

Idaho produces second biggest barley crop ever

By Sean Ellis

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POCATELLO – Idaho’s 2023 barley crop set a record for average yield this year and the state’s barley farmers produced their second biggest crop ever.

According to USDA’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, Idaho farmers produced 60.5 million bushels of barley this year. That is second only to the 62.1 million bushels they produced in 2016.

“It’s a good crop. For me personally, we did have probably the best crop we’ve ever had,” said Blackfoot barley farmer Allen Young. “We’re probably 10 bushels an acre better than what we normally are.”

According to NASS, the average barley yield in Idaho this year was 112 bushels per acre, just nudging last year’s record of 111 bushels per acre.

That yield record includes both irrigated and dryland barley.

“There were some areas that did very well yield-wise,” said Idaho Barley Commission Executive Director Laura Wilder. “On irrigated ground, most farmers did quite a bit better than 112.”

The yield record was somewhat of a surprise given many farmers planted later than normal this year due to a longer-than-normal winter and late spring, Wilder said.

Besides planting being pushed back later than normal, there were also some issues with early-season hail damage, she said.

“But overall, once things got warm, the crops really came on,” Wilder said.

“What made the year so good is that once the weather got done being so cold and miserable, June was just perfect,” Young said. “June was just perfect: 70s and low 80s, some light rainstorms. It was just perfect weather to develop that early kernel. And then July finished the crop up real nice.”

While there were some issues with sprout damage due to late-season rains, the overall quality of this year’s barley crop was good, industry leaders said.

“The quality of this year’s crop was better than last year,” said Brett Wilken, who oversees Scoular Co.’s Barley MVP program. “Mother Nature was pretty good to us.”

Idaho farmers harvested 540,000 acres of barley in 2023, the same amount as 2022, according to NASS.

The state again led the nation in total barley production, mainly because of its much higher yields per acre compared to the nation's other major barley-producing states of Montana and North Dakota.

Idaho produced 32.7 percent of the nation's total barley supply in 2023.

Montana ranked No. 2 with 49.7 million bushels produced off of 1.02 million acres and an average yield of 41 bushels per acre. Montana produced 26.9 percent of the nation's total barley supply this year.

North Dakota was the nation's No. 3 barley state in 2023 with 40.5 million bushels produced off of 570,000 harvested acres and an average yield of 73 bushels per acre. North Dakota produced 21.9 percent of the United States' total 2023 barley crop.

Idaho has ranked No. 1 in barley production in the U.S. nine of the past 10 years, with the lone exception being 2015, when the state ranked second.

About 70 percent of Idaho's barley is malt barley, which is used in the beer-brewing process. The rest is grown for human food or animal feed.

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