

Idaho's 2022 barley crop is a big one

By Sean Ellis

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POCATELLO – Idaho's 2022 barley crop is much bigger than last year's drought-affected crop and it's estimated the state set a record for average barley yields this year.

Most importantly, the quality of Idaho's 2022 barley crop looks really good, said Idaho Barley Commission Executive Director Laura Wilder.

"It's a big crop; it's an excellent crop," she said.

According to USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service, Idaho farmers produced 59.9 million bushels of barley this year, which is 37 percent more than the 43.6 million bushels of barley the state's growers produced last year.

Average barley yield in Idaho is estimated by NASS at 111 bushels an acre this year, which would be a record, narrowly clipping the previous record of 110 bushels an acre set in 2020.

"We got some good, strong barley yields ... and the quality was really good," said Rupert barley farmer Mike Wilkins.

The state's average barley yield includes both irrigated farm ground and dryland, which depends only on natural precipitation. Some barley growers with irrigated farmland reported more than 200 bushels an acre this year, while some dryland farmers reported less-than-normal yields.

Soda Springs farmer Scott Brown said unusually high temperatures took a toll on his 2022 barley crop.

His area received more moisture than last year, "but it was so hot and the rain didn't come at the right time," Brown said. "The drought continues to affect our crop."

Due to severe drought conditions and a brutal heatwave in 2021, last year's barley crop was way down from normal.

The water situation in Idaho was much better this year but high temperatures again had an impact on some barley, said Teton farmer Dwight Little.

While most farmers made it through the year with enough water, some of "the crops just didn't produce as much because of the heat," he said.

But overall, the state's barley crop was much bigger this year and it was the second-largest production year for barley in Idaho in at least the past decade. Idaho farmers produced 62 million bushels of barley in 2016 off of 580,000 acres.

According to NASS, Idaho farmers harvested 540,000 acres of barley in 2022, up from 490,000 in 2021. Average barley yield in the state last year was only 89 bushels an acre.

Idaho remains the nation's No. 1 barley producing state, ahead of North Dakota and Montana. According to NASS, Idaho accounted for 34 percent of the nation's total barley crop this year.

Montana and North Dakota both have more barley acres than Idaho but Idaho's yields are much higher because most of the state's barley crop is grown under irrigation.

Idaho has led the nation in barley production nine out of the last 10 years and Wilder doesn't see that changing because of the state's irrigation infrastructure and favorable growing climate.

Those factors result in Idaho farmers producing a consistent supply and quality of barley virtually every year, Wilder said.

"Barley production in Idaho is here to stay," she said. "We have companies that have located here because of the reliability of our crop. They're not going anywhere. They need the barley and we're able to produce it."

About 70 percent of the barley grown in Idaho is malt barley that is used in the beer-brewing process. That barley is purchased by beer companies.

Idaho farmers typically grow enough malt barley each year to produce 12 million barrels of beer or 4.1 billion 12-ounce bottles of beer.

The rest of the barley grown in Idaho is used for human food or animal feed.

Idaho's barley industry has a major impact on the state's economy and a good barley year is a good thing for Idaho's overall economy.

According to a study commissioned by the IBC that was released this year, the state's barley industry contributes about \$274 million to Idaho's total gross state product each year and is responsible for \$551 million in total sales. It also supports 2,698 jobs in Idaho.

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