

Idaho barley assessment rises by half a cent

By Sean Ellis

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation

Idaho's barley assessment will increase from 3.5 cents per hundredweight (cwt) to 4 cents, beginning July 1.

This assessment is paid by the state's 1,500 barley farmers to fund the Idaho Barley Commission, which funds promotion and market development programs for the crop, as well as research projects important to the industry.

The commission also educates growers about various barley-related issues.

The commission's four members – three farmers and one industry representative – voted June 6 to raise the assessment.

The increase will generate about \$125,000 a year more for the commission, which currently has a budget of \$900,000.

Inflation has caused the cost of virtually everything to increase, in some cases dramatically, and the commission could not continue to fund its current programs, or address additional industry needs, without the increase, said IBC Executive Director Laura Wilder.

“The fact is, the cost for everything has increased and this small assessment increase really is absolutely needed for the commission to best serve Idaho growers,” she said.

Idaho Barley Commissioner Mike Wilkins, who farms in Rupert, made the motion to increase the assessment.

“The commission must be proactive on finances to ensure we keep up with the needs of Idaho growers and in advancing the Idaho barley industry,” said Wilkins. “Through our strategic planning process, we've identified research and market development priorities and this boost to the assessment will provide the additional income to invest in these programs to benefit Idaho barley growers.”

She said commissioners were very thoughtful about the increase and pointed out the IBC had to cut back about 25 percent this year on its research funding because there simply was not enough money.

During an annual “research review,” commissioners are presented possible research projects by scientists, before deciding which ones to fund.

“They weren’t able to provide funding for all the good projects that were presented during this year’s research review,” Wilder said.

Idaho leads the nation in barley production and Gem State farmers typically produce more than 50 million bushels of barley off of about 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.

If total Idaho barley production dropped significantly in a given year due to unforeseen issues, such as bad weather, it would jeopardize many of the IBC’s programs that it is statutorily commissioned to do, Wilder said.

The increase works out to less than half a cent per bushel. A bushel of barley equals 48 pounds.

The new assessment of 4 cents per cwt works out to less than 2 cents per bushel.

“It’s a very small increase, yet it’s enough to help us do some additional much-needed work,” Wilder said.

The new 4-cents-per-bushel rate is the highest the commission is authorized to assess per state statute.

Idaho’s barley farmers formed the IBC in 1988 to help promote their industry and the commission started with an assessment fee of 2 cents per 100 pounds of production.

The assessment was raised from 2 cents to 3 cents in 2013 and it was raised to 3.5 cents last year.

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