Idaho ag posts strong year financially

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Idaho’s farmers and ranchers posted a fourth-straight record year for projected cash receipts in 2014, according to University of Idaho agricultural economists. The $9.7 billion in sales of milk, livestock and crops was a 16 percent increase from 2013 projections.

Net farm income of $4.53 billion set a second-straight record, too, up 46 percent from 2013. Soaring milk sales projected at $3.25 billion, a $677 million or 26 percent increase from 2013, powered much of the rise. Cattle and calf sales surged to $2.465 billion, a $552 million or 29 percent increase. All livestock sectors rose to $5.94 billion, a 27 percent increase overall.

Grain and hay producers posted $3.755 billion in projected receipts, a 2 percent increase, with gains for barley, sugarbeets and minor crops helping to offset declines in barley, dry bean, wheat and potato sales.

Hay to feed Idaho’s growing dairy and livestock sector yielded $605 million in sales. Economists placed the crop’s total value at $1.1 billion because much of it is produced and consumed on dairy and livestock operations without generating sales. A strong export market fueled by California drought led to record prices averaging $201 a ton.

The report, “The Financial Condition of Idaho Agriculture: 2014,” was authored by Ben Eborn, UI Extension Teton County educator; Paul Patterson, Extension agricultural economist at Idaho Falls; and Garth Taylor, UI Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology economist at Moscow.

Grain researchers respond to crop emergency

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University of Idaho Extension scientists at the Aberdeen Research and Extension Center focused on improving the production and quality of Idaho wheat and barley responded to a weather-related emergency this fall.

Agronomist Juliet Marshall was pursuing her research to improve the quality and reduce the impacts of diseases on ideal-looking crops.

Then the weather changed. Just as the first combines were beginning to harvest, record rains deluged southeastern Idaho. The moisture and delayed harvest caused wheat and barley to sprout in the field. Malting barley, bred to sprout easily to expedite the malting process, sustained the greatest damage.

“It’s been a tremendously difficult year for growers. We had a tremendous yield and high quality grain ready to harvest and then disaster struck,” Marshall said. “We did the best we could to help growers find uses for their crop in response to the damage.” Losses are expected to total in the 10s of millions of dollars.

Wheat breeder Jianli Chen intensified screening for pre-harvest sprouting resistant white wheats to reduce future losses.

Both researchers’ work is supported by Idaho Wheat Commission-endowed professorships.

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