

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

Forage field days in eastern Idaho brings research results to local producers

AT A GLANCE

Forage field days and schools held in 2022, 2023 and 2024 have allowed local growers and other Extension educators to view updated results from research trials held in multiple locations in Idaho.

The Situation

Idaho is known for growing great quality alfalfa and other forages. In 2023, Idaho was ranked sixth in the nation for overall forage production in the United States. This also comes with a first place ranking in the United States for overall alfalfa yield and fourth place for overall alfalfa acres.

Idaho forage production is a significant cash crop resulting in nearly \$670 million in cash receipts and the total value of hay production in Idaho estimated at \$1.2 billion in 2023.

Our Response

Due to the vital importance of forages to the livelihood of Idaho farmers, a group of Extension specialists and educators conducted a series of forage schools in March and field days in May or June of 2022-2024. Forage schools were held in several locations including St. Anthony, Mud Lake, Idaho Falls, Blackfoot, Malad and Preston. Field days were held at the Aberdeen Research and Extension Center (all years) and Brigham Young University-Idaho in 2022.

At each of these events, participants were provided with updated results from ongoing research as well as knowledge on current practices for planting,



Forage producers and students learn from presenters at the 2022 Rexburg forage field day.

harvesting, testing and marketing forage products. They were also introduced to new forage crops [e.g., hybrid rye or high nitrogen-fixing alfalfa cultivars (Hi-Nitro)], practices [e.g., intercropping small grains with legumes and tools (e.g., Green-seeker canopy sensor, hay bale probe)]. Presentations were given by local University of Idaho Extension educators or Extension specialists.

Program Outcomes

The field days that occurred over these three years have reached a total of 371 producers and educators in southern and eastern Idaho. Each of the following topics that were presented on are considered by forage producers one or more times throughout the growing season each year.

- Water outlook for the current year
- Nutrient management in annual forages
- Weed management
- Protecting pollinators
- Field scouting for insects
- Economic outlooks
- Vole control
- Alfalfa-grass intercropping systems
- Fall seeded cereal forages
- Annual alfalfa and subsequent nitrogen supply to cereals
- Forage Quality Assessment and Marketing

An evaluation in 2022 completed at the conclusion of the presentation indicated that 80-90% of the respondents' knowledge level about each of these topics increased due to the field day. On a scale of one to 10, the participants indicated that the level of planned use of knowledge gained was on average 7.8. The participants indicated that the water outlook, hybrid rye and nutrient management topics were the most helpful to their operations. Because water and nutrient management are the most significant operational costs,

improved management of these inputs will result in a more productive farm operation and better resource use efficiencies.

Those present at the 2024 events were also surveyed. Knowledge increase was measured with a Likert scale from one to five (five being a high level of knowledge on the subject). Average initial knowledge about the subjects was ranked at 2.8 for the seven presentations that were given. The survey indicated that knowledge at the end of the program for these same subjects ended at 4.1 (out of five). Producers at this school indicated that as a result of these presentations, that they were more likely to invest more time and effort into testing the quality of their forages and improve the marketing of their product. Incorporating canopy sensing technology to identify nitrogen deficiencies and learning more about fall seeding annual grasses were also listed as practices these participants intended to use in the future.

Forage field days in eastern Idaho have been well received by local producers and those involved in hosting these events plan on continuing to provide updated knowledge through research-based practices in the upcoming years. With forages being such a key crop in Idaho, the information from these presentations continues to be valuable for our local producers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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