The strike started Wednesday after Pacific Choice Seafood in Humboldt County, California, offered to pay \$2.75 a pound for Dungeness crab, said Ken Bates, vice president of Humboldt Fishermen's Marketing Association. Crabbers whose seasons had already opened had negotiated a price of \$3 a pound.

Prices were not set in all fisheries because the West Coast commercial Dungeness crab season opened in waves this year, due to elevated domoic acid levels that made the crustacean unsafe to eat.

Crab fishermen who are receiving \$3 a pound say they won't let others receive any less for the wildly popular seasonal food.

The market price at Fisherman's Wharf at the start of the season ranged from

\$5.50 to \$6.50 a pound, and prices generally increase as the season wears on and volume shrinks.

"The fishermen love that consumers love it. It is a beautiful product this year, but the fishermen need to be able to harvest it," said Lisa Damrosch, vice president of the Half Moon Bay Groundfish Marketing Association.

Lorne Edwards, president of the Bodega Bay Fisherman's Marketing Association, said he expects the strike to continue through New Year's Day.

"The whole coast is all tied up," he said.

A spokesman for Pacific Choice did not return requests for comment. A spokesman for Oregon-based Pacific Seafood, which owns Pacific Choice, also did not return requests for comment.

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