

IMPACT

University of Idaho
Extension

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2007 Treasure Valley Legislative Ag Tour

The Situation

Agriculture has played a vital role in Southern Idaho since the 1860's when farming communities emerged along the Boise River to feed the local mining population. The development of the irrigation infrastructure has allowed the Treasure Valley to become some of the most productive crop land in the country.

The Treasure Valley is widely known for producing high quality field and seed crops and livestock and dairy production. However, since 1992 the total acres in farms have declined throughout the Treasure Valley largely due to the increasing population. Since 1992, the population change for counties in the Treasure Valley has ranged from 4.5-32% growth.

Our Response

Every six years the Nampa/Caldwell Chambers of Commerce Agribusiness Committee hosts a tour for the entire Idaho Legislature. The Treasure Valley Legislative Ag Tour is unique in that it is the only legislative tour which focuses solely on agriculture. The Agribusiness Committee is comprised of representatives from local agricultural businesses and public agencies who volunteer their time to organize and conduct the tour. The Agribusiness Committee began meeting eighteen

months before the 2007 tour to select tour sites that would best address issues facing agriculture in Idaho and the Treasure Valley. Tour sites were selected to demonstrate agriculture change in response to population growth, increased regulation and rising input costs. University of Idaho Extension Educators and administrators served vital roles on the planning committee.

Conducting an agricultural tour for the entire legislature is an expensive undertaking. However, there was tremendous allied industry support enabling the planning committee to raise all the needed funds. There were 68 companies and individuals who helped sponsor the tour. Sponsors were invited to have a representative attend all tour events.



2007 Treasure Valley Legislative Ag Tour participants listen at the Blue Sky Bio-Diesel plant.

The 2007 Treasure Valley Legislative Ag Tour was held September 4-6th. Participants toured 14 different locations in Canyon, Payette and Owyhee counties. Issues and topics covered during the tour included:

- Water Issues—Participants had the opportunity to tour the Swan Falls dam to learn about hydropower production and re-licensing efforts. Another stop dealt with drip irrigation and its effect on water conservation and onion production. At other sites, speakers addressed urban and rural issues related to irrigation water, updates on current water storage capacities of reservoirs in the state and provided updates on the Snake River adjudication.
- Beef and Dairy Production—The tour visited Boise Valley Feeders, M/M Dairy Heifer Replacement Feedlot, and Beranna Dairy. Speakers at each site spoke about their operation and changes they have made due to population growth and regulations.
- Crop and Fresh Fruit Production—Garden seed beans and peppermint production were discussed and toured. Amalgamated Sugar Company hosted a tour stop discussing Roundup Ready sugarbeet production and the public’s perception of a GMO crop. At Symm’s Fruit Ranch, tour participants learned about fruit production and toured the packing plant during peach harvest. While at Symm’s an invited speaker discussed issues with farm labor shortages, housing, Homeland Security and legal issues.
- Potato Manufacturing—Simplot Potato Plant hosted a tour stop discussing and sampling Idaho potato products and food industry issues.
- Bio-Diesel Production—Participants toured the Blue Sky Bio-Diesel Plant and learned the process of bio-diesel production. The issues facing the future of bio-diesel production in Idaho were also discussed.
- University of Idaho, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALs) Caldwell Complex—Participants learned about the resources available to the public at the new CALs Caldwell Complex. Tours were given of the Business and Technology Incubator, Commercial Kitchen, Food Technology Center Pilot Plant and technology available to link the

University of Idaho’s educational resources throughout the state.

Program Outcomes

At the conclusion of the tour participants were asked to complete an evaluation. Eighty-eight percent responded that they were very satisfied with how the tour addressed the current issues facing Idaho agriculture. Eighty-eight percent responded they were very satisfied this tour would improve communication between industry, agency and private sector to work cooperatively on agriculture related issues. Eighty percent responded they were very satisfied that the concepts and ideas presented would help them in their decision-making responsibilities related to Idaho agriculture. Ninety-six percent of respondents rated the overall quality of the tour as excellent.

Some of the comments about what participants learned and liked best about they tour were:

- “I’ve learned so much about agriculture and its many emerging and constantly changing issues. It really informs my voting.”
- “All these field trips help us understand how the laws we make affect the industry.”
- “As legislators we really need the exposure to see all this agriculture industry that creates so much of Idaho’s overall capital and economy.”
- “Agriculture varies so much from Northern Idaho to Southern Idaho to Southeast Idaho. It is great to get a perspective from other areas of the state.”

For More Information

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