

## 2015 Economic Impact of Agriculture in Elmore County

By Mir-M. Seyedbagheri

Extension Educator

*“The mission of the University of Idaho Extension is to provide youth, adults and communities with lifelong learning opportunities that encourage the application of research-supported information and leadership skills.”*

### Introduction

The agricultural industry in Elmore County employs 6.3 % of the total workforce. There are 381 farms with a total acreage in farm land of 346,550 acres, and the average farm size is 951 acres. Based on agricultural data collected by the state of Idaho, the annual market value of farm products sold by Elmore County farmers and ranchers is \$220,121,000. The expertise of the University of Idaho Extension Educator and all university resources from different disciplines are utilized to assist the commodity groups in Elmore County. Agricultural production and land values are an important element of the primary foundation for Elmore County economic prosperity and its value index. The establishment of Carmela Winery in Glenns Ferry near Three Island State Park, and other aesthetic landscapes in Pine, Featherville and Atlanta, are attracting tourists from all over the United States. Idaho ranks fourth in the nation for publicly held land. Almost 75% of Elmore County (2,762,309 acres) is state and federally-held land: 67.4% is federal land, 6.1 % is state land, and the State Department of Fish and Game holds approximately 6,716 acres. 26.5% is privately held land.

### Potatoes

Idaho continues to rank number one in potato production. Elmore County is the largest potato growing area in southwest Idaho. There is approximately 19,000 acres of potatoes grown in the county, with an average yield of 565 cwt. per harvested acre. Total potato production in the county was 10,060,000. Approximately 85% of potatoes grown in the county are sold on contract to processors, and the remaining potatoes are sold on the open market either as fresh produce or processed product. All potato crops are grown under sprinkler irrigation. Irrigation water is obtained from deep wells or by use of high lift pumps from the Snake River. Since 1985, the University of Idaho Elmore County Extension Educator has conducted workshops and field demonstrations on planter performance, fertilizer use efficiency, irrigation management, pest and plant disease identification and control, storage and bruise management and the use of soil amendment, which have saved Elmore growers over \$1,400,000.

### Sugar Beets

Sugar beets constitute an important agricultural commodity in Elmore County. Idaho ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> in the nation. In 2013, 7,500 acres of sugar beets were planted and harvested. The average yield

per harvested acre was 35 tons and total sugar beet production was 264,000 tons. In many cases, yields have increased by as much as 40% in the last twenty-five years due to improved irrigation, fertilization and pest control practices. Elmore growers have written letters to the Commissioners regarding the efficacy of the Educator's information for enhancing fertilizer use efficiency and increasing crop yield. In 2010 an Elmore County grower who worked directly with the Educator achieved a crop yield of 42 tons per acre and was nominated "Grower of the Year". Beets from our area are processed at the Amalgamated Plant in Nampa.

### **Alfalfa Hay**

Idaho ranks second in the nation in alfalfa production. Elmore County hay yield per acre ranks among the highest of all counties in Idaho. In 2012, over 33,800 acres of alfalfa hay were planted in Elmore County, with an average yield of 4.1 tons per acre; the highest yield was 67 tons per acre. The total harvested production was 139,000 tons. Most of the hay was raised under irrigation. Over 70% of hay produced in Elmore County is shipped out of the country (with some going to Japan). Since 1985, the UI Elmore County Extension Educator has conducted three applied alfalfa production field trials that have gained national and statewide publicity for increasing hay quality and yield. Educator's publication on alfalfa harvest management has been utilized by growers at local, state and regional levels with excellent outcomes.

### **Beans**

Beans grown in Elmore County are used for seed for both dry-edible and snap garden bean varieties. Main dry bean varieties include pinto, great northern, red Mexican (small red) and California pink. A variety of kidney and small white pea beans are also produced in limited quantities. Growers typically plant 2,400 acres, with an average yield of 2,130 lbs. per harvested acre and total production of 51,000 cwt. Bean seed grown in Idaho is generally in greater demand than seed grown elsewhere because of its disease-free quality.

### **Small Grain Cereals**

Wheat and Barley are being grown mainly with sprinkler irrigation as cash crops and as a main rotation crop with potatoes. Some oats are grown for grain, but the majority are harvested while still green for hay. Based on 2013 county crop statistics for winter wheat, 12,000 acres were harvested with an average yield of 75.7 bushels per acre, and a total production of 908,000 bushels. Spring Wheat production was reported for 2012 at 5,700 with average yield of 74.1 bushels per acre. 2013-14 is withheld. Idaho was ranked 3rd in the nation for barley production. Elmore County 1300 harvested acres, with an average yield of 104.4 bushels per acre and a total production of 1,308,000 bushels. As a result of the cereal nursery research conducted by University of Idaho personnel during the past 25 years, farmers are familiarizing themselves with new varieties of wheat and barley that provide greater yields in the local environment.

### **Other Agricultural Crops**

According to crop statistics for Elmore County, 12,700 acres of corn are planted for grain and silage, producing 880,000 bushels of grain and 215,000 tons of silage. Peppermint has risen to ranking first in the nation and Spearmint is rated fourth. There was 1,500 acres of mint were grown in Elmore County and processed at a locally owned distillery. Spearmint yield per acre is 120 pounds, which sold at \$20.00 per pound. Peppermint yield per acre was 100 pounds, and

sold at an average price of \$22.30 per pound. Mint has been a good cash crop for the past few years, but requires a great deal of special care with regard to pest control, irrigation and fertilizer application. Watermelon and cantaloupe are raised in the eastern and southern portion of the county, producing fruit of excellent quality that is sold locally.

### **Vineyards**

Since 1988, Elmore County has help to established two wineries, Carmela Vineyards and Cold Springs Winery, which are located at some of the highest elevations in the Pacific Northwest. A variety of grapes are produced on 81 acres in Elmore County, including Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Merlot, Cabernet Franc, Johannesburg Riesling, Pinot Gris, Viogner, Pinot Noir, Syrah and Tempranillo. There have been several new growers interested in vineyards that the Elmore County Extension Educator is consulting with. He has published a nutrient management guide for grapes in Idaho that is widely used by growers at county, state and regional levels with excellent outcomes.

### **Cattle**

Cattle represent a significant share of the agricultural economy of Elmore County. According to 2011 Idaho County Estimates, all cattle and calves in the county totaled 110,000 head. Of these 22,000 were beef (cows that have calved). Because almost 75% of the land in the Elmore County is federally and state owned, Elmore County presents an ideal situation for cow-calf operators to graze on federal lands six to eight months out of the year. There is a major commercial feed lot in the county which has a capacity of approximately 150,000 head. Japan is becoming one of the major exporters of beef from Elmore County.

### **Dairy**

Idaho is fourth in the nation for milk production and second for cheese production. Cash receipts for 2013 were \$2.42 billion, producing 13.6 billion pounds, the largest commodity for Idaho. There are currently seven dairies located in Elmore County with over 28,500 dairy animals. The Educator worked with dairymen on their Crop Enterprise Budgets and establishment of new cropping systems such as silage corn, alfalfa quality management, crop production, and waste management. Elmore County dairy products are largely sold outside the county, generating a large infusion of “new” or “outside” money into the community that contribute to the growth of the local economy.

### **Sheep and Lamb**

ISDA livestock statistics show approximately 1000 sheep and lambs in Elmore County. The average value per head is \$124.00, with a total value of \$75,285. 6,847 pounds of fleece were harvested at a record 1.70Lb. Lambs are sold locally at livestock auctions in the Treasure Valley and Magic Valley areas.

### **Noxious Weed Control**

Since 1984, the Extension Educator has directed the Elmore County Noxious Weed Departments; implementing very successful noxious weed projects throughout the county. Working in cooperation with the South Fork Cooperative Weed Management Area, BLM, US Forest Service, Dept. of Lands, and ISDA, the Educator supervises and implements weed control projects totaling over \$75,000 each year. Approximately \$60,000 is used for cost-share programs

where the department provides pesticide education, herbicides and spray training in multiple communities each year.

### **Pest Management**

The Educator supervises and implements the Elmore County Pest Abatement Program. Due to the highly successful aerial spraying in 2006, it was reported that 96% of the adult mosquito population was killed. Every year, a comprehensive program continues to keep mosquito population at a minimal. Known hot spots of standing water are surveyed and treated with a larvacides to significantly reduce the mosquito population. With community help and the Educator's training, prevention has become an important key to controlling outbreaks of WNV. Areas that have been found to have high mosquito activity have been consistently fogged through-out the mosquito season each year. Reports of incidents of West Nile Virus in humans and horses has dramatically declined every year. In 2013 and 2014, there were zero positives for WNV in mosquitoes trapped and zero reports of WNV in humans or horses.

In 1985, the USDA reported that in one year the Educator's Mormon cricket and grasshopper control measures for crop protection saved growers and the county \$14 million. The outstanding success of the program was publicized nationally via the New York Times and national television, and Educator was awarded the Governor's Award of Excellence in Agriculture.

### **Forests**

According to USDA/Idaho Forest Service, there is a total of 783,196 forested acres in Elmore County. Primary species of trees harvested in the county are Ponderosa Pine and Douglas fir. The 2000 timber harvest in Elmore County was 11.48 million board feet with a value of \$1,123,675.00, and an additional 1-2 million board feet was cut for firewood. Current statistical data is not available at this time, however USDA/IFS reports that these figures are considerably lower today.

Your Elmore Extension is dedicated to the prosperity of our community. We provide services such as disease-pest identification, soil management, weed control, agriculture & horticulture recommendations. You can contact the office by email: [elmore@uidaho.edu](mailto:elmore@uidaho.edu) or call us at 208-587-2136 Ext. 509.