

Idaho's barley assessment fee going up half a cent

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

POCATELLO – The assessment fee that Idaho barley farmers pay per hundred pounds of production will increase from 3 cents to 3.5 cents.

The increase will be effective July 1 and impact the state's 1,500 barley growers, who pay the assessment to fund marketing, research and grower education programs conducted by the Idaho Barley Commission.

Idaho's barley farmers formed the commission in 1988 to help promote their industry and the commission started with an assessment fee of 2 cents per hundred pounds of production.

This will be only the second time the assessment has increased. The other time was in 2013, when it was raised from 2 cents to 3 cents.

The new 3.5-cent rate is equivalent to 1.68 cents per bushel.

Idaho's four IBC members – three barley farmers and one industry representative – voted unanimously to raise the assessment during a special meeting June 9.

The need to raise it to cover rising costs was a main topic of discussion.

“I think it's time to move up (from 3 cents),” said Blackfoot farmer and IBC Commissioner Allen Young. “I really see that staying at 3 cents would make it hard to maintain what we are doing as a commission.”

During the June 9 meeting, commissioners voted to adopt a budget of \$915,447 for fiscal year 2024, which begins July 1. That represents a 4 percent increase over the fiscal 2023 budget of \$877,604.

While examining the budget, IBC Executive Director Laura Wilder pointed out the cost of virtually every program and service the commission provides barley growers has increased.

“The cost of all those programs has gone up incrementally,” she told commissioners. “Everybody is asking for more money. It really erodes what we can do as a commission.”

If the barley commission is to continue its various market development, research and grower outreach programs, raising the assessment is necessary in order to keep up with rising costs, Young said.

“Inflation is real. Another half cent does not seem outrageous to ask for to keep the commission’s services going,” he said. “We definitely need an increase.”

Rupert farmer and IBC commissioner Mike Wilkins said growers understand well the reality of rising costs.

“Our farm production prices the last two years have gone up significantly,” he said.

Idaho leads the nation in barley production and Gem State farmers typically produce more than 50 million bushels of barley off of 550,000 acres annually.

Most of that barley is used as malt during the beer production process and the rest is grown for human food or animal feed.

The half-cent increase in the barley assessment will bring in about \$125,000 per year in additional revenue for the barley commission.

While the vote to increase the assessment was 4-0, the decision did not happen without significant debate. A motion to raise it to 4 cents died for lack of a second motion and discussion occurred over two days.

North Idaho farmer and IBC commissioner Josh Jones said he was reluctant to raise the assessment without being assured it would result in an additional return to growers.

“I would like to see more dollars put into market development if we want to increase the rate,” he said. “I just want to make sure we have some agreement among ourselves on how to better utilize these funds and ... get more return to the producers. That’s our job.”

14 Jun 2023