Letter from the President

Office of the President, president@uidaho.edu

Jan. 23, 2026

Dear Vandals,

Partnership with the University of Idaho provides solutions to improve safety and efficiency for one of the country's top sugar beet processors. While Amalgamated Sugar's employees focus largely on day-to-day operations, Vandals work to improve processes and make those operations smooth.

Scott Hyer '10 began building a relationship with his alma mater eight years ago. As an operations manager at Amalgamated Sugar, he works with several U of I interns each year along with faculty and graduate students.

"Students bring a lot of energy and a lot of focus to their work," Hyer said. "They are very motivated, and being with the U of I,

they bring that credibility behind the university's mission. The students don't have a personal agenda — they're driven by improvement."

Last year, a team from the U of I devised an AI solution to a problem that caused safety issues and hindered production.

Amalgamated Sugar's Nampa facility produces about 4.4 million pounds of sugar a day during the peak season. The raw sugar beets are cleaned, cut into waffle fry-like shapes, and immersed in hot water to diffuse the sugar from the pulp. The pulp is then placed in a steam dryer to reduce the moisture content and produce livestock feed. But Amalgamated Sugar's production has suffered shutdowns and delays due to issues in the pulp drying process.

By using 10 years of data and measuring factors such as moisture content in the sugar beets, U of I graduate student Hunter Hawkins developed an AI algorithm that can predict potential issues in the steam dryer and help employees avoid them. Amalgamated Sugar recently implemented the new solution in Nampa, which improves employee safety and potentially saves millions of dollars in lost production time.

Kate Bouse '25, a chemical engineering graduate who interned at Amalgamated Sugar last summer, played a key role in developing the solution on site.

"I served as the boots on the ground for Hunter, and I was able to connect with the right people in the factory to troubleshoot and ask about any problems," said Bouse, who is now a U of I graduate student in computer science. "It was great to work on this project and be able to connect my education to an application in industry."

Partnerships with organizations across Idaho provide invaluable experience for U of I students while advancing innovative solutions to move businesses forward. In the emerging field of AI, the university's expertise is especially beneficial.

“We’ve had an interest in how computer models and AI can help find the nuances that we miss,” Hyer said. “To stay competitive, we can’t afford human mistakes — they cost a lot of money in lost production and repairs. We can’t hand our operations over to computers, but we can give ourselves more tools so that people can make better decisions and avoid problems.”

The U of I’s industry partnerships help prepare our graduates to thrive in their careers, while boosting Idaho companies. We’re grateful to our partners across the state who provide rich opportunities for our students and faculty members to put our research into action.

Go Vandals!

C. Scott Green

President

Snapshots

Student researchers track Idaho wolf packs

U of I students hike through the Idaho backcountry to collect wolf droppings, locate dens and document wolf gatherings to provide valuable information to the Idaho Department of Fish and Game and other agencies. The goal is to learn what effect hunting and trapping has on wolf packs across the state.
Learn more.

U of I, NIC open doors for students in Coeur d'Alene

The U of I and North Idaho College provide opportunities for students to complete four-year degrees entirely in Coeur d'Alene. Through collaborative pathways, NIC students can go on to earn bachelor's degrees in computer science, geoengineering, education and liberal arts.
Learn more.

Faculty members team up to develop new fungicides

A U of I team is conducting experiments, running computer simulations and forming new chemical compounds to develop new agricultural fungicides. The multi-college effort aims to develop fungicides for potato production.
Learn more.

Earlier this month the National Bobblehead Hall of Fame and Museum unveiled a new Joe Vandal bobblehead.

University of Idaho

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