

impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

North Central Idaho beef school series: commitment to beef programming

AT A GLANCE

The North Central Idaho region is home to approximately 47,000 head of cattle, requiring that current and applicable information be delivered in an engaging platform through annual beef schools.

The Situation

According to the 2022 Census of Agriculture, cattle and calves take the second spot in market value of agricultural products sold in Idaho and Nez Perce counties. Cattle producers within the region strive to remain competitive in marketing and are committed to remaining abreast of management practices that impact their income. Cattle management is multifaceted, with each area having influence on another, such as vaccine response being impacted by mineral status of the animals or body condition impacting conception. Cattle producers need to stay up to date with current practices that have the potential to influence daily decisions for their operation, and ultimately for their income.

Our Response

To meet the needs of cattle producers, an annual beef school series is offered in Idaho and Nez Perce counties over a two-week period in January. The 2023 series focused on herd health, a topic relevant with the new regulation on antibiotic access that was going into effect in June 2023, paired with the reformatted Idaho Beef Quality Assurance program. Topic focus for 2024 shifted to nutrition, continuing to tie one area of management to the next. Expected immune responses



Attendees receive information on feed sampling in week one of the series at Lewiston location. Photo by Audra Cochran.

following vaccination are greatly impacted by nutritional status of an animal, in addition to other production needs, such as breeding, fetal development, lactation and growth. Additionally, with feed costs being one of the biggest inputs for producers, it is imperative that they have a feeding management plan in place and be equipped with the data to do so.

Program Outcomes

One of the topics covered during the 2024 series focused on the value of forage sampling and testing. Sampling techniques along with analysis package selection was explained. As an extension of a secured University of Idaho Department of Animal, Veterinary and Food Sciences (AVFS) grant, geared towards beginning producer education programming, beef school

participants were then offered the option to have up to \$50 put towards having feed analysis done on their feed sources. To support this service, the University of Idaho Extension office in Idaho County purchased a drill powered hay probe kit with Idaho Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education mini grant funds. During the schools, 14 producers signed up to have their forages tested later in the year, to work with the Idaho County’s UI Extension office to complete sampling, and to receive assistance with interpreting the results. Additional producers that did not attend the series, but were informed of the topics covered, have also utilized the new hay probe equipment.

Since July 2024, almost 40 forage samples have been collected and analyzed. During follow up discussion of the results, producers became better aware of how to best utilize their feeds, ensured that grain hays were safe for their livestock, and informed of nutritional gaps that will require additional supplementation. A program evaluation was administered at the conclusion of week two (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: Program evaluation outcomes (N=38)

How much do you know about the topics presented after the beef school on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being high?	4.4
How applicable was the information covered on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being high?	4.0
Percent of attendees who attended both weeks of the school	74%
Percent of attendees who attended in both 2023 and 2024	42%

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Table 2: Which topics covered were most valuable to participants’ operational needs (N=38)

Economics (of what)	26
Cow nutrition	23
Supplementation	22
Feed sampling	9

The data indicates that participants gained knowledge applicable to their operational needs. The majority attended both weeks of the school and almost half were participating for the second year. When asked what practices were already being implemented on their operation responses included:

- Utilizing free choice mineral and supplementing protein, testing hay, mixing lower cost feed sources with higher quality to manage feed costs and feeding to maintain body condition.

When then asked what practices they would consider adding responses included:

- Providing additional mineral supplement, testing hay and managing feed costs more accurately.

The Future

Participants were also asked what topics would be useful in future beef schools. Their responses — including genetics, reproduction management and calving — which will be used in planning the 2025 series.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

This beef school series is accomplished annually with great support from community partners, invited speakers from allied industry and the University of Idaho AVFS department. 2024 sponsorship was provided by Idaho County and Clearwater-Lewis County Farm Bureau Federation along with grant funding from U of I AVFS department.