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The Present and Future Role of Cooperative Extension in Idaho

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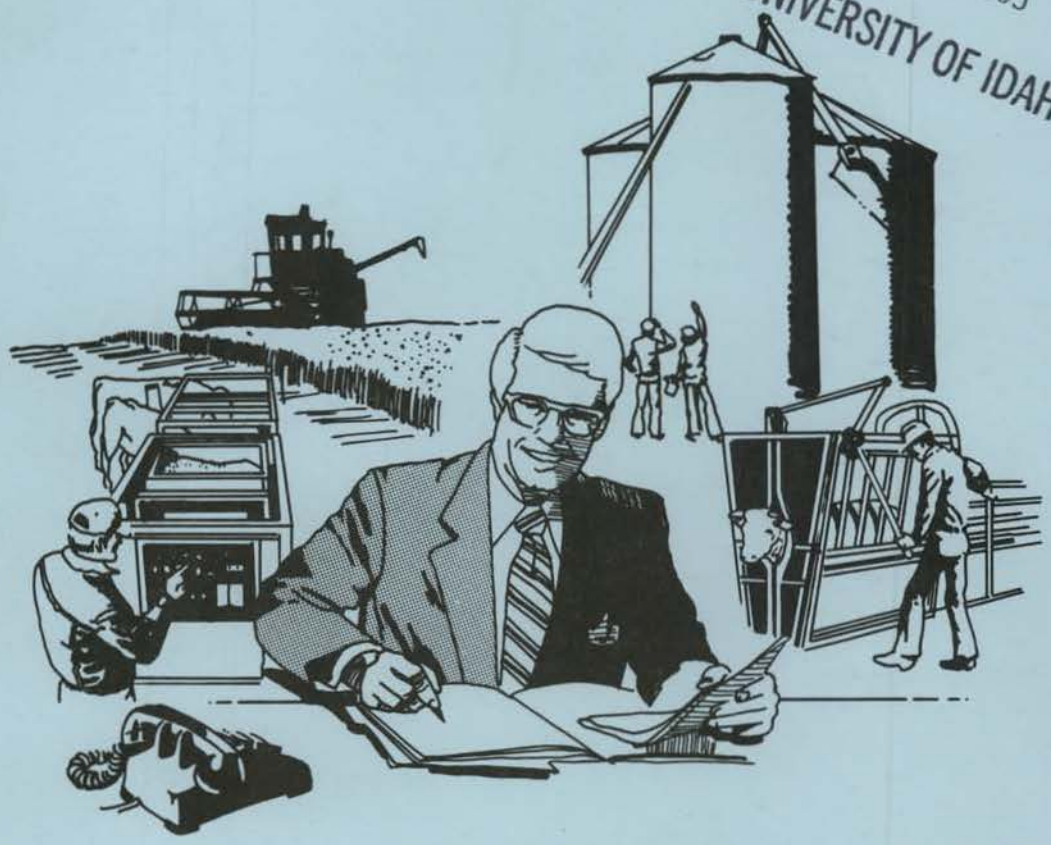

Cooperative Extension Service
University of Idaho
College of Agriculture

The Present and Future Role Of Cooperative Extension in Idaho

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Introduction

The Cooperative Extension Service in Idaho is faced with the same problems as many agencies in the Federal and state governments. These problems center on being able to identify appropriate clientele, determine clientele needs and incorporate clientele feedback and evaluation into agency programs. The future of Cooperative Extension, as with many other agencies, "depends on its ability...to show its effectiveness and to maintain a climate of political legitimacy" (Christenson and Warner 1982:369).

The beginnings of Extension are grounded solidly in the area of agricultural production. The Smith-Lever Act uses the terms "cooperative agricultural Extension work" to emphasize the rural agricultural thrust of the legislation. Our nation has, however, undergone a dramatic transformation from rural to urban living during the years since the original legislation. For example, 30 percent of the population were farmers in 1920 compared to about 3 percent in 1980 (Carlson, Lassey and Lassey 1981:10). This change has forced Extension to evaluate continually its role and mission. While the four program thrusts — agriculture, home economics, 4-H/youth and community development — have remained the same, the potential clientele of the Extension Service has changed dramatically. Extension program development must take this diverse environment into account to remain viable.

While changes in the state of Idaho have not followed the trends of the rest of the nation exactly, the changes have been dramatic and have a potential impact on Extension programming. Idaho is still predominantly a rural state. Increased urbanization, however, has taken place. Also, a rather dramatic influx of population into rural areas has occurred during the previous decade. Most of this increase has been from urban areas to rural areas, and the characteristics of these inmigrants tend to be different than the native residents of the state (Sargent and Carlson 1983).

An important source of feedback to Extension can be obtained by assessing the attitudes of Idaho residents regarding their experiences with Extension and where they feel greater or lesser emphasis should be placed. This publication presents results of several surveys that have asked the people of Idaho how they feel about Extension programs in the state.

The Surveys

The survey of College of Agriculture faculty was designed to assess the opinions of the faculty with regard to current problems and the future of the College. Included were several questions related to its teaching and research programs.

Two hundred forty questionnaires were mailed to the home addresses of all permanent College of Agriculture faculty. One questionnaire was returned undeliverable (moved, no forwarding address) and one was returned too late to be included in the study. Fifteen faculty failed to return questionnaires, leaving 230 useable responses, a return rate of 93 percent.

A second survey was sent to members of the boards of directors of businesses and agencies represented on the Agricultural Consulting Council (an advisory council to the College of Agriculture). Appendix A contains a list of these businesses and agencies. The survey's objective was to solicit attitudes related to various areas of agricultural policy and to obtain input useful in planning the future direction for the College of Agriculture. The questionnaire was mailed to 494 people. Three hundred ninety responses resulted, a return rate of 80 percent.

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The statewide survey used basically the same questionnaire as the agricultural-related organization survey. It was sent to a randomly selected sample of 1,223 Idaho residents. After several follow-up mailings, 675 useable responses were obtained for a 55 percent return rate. The low return rate was likely a result of both the questionnaire length and its complexity. The low return rate was not unexpected in light of these problems.

The last two surveys can be compared directly since they contain the same sets of questions. The faculty survey, however, contains a different set of questions. Results from the faculty survey were used in areas where data allowed comparisons to be made.

Data from the statewide sample and the sample of agricultural related organizations (ARO) were analyzed using multiple regression applied to a number of socioeconomic background characteristics. These variables included age, sex, location of childhood residence, present residence, length of time in Idaho, occupation (comparing farmers, with non-farmers), respondent's education and family income.

Table 1. Comparison of background characteristics of sample of boards of directors represented on Agricultural Consulting Council and statewide population samples.

Demographics	Directors	Statewide sample
	(%)	(%)
Median age	45	44
Sex:		
Male	87	60
Female	13	40
	100	100
Childhood community:		
Rural farm	59	34
Rural non-farm or town under 10,000 population	30	20
City over 10,000 population	11	46
	100	100
Present community:		
Rural farm	45	16
Rural non-farm or town under 10,000 population	27	21
City over 10,000 population	28	63
	100	100
Median years in Idaho	37	30
Major occupations:		
Professional	14	12
Managers	17	9
Farmers	54	11
Other	15	36
Craftsman, op. service	—	15
Clerical and sales	—	18
	100	101*
Median education	Some college	Some college
Median income	$25,000 to $49,999	$20,000 to $24,999

*Exceeds 100 because of rounding.

Sample Characteristics

Some definite differences are evident when comparing the agricultural related organization (ARO) replies with the statewide sample of Idaho residents (Table 1). The ARO respondents were more agriculturally oriented than those in the statewide sample. More of the ARO sample grew up on farms (59 compared to 34 percent); more of the ARO currently resided on farms (45 compared to 16 percent); and more of the ARO were professionals, managers and farmers (85 compared to 32 percent) than the statewide sample. The ARO sample has lived in Idaho about 7 years longer than the statewide sample (37 compared to 30 years), and they had slightly higher education and income levels. Not much difference existed in the median ages of the two samples. The ARO sample had a higher male representation than the statewide sample. The ARO sample represented the agricultural business interests of the state. The statewide sample, even though it contained 11 percent farmers, was more representative of the non-agricultural segment of the population.

Extension Use and Satisfaction

Cooperative Extension has relatively high exposure among Idaho residents. Exposure was greatest among the agricultural segment of the population (Table 2).

Extension county agents and 4-H provided the greatest exposure to both agricultural and

Table 2. Have heard or read about Cooperative Extension programs.

	% responding yes	
	ARO	Statewide sample
A program for youth called **4-H**	99	97
Radio/TV programs on specific topics and issues	77	65
Assistance for people with gardening or landscaping problems or **Extension publications** on how to grow gardens, trees and lawns	85	73
Newspaper items written by Extension people	92	72
Extension County Agents who give advice to farmers on farming practices and other agricultural matters	98	84
Extension Home Economists through homemakers clubs and other activities	92	75
	N=390	N=660

non-agricultural segments of the population. In fact, 4-H had almost the same exposure to the non-agricultural segment as it did to the agricultural segment.

In all other areas, the agricultural segment had greater exposure to Extension programs. The least exposure occurred in the areas of radio and TV programs; this was true for all segments of the population. The largest difference between the agricultural and non-agricultural segments occurred in the area of "newspaper items written by Extension people." This was followed by "Extension home economists" and "county agents."

The only socioeconomic background influences among the ARO group occurred in the areas of "Extension publications," "Extension county agents" and "Extension home economists." Older persons were more likely to be exposed to all three of these areas. Females and those with higher education levels were more likely to be exposed to Extension publications. For the statewide sample, older people, those who grew up in rural areas and those who have lived in the state the longest have had more exposure to Extension programs than others. Females were more likely to read Extension publications and interact with Extension home economists. Those with higher education levels and those currently living in rural areas were more likely to contact Extension agents than those with lower education levels. The data suggested that Extension exposure is selective in terms of the older people and those who have grown up in rural areas.

The increased exposure of Extension to the agricultural sector was further documented by the proportion of people who indicated that they had used Extension within the last year or two (Table 3).

Eighty seven percent of the agricultural segment compared to 45 percent of the non-agricultural segment has used Extension. The use of Extension by Idaho residents exceeds the national average by almost double (Christenson and Warner 1982). No doubt the rural nature of the state contributes to this higher exposure to Extension.

Analysis showed that throughout the state, females, those with higher educations, farmers and those who resided in rural areas tended to use Extension to a greater extent than others. Among the agricultural-related organization sample, those currently residing in rural areas were more likely to have used Extension.

The agricultural sector placed greater value on the information or assistance they received from Extension than did the non-agricultural sector, although the differences are not large (Table 4).

In both the statewide sample and the ARO sample, females found Extension material more useful than males. When asked about the general usefulness of information regardless of whether they had actually had contact with Extension or not, there was essentially no difference between the agricultural and non-agricultural segments (Table 5).

For both examples, females were more likely than males to indicate that Extension information was useful. For the statewide sample, those who grew up in rural areas and those with lower incomes viewed Extension materials as being more useful.

Support for Cooperative Extension

Faculty support for Extension was measured by comparing the perceived quality of

Table 3. Have personally received assistance or information from Cooperative Extension Service.

	% receiving assistance	
	ARO	Statewide sample
Yes	87	45
	N = 389	N = 289

Table 4. Usefulness of information to those receiving Extension assistance.

	% responding	
Usefulness of information	ARO	Statewide sample
1. Great value	46	37
2. Some value	52	57
3. Little value	3	4
4. No value	0	2
	101	100
Mean	1.578	1.711
	N = 341	N = 304

Table 5. Helpfulness of Cooperative Extension programs.

	% responding	
Helpfulness	ARO	Statewide sample
1. Very helpful	46	45
2. Somewhat helpful	48	50
3. Not too helpful	5	4
4. Not at all helpful	1	1
	100	100
Mean	1.604	1.603
	N = 389	N = 643

Extension with the other two major functions of the College, teaching and research (Table 6). As can be seen, Extension is viewed as having the lowest quality among the three major functions.

A great deal of variation existed in perceived quality depending on the faculty member's appointment (Table 7). Research faculty and those on joint appointments viewed the quality of Extension the lowest while Extension faculty viewed the quality of their own programs the highest of all faculty groups. All faculty groups ranked teaching programs as having the highest quality. Research, administration and joint appointments ranked the quality of Extension lower than teaching and research whereas teaching and Extension faculty ranked research as the lowest quality.

In terms of 11 major functions of the College, Extension was ranked fifth in terms of quality (Table 8).

When faculty were asked to indicate the seriousness of selected problems facing the College, Extension issues did not emerge among the 10 most serious problems of the College (Table 9).

In comparison, however, with quality of teaching and research, quality of Extension was ranked as more serious than either research or teaching. "Meeting needs of client groups in the state" and "recruiting qualified extension faculty" were ranked 11th and 12th in seriousness of problems facing the College. "Quality of Extension" was ranked 15th.

The statewide and ARO surveys also asked respondents to indicate the degree of seriousness for a selected list of possible problems facing Idaho agriculture. Out of a list of 12 possible problems, the item "University Extension programs not meeting needs of client groups" ranked ninth in the ARO sample and

Table 6. The quality of teaching, research and Extension in the College of Agriculture as ranked by the faculty.

Function area	Quality of function								Mean*
	Poor		Fair		Good		Excellent		
	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	(N)	(%)	
Teaching	4	2	58	32	107	59	12	7	2.701
Research	16	8	72	34	116	56	5	2	2.526
Extension	25	12	82	39	93	44	12	6	2.434

*The mean is based on a scale ranging from 1 to 4 with 4 being excellent quality.

Table 7. Faculty perceptions of quality of teaching, research and Extension by major appointment.

Function	Mean quality score[1]				
	Research	Admin.	Teaching	Extension	Joint appointment
Teaching[2]	2.639 (36)	2.786 (14)	2.737 (19)	2.789 (76)	2.522 (23)
Research	2.500 (38)	2.786 (14)	2.450 (20)	2.560 (98)	2.360 (25)
Extension	1.971 (34)	2.286 (14)	2.533 (15)	2.732 (112)	1.913 (23)

[1]Scores range from 1 to 4 with 4 being excellent quality.

[2]Numbers in parentheses indicate sample size used to compute the quality score.

Table 8. Ranking of perceived quality of selected functions of the College of Agriculture by the faculty.

Function area	Mean function score*
Teaching	2.702
Cooperative programs with regional universities (WSU, OSU)	2.599
Generating outside grants	2.571
Research	2.526
Extension	2.434
Reaching appropriate clientele	2.411
Integration with total university	2.031
Cooperative programs with other colleges and universities in the state	1.926
Obtaining state funds	1.745
Communication between faculty and top level administrators	1.564
Faculty morale	1.420

*The scores range between 1 and 4 with 4 being excellent quality.

Table 9. Perceived seriousness of problems facing the College of Agriculture by the faculty.

Issue	Mean seriousness score*
1. Faculty morale	3.527
2. Lack of adequate funding	3.467
3. Communications between faculty and top level administration	3.213
4. Moral support of top level college administrators	3.083
5. Lack of faculty involvement in decision making	3.045
6. Lack of time available by immediate supervisors	2.910
7. Recruiting qualified administrators	2.848
8. Lack of positive image in state	2.847
9. Lack of direction for the College	2.671
10. Recruiting qualified research faculty	2.597
11. Meeting needs of client groups in the state	2.521
12. Recruiting qualified Extension faculty	2.520
13. Identification of research needs	2.454
14. Recruiting qualified teaching faculty	2.436
15. Quality of Extension work	2.298
16. Isolation of various college facilities	2.273
17. Quality of research	2.257
18. Dissemination of research results	2.190
19. Quality of teaching	1.944

*The scores range from 1 to 4 with 4 being a serious problem.

10th in the statewide sample. In the ARO sample, the urban residents saw it as a more serious problem than those from rural areas.

The list of problem areas in Table 9 was analyzed using a statistical procedure called factor analysis. This procedure puts items with similar responses together into groups and ranks the groups in order of importance. The second most important group of problems facing the College consisted primarily of Extension-related items. Of the total of five items in this group, the four related to Extension include "dissemination of research results," "quality of Extension work," "lack of positive image in state" and "meeting needs of client groups in the state." These items suggest that Extension has the potential of directly addressing an important area of university-community relations, that of improving the image of the University in the state. There may be no better outreach arm for the University than the Cooperative Extension Service.

Idaho residents and the ARO sample were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with statements about the target of Extension programs. Table 10 shows these statements and the responses. A majority of both samples felt that Extension programs should be designed for all in the state. The statewide sample, however, indicated a greater support for the statement than the ARO sample. On the other hand, there was little difference in agreement with the statement that Extension programs should be addressed primarily to the agricultural sector. About a fifth of both groups agreed with the statement. In the ARO sample, females were more likely to agree with the first statement and disagree with the second.

In the statewide sample, those with lower incomes were more likely to agree with the first statement while those with higher educational levels were more likely to disagree with the second statement.

Table 10. Agreement with statements on focus of Extension programs for statewide and ARO samples.

Statement	% agreeing with statement	
	Statewide sample	ARO
Extension Service education programs should include those designed to assist all individuals and families in the state.	76	66
Extension Service educational programs should be limited to those directly serving the needs of farmers.	21	19

Future Directions for Extension

As to future goals for the College, the faculty ranked an increased emphasis on Extension ninth in priority (Table 11). Increased emphasis at the county level was ranked 11th, and increased emphasis at the specialist level ranked 17th in priority. While viewing Extension as having greater problems than both research and teaching, there appeared to be little desire by College faculty to increase the emphasis on Extension.

In terms of future allocations of resources, the faculty ranked "work with producers" and "work with consumers" fourth and sixth respectively (Table 12). When Extension people were analyzed separately, they ranked "work with producers" second and "work with consumers" fifth.

Quite a difference existed between the statewide data and the ARO data with regard to future financial support for research and Extension. In response to the statement, "The government should provide increased funds

Table 11. Perceived priorities for selected areas in the College of Agriculture by the faculty.

Area	Mean priority score*
1. Provide more support for faculty in teaching, research and Extension	3.759
2. Increase emphasis on production efficiency rather than product maximization	3.547
3. Increase efforts in disseminating research results to clientele	3.511
4. Increase emphasis on research	3.412
5. Pay more attention to problems of producers	3.380
6. Increase emphasis on undergraduate teaching and curricula	3.363
7. Increase emphasis in applied research	3.333
8. Increase emphasis on graduate teaching and curricula	3.305
9. Increase emphasis on Extension	3.281
10. Increase the number of students in the college	3.281
11. Increase emphasis in Extension at county level	3.159
12. Pay more attention to needs of consumers	3.022
13. Increase emphasis on product utilization	3.018
14. Increase emphasis in electronic information delivery	3.013
15. Increase emphasis on commodity production	2.996
16. Increase emphasis in basic research	2.956
17. Increase emphasis on Extension at specialist level	2.904
18. Increase efforts in finding jobs for college graduates	2.832
19. Increase emphasis on endowments and chairs	2.619
20. Increase emphasis on vocational short course teaching and curricula	2.608
21. Increase emphasis on international programs	2.412

*Scores range from 1 to 4 with 4 being the highest priority.

for agricultural research and Extension activities," 48 percent of the random sample of Idaho residents agreed with the statement compared to 64 percent of the ARO sample. In the statewide sample, the lower income respondents were more likely to support increased funding whereas in the ARO sample females and those from rural areas indicated stronger support for the statement.

Both the statewide and ARO samples were asked to indicate the amount of support they would like to see for various specific programs in the area of Extension. Table 13 shows these.

The ARO sample (which was more agriculture oriented) indicated stronger support than the statewide sample in only one area, that of marketing and market development. In all other areas, the statewide sample placed more emphasis than the ARO group. The difference between the two groups increased in magnitude as one moved from the more traditional agricultural areas to those more related to human resources. For both groups, females wanted to see more emphasis in at least a third of the areas. In the statewide sample, the younger respondents preferred more emphasis in about a quarter of the areas, and in the ARO sample, the lower income respondents wanted more emphasis in about a quarter of the areas.

Table 12. Future allocation of resources as ranked by the faculty of the College of Agriculture.

Resource allocation area (ranked from highest to lowest priority)
1. Applied research
2. Statewide needs
3. Production agriculture
4. Work with producers
5. On-campus instruction
6. Work with consumers
7. Off-campus instruction
8. Basic research
9. Postharvest technology
10. Genetic engineering
11. Development in international programs
12. National needs

Table 13. Preference for emphasis in Extension for the statewide and ARO samples.

Programs	% favoring more emphasis	
	Statewide sample	ARO
Marketing and market development	76	82
Using computers in business/household activities	72	71
Crop production	72	68
Livestock production	63	61
Farm and home financial management	67	58
Small business management	69	58
Conservation of natural resources	74	52
Leadership development	56	53
Child and youth development	63	42
Human nutrition and wellness	61	31
Home food preparation	56	27
Local government financing	45	27
Home gardening and horticulture	52	19
Family and social relations	46	23

Information Transfer

The lifeline of Extension is the media. A major goal of Extension should be to deliver an appropriate message to the appropriate audience. We asked both the random statewide sample and the ACC sample how useful they felt a number of ways of getting information to people would be to them. Table 14 shows the results of this question. In general, the agricultural group (ARO) preferred "short courses," "newsletters," "public meetings, tours, demonstrations" and "individual consultation," whereas the random sample of residents were more likely to choose "learn-at-home materials," "newspaper, feature stories, etc." and "newsletters." The regression analysis of the statewide sample indicated that those in rural areas, farmers and those that grew up in rural areas were more likely to find the same sources useful as did the ARO sample. It seemed that the younger respondents were more inclined to find the electronic media such as computers and videotapes more useful. Similar findings regarding the younger respondents showed up in the ARO sample. In this sample, females found short courses,

Table 14. Usefulness of information channels for statewide and ARO samples.

Information channel	% indicating "very" or "somewhat" useful	
	Statewide sample	ARO
Indepth short courses or workshops	73	89
Individual consultation	67	87
Newsletters	76	89
Public meetings, tours, demonstrations	70	87
Articles in farm/ranch magazines	72	85
"Learn-at-home" materials (i.e. bulletins, manuals, etc.)	82	81
Agent training/leader training	60	75
Newspaper, feature stories, news articles, etc.	84	75
Television, videotape	51	59
Television-public and commercial	66	57
Computer networks	40	56
Radio	59	53
Recorded telephone messages	32	27

public meetings, newspaper articles, newsletters, learn-at-home materials and agent/leader training more useful than males. Reading sources seemed more important among the less educated respondents in the ARO sample.

Conclusions

Results of the analysis of the three surveys of College of Agriculture faculty, boards of directors of the representatives on the Agricultural Consulting Council and a random sample of Idaho residents provides some interesting insights into the role of Cooperative Extension in Idaho. On the positive side, the data show that the use of Extension exceeds that of the average on the national level. Extension plays a more significant role in Idaho than in most other states in the nation. Those who have used Extension material have been fairly well satisfied.

Greater satisfaction, however, was expressed among the agricultural clientele than among other clientele. Within the College of Agriculture, Extension was placed lower in terms of quality of functions and in terms of future priority for support than both teaching and research. It is evident that the role of Extension in the state was not as highly appreciated as might be necessary to maintain an adequate, much less than excellent Extension program.

Results of the statewide and ARO surveys suggest that more emphasis should be placed on providing more specialized delivery systems to various segments of the population. No longer can Extension place greater emphasis on the rural, farm sector of the state, yet our analysis suggested that most support for Extension comes from this segment of the state. Future programs must be directed at various segments of the population, both within the rural and urban areas of the state.

The older, rural clientele are more willing to accept a traditional delivery model; however, this segment of the population is becoming a smaller proportion of the state's population. As a result, a different delivery system may be necessary to continue to meet the needs of the state. Such a delivery system will likely emphasize high technology media. Written media will need to be geared to more specific groups rather than try to focus on the "average" farmer or "average" urban resident.

In sum, for Extension to remain a viable, important arm of the University of Idaho, it will have to continually undergo evaluation and change.

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Appendix A — ARO Sample Groups

United Dairymen of Idaho
Idaho Association of Counties
Idaho Onion Growers' Association
Idaho Feed and Grain Association
Idaho Bean Commission
Idaho Women for Agriculture
Idaho Farm Bureau Federation
Idaho Wool Growers Association
Idaho Horse Pony Youth Activities Council
Potato Growers of Idaho, Inc.
Idaho Veterinary Medical Associations
Idaho Poultry Industries Federation
Idaho Pork Producers Association, Inc.
Idaho Grower Shippers Association
Idaho State Wheat Growers Association
Idaho Cattlemen's Association
Idaho Potato Commission
Idaho Alfalfa Seed Commission
Idaho Association of Pea Lentil Producers, Inc.
Idaho Pea and Lentil Commission
Idaho Agricultural Chemical Association, Inc.
Idaho Horse Council
State 4-H Leader's Association
Idaho Vocational Agriculture Teachers Assn.
Idaho Extension Homemakers Council, Inc.
Idaho/Eastern Oregon Seed Association
Idaho Cooperative Council
Idaho Feed and Grain Association
Idaho Milk Processors Association
Idaho Crop Improvement Association