

Crop Management

Idaho cows boost ethanol drive

By RUSTY TEWS

WITH less than 5% of the nation's corn acreage, Idaho isn't noted for being a corn producing state, but the corn-for-ethanol buzz heard across the U.S. is being felt in the Magic Valley.

Unlike other regions, ethanol isn't fueling the demand for corn on the Snake River Plain from Burley to Glens Ferry, Idaho. Conversely, dairy demand for

Key Points

- Ethanol production is growing in Idaho's Magic Valley.
- Burgeoning dairy industry is fostering ethanol production.
- Corn acres have increased 70% over six years.

feed products is luring ethanol production to Idaho.

"It's cheaper for them [ethanol producers] to ship corn here to produce ethanol," says Mark Mitton, Burley's city manager, "than it is to produce ethanol in the Midwest and haul the byproducts and fuel to Idaho."

Mitton's city is seeing an explosion of ethanol plant construction. "We've got two plants under construction right now," he says. "A third company is looking for funding for another 50 million-gallon plant." The two plants under construction are scheduled to be on line in March, producing 72 million gallons annually.

Burley's location on the rail system, proximity to urban areas (Salt Lake City, Las Vegas and Portland, Ore.) and the 300,000 dairy cows in the area make it attractive to fuel producers.

"The distillers grain byproducts have to be dehydrated before shipment from the Midwest," Mitton explains,

"Dairymen rehydrate it to feed to their cows. With the plant here, there is a ready market for the wet product direct from the plant." Distillers grains are a major ingredient in many dairy rations and a coproduct of ethanol production.

So far, the plants are not making provisions for receiving local corn production.

Corn production up with dairy

However, that's not to say that Magic Valley producers aren't increasing their acreage. "Idaho is a corn-deficient state," says Rick Speicher, Land-O-Lakes/Croplan agronomist. "Our dairies consume way more corn than we can produce."

Magic Valley producers planned on 158,000 acres in corn for 2007. Historically, 85% of those would be for ensilage. "We are seeing a 30% increase in our seed sales this year," Speicher says. "About a third of that increase is for grain corn seed."

Most corn produced in the valley is consumed by the region's dairy cows. Cow numbers and corn production have followed a parallel track with 232,000 dairy cows consuming 96,000 acres of corn in 2000, while 341,500 cows consumed 158,000 acres of corn in 2006.

Acreages planted to the glamour crops — potatoes, sugarbeets and wheat — have declined by 121,000



ETHANOL ENERGIZED: Burley, Idaho, City Manager Mark Mitton, sees big energy opportunities with ethanol in Idaho.

They said it

"We have had a very good spring for planting corn. Planting will wrap up a week early this year."



Bob Simmons,
Valley Agronomics agronomist,
Shoshone, Idaho



"Our seed corn sales have been growing at double-digit rates for the past six years. Our Roundup Ready and Yield Guard brand seeds allow growers to rotate corn after corn without weed and insect problems."

Dan Rongen,
DeKalb/Asgrow agronomist,
Kimberly, Idaho

acres since 2000. Alfalfa hay production has been steady at about 312,000 acres. Acres planted in barley, an ingredient in many dairy rations, has declined 30% in the same period. Oats, green chopped for dairy forage, has doubled to 28,000 acres in the six-year period, although a 17% statewide drop in production for 2007 is anticipated.

Unlike Midwestern and Southeastern corn producers, extreme weather hasn't affected Idaho's corn planting schedule with 40% planted by mid-May versus the 30% average.

Tews writes from Shoshone, Idaho.

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