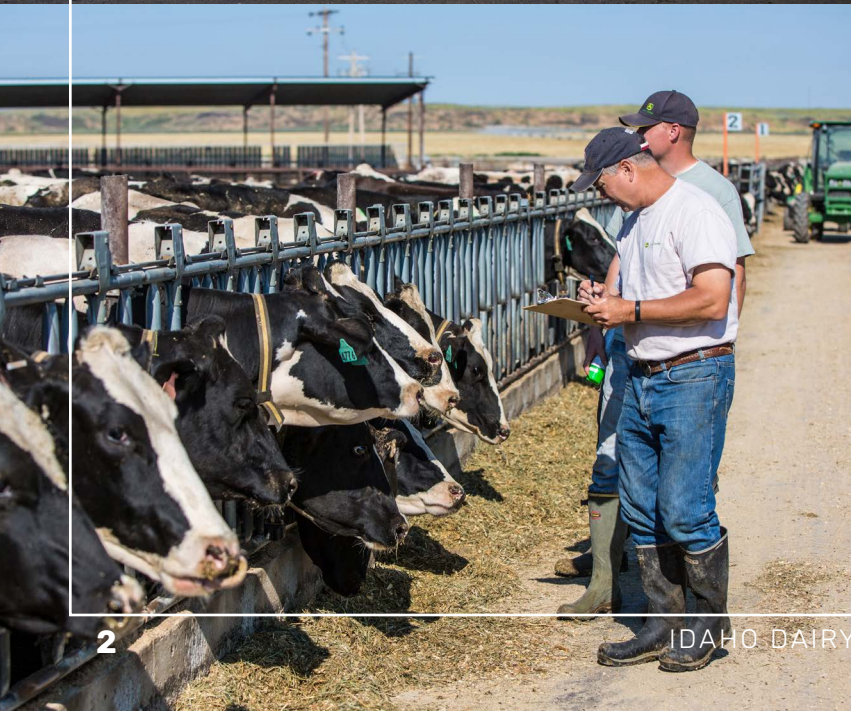


Idaho Dairy Focus

Idaho Dairymen's
Association - Summer 2026





Protecting
Idaho's dairy
industry
through
environmental,
legal, and
legislative
efforts since
1924

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A Message from Pete Wiersma

Idaho Dairymen,

Over the past several months, the IDA Board has been meeting with the Washington State Dairy Federation (WSDF) Board around joint management of the two state organizations. This week, the Boards reached an agreement for Rick Naerebout to serve as the Chief Executive Officer of both IDA and WSDF, with Jamie Neill helping lead the government affairs work in both states, and Charlie Garrison representing both states in Washington DC on federal issues.

This was a strategic decision that was carefully deliberated by the IDA Board, with two significant upsides for IDA and our members. First, it expands our relationships with congressional offices in DC. Historically, Idaho is represented by conservative Republicans in our federal delegation, resulting in IDA being effectively sidelined when Democrats control chambers of congress or the presidency. Leading in two states that span political parties keeps us in the game working on critical federal issues, regardless of which party is in power. Furthermore, gaining more influence at the federal level will benefit us on our greatest areas of focus – labor and environment.

Second, we have recently experienced environmental litigation, with origins in Washington, spill over into Idaho. Having our staff lead both states puts us on the front line of fighting those issues, before they have a chance to reach Idaho. Structurally, this is not a merger, and our two state organizations will continue to exist and operate separately. The IDA Board of Directors remains the same and continues to fully control the assets and direction of IDA, unencumbered. IDA is being compensated for its staff leadership being utilized in Washington and the agreement between our two states is revenue positive for Idaho. The IDA Board was resolute regarding Idaho funding not being used to carry out the work of the WSDF.

IDA will continue to represent Idaho's dairy industry with the highest standards of integrity and responsiveness. We are supported by a strong team and effective leadership, dedicated to serving Idaho dairymen, enabling us all to succeed in our businesses and communities.

We understand this is a significant change and if you have questions or concerns, we encourage you to reach out to your local IDA Director, or you can contact me directly. ■



Pete Wiersma

President, Idaho Dairymen's Association





Federal Policy Update

Charlie Garrison | Idaho Dairywomen's Association

The early weeks of summer have seen a lot of action in Washington, D.C. on priority issues affecting Idaho dairy producers. The month of June saw movement on agriculture labor reform, both in new regulations issued by the Trump Administration and in new legislation introduced in Congress. The Senate plans to take its first steps on a new Farm Bill soon, and the U.S. Supreme Court has issued its rulings on a major pesticide case and attempts to restrict birthright citizenship. IDA continues to work with our congressional delegation, federal agency officials and industry allies to keep progress moving forward on all of these fronts.

New U.S. House Bill Would Reform H-2A; Make Dairy Eligible

The long-anticipated bill to reform the H-2A visa program was introduced by House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn 'GT' Thompson (R-PA) on June 30th. The bill has nearly 50 original cosponsors including Idaho's Mike Simpson who continues his work to find a solution to the labor needs of dairies in the state. Even though he's not a member of the Agriculture Committee, the congressman's leadership role on this issue was recognized as he was given one

of just four spots for House members to speak at the press conference marking the introduction of the bill.

The House Agriculture Committee Chairman's bill, the "Securing Agriculture's Workforce Act of 2026," (SAWA) makes many changes to the H-2A program advocated by IDA for the past several years. Most notably, it provides access to the farmworker visa program for jobs that are not seasonal, meaning most jobs on dairies, and it offers a way for current workers to obtain legal status and continue on in their jobs.

The SAWA legislation grew out of the work done by Chairman Thompson's bipartisan Agriculture Labor Working Group he formed two years ago as discussions for a new Farm Bill were ramping up. While the Agriculture Committee does not have jurisdiction over immigration issues, that is reserved for the Judiciary Committee, the subject of labor shortages and difficulties in compliance with many aspects of the H-2A program by those who could use it, kept coming up as the main issue facing farmers everywhere as the Committee was seeking stakeholder input on the new Farm Bill.

The reforms in the SAWA bill include:

- Removing the requirement that an H-2A job be seasonal;
- Clarifying that “temporary” defines the length of the job contract as being up to 350 days;
- Stating that the USDA Secretary defines “agriculture labor and services” rather than the Secretary of Labor;
- Ensuring that additional sectors are eligible for H-2A including controlled environment agriculture, forestry, aquaculture and the “harvest” of livestock;
- Offering an opportunity for existing unauthorized workers in agriculture to gain access to the H-2A program.
- Controlling costs of H-2A by reforming the wage structure, allowing employers to charge a reasonable amount for the housing they must provide, limiting wage fluctuations if an adverse effect wage rate (AEWR) is in effect and allowing multi-year labor certifications and housing inspections;
- Streamlining H-2A by creating an online platform for employer interface with the program; and
- Preventing duplication of roles by various federal agencies.

The SAWA bill is the first one that has drawn the support of nearly all agricultural employer groups in the country. More than 400 producer groups have signed on in support of this bill. If signed into law, it would be the first statutory reform to the H-2A program since it was created more than 40 years ago during President Reagan’s second term in office.

The IDA Board of Directors took a position in favor of a discussion draft of the bill just days after it was released. The language in the bill has stayed intact, most notably for dairy producers, on the provision allowing current unauthorized workers to adjust their status to access the program. It was even improved by allowing only those with previous work history in agriculture to be able to adjust status to become H-2A and with the addition of language to ensure that employers could not be held liable for providing documentation of work history for workers seeking to access H-2A under the provisions of the bill.

The next steps for SAWA suggest it will be a tough journey, but one Idaho dairy producers have been on for years. Conversations have begun with the Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, Jim Jordan (R-OH) and with House leadership including Speaker Mike Johnson (R-LA), Majority Leader Steve Scalise (R-LA) and Majority Whip Tom Emmer (R-MN). Many House Republicans are willing to agree that

the southern border is now secure but they want additional enforcement legislation to help ensure that it stays that way even with the other party in the White House at some point in the future. Agriculture’s response to that is, “let’s talk.”

IDA will continue working with Congressman Mike Simpson and his staff to try to get SAWA across the finish line for Idaho’s dairy farm families and their workers. We have also been working with Senator Mike Crapo and his staff to get started on a Senate counterpart to SAWA.

Regulatory Changes to H-2A

Also in June, the Trump Administration issued a policy memorandum to clarify that some jobs on dairy farms can meet the requirements of the H-2A program. The new policy states that dairy jobs meet the definition of agriculture work under the program established by Congress even though some are not of a temporary or seasonal nature. Also, some workers who might perform work that is different based on the time of year while other work they do is year-round may be eligible for the program. It is helpful to have the White House acknowledge that dairy is at a disadvantage when it comes to H-2A and that reforms are needed for the industry to access foreign-born workers when they are needed.

U.S. Supreme Court News

The U.S. Supreme Court ended its session on June 30th striking down the White House Executive Order that sought to restrict birthright citizenship. That news is a welcome relief for many dairy farmworker families.

Earlier in the month the Court also ruled that Bayer, the manufacturer of glyphosate, the main ingredient in Roundup, cannot be held liable under state law for failing to place a cancer risk warning label on its packages. The ruling is a boost to EPA efforts to have one uniform pesticide labeling system in the country and is expected to help the company resolve the lawsuits over claims of cancer caused by Roundup use. That ruling came the same day as the President signed an Executive Order calling for additional study on chemicals in the food supply and potential impacts on human health. That EO was supported by the “Make American Healthy Again” (MAHA) movement led by Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. ■

Charlie Garrison

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2026 Primary Election Results

Jamie Neill & David Claiborne | Idaho Dairy Industry PAC

Idaho’s primary election is now concluded, the results are in, and we are encouraged by our successes. This election cycle featured the largest spending ever by the Idaho Dairy Industry PAC, the most focused independent expenditures ever, and a very focused ground game in support of candidate for state and local offices. We employed new strategies that have yielded results certain to assist us in the coming years.

The IDI-PAC endorsed 73 candidates; 51 candidates are moving forward to the November election. 70% success rate. 40 of the candidates the IDI-PAC endorsed didn’t have an opponent in the Primary; for the contested races, success rate was 71%. A huge thank you to all our supporters that made these success rates possible.

To say that the dairy industry, and all of agriculture for that matter, had a lot on the line, would be an understatement. In a session where E-verify nearly became law, the elections were the only remedy available to counter attacks on farmers and ranchers.

The Idaho Dairy Industry PAC was the most active we have ever been, and that is thanks to the resources producers, processors, and allied industry provided. Having raised \$205,000 and having spent \$192,000 was critical to the success of pro agriculture candidates.

IDI PAC spent the money in various ways including direct candidate contributions, independent expenditures, and working with other partners on activities like voter guides.

One of the most important and influential tools was working with the WinAg PAC to target districts 24,

25, and 28 to educate voters on candidates and sitting legislators. Sometimes the content was perceived as negative, but the fact is all the communications were true, accurate, and verified. As they say, sometimes the truth hurts. But voters deserve to know.

In those focused races – WinAg supported 5 candidates, and 4 of them prevailed in the primary. All in all, this demonstrates that our strategy and approach worked.

Voter Turnout

As is often the case with voter turnout in a primary election, it was low across most of Idaho with just under 30 percent statewide. However, if you look at priority areas like Twin Falls County (38%) and Gooding County (36%), they were above the state average. As a rule of thumb, when more people turn out to vote, it becomes positive for pro agriculture candidates as we experienced in the Magic Valley.

Priority Races – Success in 8 of 9 (89%)

Early on it was determined that the IDI-PAC would by hyper focused on three legislative districts, those being Districts 24, 25 and 28. In those districts, we provided maximum direct contributions to our endorsed candidates (\$1,000 each) and then engaged in independent expenditures in aid of our endorsed candidates. Those efforts included text messaging and mailers to likely voters, as well as some broadcast or print media (newspaper). A ground game was employed to spread the message through grassroots voters. Largely, these efforts were successful. Here are the results, showing 7 wins, 1 neutral, and 1 loss for our efforts.

District 24	District 25	District 28
Brent Reinke defeated Glenneda Zuiderveld	Casey Swensen defeated Josh Kohl	Jim Guthrie defeated David Worley
Alexandra Caval lost to Clint Hostetler	Grayson Stone defeated Andrew Messer	Rick Cheatum defeated James Lamborn
Steven Miller lost to Chance Requa (Chance being a secondary preferred candidate is not a loss to industry)	Cherie Vollmer defeated David Leavitt	Dan Garner unopposed

Other Senate Races - Success in 9 of 13 (69%)

On the Senate side, IDI-PAC endorsed many candidates, some with contested elections and some without a contest. Endorsed Senate candidates each received a direct contribution to their campaign. Additionally, we engaged on a more limited basis with indirect expenditures to support the Senate endorsed candidates – all with supportive text messaging, and with mailers in East Idaho, the Magic Valley, and the Treasure Valley. Overall, 20 candidates were endorsed, and of those 16 advanced, a healthy 80% margin. The contested races, however, were mixed, with losses largely seen in North Idaho and the Treasure Valley. Here are the Senate endorsement results.

Senate Races	
Wins	Losses
Camille Blaylock (contested)	James Woodward (contested)
Ben Adams (contested)	Lori McCann (contested)
C. Scott Grow (contested)	Megan Blanksma (contested)
Sonia Galviz (contested)	Russ Spencer (contested)
Treg Bernt	
Lori Den Hartog (contested)	
Todd Lakey	
Brent Reinke (contested)	
Casey Swensen (contested)	
Kelly Anthon	
Jim Guthrie (contested)	
Julie Van Orden (contested)	
Van Burtsenshaw	
Kevin Cook	
Dave Lent	
Mark Harris	

Other House Races - Success in 17 of 28 (61%)

On the House side, IDI-PAC endorsed many candidates, like in the Senate, some with contested elections and some without a contest. Endorsed House candidates each received a direct contribution to their campaign. Additionally, we engaged on a more limited basis with indirect expenditures to support the House endorsed candidates – all with supportive text messaging, and with mailers in East Idaho, the Magic Valley, and the Treasure Valley. Overall, 40 candidates were endorsed, and of those 29 advanced, a healthy 73% margin. The contested races also reflect losses primarily in North Idaho and the Treasure Valley. Here are the House endorsement results.

Statewide Races Success in 5 of 5 (100%)

Statewide, IDI-PAC endorsed Brad Little for Governor, Scott Bedke for Lt. Governor, Phil McGrane for Secretary of State, Debbie Critchfield for Superintendent of Public Instruction, and Brandon Woolf for Treasurer. Only the Governor had a contested primary and was overwhelmingly selected by the voters. Each statewide endorsement received a direct contribution to their campaign. We had no independent expenditures directed at statewide offices.

House Races	
Wins	Losses
Brian Beckley (contested)	Mark Sauter (contested)
John Shirts (contested)	Chuck Lowman (contested)
Judy Boyle (contested)	Christa Hazel (contested)
Mike Moyle	Cindy Agidius (contested)
Debbie Geyer (contested)	Michael Collins (contested)
Jeff Cornilles	Carlos Hernandez (contested)
James Holtzclaw	Kody Daffer (contested)
James Petzke	Melissa Durrant (contested)
Kelly Walton (contested)	Steve Miller (contested)
Jason Monks	Alexandra Caval (contested)
Shawn Dygert	Connor Cook (contested)
Grayson Stone (contested)	
Cherie Vollmer (contested)	
Mike Pohanka (contested)	
Douglas Pickett	
Clay Handy	
Rick Cheatum (contested)	
Dan Garner (contested)	
Dustin Manwaring	
Ben Fuhrman (contested)	
Jerald Raymond	
Rod Furniss (contested)	
Stephanie Mickelsen (contested)	
Erin Bingham (contested)	
Marco Erikson (contested)	
Jon Weber	
Britt Raybould (contested)	
Mike Veile (contested)	
Josh Wheeler	



Local Races - Success in 4 of 4 (100%)

IDI-PAC engaged in 4 local races, all in Twin Falls County. This was to support Scott Tverdy and Suzanne Hawkins for commissioner seats, Brad Wills for Assessor, and Kristina Glascock for Clerk. Each received a direct contribution to their campaign. All 4 won their primary races.

Looking Towards the General Election

As we have long said, the primary election in Idaho is THE election. It is nearly a forgone conclusion that 90 of the legislative winners from 19th will win in November. There will be some interesting activity in four “purple” districts across Idaho. The four remaining districts perceived as bipartisan will be 6 (Moscow, Lewiston), 15 (Boise), 26 (Blaine, Lincoln, Jerome Counties), and 29 (Pocatello).

If history holds true, the results of the general election yield a likely shift of plus 1 Senate seat for agriculture friendly Republicans and at least plus 3 seats in the House for agriculture friendly Republicans.

Our best assessment, based on current conditions and primary results, is that the makeup of both legislative bodies will break down as follows: Looking back historically, we have now reversed the Magic Valley’s slide to the far right, and it is quite normalized. North Idaho remains a bastion of the far right element. East Idaho seems to be solidified as a business-oriented conservative stronghold. The Treasure Valley is a mix of the political spectrum. Outside money flowing into Idaho continues to have a negative impact on our state legislative races. It is why we must continue to be engaged in the IDI-PAC, maintain and grow the strong financial support we received this cycle, and achieve our goal of having the Idaho Dairy Industry PAC renowned as the voice of agriculture impacting Idaho’s political elections. ■

Jamie Neill

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David Claiborne

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Senate (anticipated)	House (anticipated)
Far Right Republicans - 10	Far Right Republicans - 20
Right Leaning Republicans -7	Right Leaning Republicans -12
Agriculture Friendly Republicans - 11	Agriculture Friendly Republicans - 24
Democrats – 7	Democrats – 14

2026 Water Update

Jamie Neill | Idaho Dairymen's Association

Now that the legislative session and the May primary are behind us, we are squarely in irrigation season. In my former role working for the Governor, this time of year was often my busiest.

Most days were spent on the phone with canal companies, groundwater district members, and the Department of Water Resources as the weather patterns dictated how the harsh reality of prior appropriations would be administered. No year was that more real to Idaho than the 2024 irrigation season.

Thanks to effort, communication, and leadership – 2024 culminated with a mitigation plan that provided certainty for water users.

Looking at this year, the State has declared a drought emergency declaration. Producers are aware of the conditions on the ground and it doesn't take a meteorologist to recognize this is a dry year.

While water users in the Eastern Snake Plain do have the certainty of a mitigation plan from 2024, there is another challenge we need to remain cognizant of. That challenge is the Swan Falls Agreement.

In short, the Swan Falls Agreement settled a major water rights dispute in 1984 that sought to balance agriculture and hydropower (Idaho Power) interests. The State agreed to hold the water in trust, and as long as the minimum flows at the Murphy Gage near Swan Falls Dam are met, "trust water rights" would be able to irrigate under the conditions of the water right. If the minimum flows are not met, then the Director needs to look at the use of trust water as a potential solution to make sure the minimum flows are met.

Unfortunately, this year there was a breach of the minimum flows in March which lasted for six days and amounted to roughly 1,900 acre feet of a shortfall. Because it wasn't the irrigation season, and the state helped to mitigate the breach, it was not a major problem. However, with continuing dry conditions, a breach scenario was, and is still, possible.

So what does this mean for farmers? If you have a trust water right, you should know by now as the Department of Water Resources sent letters to all trust water right holders notifying them of a potential summer breach. In those letters, there is information from the Department on what to do when a breach occurs. IDA also hosted a webinar with the Department to provide more information.

However, as of June 26th – the consequences of a breach were mitigated by wise leadership and thoughtful planning. Lieutenant Governor Scott Bedke and Chairman of the Water Board Jeff Raybould, worked with Governor Brad Little to recognize that the affected trust water right holders could secure the requisite water to mitigate any potential breach in the 2026 irrigation season. The Idaho Power Company also sent a letter to Governor Little saying they are not pursuing curtailment of trust water rights this year.

In short, this provides certainty to water users (this year only) as a short-term solution ensuring a curtailment almost certainly will not occur for trust water rights. You can read more about this via the attached letter from Governor Little to the Water Board.

As IDA staff, we were very engaged with all the stakeholders to work towards the short-term solution for this summer, and we will be similarly engaged in working towards a long-term solution (an approved mitigation plan) to provide the ultimate certainty. In an uncertain time with water – the only sure thing – is water will not get cheaper as more and more water will need to be secured to mitigate these water disputes.

As always, please reach out if you have any questions, especially if you are an impacted trust water right holder. ■

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Supreme Court Secures Access to Essential Pesticides in *Monsanto Co. v. Durnell*

David Claiborne & Ellie Bentley-Dyches | Sawtooth Law

On June 25, 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court issued a decision that will have far-reaching consequences for Idaho's dairy industry and agricultural community. In *Monsanto Co. v. Durnell*, the Court ruled 7-2 (with two of the liberal Justices joining the conservative majority) that federal pesticide law preempts state-law failure-to-warn lawsuits that would require pesticide manufacturers to add warnings not mandated by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). This decision ensures that farmers can continue to rely on federally approved pesticide labels without applicators and manufacturers facing a patchwork of conflicting state requirements.

The lawsuit centered on John Durnell, a Missouri resident who alleged he developed non-Hodgkin lymphoma after twenty years of using Roundup, a glyphosate-based herbicide manufactured by Monsanto Company. Durnell sued Monsanto under Missouri state tort law, claiming the company should have included a cancer warning on Roundup's label even though the EPA has repeatedly concluded—over more than three decades—that glyphosate is not likely to cause cancer and has never required such a warning.

The Supreme Court held that the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA) expressly preempts Durnell's state-law claim. FIFRA prohibits states from imposing "any requirements for labeling or packaging in addition to or different

from those required under" federal law. Because manufacturers are legally required to use EPA-approved labels, Missouri could not impose a different labeling system through its tort system.

For Idaho's dairy farmers, this ruling addresses a growing source of uncertainty that threatened the continued availability of essential agricultural chemicals. In January 2024, a Philadelphia jury ordered Bayer AG (which now owns Monsanto) to pay \$2.25 billion to a Pennsylvania man in a Roundup-related suit. Verdicts and settlements of that magnitude created a real risk that manufacturers would stop producing or distributing pesticides rather than face potentially unlimited liability, even when the EPA had determined those products were safe for their intended uses.

Idaho dairy operations depend on effective pest and weed control to maintain productive pastures, forage crops, and facilities. Without reliable access to EPA-approved herbicides and pesticides, dairy farmers face reduced yields, higher labor costs, and diminished competitiveness. This decision helps ensure that pesticide manufacturers will continue supplying these essential products without threat of conflicting state-by-state labeling litigation. ■

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Buck the Trend Workshop

Anna Lickley | Idaho Farm and Ranch Center

The Idaho State Department of Agriculture's Farm and Ranch Center, with the help of agricultural groups across the state, is bringing a training to Idaho focused on farmer and rancher mental health. The training is called Buck The Trend, and will be held in Twin Falls, November 13-15. As troubling factors such as drought, volatile markets, high input costs and debt impact our agricultural industry, support for the farmers and families bearing these burdens is vital.

Buck The Trend (BTT) is a 2-day training designed to address mental health challenges specific to farmers and ranchers. It is founded on the idea that small, peer-focused groups, hosted in a safe and relaxed setting, and led by experienced counselors is an effective way to nurture conversations, build skills, and affect positive change. The aim of the training is to equip attendees with the tools and skills to improve their own mental health, and help those around them. Writer and ranch hand, Maddy Butcher, created the BTT training after seeing an increase in suicides and mental health challenges in her ranching community. "While people in the agriculture community are extremely talented and resourceful, there's not a way for us to get better skills and tools for addressing what ails us specific to mental health," Maddy said.

Buck The Trend focuses on building real tools and skills to navigate and manage stress. Maddy says that it's difficult to appreciate the stress that farmers and ranchers are under. An unpredictable and often overflowing to do list coupled with volatile markets and daily uncontrollable factors such as weather issues can put a real strain on producers. Maddy said, "the training approaches the topic of mental health from a variety of angles with interactive sessions and topics ranging from myths related to therapy and suicidal ideation, to brain development and cultural norms that contribute to poor mental patterns."

Dan Flitner, Oregon rancher and past BTT participant, said his journey to better understand his own mental health started when he realized he didn't have the mental and emotional skills to be the father and husband that he wanted for his family. Dan said, "the training provided me with an

opportunity to work in a group setting. It actually felt really good to learn from and share with others, even though it was hard." He says that the ideal candidate for the Idaho BTT training is involved in agriculture and is curious about learning tools to build a strong mental health.

Dan, Maddy and the BTT team are hosted a BTT training in Oregon earlier this year. Dan says that he hopes the training will help producers be more open about their struggles. "I hope that openness will help those who are in pain to know that change is within their power." Buck The Trend is a traveling workshop that presents to the agriculture community in western states. The Idaho training is limited to 20 attendees, and free to attend thanks to the support of agricultural groups across the state. Learn more by visiting the Farm and Ranch Center webpage, farm.idaho.gov. ■

Anna Lickley

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Irrigation Strategies for Idaho Dairy and Forage Producers

Emily Bedwell | University of Idaho

Water management continues to be one of the most important challenges facing Idaho agriculture. Across much of the state, producers are navigating declining groundwater levels, changing water management requirements, and increasing uncertainty surrounding annual water supplies. While no single management practice can solve these challenges, improving irrigation efficiency can help producers make the most of every acre-inch applied while maintaining forage productivity and profitability.

One of the most common misconceptions about irrigation efficiency is that it simply means applying less water. In reality, irrigation efficiency is about applying the right amount of water at the right time and in the right place. The goal is to maximize the amount of applied water that is actually used by the crop while minimizing losses to evaporation,

wind drift, runoff, or deep percolation below the root zone.

For forage producers, the first step is understanding current soil moisture conditions. Soil moisture monitoring tools, whether they are simple hand probes or advanced telemetry systems, provide valuable information about how much water is available in the root zone and whether irrigation applications are reaching their intended target (the crop root zone). Even periodic soil moisture checks can help identify situations where fields are being overwatered or where irrigation systems are not keeping pace with crop demand.

As we move through the summer months, crop water use increases rapidly. Alfalfa, corn silage, and other forage crops can remove significant amounts of water from the soil profile during periods of



peak evapotranspiration (ET). One strategy that becomes increasingly important during these periods is building and maintaining adequate soil moisture reserves before peak demand arrives. For fields irrigated by lower-capacity center pivots, it is often easier to maintain soil moisture than it is to catch up after the crop has already experienced water stress.

Irrigation system performance should also be evaluated periodically. Worn nozzles, pressure regulation issues, plugged sprinklers, and uneven water distribution can reduce efficiency and create variability across a field. Small maintenance issues that go unnoticed can result in significant water losses over the course of a season. Conducting periodic inspections and addressing problems early can improve both irrigation performance and crop uniformity.

For producers facing limited water supplies, prioritizing irrigation timing is often more effective than reducing every irrigation application equally throughout the season. Water stress during critical growth stages can disproportionately affect yield and forage quality. Identifying the crop growth stages most sensitive to water deficits can help producers make informed decisions when water resources are constrained.

Technology continues to offer new opportunities for improving irrigation management. Soil moisture sensors, remote sensing platforms, weather-based scheduling tools, and variable-rate irrigation systems are becoming more widely available and easier to use. While these technologies differ in complexity and cost, they share a common goal: providing better information to support irrigation decisions.

Ultimately, irrigation efficiency is not about achieving perfect management. It is, instead, about making informed decisions that improve the return on every unit of water applied. As water challenges continue to shape the future of Idaho agriculture, practices that improve irrigation efficiency will play an increasingly important role in maintaining productive, resilient, and profitable dairy and forage systems.

For producers interested in learning more about irrigation scheduling, soil moisture monitoring, or irrigation efficiency, University of Idaho Extension continues to develop research-based resources and educational programs to support water management decisions across the state. For questions, reach out to Dr. Emily Bedwell, University of Idaho's Extension Irrigation Technology Specialist at ebedwell@uidaho.edu. ■

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The 2026 'Idaho Cheeseburger Battle' for Foodservice Kicks Off with a Bang

Tatum Sitz | Idaho Beef Council

Calling all restaurant operators in Idaho, it's time to earn some real bragging rights for your most creative Cheeseburger offering.

The Idaho Beef Council and Dairy West are teaming to launch the annual 2026 Idaho Cheeseburger Battle targeting foodservice professionals across the state. The contest, launching July 4th and coinciding with Idaho Beef Month challenges restaurant operators within all foodservice segments (commercial and noncommercial) to submit their most creative cheeseburger recipe featuring beef and cow's milk cheese. The contest is being promoted via Chef's Roll, a global online community consisting of Michelin-starred chefs, culinary students and Food & Beverage hospitality professionals with a social following of over 1.6 million.

The contest is aimed at celebrating creative ingenuity from unique carriers, toppings, preparation and serving techniques. The cheeseburgers can appear on menus today or be a new item imagined 'back of house' and all must come from restaurants with locations in Idaho. The entry kicks off on July 4 and closes July 26. The contest will be judged by IBC and Dairy West Board members along with Chef's Roll culinary experts. Winners will be announced August 18th for the coveted first, second and third prize and a "People's Choice Award" voted on by the public through a QR

code on Chef's Roll website.

The beloved cheeseburger is currently found on 29% of U.S. menus and penetration continues to grow, increasing 2% over the past year likely driven by perceived value and flavor appeal, according to foodservice research firm Datassentials. While patrons love traditional cheeseburgers, we've seen an explosion of new creative offerings from global influences to the addition of new textures, toppings and flavors, including unique cheese and applications as toppers or indulgent cheese sauces offered as a side to dunk.

For operators interested in submitting entries starting on July 4th, please visit <https://chefsroll.com/opportunities/Idaho-Cheeseburger-Battle>. ■

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A Fall Forage Digest

Tanya Hibler | HD Forage

In my opinion, this winter was like one of the survival shows on TV. Each type and variety of fall-planted forages was a contestant, and the producers (mother nature) threw out every single stressor to see who survived and who tapped out. While the show was playing, HD Forage was taking notes.

The dry winter that scorched the west made life difficult for all the crops in the field. We had a shortage of snowpack and moisture in general in the western U.S, combined with temperatures that would give anyone whiplash. We grappled with couple full weeks of 80-degree temperatures, low soil moisture, all of which were followed by some hard March and April frosts. The implications of the winter conditions on the 2026 irrigation season are substantial, but the things we saw in the field were learning experiences like no other.

Small grains were interesting to watch. The winning contestants were heavily influenced by precipitation, early and late irrigations, and how that timing interplayed with hot and cold temperatures.

Fields that entered the winter with soils already on the drier side tapped out first. We saw late planted fields catch up to those planted on time due to the warm fall temperatures. Most of the small grains had a great fall and set a lot of tillers. In early December we saw fantastic tillering and growth. However, by late December and into January fields were starting to run out of soil moisture. The number of tillers became expensive, and most plants started to abort the outer auxiliary tillers. Fall application of lagoon water likely saved a lot of fields from critical water stress in January through March.

Stressed fields matured earlier. The small grains started elongating and it was only a week or two before the head was in the boot. At harvest, plants were 8-14 inches shorter than we typically see. Overall, tonnage was down across the board. It made for a difficult year to effectively size up new varieties.

Fields with early spring water? Well, they weren't harmed by the hard frosts that came in the middle of March and April. However, the fields with any kind of drought stress were damaged and a significant number of heads, and therefore seeds, aborted. This can be identified by the bleached-out, white heads found after head emergence.

The frosts across the west converted a significant amount of grain acres into forage. Cutbacks and reductions in irrigation water allocations helped make that decision easier and the majority of the small grain acres had been harvested by mid-May. Seed supply is going to be limited this fall. If you have a variety that you are very fond of it might be wise to get in your orders as soon as possible.

Regrowth after harvest came with some gusto. An applicator spraying a double cropped field mentioned that they were second-guessing about whether the forage had ever been harvested. The hypothesis is that there were a lot of tillers that livened up and started growing after water turned on this spring. Those tillers hadn't headed out by harvest and kept coming after the chopper came through. We know some in Utah cut their hybrid rye a second time.

The KWS hybrid-rye performed well in general.

Across the state of Utah and Idaho, KWS Aviator or Progas withstood the hard freezes despite low soil moisture and drought stress. Satin Union's Performer hybrid-rye also withstood the frost, but the open pollinated rye did not. When it came to yield, hybrid-rye did not stand out compared to triticale. Hybrid-rye gets it's leg up when the temperatures are cold. It will keep growing at low temps while the other small grains lay dormant. This year, triticale was growing every day the hybrid-rye was and it separated the two yields more than in a typical year.

Triticale in general did excellent in the fall only to give up a significant number of tillers during the first three months of 2026. All varieties of triticale matured on average two weeks earlier than normal due to stress of warm temps and lack of moisture. For the first time ever, there were even some triticale varieties that matured before hybrid-rye. Triticale didn't handle the late spring frosts very well. In pockets where temperatures dipped into the teens, all of the triticale had damage on the upper leaves and emerged heads.

Wheat and Barley kept on their usual schedule and were late to the party like always. It probably spared them some stress in the driest parts of the season. Sonic Barley looked great this spring and harvested well. Eastern Idaho saw some dramatic losses due to the combinations of conditions. In my travels I witnessed entire fields of wheat burnt all the way to the ground from the April frosts. In the Burley and Oakley areas, much of the malt barley was chopped for forage after significant frost damage.

Wheat and Triticale fields saw an additional pressure: fungus. Crown and Stem Rot of Wheat infected a significant number of acres and was widespread in geography. During the last week of April and into the first week of May, beautiful stands of wheat and triticale started to turn a pale yellow. The yellow came in patches and suddenly the grains looked sick. When looking at the plants, the lower nodes appeared black, and the crown had already started to rot. By then harvest was beginning and there wasn't much to do. Crown and Stem Rot of Wheat is a fungus and can only be prevented with fungicides prior to infection. It's not curable once it is in the field.

The real winners this year were the blends. Fields planted with a small grain forage blend performed above those with a single variety. The risk was spread and each variety blended together made up some component of a great forage. We found those that were most successful chose varieties for their own purpose and knew exactly what that was.

Mixing and matching willy nilly and buying the cheapest three-way seed didn't produce the same results. Diversity is a helpful tool, but it is important to know your own why and how that interplays into your farm's goals.

Interseeding small grains into existing alfalfa stands has increased in popularity. This year was its time to shine. Alfalfa crops suffered just as much from the wild winter. We witnessed the interseeded small grains save several stands of alfalfa from the frosts just by providing cover for the sensitive growing points on the tips of alfalfa stems. Some places harvested a very early first crop because over half of the growing points had been killed.

Overall, soil conditions were dry, and many growers felt like they really had to pour the water to the crops to finish them out. The early maturation of the small grains this year led to one of the most relaxed harvests we have ever witnessed. Those who staged harvest with the maturity timing of their small grain forages leisurely went about chopping. There is a lot to evaluate when it comes to ranking and prioritizing varieties for each farm. It doesn't get any simpler when we have challenging growing conditions. Evaluating inputs and comparing them to tonnage vs. quality allows different varieties shake to the top and bottom. Assessing quality is also dependent on how each farm prioritizes TDN over digestible fiber and vice versa.

So who was the real winner of the survival TV show? In our opinion it was KWS Aviator. While tonnage was down, the quality and survival of the crop was impressive. On the survival TV show, it showed the most grit and endurance in the most stressful situations and still provided great returns to the producers. Now if we are talking about a reality TV show where the contestants are living in a gorgeous mansion... our choice might be different, and those varieties are highly dependent on individual farm's goals.

Experimenting with multiple varieties on your farm is the quickest way to find what fits for each situation. HD Forage can help set up on-farm evaluations with our Forage Pilot Program and would love to assist in any data collection to best inform decisions. This winter served as a great learning opportunity, and we hope to never see another one like it. ■

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FARM Program Combats Screwworm - Publishes 2026 Drug Residue Prevention Manual

FARM Program Staff | National Milk Producers Federation

The National Dairy Farmers Assuring Responsible Management (FARM) Program released its 2026-2027 Milk & Dairy Beef Drug Residue Prevention Reference Manual, equipping farmers with an educational tool that promotes best management practices for responsible and judicious use of antimicrobials in dairy cattle.

The updated manual has timely information about the FDA's conditionally approved and emergency use authorizations of drugs to combat New World screwworm.

New World screwworm flies are attracted to wounds. Animals that have recently given birth, suffered an injury, or had a surgical procedure (such as dehorning or branding) are most at risk. Untreated umbilical cords of newborn animals and foot lesions are commonly infested sites, as are tick bites.

Producers who suspect a screwworm infestation in one or more of their animals should immediately quarantine affected animals and report the case to their local veterinarian, State Animal Health Official or USDA. Do not attempt to treat suspected screwworm on your own without first reporting it to a veterinarian or health official. To access additional resources, visit the National Milk Producers Federation's webpage.

The manual also includes the Food and Drug Administration's Guidance for Industry No. 273: "Defining Durations of Use for Approved Medically Important Antimicrobial Drugs Fed to Food-Producing Animals" (GFI No. 273), finalized and announced in February.

When dairy animals get sick or injured and treatment is necessary, producers and veterinarians use antibiotics and other drugs prudently. The manual serves as a resource for producers and veterinarians, and includes information on:

- Residue prevention best practices
- Record keeping and herd health
- Drug administration
- Culling of animals
- Residue testing
- Drug classes
- Approved drugs and screening tests

The Milk & Dairy Beef Drug Residue Prevention Manual and the associated pocket guide are sponsored by Zoetis. Their sponsorship supports the development of on-farm resource development for U.S. dairy farmers.

The manual and accompanying pocket guide are available for download on the FARM Program website. Physical copies will be available for purchase later this summer.

Through educational resources and training, the FARM Program advances its mission of fostering a culture of continuous improvement by demonstrating U.S. dairy farmers are committed to producing high-quality, safe milk with integrity. ■

FARM Program Staff
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The Seasonality of Cheese Prices

Colin Kadis | Ever.Ag

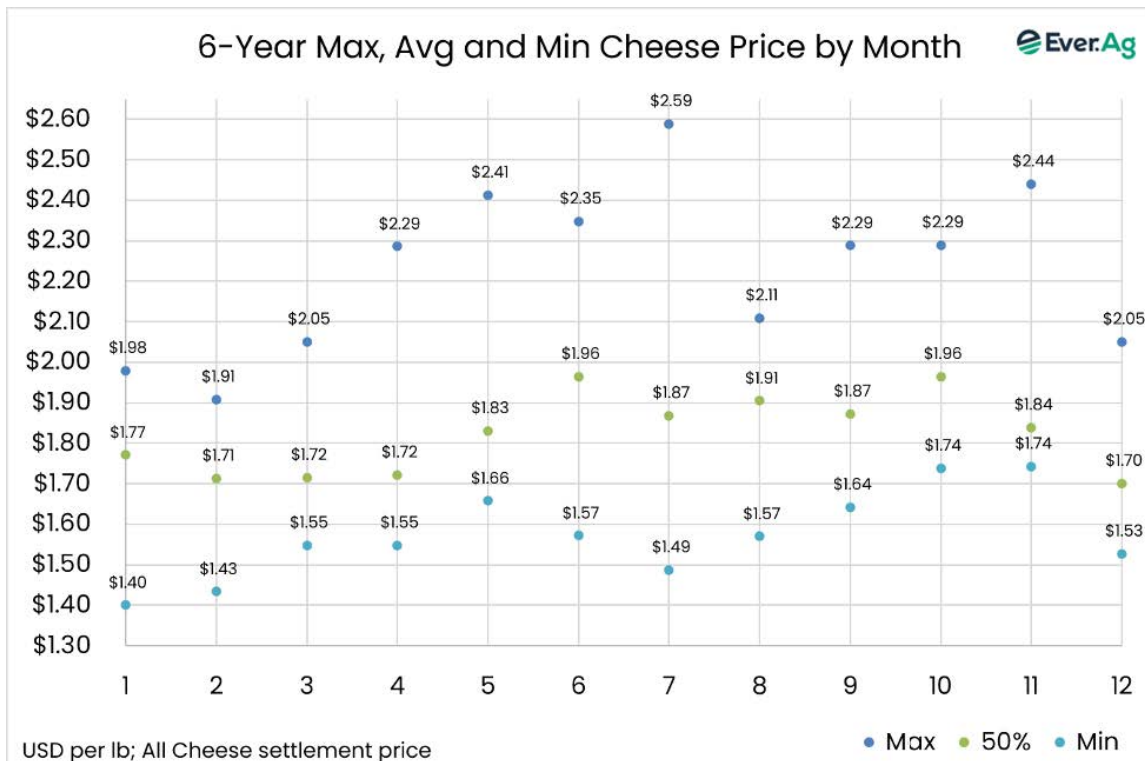
In the time I've spent with Idaho dairymen, I've noticed that they're an awfully detail-oriented group. Obviously, good stockmen and businessmen have to notice the small details to find success in a profession as competitive as dairying, whether it's picking out a cow that has a DA or sensing a business opportunity. Likewise, there aren't many dairymen that I know who haven't picked up on the fact that cheese prices (and thus milk prices, for most Idaho dairymen) are generally a lot higher in the Fall than they are in the Winter.

The good thing is that this generally is true. Over the last six years, the average cheese price in the second half of the year has been \$1.86 per pound, and the average cheese price in the first half of the year has been \$1.79. That means that usually the year finishes up \$0.70 better than it starts (on a Class III hundredweight basis). Often this historical trend is also reflected in the hedge decisions we see dairymen make. While there is usually substantial

interest in hedging the first two quarters of the year (sometimes regardless of the price offered), we often see decreased interest in hedging the last two quarters of the year (also occasionally regardless of the price offered!).

While it's easy to understand why this bias exists – we all know that plants usually deal with an excess of milk at the beginning of the year and sometimes have to go looking for extra loads in the second half of the year – the historical DRP data actually provides a slightly different picture.

Imagine that you purchased a small portion of Dairy Revenue Protection for every quarter available every day since the program began in 2019, that you used the 95% coverage level and were a 100% Class III dairy. If you added up all of the premium bills you paid with all the indemnities you received, you would've had the highest net return in the first quarter of the year (+\$0.35/cwt) – and the lowest



net return in the second quarter (+\$0.12 per cwt). July, August and September, deep in the Summer when cows generally drop production, actually proved to be the second-best time to have coverage (+\$0.26 per cwt).

Now, it's worth pointing out that we're only discussing about seven years of data. But even in that timeframe, Q1 has paid out four times (out of eight), Q2 twice (out of seven), Q3 three times (out of seven) and Q4 twice (out of seven).

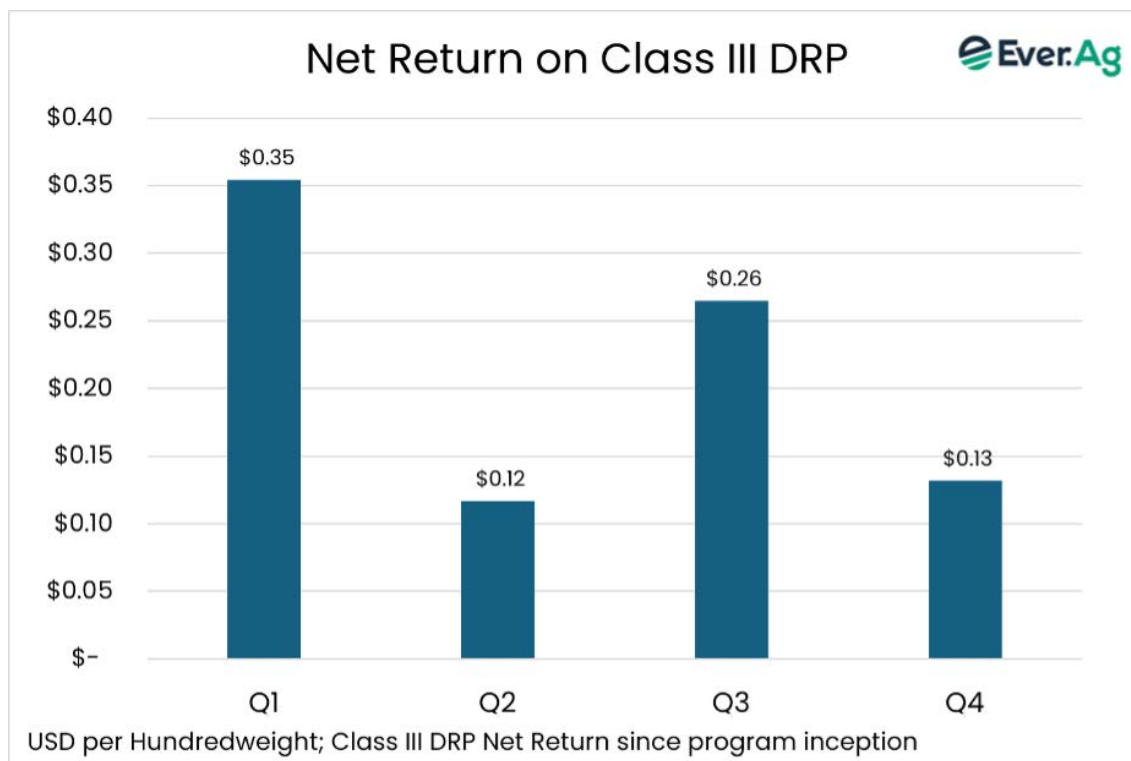
The reason to take notice of this information is that current market fundamentals for cheese do not look great. As expected, milk production continues to increase throughout the world, and cheese plants indicate that they're making plenty of product. As I referenced in last quarter's article, European cheese prices had been strong and enabled US processors to balance our markets through strong exports. April US cheese exports reached 141.5 million pounds in April, 30% higher than last year. More recent chatter indicated that exports have been more difficult to win into Europe and that many buyers may already have a good amount of product on hand. What was true at the beginning of the year is still likely true for the second half: If European

cheese prices hold or move higher, expect US prices to find support. If they move lower, it will take rapid expansion in cheese demand or a decrease in milk supply for high prices to return.

Looking at Q3 2026, many of our dairy producers hold coverage that is (as of this writing) paying out, or not far from it. It is very possible that we may see a continuation of lower Class III and cheese prices in Q3 than in Q2.

The risk of loss trading commodity futures and options can be substantial. Investors should carefully consider the inherent risks in light of their financial condition. The information contained herein has been obtained from sources to be reliable, however, no independent verification has been made. The information contained herein is strictly the opinion of its author and not necessarily of Ever.Ag and is intended to be a solicitation. Past performance is not indicative of future results. ■

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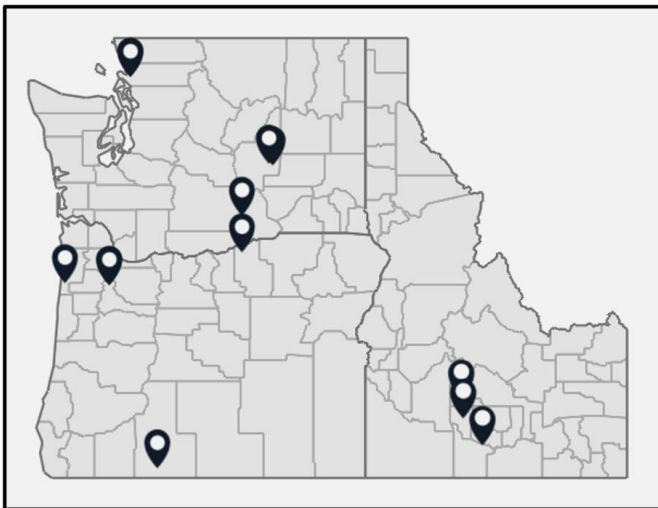


Can Soil Type Influence Dairy Manure Nitrogen Availability?

Amber Moore | Oregon State University & Ryan Auld | Idaho Dairymen's Association

Many dairy producers have observed that the same manure application can produce different crop responses from one field to another. One field may show a strong response to manure N, while another field receiving a similar application appears to receive less benefit. Differences in manure characteristics often explain part of that variation, but could differences in soil properties also play a role?

To explore this question, Ryan Auld evaluated 13 soils collected from dairy-producing regions across Idaho, Oregon, and Washington as part of his M.S. research at Oregon State University (Figure 1 and 2). The soils represented a wide range of textures, organic matter concentrations, and pH values commonly found in Pacific Northwest dairy production systems. The goal of the study was to determine whether soil type influences how much plant-available N is released from dairy manure and compost.



The dairy manure and compost used in the study were representative of materials commonly applied on Pacific Northwest dairies. The solid dairy manure consisted of scraped manure and straw bedding collected from an open pen and stockpiled for storage. Approximately 99% of the N in the stockpiled manure was organic N. The compost originated from scraped dairy manure that had been composted in small batches. Compost N was composed of approximately 89% organic N and 11%

nitrate-N, indicating that a portion of the organic N had already been converted into plant-available forms during composting.



Dairy Manure Findings

Soil type influenced how much N was released from the dairy manure. Across all soils included in the study, manure potentially mineralizable N (PMN) ranged from 2.0 to 16.1%, with a study-wide average of 8.3%.

One of the clearest patterns observed involved soil texture (Figure 4). The highlighted soils illustrate the range of manure N availability observed across textures relevant to southern Idaho dairy production systems. The Taunton sandy loam released nearly twice as much manure-derived N as the Portneuf silt loam (14.1 vs. 7.3% PMN), while the Brinegar and Deter clay loams released about one-third less manure-derived N than the Portneuf soil (approximately 5.0 vs. 7.3% PMN).

These findings were consistent with the broader Pacific Northwest dataset, where soils with greater clay content generally released less manure-derived N than soils with lower clay content. One possible explanation is that clay particles physically protect manure organic N from decomposition, thus reducing the amount of manure N converted into plant-available forms.

Dairy Compost Findings

Soil type also influenced N release from compost, although the effect was much smaller than for manure. Compost PMN ranged from -6.8 to 5.6% across the 13 soils, with a study-wide average of 0.5%. This finding is consistent with the more stable nature of composted organic matter, with a portion of the organic N had already been mineralized to nitrate during composting.

Unlike manure PMN, which was most closely related to soil texture, compost PMN showed stronger relationships with extractable potassium, zinc, calcium, and magnesium. This suggests that the factors controlling N release from compost may differ from those controlling N release from manure.

What Do These Findings Mean for Idaho Dairy Producers?

Current manure N availability estimates rely primarily on manure characteristics and generally do not account for soil differences. Results from this study suggest that soil properties may also influence how much manure N becomes available following application.

While additional research on manure properties and mineralizable N is needed before soil properties can be incorporated into manure recommendations, these findings may help explain some of the

field-to-field differences in manure N availability observed by producers. The results also highlight the importance of considering both manure characteristics and soil properties when evaluating nutrient management decisions.

Understanding how soil and manure characteristics interact may eventually improve estimates of manure N availability and help refine N management recommendations across dairy production systems.

Acknowledgments

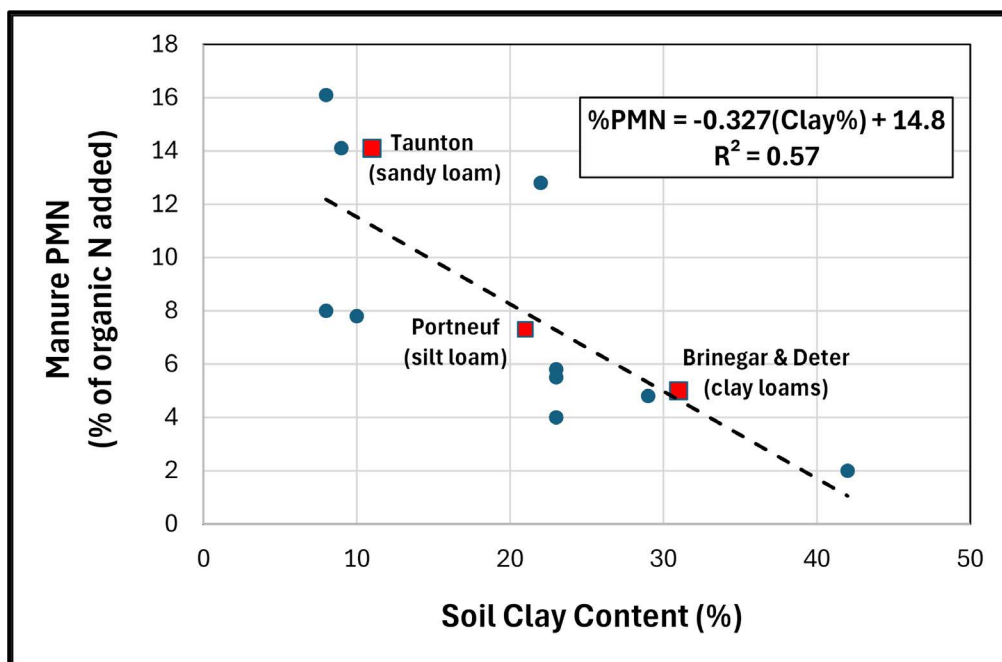
This research was supported by the Oregon Dairy Farmers Association and the BUILD Dairy Program, a Dairy West-supported initiative that provides graduate student training and research opportunities focused on dairy production and environmental stewardship. Ryan Auld completed this work as part of his M.S. degree in Soil Science at Oregon State University and now serves as a Nutrient Management and Research Technician with the Idaho Dairymen's Association. ■

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Dairy Markets Adjust as Demand Cools

Nate Donnay | StoneX

We're going through a demand lull while supply is still growing. The impact on prices is predictable. The first half of 2026 has been marked by some wild swings in dairy prices. Butter started the year at \$1.375, rallied to \$2.1375 and then fell to \$1.60 as of writing in mid-June. Nonfat dry milk (NFD) has had an even more dramatic swing, starting at \$1.175, running up to a new record high of \$2.295, then dropping back to \$1.67. Cheese has been more stable, but it also rallied from \$1.2825 in mid-January to \$1.6725 before falling back to \$1.47 in mid-June.

We started the year with a story about strong milk production depressing prices, then demand perked up and prices rallied, helped along by a recall on NFD and trading rules around the age of butter on the CME spot market, and now we're seeing the demand side react to those high prices and has slowed down which is pushing current prices lower. So what's the next move?

At the highest level, demand breaks down into two categories; domestic sales and exports. The U.S. market is largely structured to meet domestic demand first, and then the remaining product is exported. We did see good domestic demand for cheese November to February when domestic sales were up 4.4% on the prior year, but then domestic sales fell 0.4% YoY in March and 1.5% in April. However, exports have continued to be strong and have hit new record highs in 3 of the past 4 months. U.S. cheese prices have been well below EU and New Zealand prices which have kept the exports moving. But cheese prices in Europe have been trending down during June on strong production. With domestic demand soft, the U.S. is reliant on exports for demand and that means the U.S. price needs to follow the EU lower until domestic demand improves.

The butter demand story has been a little better than cheese. Domestic sales in 2025 were up 4.3% (along with record exports). So far this year domestic

sales are up a healthy 4.0%, although the growth did slowdown in March and April. A big chunk of the exports have been driven by very low U.S. prices relative to the rest of the world. The U.S. ran about \$1.00/pound lower than Europe during the second half of 2025. That spread has narrowed up to about \$0.50, so exports are expected to slow down. Even with good domestic sales growth we'll still need to keep a decent amount of exports moving which means U.S. prices probably need to follow the world market, which is also trending lower right now. NFD is a tough story to tell. The price spiked up to record highs in May. Production is up. Exports have been growing a bit, but aren't massive. Domestic sales have also been up, but again, not massively. Stocks are well off their lows made back in 2024. There is nothing in the balance table that would suggest prices should have been at record highs. The U.S. exported 69% of our production in 2025, so we are highly dependent on the world market to clear our supply. Prices in Europe and New Zealand topped out in the \$1.50-\$1.60 range while the U.S. was over \$2.00. That likely means the U.S. has lost export sales for the third quarter and that is brining the U.S. market back to reality.

While U.S. milk production growth has slowed from the hectic pace in the second half of 2025, headline milk production growth in April was still up 2.7%, and if you factor in the higher components in the milk, the growth is more like 3.4%. Lower prices will eventually generate more demand again, but the good growth in milk production is currently outweighing the soft demand situation.

The trading of derivatives such as futures, options, and over-the-counter (OTC) products or "swaps" may not be suitable for all investors. Derivatives trading involves a substantial risk of loss. Past results are not necessarily indicative of future results. ■

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Idaho Dairymen's Association 2026 Associate Members

The Idaho Dairymen's Association offers associate memberships for organizations who are interested in a unique way to reach and support Idaho's dairymen. The organizations listed below comprise this year's cohort.



Improving Safety on the Dairy: Investing in Your People While Protecting Your Bottom Line

Zach Bird | Post Insurance

Dairy producers are constantly evaluating opportunities to improve efficiency, productivity, and profitability. Feed quality, genetics, and technology often dominate the conversation, but one area that is frequently overlooked is employee safety. A strong safety culture not only protects the people who keep your operation running, but it can also have a significant impact on workers' compensation costs, employee retention, and overall farm performance.

When an employee is injured, most dairy producers immediately think about the direct costs associated with the workers' compensation claim, such as medical bills and wage replacement benefits. While these costs are important, they often represent only a fraction of the true financial impact of an injury. The indirect costs to the business can be much greater and are often absorbed by the operation without being easily measured. A study popularized by the National Safety Council shows that for every \$1 in workers' compensation claim cost represents approximately \$2–\$4 in total business impact. Missed milking shifts, overtime for other employees, reduced efficiency, training temporary replacements, management time spent coordinating the claim, and disruptions to daily routines can all affect productivity. On a dairy, where consistency is critical to animal health and milk production, even one injury can create challenges that impact the entire team.

The dairy industry presents unique challenges when it comes to workplace safety. Employees work around large animals, heavy equipment, moving vehicles, chemicals, and wet surfaces on a daily basis. These hazards create opportunities for injury, but they also create opportunities for improvement. Farms that prioritize safety often experience fewer claims, less downtime, and a more engaged workforce.

Many dairy operations focus on responding to accidents after they occur rather than preventing them in the first place. The most successful farms take a proactive approach. Regular safety meetings, documented training programs, and clear expectations help employees identify hazards before injuries happen. A few minutes spent discussing safety each week can prevent costly incidents and lost productivity later.

New employee training is particularly important. Many workplace injuries occur within an employee's first year on the job. Proper instruction on animal handling, equipment operation, chemical safety, and emergency procedures can dramatically reduce the likelihood of accidents.

Animal handling remains one of the leading causes of injury on dairy farms. Even the calmest animals can react unpredictably. Well-designed handling facilities, low-stress livestock handling techniques, and proper employee training can reduce the risk of kicks, crush injuries, and other animal-related incidents.

Slip-and-fall injuries continue to be a common source of workers' compensation claims. Milking parlors, wash areas, and feed alleys are often wet and slippery. Investing in proper drainage, adequate lighting, non-slip surfaces, and routine housekeeping can significantly reduce these exposures.

Equipment-related injuries are another area where prevention pays dividends. Tractors, skid steers, feed mixers, and other machinery are essential tools on the dairy, but they can also present serious risks. Routine maintenance, operator training, and lockout/tagout procedures should be part of every farm's safety program. Employees should understand not only how to operate equipment safely, but also how to properly shut down and

service machinery when maintenance is required.

One of the most overlooked tools for controlling workers' compensation costs is a formal return-to-work program. When injuries do occur, modified-duty opportunities allow employees to remain productive while they recover. Tasks such as inventory management, maintenance planning, recordkeeping, or training assistance can often be performed safely while physical restrictions are in place. Return-to-work programs help reduce claim severity, maintain employee engagement, and support a smoother recovery process.

Safety should not be viewed as an expense but as an investment. A strong safety program can improve employee morale, reduce turnover, and help control insurance costs over time. Insurance carriers increasingly look for evidence of documented safety procedures, employee training, and return-to-work programs when evaluating dairy operations. Farms that demonstrate a commitment to risk management often position themselves more favorably in the insurance marketplace.

As you evaluate your operation this year, take time to reflect on your safety efforts. Have you experienced recurring injuries? Are employees receiving consistent training? Do you have a plan in place for injured workers to return safely and productively? Small improvements made today can have lasting impacts on both employee well-being and the long-term success of your dairy.

Creating a culture of safety does not happen overnight, but the results are worth the effort. Protecting your employees protects your operation, your profitability, and the future of your farm. For further information on available safety resources and market strategies on keeping workers compensation insurance costs down, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. ■

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Preparing for the Next Generation: Facility Improvements That Add Long-Term Value

Valene Cauhorn and Chad teVelde | AGPROfessionals Engineering

Most dairy producers are striving for the same thing: longevity for their operations. The goal is to build a strong, sustainable business that can be passed down to the next generation. While every operation is different, every producer wants the best return on every investment. Determining which capital improvements will deliver the most meaningful returns over the years is crucial. The most successful facility investments improve daily operations now while preserving flexibility for future growth and transition.

Start with a Comprehensive Evaluation

Across Idaho and the West, dairy producers are evaluating their facilities, adjusting labor dynamics, evolving animal welfare practices, and facing increasing pressure to improve efficiency. Specifically, Idaho producers may be challenged by power and water availability, local planning and zoning requirements for animal units per acre and setbacks, and the availability of land for liquid manure management. It's a good idea to check with your utility providers to understand your current power and water rights and ensure they can handle future enhancements.

Assess Your Infrastructure

Before investing in new construction or major upgrades, dairy owners should evaluate the condition and remaining useful life of existing infrastructure. A facility assessment can also reveal opportunities to improve workflow, reduce labor requirements, and prepare infrastructure for future technology integration. In many cases, deferred maintenance can quietly erode operational efficiency and increase long-term costs. Identifying critical deficiencies early allows producers to prioritize improvements before they become emergency repairs.

Key areas to assess include:

- Milking facilities and parlor systems
- Feedbunk, fencelines, and transfer alleys

- Freestall barns and housing structures
- Manure management systems
- Feed storage and handling facilities
- Water distribution systems and efficiencies
- Electrical infrastructure and backup power capacity
- Roads, drainage, and site access
- Calving and reproduction areas

Engineer for the Future

Succession planning for dairy operations isn't just about transferring ownership. It's about ensuring the facilities, infrastructure, and operational systems can support the next generation's goals. The next generation may operate differently from the current one.

Facilities that are designed with flexibility in mind can help preserve options and reduce costly modifications later. Facility improvements should be evaluated not only for current needs but also for their ability to support future operational goals. Engineering considerations may include:

- Local land use CAFO permitting capacity for future growth
- Early planning and permitting (most regulations won't get any less stringent)
- Structural capacity for future expansion
- Adaptability to technology changes
- Utility sizing and future service demands
- Site drainage and environmental compliance
- Traffic flow for feed delivery and manure handling
- Adaptability to change herd sizes or breed types
- Potential regulatory requirements
- Extending the number of cows' lactations to compensate for the increased cost of replacements
- Reducing replacement death loss

Phase Projects to Manage Cash Flow

One of the most common mistakes in capital

planning is attempting to complete too many projects at once. A phased improvement strategy allows producers to prioritize projects based on operational impact, risk reduction, and available capital. This approach helps maintain financial flexibility while steadily improving the operation's overall value and functionality. A phased plan also provides a roadmap to guide future generations as ownership and management responsibilities evolve. Typical phases may include:

- Addressing critical infrastructure deficiencies
- Improving cow comfort and animal performance
- Enhancing labor efficiency and safety
- Improved calving and replacement areas
- Expanding technology capabilities
- Positioning facilities for future growth
- Capital improvements or expansion

Cow Comfort Continues to Drive Facility Design

Research and practical, boots-on-the-ground, industry experience consistently demonstrate that comfortable cows are more productive, healthier, and easier to manage. As a result, many modernization projects focus on improvements such as:

- Enhanced ventilation systems
- Improved cooling strategies for summer heat stress
- Stall redesign and bedding improvements

- Improving traffic flow around milking facilities
- Increased water accessibility
- Reduced overcrowding
- Pen sizes and ease in drying and cleaning
- Calving, close up, and fresh cow care

Importantly, these improvements can frequently be phased into existing facilities rather than requiring complete replacement.

Improve Employee Safety and Operational Efficiency

Labor remains one of the most significant challenges facing dairy operations. Facility improvements that support employee safety and productivity can generate long-term value well beyond their initial cost.

Facilities that are safer and easier to work in can contribute to improved employee retention, reduced downtime, and more consistent operational performance. Potential improvements include:

- Modifying livestock handling areas
- Upgrading lighting throughout facilities
- Enhanced equipment access and maintenance areas
- Improved traffic separation between vehicles and employees
- Modernized electrical and mechanical systems
- Limit employee/cow interactions as much as possible to leave room for future technology



and robotics that reduce labor

- Labor efficiencies.

Evaluate Technology Integration Opportunities

Dairy operations are increasingly leveraging technology to improve decision-making and operational efficiency. Future-ready infrastructure provides flexibility as technology continues to evolve. Even if implementation is years away, incorporating adequate electrical capacity, communication networks, and facility layouts during current projects can reduce future retrofit costs. Therefore, when planning facility upgrades, producers should consider infrastructure needs that may support future technologies, including:

- Activity and health tracking technologies, including data collection and reporting platforms
- Environmental monitoring equipment
- Precision feeding systems
- Automated sorting and management
- Beef cross calf production
- Robot/automation in milk barn

Put It In Writing

Once you have an idea of what you want to do, start planning! Put it on paper and make sure future generations are aware of the plan. Then, begin communicating with your county officials. If your plans will affect permits, zoning, or setbacks, knowing that in advance enables you to incorporate

these needs into the overall strategy.

An Integrated Approach

The most effective facility improvement projects are part of a comprehensive strategy that integrates infrastructure investments with operational efficiency, regulatory compliance, growth goals, and succession planning. Strategic capital upgrades can enhance the current value of operations while laying a solid foundation for future owners and managers to expand upon. By adopting a long-term perspective on facility investments, dairy producers can ensure their operations stay competitive, flexible, and successful across generations.

At AGPROfessionals, we combine planning, engineering, permitting, and agricultural consulting expertise to help producers develop practical, sustainable solutions tailored to their specific needs. ■

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Chobani scientist pilots new U of I food science degree option

John O'Connell | University of Idaho

Mid-career food processing professionals throughout southern Idaho have a new option to boost their skills and ingenuity thanks to Peter Krell's resolve to return to school.

Krell, 51, a senior food innovation scientist with Chobani, approached the faculty in University of Idaho's expanded food science program about pursuing a master's degree remotely while keeping his full-time job at the Twin Falls-based Greek yogurt plant. His instructors in U of I's Department of Animal, Veterinary and Food Sciences expect more seasoned Idaho food processing employees will follow his lead and stay in the workforce while earning online graduate degrees to keep pace with industry changes.

"What I hope to gain from this is the ability to give back to Chobani and make a bigger contribution," Krell said. "If I can learn and grow my knowledge and pass it on to the rest of the team, that's the end goal."

Bridging the distance

U of I's Moscow campus is more than 300 miles from the state's food processing hub in the Magic Valley. Krell's faculty advisor, Ningjian Liang, assistant professor of food chemistry, believes the remote graduate degree option her student is pioneering will help the program close that distance and deliver workforce education and research that target industry priorities.

"Most of our food industry is located in the southern part of the state, so to bridge this geographical gap and better connect students with industry, we are trying something new," Liang said. "Peter can learn remotely and gain hands-on experience on site, so he can not only work but also study and improve the company's products. I think this is a win-win scenario for industry, students and the consumer."

The food science program lapsed for about two years prior to fall 2025, when the university hired three new faculty members, including Liang, based on industry demand. U of I had long offered food science

graduate degrees, but not remotely.

Liang, who specializes in milk processing methods that preserve healthy bioactive proteins, envisions each faculty member supporting three or four remote graduate students.

"We are definitely looking for more food science students who want to do a remote master's or doctoral program," Liang said, adding industry partners will play a key role in growing the program.

Focus on protein

Krell earned a bachelor's in food science from Oregon State University in 1997 and joined Chobani in 2015 after working for a dairy company and a bakery. Chobani's Twin Falls plant processes about 5 million pounds of milk a day into Greek yogurt and other products.

He's part of a large innovation team developing new products, with recent emphasis on high-protein options such as a yogurt line that delivers 20 grams of protein per 6.7-ounce cup.

"This product is quite innovative and important for the company and its growth," Krell said. "They say if you don't innovate, the consumer gets bored."

He will work closely with Liang to design a master's thesis project examining how processing changes affect yogurt's protein percentage and structure. Chobani is splitting the cost of the two-year study with Building University-Industry Linkages through Learning and Discovery (BUILD) Dairy — an industry-led initiative connecting dairy companies with western universities and researchers. The results will help Chobani communicate the health benefits of its products more clearly to consumers.

"We're looking at different processing parameters we need to optimize," Krell said. "There are things that can be done in Ningjian's lab regarding testing of protein structure that we don't have the resources to do here at Chobani."



Balancing work, family and school

Krell completed a three-credit food chemistry course during his first semester back in school and is now taking a food product development class.

Weekdays are reserved for his full-time job, evenings for time with his wife and two young children and weekends for studying. He'll also spend a few weeks on U of I's Moscow campus, bringing food samples from Chobani for testing in Liang's lab.

Krell began considering graduate school while representing Chobani at BUILD Dairy meetings at Oregon State and Utah State universities, where graduate students presented dairy research.

"Going to those meetings and being involved with those students intrigued me and gave me a little spark to think, 'Wow, maybe I could do that,'" he recalled.

Krell heard about U of I's major investment in its food science program while visiting the faculty

at the Twin Falls Research and Extension Center. Liang was excited when he approached her about pioneering a new remote degree option.

Krell anticipates colleagues at Chobani and other mid-career food processing employees will follow his lead.

"There's been a lot of growth in the industry, both at Chobani and in the Magic Valley. We're becoming a powerhouse in the southern part of the state," he said. "As we grow, the employees who run these companies will need a higher skillset. Instead of coasting, you have to think, 'How can I continue to move up and gain more skills so I can contribute better?'" ■

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Margin Management Topics for Idaho Dairy Producers

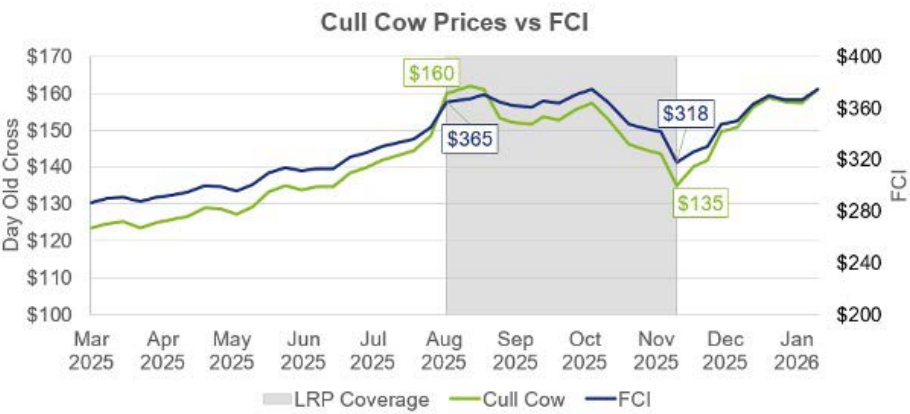
Jacob DeKruyf | Commodity & Ingredient Hedging

While milk prices have generally been moving lower since spring when we last contributed to this column, there are several positive developments that are helping to sustain dairy margins and producer profitability. From a revenue standpoint, the impact of beef on dairy in breeding programs has been a key in helping to keep net margins above breakeven. The added value from cull cows and beef calves is estimated to be contributing anywhere between \$3 to \$5/cwt. to gross margins and making up for much of the lost value of lower milk prices. While this is a welcome development for dairy operations who have adopted this practice, it also presents significant exposure to the dynamics of the cattle market and introduces a new risk to manage. Fortunately, there are tools available to assist dairies manage this unique exposure in their business and those tools have recently become more attractive to use.

Livestock Revenue Protection (LRP) issued by USDA’s Risk Management Agency (RMA) allows dairy producers to protect the price of both cull cows and day-old beef calves based on changes in the value of the CME Feeder Cattle Index (FCI), which is what the Feeder Cattle futures contract settles into upon expiration. As most readers are aware, feeder cattle

futures have been trading at all-time highs since last fall both in nominal terms as well as adjusted for inflation. The spot August futures contract is currently trading just under \$370/cwt., and previous expirations going back to the October contract last fall have all topped out around \$380/cwt.

Livestock Revenue Protection (LRP) offers an attractive way for dairy producers to protect the price risk exposure of both cull cows and day-old beef calves. For cull cows, coverage is offered 13 weeks out in time, and covers dairy cows removed from the herd and sold for beef. The coverage weight for these animals ranges from 800 to 1,500 pounds, and sales receipts must be provided 60 days before or after the policy end date. The coverage and ending prices are based on the CME Feeder Cattle Index (FCI), and a price adjustment factor which is dynamic and set monthly by RMA. The PAF value curve changes based on a seasonal factor and ranges from 30% to 55% of the FCI in determining whether an indemnity is due based on the coverage and ending prices for a particular endorsement. Figure 1 illustrates an example of a representative indemnity that would have been paid last fall based on a drop in the FCI during a hypothetical coverage period.

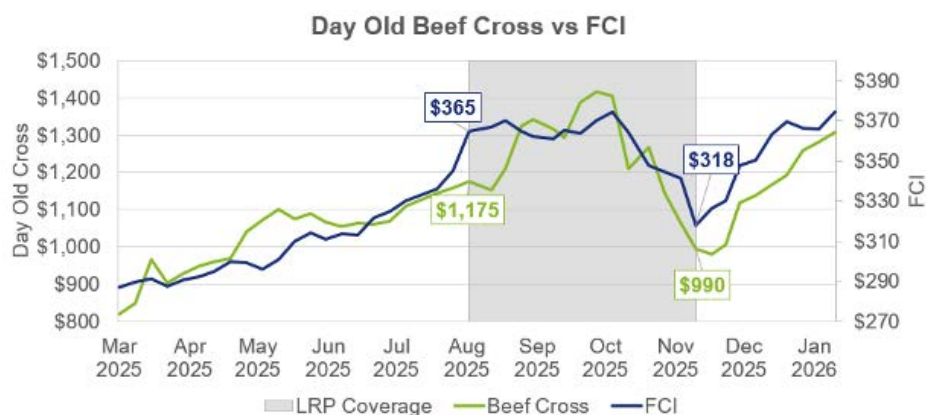


	Cull Cow	Feeder Cattle Index	Indemnity Calc
August 29, 2025	\$160	\$365	\$157 (\$365x43%)
November 28, 2025	\$135	\$318	\$137 (\$318x43%)
Net Change	(\$25)	(\$52)	+\$20

For day-old beef calves, there is no set range such as is used for cull cows; rather, RMA sets the PAF monthly based on actual data from the Pennsylvania/New York auction of non-utility grade, beef-cross dairy calves ranging from 50 to 200 pounds. Like cull cows, the PAF follows the endorsement and is applied to both the coverage and ending prices. Figure 2 illustrates a representative example from that same hypothetical coverage period last fall.

will allow dairies to add Livestock Gross Margin (LGM) coverage, even if they already purchased Dairy Revenue Protection (DRP) for that particular quarter's projected milk production.

With the impact that cattle prices are having on dairy margins and producer profitability, it is important to understand how these insurance tools work in protecting the value of both cull cows and day-old beef calves as well as to incorporate them



	Day Olds	Feeder Cattle Index	Indemnity Calc
August 29, 2025	\$1,175	\$365	\$1,170 (\$362x323%)
November 28, 2025	\$990	\$318	\$1,030 (\$318x323%)
Net Change	(\$185)	(\$52)	+\$140

USDA's RMA recently adopted some changes to their insurance programs that will become effective July 1 and offer more flexibility to dairy producers which should increase participation. For the LRP program, cull cow coverage has been extended to a maximum of 52 weeks from 13 weeks previously which will allow producers a longer runway and more opportunity to lock in a price floor on animals destined for slaughter. Also, RMA clarified that cull cows marketed or sold to intermediaries are insurable, allowing the inclusion of animals sold to a livestock market, not just those sent directly to packing plants. Further clarity was also provided for coverage of unborn calves and has been added to LRP underwriting. RMA now specifies that full dairy calves can only be covered as feeder cattle and cannot be insured under the "calves sold within the first two weeks of birth" policy, although crossbred dairy calves are covered under that program. In addition, the maximum weight for fed steers was raised to 1,800 pounds, and more guidance on forage disaster exemptions were added. Although not related to LRP, another producer-friendly change

into an operation's risk management portfolio. Shifting gears to the input side of the balance sheet, another current topic is the recent collapse in corn prices and the impact this is having on projected feed costs. While high beef and cattle prices are providing a meaningful boost to margins on the revenue side of the ledger, it should not be overlooked how cheap corn prices have become and the projected savings this provides to feed rations. New-crop December Corn futures have declined from over \$5.00/bushel in mid-May to around \$4.40 by mid-June. This historic selloff was due to record commodity fund liquidation, with managed money having moved from a 10-year high net long position to net short in about 3 weeks, selling nearly 350,000 contracts in that time frame.

While there is a strong seasonal tendency for corn prices to decline at this time of year once the crop is planted and initial crop development progresses "normally", there is always risk associated with uncertainty in final acreage, pollination, and ear fill as corn moves from its early growth stage through

harvest. Weather plays a critical role through all these risk factors and has been quite uneven so far during this growing season. Drought is always a concern of the market, and the Western Corn Belt has been quite dry this season. The latest Drought Monitor map from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) shows that a large patch of abnormally dry to exceptional drought conditions exist across Iowa/Southern Minnesota through all of Nebraska, stretching north into South Dakota as well as south into Kansas. In the Eastern Corn Belt, excessive rainfall recently has led to widespread flooding with more rain also forecast through late June, threatening late-planted crops in key states like Indiana and Ohio that have not established well ahead of the precipitation.

Both weather factors threaten yields which may negatively deviate from trendline assumptions

sensitivity to supply/demand changes (Figure 4).

Another consideration when evaluating corn price risk from a feed input cost perspective is where current values sit within a historical context. Looking at current price levels nominally, December corn futures are about average from a long-term perspective, though low over the recent past 3-5 years. However, when one considers the impact of inflation and adjusting price for the PPI, it paints a much different picture. Corn futures have generally ranged from \$3.00 to \$8.00/bushel over the past 15 years, but when you adjust this based on PPI, \$8.00 corn during the drought year of 2012 would translate to a price of nearly \$12.00 today while what used to be a floor in the post-ethanol era of around \$3.00/bushel would translate to more like \$4.25 in today's dollars (Figure 5).

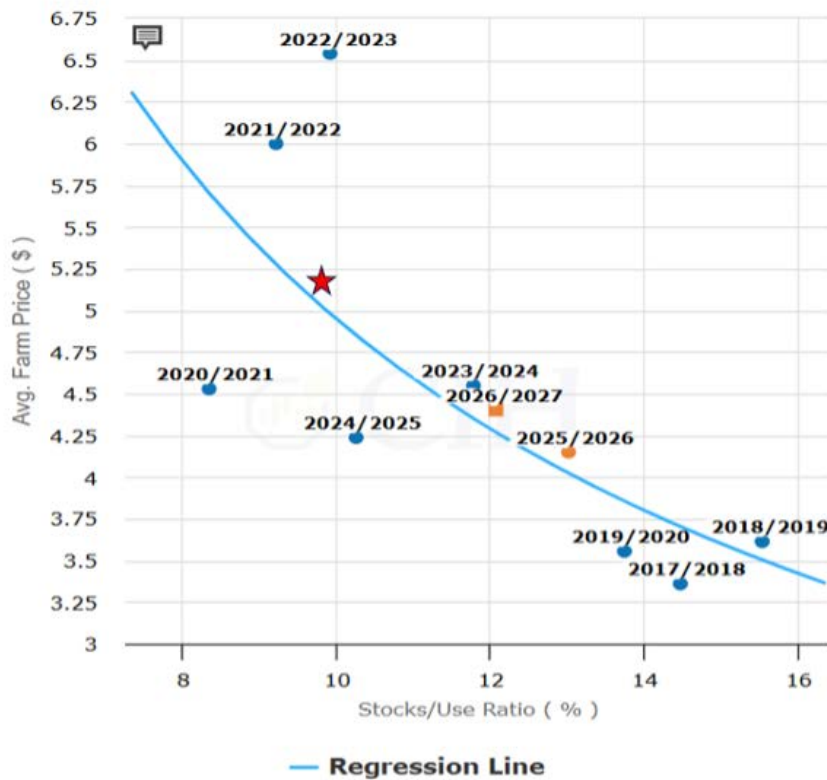


if crop conditions deteriorate over the next two months. It would not take much of a decline in final acreage, and/or yield to reduce projected corn ending stocks from the initial estimate made in USDA's May WASDE report to the final number released in January. There have been several years in recent history where significant differences between the initial and final estimates were observed, with most of the larger deviations skewed to the downside (Figure 3). If corn were to experience a negative deviation like some of these observations on a magnitude of 500 million bushels or more, the projected stocks/use ratio would decline under 10% which historically has been associated with much higher prices than current values as well as greater

Looking at this price history in tabular form in Figure 6, you will notice that adjusting this range by PPI places the current value of December Corn futures in the first percentile of the past 10-15 years as well as at or below the 5th percentile over the past one to five years.

Moreover, in years where corn ending stocks and the stocks/use ratio are projected to drop year-over-year as is forecast for 2026-27, the corn futures market tends to put in a low sometime over the summer by mid-August as opposed to later in the fall during harvest in Q4. As a result, dairy producers should be prepared to lock in prices for an extended period of time to protect their corn silage needs and other

US Corn Stocks/Use Historical Regression



costs that are directly correlated to the corn market over the near term. In addition to milk prices, there are other factors currently relating to dairy margins that are still projected to be profitable for now. Dairy producers should be vigilant attending to both in their risk management endeavors. For further information on how to identify and protect margins for your own operation, please contact us.

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	1 Year	3 Year	5 Year	10 Year	15 Year
Dec 2026 Futures	\$4.42	\$4.42	\$4.42	\$4.42	\$4.42
Percentile	5.2%	2.7%	1.7%	0.8%	0.6%
High	\$5.07	\$7.03	\$7.90	\$8.00	\$11.68
90th	\$4.98	\$5.49	\$7.14	\$6.67	\$7.46
80th	\$4.92	\$5.33	\$6.58	\$6.29	\$6.67
70th	\$4.83	\$5.20	\$6.36	\$5.85	\$6.32
60th	\$4.80	\$5.04	\$5.94	\$5.70	\$6.04
50th	\$4.77	\$4.94	\$5.36	\$5.53	\$5.77
40th	\$4.68	\$4.83	\$5.15	\$5.31	\$5.60
30th	\$4.61	\$4.78	\$4.94	\$5.15	\$5.34
20th	\$4.56	\$4.64	\$4.79	\$4.99	\$5.11
10th	\$4.48	\$4.54	\$4.60	\$4.79	\$4.87
Low	\$4.27	\$4.27	\$4.27	\$4.27	\$4.27



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UPCOMING EVENTS

August 11

IDA Board Meeting - *Sun Valley, ID*

August 13-14

IMPA Annual Meeting - *Sun Valley, ID*

August 27

Sustainable Dairy Forage Field Day - *Kimberly, ID*

September 15

IDA Board Meeting - *Twin Falls, ID*

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