Specialty farming in Idaho: Is it for me?

D. L. Barney, T. L. Finnerty, and K. M. Laughlin

University of Idaho
College of Agriculture
Cooperative Extension System

EXT 743

S
53
E415
no.743

Specialty farming in Idaho: Is it for me?

D. L. Barney, T. L. Finnerty, and K. M. Laughlin

Idaho has an abundance of natural beauty and what some consider to be a simpler, more natural lifestyle. As a result, many people move into Idaho with the idea they will grow a high-cash-value crop or raise specialty livestock to provide or supplement their income. For personal and economic reasons, some established Idaho residents also consider taking up specialty farming as a way of life.

One of the reasons for Idaho's natural beauty is its tremendous diversity of climates and terrains. Mountain peaks and valleys, alpine meadows, high-plains desert, and rolling grassland are all a part of Idaho. Within these diverse environments are locations suitable for the production of many agricultural commodities.

The challenge is to select a crop or livestock adapted to the area, locate a suitable site, and find a profitable market. Other considerations are the start-up costs, the time required before the enterprise begins to provide a cash return, and the skills needed to establish a business, produce a commodity, and market it successfully.

Many crops and livestock are successfully produced in Idaho. Traditional enterprises include potatoes, wheat and other grains, hay, sugarbeets, cattle, dairies, and sheep. Specialty crops include dry beans and peas, vegetable and flower seeds, ornamental nursery stock, apples and other tree fruits, grapes, Christmas trees, onions, sweet corn, and mint. The cash receipts of these crops are shown in Table 1. Other alternative agricultural enterprises that show some promise for Idaho include small fruits, herbs, specialty vegetables, and exotic livestock. Alternative products are generally produced on small farms and sold through specialty or "niche" markets.

The risks

Most high-cash-value crops require a tremendous amount of skill to produce. It is difficult for someone with little or no agricultural experience to attain immediate success. Success requires time to learn about the climate, site, production, business management, and marketing. Farmers must be knowledgeable about weather, soil science, plant or animal physiology, and agricultural production practices. A farm, like any other business venture, requires constant attention. Growers must diligently carry out effective pest and disease control, irrigation, fertilization, and other cultural programs.

In addition to producing a crop or livestock, a farmer-entrepreneur must be able to fund and establish a business and then market that business's product. Products often face stiff competition, limited market exposure, and high transportation costs. An option for an inexperienced or part-time grower is to hire an experienced manager who can put in the necessary time and effort to run the operation. The owner can then learn about the business over a period of time and be assured of regular care of the crop.

One of the major reasons new specialty farms fail is because people tend to start big, underestimating the money, time, effort, and skill needed to operate a farm. If you haven't commercially produced a particular commodity before, start with no more than 1 acre (a half-acre may be even better). Get to know the crop or livestock without putting your life's savings at risk. Don't plan on supporting yourself with the enterprise for several years. You may find you don't care for commercial agriculture and would prefer to work a small, home garden. After getting some experience, if you still like the enterprise and believe

Table 1. Cash receipts from Idaho farm marketings.[1]

Commodity	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
	($)	($)	($)	($)	($)
Crops[2]					
Food grains					
Wheat	186,756	210,785	238,410	324,307	273 643
Feed crops					
Barley	134,452	114,228	107,407	128,224	130,690
Corn	9,349	8,443	11,981	6,886	10,036
Hay	79,862	70,885	110,160	143,117	139,856
Oats	966	1,812	4,169	4,123	2,136
Vegetables					
Dry beans	40,247	44,581	50,940	83,620	92,446
Dry peas	10,472	9,551	11,656	10,904	8,701
Lentils	10,316	6,930	5,053	9,235	4,984
Onions	34,392	38,222	33,324	48,068	37,090
Potatoes	222,917	365,186	378,370	558,311	693,770
Sugarbeets	149,677	165,520	176,837	174,845	210,850
Sweet corn	8,653	8,887	8,829	10,538	10,485
Fruit					
Apples	22,372	18,536	23,800	14,501	19,108
Cherries	1,971	1,259	2,056	1,903	1,720
Peaches	2,596	1,672	2,914	1,498	890
Plums and prunes	2,387	830	1,585	2,677	1,703
Other crops					
Hops	13,209	10,549	4,273	5,154	7,047
Mint	8,463	7,895	12,165	13,050	15,547
Nursery	25,270	39,700	41,997	44,349	46,481
Miscellaneous[3]	70,439	66,426	69,207	76,296	77,053
Total crops	1,034,766	1,191,897	1,295,133	1,661,606	1,784,236
Livestock[4]					
Meat animals					
Cattle and calves	521,114	555,071	659,538	661,075	704,908
Hogs	16,412	12,657	10,420	9,213	11,050
Sheep and lambs	19,012	20,601	17,943	15,234	11,631
Products					
Eggs	9,775	8,925	8,517	15,208	12,326
Milk products	274,131	267,950	288,960	322,260	354,410
Wool	1,798	2,472	3,456	3,289	1,804
Miscellaneous	41,478	51,480	50,247	55,383	58,608
Total livestock	883,720	919,156	1,039,081	1,081,662	1,154,737
Totals	1,918,486	2,111,053	2,334,214	2,743,268	2,938,973

[1]Taken from the *1991 Idaho Agricultural Statistics*, published by the Idaho Department of Agriculture and the USDA.

[2]Except for barley, corn, oats, dry edible beans, potatoes, apples, peaches, prunes, and plums, commodities include only USDA estimates of income.

[3]Includes crops in Idaho for which the USDA does not estimate individual values of production.

[4]The livestock commodities include only Idaho estimates of income for which the USDA estimates value of marketings. Other estimates are combined under "Miscellaneous" to prevent disclosure of confidential data.

it to be economically viable, you will be in a better position to successfully expand.

Labor is another limiting factor for Idaho agriculture, particularly in northern and central Idaho. Many specialty crops require a large amount of labor to produce and harvest. Other than very small operations where the owner treats the farm as a full-time endeavor, hired labor will be necessary. Finding local laborers who are skilled with specialty crops or exotic livestock and who desire to work with them can be extremely difficult.

Although migrant farmworkers make up the backbone of the agricultural labor force in California, Oregon, and Washington, many regions in Idaho, particularly in the north, attract relatively few migrant workers. In order to attract and keep migrant laborers, producers must be able to provide competitive wages (plan on about $7.00 per hour) and an extended working season. Employers may also find it necessary to provide migrant workers with housing, which must comply with government standards. In some cases, growers who produce different crops share workers. As labor needs decrease for one crop,

workers may move to other crops in the immediate area. For more information on labor, contact the Idaho Department of Employment.

There are opportunities for specialty enterprises in Idaho, but success requires excellent planning and a lot of hard work. If you hope to get rich quickly, consider a statement made by one of America's greatest horticulturists, Liberty Hyde Bailey. "Farmers don't get rich... It is one of the blessings which agriculture bestows upon both the individual and the nation, that it makes its devotees happy and comfortable without making them wealthy." That statement, written in 1897, is just as true today as it was then. Being a farmer can have rich rewards, but easy and abundant money will seldom be among them. The work will be long, hard, and unending. The risk of failure due to bad weather, labor shortages, inadequate cash flow, fluctuating markets, and a multitude of other factors is always present.

Gathering information

The first step is to decide where in Idaho you want to be. An excellent source of information on the climate, topography, geography, agriculture, economics, and population of Idaho is the *Compact Atlas of Idaho*, which can be purchased from the University of Idaho Center for Business Development and Research. (Write to CBDR, College of Business and Economics, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83843 or call (208) 885-6611.) The climate, topography, resources, and population in southwestern Idaho are far different from those in the northern Panhandle — a crop that will do well in one location may be impossible to produce or market in another. Don't make this decision based upon a travel atlas. Visit the areas you're interested in, preferably during both the summer and winter. Temperatures of 110°F and -45°F take on entirely different meanings when experienced than when simply appearing on a weather map.

After narrowing your choices, get all the local information you can. University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System offices can provide information on climate, soils, and some agricultural enterprises. For many exotic crops or livestock animals, however, local information may be scarce or nonexistent. Extension agricultural agents are generally knowledgeable about agricultural endeavors that have been successful or unsuccessful in their areas. If a particular type of enterprise has consistently failed, you should find out the reasons and develop solutions before trying the same kind of enterprise yourself.

Soil surveys for all or part of 27 Idaho counties have been published (there are 44 counties in Idaho) that provide detailed information on soils, climate, and cropping potential. To determine if a survey is available, contact the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension agent in the county of interest.

Local chambers of commerce can provide information about businesses in the area, markets, processors, schools, transportation facilities, and proposed development. Local realtors are the best source of information on available properties. County tax assessors can provide information on taxes. Contact the Idaho Department of Agriculture and county planning and zoning commissions to determine what regulations will apply to your proposed enterprise. Will you be able to do what you want, where you want to do it? Some Idaho counties have strict zoning ordinances that limit agricultural enterprises.

If you have decided on a specific enterprise, find out if an association for that commodity exists in the state or region. Such organizations may be listed in the *Encyclopedia of Associations*, available from public libraries. A directory of agricultural organizations in Idaho is available from the Idaho Department of Agriculture.

Evaluating information

If the area you want to live in is unsuitable or even marginally acceptable for the enterprise you want to develop, think again. Give yourself every chance for success. General information on selected enterprises is given in the next section. Before making a final decision on a particular enterprise, learn all you can about a particular commodity's climatic and soil requirements and how it is marketed generally. Next, identify a market for your product, and know how you will get it to buyers, how much transportation will cost, and how much money you can expect from sales.

Don't buy a site and then decide what you can raise or grow on it. Know what you need *before* you buy and get the best possible site for that enterprise. Identifying a suitable crop and market and then selecting a good site are three of the most important steps in establishing a successful enterprise. If the site and/or crop are wrong or the market doesn't exist, the enterprise will fail. Publications that can help you evaluate the climate, identify markets, and select crops and sites are available from the University of Idaho. Information on selecting a farm site and a step-by-step checklist for establishing an enterprise and selecting a site is contained in a companion publication, *Specialty Farming in Idaho: Selecting a Site*, EXT 744. Both publications are available from the University of Idaho, Agricultural Publications, Idaho Street, Moscow, ID 83843.

Specific enterprises

The descriptions that follow are intended only to give brief overviews of enterprises for which information is often requested. More detailed information on specific commodities is available. See the University of Idaho's EXT 401, *List of Available Publications,* at the Extension office in your county or request a copy of the list from Agricultural Publications, Idaho Street, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83843.

Specific crop information can also be requested from the university's Department of Plant, Soil, and Entomological Science; information on livestock enterprises is available through the Department of Animal and Veterinary Science; and marketing information may be requested from the Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. Write to these departments care of the College of Agriculture, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83843-4196. The departments can provide general crop information before a prospective farmer decides on a given location.

Tree fruits

Apples are the main tree fruit crop produced in Idaho, followed by plums, peaches, and cherries. Nearly all commercial production is now located in southwestern Idaho in Ada, Canyon, Gem, Owyhee, Payette, and Washington counties. Apples, and to some extent, cherries and pears, were once produced commercially in many parts of Idaho. The Clearwater River drainage around Lewiston and Orofino is an area where apples, plums, and possibly cherries and pears can be reliably grown. Some locations in the Idaho Panhandle are suitable for the commercial production of apples and plums. Severe winter temperatures, short growing seasons, and spring frosts throughout much of central, southeastern, and northern Idaho make commercial tree fruit production difficult and risky.

Although peaches are grown in the warmer portions of southwestern Idaho, they are not well adapted to any other locales in the state. Apricots are very susceptible to spring frosts in all parts of Idaho and are not recommended for commercial production. Most nut crops are not well adapted to Idaho growing conditions because of the crops' limited cold hardiness, need for a long growing season, and tendency to bloom during the winter or early spring when frosts are likely.

Harvesting tree fruit crops generally begins 2 or 3 years after planting, but full production takes several more years to develop. Pruning trees and harvesting fruit require a lot of labor.

Grapes

Nearly 1,000 acres of grapes are grown in the warmer parts of Ada, Gem, and Canyon counties. Small acreages of grapes are also grown around Lewiston. Most of the grapes produced in Idaho are used for wine. Growers in southwestern Idaho favor European (vinifera) grapes, despite that crop's limited cold hardiness and the prospect of frequent crop losses due to freezing injury. Vinifera grape production is limited to southwestern Idaho and is risky there.

In the Clearwater River drainage in Nez Perce and Clearwater counties, American (labrusca) or hybrid grapes can be produced on selected sites. Winter injury will still be a problem, even for these hardier grapes. Two feasibility studies and many years of horticultural experience show that commercial grape production in other parts of Idaho ranges from extremely difficult to impossible. Even if the canes do not freeze, the seasons are generally too short and the night temperatures too cool to properly mature grape crops. A partial crop can generally be harvested 2 or 3 years after planting.

Berries

Strawberries — Strawberries have been grown commercially on a small scale in Idaho for many years. This crop requires a well-drained soil, free of parasitic nematodes. The optimum soil pH is between 5.0 and 7.0, and high levels of soil organic matter are desirable. Strawberries are more tolerant of elevated soil pH and salts than raspberries or blueberries and can be grown on slightly alkaline sites. Strawberries cannot tolerate drought. Cultivars range in cold hardiness from +25°F to -40°F, so be sure to select a cultivar suited to your site.

Strawberries are very perishable, making harvest, handling, storage, and shipping critical. Fresh-market berries should reach consumers within 24 hours of picking. Strawberries lend themselves well to value-added products. Nearly all of the fresh and processing strawberries in the United States are produced in California, Florida, Oregon, and Washington. Idaho strawberries are generally sold locally. Harvesting begins 1 year after planting. Successful U-pick strawberry operations generally require a population of at least 2,500 people within a radius of 20 miles for each acre of strawberries. Strawberry fields are generally cropped for only 3 or 4 years due to buildups in pests and diseases. Then, fields are either rotated into another crop for a year or 2 or are fumigated and replanted with strawberries.

Raspberries — Small commercial plantings of red raspberries exist in Ada, Blaine, Bonner, Canyon,

Fremont, Gem, and Kootenai counties. Production in southern Idaho is limited by alkaline soils and the need for large amounts of high-quality irrigation water. Raspberries are extremely labor-intensive and growers must be diligent in weed, pest, and disease control. Raspberry growers typically face labor shortages, especially for harvesting. Root diseases and cane freezing injury often limit raspberry production in Idaho. Raspberries can generally tolerate temperatures near -20°F on good sites, depending upon cultivars. For summer-bearing raspberries, a small crop can be harvested 1 year after planting. Full production normally occurs 2 or 3 years after planting. Fall-bearing varieties come into production sooner, but early fall frosts limit the commercial viability of fall-bearing raspberries throughout much of Idaho.

Blackberries — Blackberries range in hardiness from about +5°F to -15°F, depending upon type. Trailing cultivars are generally more desirable commercially than erect types, but are less cold hardy. Nearly 100 percent of the blackberry production in the United States is in coastal Oregon and Washington. Even with the moderating influence of the Pacific Ocean, coastal growers frequently suffer crop losses due to freezing injury. For Idaho, only the hardiest cultivars should be considered. Commercial production, which is risky at best, should be considered only in the grape-growing regions of Ada, Canyon, and Gem counties. Although blackberries are grown by homeowners in other areas, including Bonner, Clearwater, and Nez Perce counties, commercial production in these areas is too risky to be recommended.

Blueberries — Blueberries (highbush and lowbush) can tolerate temperatures between -20°F and -35°F, depending upon cultivar. They require acidic soil and grow best at pH values between 4.0 and 5.0. The root system is very shallow, and blueberries are not tolerant of drought. Production in northern and central Idaho is promising on ideal sites. Production on alkaline, calcareous sites in southern Idaho is generally not economically feasible. A partial crop can be harvested 4 years after planting. Full production requires 6 to 8 years.

Blueberries require less labor to produce than raspberries and provide far more flexibility in harvesting and transporting, but are expensive to establish. A Cornell University enterprise budget indicates that in New York, U-pick blueberry growers may not break even and start to show a profit for as long as 13 years after planting.

Currants, gooseberries, and jostaberries — These crops are hardy to about -40°F and are well adapted to many Idaho growing regions. They prefer cool, moist sites, favoring north-facing, sloping sites, and do not tolerate high temperatures well. They bloom very early in the spring and are susceptible to frost damage. Gooseberries are somewhat more tolerant of high temperatures than currants and are the better choice for southern Idaho locations. Labor requirements are about the same as for blueberries. Currants, gooseberries, and jostaberries are more tolerant of dry conditions than raspberries or blueberries. Markets for currants, gooseberries, and jostaberries are presently very limited in the United States. A small crop can be harvested 1 year after planting. Full production requires 3 to 5 years.

Other fruits — Other small fruits that show potential for various Idaho locations include saskatoons (*Amelanchier alnifolia*), elderberries (*Sambucus spp.*), black chokeberry (*Aronia melanocarpa*), buffaloberry (*Shepherdia argentea*), and Oregon grape (*Mahonia spp.*). All of these crops are cold hardy, but marketing the fruit is difficult and strictly niche oriented. In general, small fruits are well-suited to value-added products such as jams, jellies, juices, purees, concentrates, syrups, candies, dried fruit, and yogurt.

Specialty vegetables

Idaho is the leading producer of potatoes in the United States and is a major producer of onions, dry beans, dry peas, lentils, sweet corn, and sugarbeets. In addition to questions about these traditional crops, Cooperative Extension personnel are often asked about producing specialty vegetables for local markets. Market gardening is commonly used in Idaho to provide or supplement family incomes through sales at roadside stands, farmers' markets, and local stores and restaurants. Locations near large population centers are generally favored, although some small communities also sponsor farmers' markets. Chambers of commerce and Cooperative Extension offices are good sources of information about farmers' markets in your area. Growers may find marketing difficult in rural areas where many people grow their own vegetables.

Due to the wide variety of vegetables available and the diversity of Idaho climates, it is not possible to make any specific growing recommendations in this guide. Vegetables requiring moderately long growing seasons are suited to southwestern Idaho and the Clearwater River valley in Nez Perce and Clearwater counties. Cool season vegetables do well in most parts of northern, central, and southeastern Idaho.

When looking at sites and crops, pay particular attention to frost dates, length of the growing season, and average daily temperatures. Although the growing season in Bonner County is long enough to

produce a tomato crop, for example, the cool night temperatures often prevent tomatoes from ripening. Some temperature-sensitive species can be grown in cooler areas by using greenhouse-grown transplants and protecting the crop with row covers or plastic tunnels, although such methods increase production and management costs.

Herbs

Herb production is increasing throughout the United States, and the potential for Idaho production looks favorable. Herb markets, however, are somewhat limited, and the potential for overproduction appears high. The same criteria for site and crop selection apply as for vegetables. Some herbs have an advantage for Idaho growers over vegetables in their drought and heat tolerance.

Perennial herbs are probably easier to produce than any of the other crops listed in this guide, but still require diligent care. Irrigation is generally required for commercial production everywhere in Idaho. Herbs are used to create many value-added products, such as pharmaceutical drugs, cosmetics, soaps, sachets, potpourris, incenses, scented candles, scented oils and perfumes, wreaths and bouquets, dyes, and flavored cooking oils.

Dry flowers

Interest in the commercial production of cut dry flowers or everlastings increased dramatically in Idaho during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Most of the current interest involves market gardening for gift and craft shop sales. The potential for dry flower production in Idaho is fair. Selection of varieties that are in demand, maintaining high quality, and aggressive, creative marketing are critical for success.

Flower wholesalers and retailers generally require large quantities of quality materials. Competition within the industry is stiff and may be controlled by volume growers who can stockpile large quantities of flowers. Domestic growers face competition from foreign imports. Local flower co-operatives offer some potential for dealing successfully with a tough market.

Commercial dry flower production is very labor intensive, and creating a value-added product increases both labor and material costs. Frost protection will be required for some crops and sites. Dry flower crops normally require drip or trickle irrigation systems, and you will need facilities for drying and storing the flowers.

Nursery stock

Idaho has a well-established ornamental nursery industry, whose 1990 sales topped $46 million. The production of high-quality, cold-hardy stock has earned Idaho growers an excellent reputation throughout the United States. Most of the nursery stock produced in Idaho is shipped to midwestern and Rocky Mountain states, Alaska, and Canada. The bulk of production is field-grown bare root or ball and burlap stock. There are a few small container nurseries, but overwintering large numbers of containers during Idaho's cold winters is both difficult and expensive. Many production nurseries require irrigation. Retail nurseries and garden centers are located near population centers.

Production of seedlings can provide a cash return in 1 to 2 years. Landscape stock takes from 2 to 12 years to reach harvest maturity. Nursery production is very labor intensive and requires a high level of production skill. Work in a nursery is a daily event from early spring through late fall. Winter months are spent attending trade shows, marketing next year's crop, and attending seminars.

While the potential for expansion still exists, there are indications that the ornamental market is softening due to plentiful supply and other economic factors. Specialty products and niche marketing are becoming more important in this industry. Regardless of the market, competition is stiff. Selling anything less than top-quality stock is very difficult.

Christmas trees

Idaho has a well-developed Christmas tree industry, most of which is located in the central and northern parts of the state. The trees are usually grown under dryland conditions and may be either native or introduced species. Idaho is especially noted for producing high-quality grand and concolor fir trees.

Competition is very stiff from other Christmas tree producers and from artificial trees. Presently there is a glut of trees, often of poor quality, and the prospects for new growers are not favorable. Christmas trees take from 6 to 10 years to reach harvest maturity and are very labor intensive to produce. Starting 2 or 3 years after planting, every tree must be sheared every year.

Most of Idaho's Christmas trees are shipped to out-of-state markets. Some choose-and-cut operations exist around population centers. Enterprising individuals have combined Christmas tree choose-and-cut and

pre-cut tree lots with recreational experiences such as sleigh rides. Surplus boughs can be used for wreaths and other value-added products.

Greenhouse production

People frequently ask about the feasibility of greenhouse production in Idaho. There are commercial greenhouses scattered throughout the state producing such crops as roses, bedding plants, and millions of tree seedlings for reforestation. The climate generally does not favor year-around commercial greenhouse production, however, and many in Idaho close during the winter to reduce heating bills. For very high-cash-value crops or where a grower has access to geothermal or industrial waste heat, year-around operation is an option.

Due to cold winters and hot summers, heating and cooling costs can be very high. Particularly for northern, central, and southeastern Idaho, structures must be designed to support a substantial snow load, and frequent cloudy days during the fall, winter, and spring limit the effectiveness of solar heating. Alkaline water in parts of southern Idaho can create problems with irrigation equipment and makes application of fertilizers through irrigation lines difficult.

Potential growers should bear in mind that the bulk of greenhouse production in the United States is in California and Florida. Even those areas are losing substantial amounts of business to Mexican operations where heating and labor costs are less.

Seed production

Southwestern Idaho has a well-established seed production industry. The warm climate, relatively long growing season, and lack of humidity make this area ideal for the production of flower, vegetable, grass, alfalfa, and green manure crop seed. Grass seed is also produced in the northern Panhandle, around Nez Perce, and in south-central Idaho. Seed potatoes (note these are not actual seeds) represent another specialty crop produced in Idaho.

Particularly where operations produce certified seed, major concerns are weeds, pests, diseases, impure seed lines, and unwanted cross-pollination. Certification guidelines are rigid and quality standards high.

Specialty livestock

Idaho has long been a producer of beef cattle, dairy products, sheep, and swine. At one time, large numbers of horses were raised in Idaho, and there appears to be a resurgence of recreational and working horse production in some parts of the state. Exotic and specialty livestock production has generated interest, and a fledgling industry is becoming established. Specialty sheep, llamas, draft and miniature horses, specialty pigs, rabbits, peacocks, buffalo and buffalo-cattle hybrids, game birds, and Japanese deer are all raised in commercial and semi-commercial operations. Mink farms are well established in some parts of Idaho. Specialty livestock production even includes fly grubs ,which are sold for fishing bait.

With the exception of mink, most specialty livestock is sold through niche markets. Exotic pets are one outlet for some of the animals, and specialty food products, such as buffalo burgers and goat cheese, are another outlet. Establishment and maintenance costs vary tremendously, depending upon the type of livestock and the size of the operation. Livestock producers generally face more stringent regulations than crop farmers, and prospective farmers should carefully investigate local and state regulations and zoning before investing in an operation.

Although there is potential for specialty livestock production, the risks are great. Production difficulties, limited marketing opportunities, and costs must be considered, particularly in light of the fact that technical support from the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System and other agencies will probably be limited. Plan to be on your farm or to hire farm labor every day of the year; livestock animals don't give you any days off. Ensure your stock is adapted to the climate. Temperatures in Idaho range from about 110°F to -45°F, and access to fields and pastures can be limited or impossible for days or weeks at a time during the winter.

Marketing specialty livestock can be very difficult. Know where and how you will sell your livestock or products *before* you begin an operation. Watch out for schemes where you agree to buy breeding stock at extremely high prices on the premise you will recoup your costs by producing and selling more breeding stock to other producers. Although rare, pyramid schemes have surfaced in the exotic livestock trade from time to time. Deal only with reputable producers who have proven track records. Don't hesitate to ask for and to check on references. When purchasing any livestock, take steps to ensure it is healthy and comes with all necessary inspections and certifications. For more information on specialty livestock production, contact the Idaho Department of Agriculture and the Idaho Department of Fish and Game.

Aquaculture

Idaho is the leading producer of trout in the United States, and the aquaculture industry, which involves other aquatic animals, such as crayfish, as well as fish, is well established in the state. Approximately $70

million is generated annually by fish production and processing. Rainbow trout is the main species grown, with smaller amounts of catfish and tilapia. Crayfish production is limited by the species' slow growth under Idaho conditions. Nearly all aquaculture operations are centered around Hagerman in southern Idaho, with smaller operations near Pocatello and other southeastern Idaho locations. Approximately 75 percent of the fish are raised in specially constructed concrete tanks, similar to those found in fish hatcheries. About 25 percent of the production comes from farm ponds. Most of the fish are processed before being sold, with the majority of the sales being out of state. Entrails and other waste products can be used for feed by the mink industry.

Aquaculture is a complex, capital-intensive, management-intensive business. Environmental factors, such as water quality and temperature are critical. For more information, contact the University of Idaho Aquaculture Institute, Moscow, ID 83843.

Summary

If you're serious about being an Idaho farmer, keep the following steps in mind.

- **Do your homework** — Find out all you can about the area, climate, commodity, and market.
- **Plan, plan, plan** — Consider all of the factors that pertain to business establishment, management, and production. Develop business and marketing plans. Plan to lose crops or livestock periodically due to unforeseen events.
- **Start small** — Gain the experience you need before expanding. Don't bet your life's savings on the enterprise until you are sure it will succeed.
- **Use all available resources** — The University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System can provide invaluable assistance when learning about a crop and in problem solving. Extension county offices are listed in your local phone directory. The Small Business Administration can greatly assist in designing, developing, and operating a business. Other growers are a tremendous asset in producing and marketing a crop. The Idaho Department of Agriculture can help with legal questions and provide assistance in marketing. The USDA Soil Conservation Service is another excellent source of information.

For further reading

To order University of Idaho College of Agriculture publications, contact the University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System office in your county or write to Agricultural Publications, Idaho Street, University of Idaho, Moscow, ID 83843 or call (208) 885-7982.

The authors — **Danny L. Barney,** Extension horticulturalist and superintendent of the Sandpoint Research and Extension Center, University of Idaho Department of Plant, Soil, and Entomological Sciences; **Terry L. Finnerty,** Extension associate, Sandpoint Research and Extension Center, University of Idaho Department of Plant, Soil, and Entomological Sciences; and **Kevin M. Laughlin,** Extension agricultural agent, University of Idaho Cooperative Extension System, Bonner County, Sandpoint.

Organizations of interest to specialty farmers

Idaho Department of Agriculture
2270 Old Penitentiary Road
Boise, ID 83712

Idaho Department of Employment
317 Main Street
Boise, ID 83735

Idaho Department of Fish and Game
P.O. Box 25
Boise, ID 83707

Idaho Horticulture Society
c/o Dr. Wm. M. Colt, Secretary
Parma's Research and Extension Center
29603 U of I Lane
Parma, ID 83660-9637

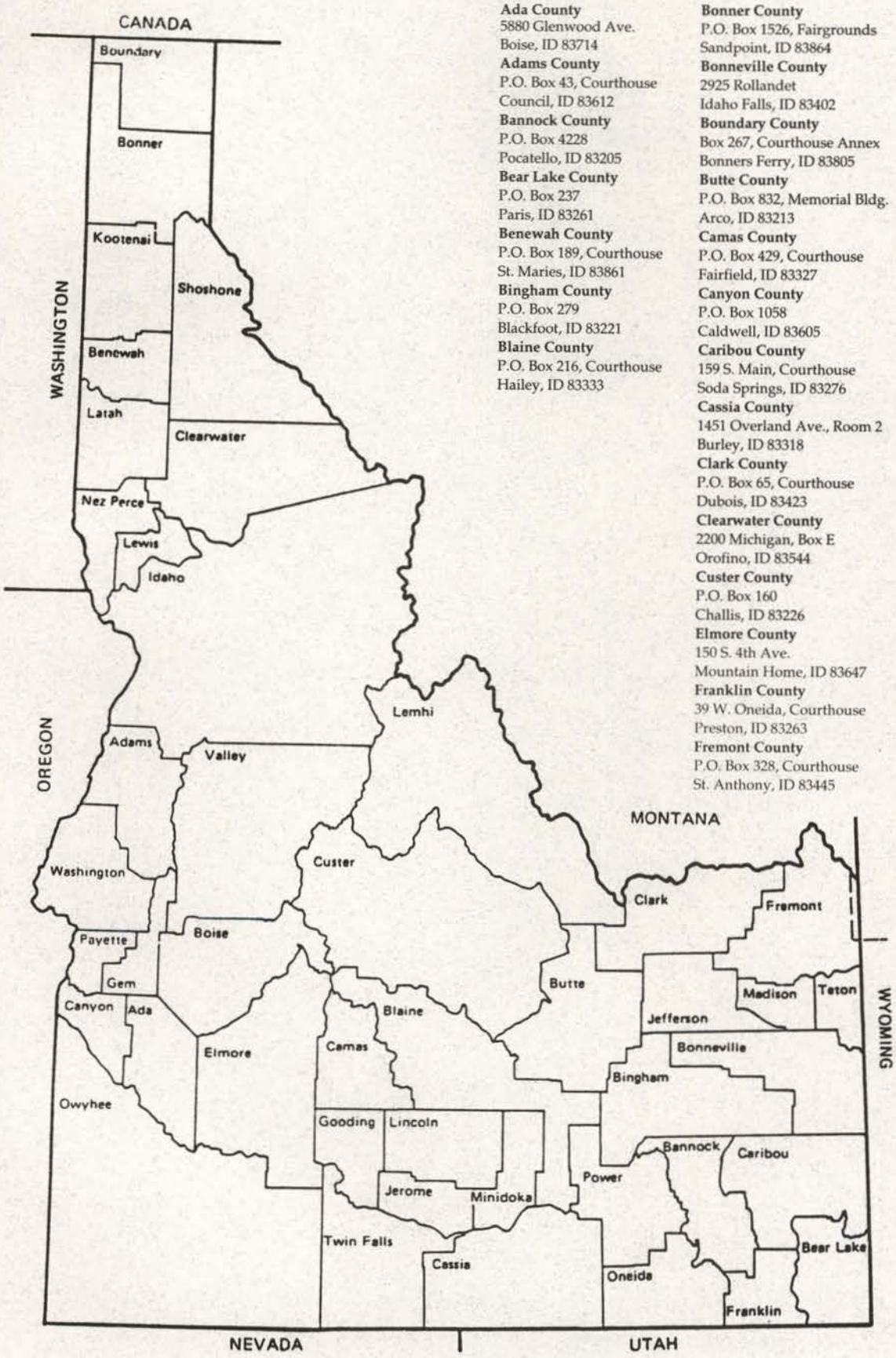
Idaho Nursery Association
c/o Carla Nakano, Executive Director
2104 Floating Feather Road
Eagle, ID 83616

Idaho Organic Producers Association
c/o Tim Sommer
11741 Bullock Lane
Middleton, ID 83644

Inland Empire Christmas Tree Association
Route 1, Box 43
Plummer, ID 83851

U.S. Small Business Administration — To locate the nearest office look in your telephone directory or write to U.S. Small Business Administration, U.S. Courthouse, West 601 1st Ave. 10th Floor East, Spokane, WA 99204.

Cooperative Extension Offices in Idaho



Ada County
5880 Glenwood Ave.
Boise, ID 83714

Adams County
P.O. Box 43, Courthouse
Council, ID 83612

Bannock County
P.O. Box 4228
Pocatello, ID 83205

Bear Lake County
P.O. Box 237
Paris, ID 83261

Benewah County
P.O. Box 189, Courthouse
St. Maries, ID 83861

Bingham County
P.O. Box 279
Blackfoot, ID 83221

Blaine County
P.O. Box 216, Courthouse
Hailey, ID 83333

Bonner County
P.O. Box 1526, Fairgrounds
Sandpoint, ID 83864

Bonneville County
2925 Rollandet
Idaho Falls, ID 83402

Boundary County
Box 267, Courthouse Annex
Bonners Ferry, ID 83805

Butte County
P.O. Box 832, Memorial Bldg.
Arco, ID 83213

Camas County
P.O. Box 429, Courthouse
Fairfield, ID 83327

Canyon County
P.O. Box 1058
Caldwell, ID 83605

Caribou County
159 S. Main, Courthouse
Soda Springs, ID 83276

Cassia County
1451 Overland Ave., Room 2
Burley, ID 83318

Clark County
P.O. Box 65, Courthouse
Dubois, ID 83423

Clearwater County
2200 Michigan, Box E
Orofino, ID 83544

Custer County
P.O. Box 160
Challis, ID 83226

Elmore County
150 S. 4th Ave.
Mountain Home, ID 83647

Franklin County
39 W. Oneida, Courthouse
Preston, ID 83263

Fremont County
P.O. Box 328, Courthouse
St. Anthony, ID 83445

Gem County
2199 S. Johns
Emmett, ID 83617

Gooding County
202 - 14th Ave. East
Gooding, ID 83330

Idaho County
Courthouse, Room 3
Grangeville, ID 83530

Jefferson County
P.O. Box 187, Courthouse
Rigby, ID 83442

Jerome County
Courthouse, P.O. Box 507
Jerome, ID 83338

Kootenai County
106 Dalton Ave.
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83814

Latah County
P.O. Box 8068
Moscow, ID 83843

Lemhi County
206 Courthouse Dr.
Salmon, ID 83467

Lewis County
P.O. Box 9, Courthouse
Nezperce, ID 83543

Lincoln County
P.O. Box 608
Shoshone, ID 83352

Madison County
Courthouse, P.O. Box 580
Rexburg, ID 83440

Minidoka County
Courthouse, 715 G St.
Rupert, ID 83350

Nez Perce County
1239 Idaho St.
Lewiston, ID 83501

Oneida County
10 Court St.
Malad, ID 83252

Owyhee County
P.O. Box 400
Marsing, ID 83639

Payette County
Box 10, Federal Bldg.
Payette, ID 83661

Power County
P.O. Box 179, Courthouse
American Falls, ID 83211

Teton County
P.O. Box 146, Courthouse
Driggs, ID 83422

Twin Falls County
246 3rd Ave. East
Twin Falls, ID 83301

Valley County
Box 69, Edwards Bldg. #4
Donnelly, ID 83615

Washington County
485 East Third
Weiser, ID 83672

The Alternative Agricultural Enterprises publication series was supported by a grant from the Northwest Area Foundation, St. Paul, Minnesota.

Issued in furtherance of cooperative extension work in agriculture and home economics, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, LeRoy D. Luft, Director of Cooperative Extension System, University of Idaho, Moscow, Idaho 83843. We offer educational programs, activities, and materials without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or disability, in accordance with state and federal laws.

1,000, October 1992

Produced by the Agricultural Communications Center

$1.00

Printed on recycled paper