

IMPACT



Canyon County Extension, 501 Main; Caldwell, Idaho 83605; 208-459-6003; Fax: 208-454-6349

2004 Treasure Valley Legislative Ag Tour

The Situation

Agriculture has been the foundation of the Treasure Valley's economy since the 1870's when small groups of farmers banded together to begin building canals and small diversion dams. Today the irrigation infrastructure in the Treasure Valley provides water for nearly 400,000 acres of some of the most productive crop land in the country.

The Treasure Valley is widely known for its high quality field and seed crops that are exported to all parts of the world. The farmgate value of these products is approximately 500 million dollars annually. Despite agriculture's rich history in the Treasure Valley, the area is becoming more urbanized. The valley's population grew by 43.2 percent during the 1990's. At the same time the economy is becoming more diversified as the manufacturing sector grows. There is increased competition for the natural resources that were used to make this valley great and a desire to see them used in other segments of the local economy.

Our Response

In recent years, the Agribusiness Committees of the Nampa and Caldwell Chambers of Commerce have taken an active role in educating Idaho Legislators, County Commissioners, Mayors, Planning and Zoning Boards and other key decision makers about the importance of agriculture to our economy. The Agribusiness Committees consist of representatives from agriculture related businesses and agencies in Canyon County. The tool used in the latest Agribusiness Committees' educational effort was a one day guided bus tour to address several issues facing the agriculture industry in the Treasure

Valley. University of Idaho Extension Educators Jerry Neufeld and Scott Jensen who serve on the Agribusiness Committees were the tour's co-chairs.

On June 30, 2004 the Agribusiness Committees and the Idaho Water Users Association conducted a one day tour of agriculture related facilities and businesses to educate participants about:

1. How surface water, which is typically thought of as agricultural water, is used in a variety of urban settings.
2. The importance of the sugar industry to our economy.

The tour planning committee raised over \$13,000 in cash and in-kind contributions from 17 sponsors to conduct the tour. The tour was attended by over 80 people.

The tour stops and educational subjects were:

- United Water—United Water supplies ground and surface water for municipal use in Boise. They are building a new water treatment facility in southeast Boise in order to meet existing, as well as future water demands. The new treatment plant will draw water from the Boise River, then following several treatment processes deliver it to Boise City residents to be used for drinking, cooking, bathing, lawn watering, etc.
- Ridenbaugh Headworks—The Nampa & Meridian Irrigation District irrigated 24,000 acres of farmland in 1904 when it was formed. Today the district irrigates 64,000 acres of

cropland and 3,500 acres (over 10,000 lots) of residential and commercial land. Forty percent of the water in the Ridenbaugh canal, which is owned by the District is used for urban irrigation.

- City of Nampa Pressurized Irrigation Station—For a nominal yearly fee, Nampa residents have access to all the water they need to irrigate lawns and gardens. In order to supply this water the city operates and maintains over 70 irrigation pumping plants that filter and pressurize surface water for urban irrigation. Due to growth, Nampa installs two new pumping plants a year at a cost of \$70,000 each.
- Amalgamated Sugar Company (AMSCO)—The AMSCO is a local grower owned company that has produced sugar for over 100 years. AMSCO is the second largest producer of sugar in the U.S. Sugarbeet growing areas are in southern Idaho, Eastern Oregon and Washington. The economic impact of the sugarbeet industry in Idaho is \$1.1 billion dollars annually. The Nampa factory, which is the second largest in Idaho, can process 12,000 tons of sugarbeets every 24 hours.

Program Outcomes

At the conclusion of the tour participants were asked to complete a short evaluation. On a scale of 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent) they were asked to give their opinion of the tour and what they learned. The average of the responses was 4.20. Participants were also asked to rate from 1 to 5 their opinion on each of the four tour stops. Response averages ranged from 3.68 to 4.18.

In addition, participants were asked what they liked best about the tour. Some of the responses were:

- The local perspective given by the stakeholders and the diversity of those impacted. I also believe that the time was managed very effectively and efficiently.
- I enjoyed the detailed tours and commentary on the bus.
- I learned so much about water in the valley.
- All of it was very educational. Water is a serious issue.

The economy of the Treasure Valley is changing. Agriculture is still the largest sector, but is slowly declining as the land base shrinks. Manufacturing, the second largest component of our economy is bringing the benefit of economic diversity. Through this tour and other events, the Nampa/Caldwell Agribusiness Committees are working diligently to educate policymakers and the general public about issues affecting agriculture in order to sustain this industry and the numerous benefits it brings to the Treasure Valley.

Collaborators

- University of Idaho, Canyon County Extension
- Nampa/Caldwell Chamber of Commerce Agribusiness Committees
- Idaho Water Users Association

For More Information

Jerry Neufeld, Extension Educator
Canyon County Extension
501 Main Street
Caldwell, Idaho 83605
208-459-6003
Fax: 208-454-6349
Email: jerryn@uidaho.edu

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