

BUSINESS/ECONOMICS—University students get crash course in Idaho's economy

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STUDENTS IN A SENIOR-LEVEL University of Idaho agricultural economics class got a look at public policy during a three-day immersion tour of Boise's legislative scene Jan. 20 to 23.

Food Producers of Idaho and a broad section of the state's agricultural industry sponsored the eighth-annual tour, and Rick Waitley of Food Producers coordinated it. Agricultural economics professor Chris McIntosh, who originated the tour with the late Jim Nelson, teaches the class with Stephen Cooke. Both accompanied the students to Boise.

"The real value," McIntosh said, "is it opens students' eyes to the nuts and bolts of policy making in the state as it relates to agriculture."

Students explore the interplay of lobbyists and legislators as they address issues important to one of the state's core industries.

"What impressed me was how legislators and lobbyists work together and how that relationship affects public policy in a good way," said Elliott Toevs, a senior studying agricultural production management. He plans to return to the family farm near Aberdeen when he graduates in December. "I was also surprised by how many people involved in agricultural policy are from the University of Idaho and still work on the farm." He found that encouraging because "it ensures the producer's voice is reflected in policy."

Students met with Idaho Wool Growers, Idaho Grain Producers Association, and Idaho Sugarbeet Growers representatives, dined with Idaho legislators, met with representatives of U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies who implement policy, visited legislative committee meetings, and talked with representatives of Sen. Larry Craig and Rep. Bill Sali.

Students also attended the Food Producers of Idaho weekly legislative meeting, where members gather to discuss developments.

Katlin Davis, a senior from Cascade majoring in agricultural industry management and communications, found it "an opportunity to understand how things work that you couldn't get in a classroom." Her observations at Boise added to her own experience. She spent spring semester last year working as an intern for Sen. Larry Craig in Washington. "It's the busy season for everyone involved in the Legislature. I appreciate that they took the time to talk with us," she said.

Caldwell Food Technology Center helps clients exceed their quality goals

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WHEN HAILEY'S Prosperity Organic Foods won "Best of Show" for the best new vegetarian product at ExpoWest 2007, Drew Dalgetty was delighted—but not surprised.

For several years, the firm's founder and president, Cygnia Rapp, had been Dalgetty's client at the University of Idaho's Food Technology Center in Caldwell, where she had learned how to scale up her Organic Coconut Flax Butter for manufacturing. "She's going to go really big really fast," says Dalgetty.

Besides providing invaluable services to Idaho's food entrepreneurs, Dalgetty also tested grapes, juices, and wines from Idaho vineyards this fall to ensure that Idaho's new Snake River Valley wines exceed consumers' expectations.

"Quality is our number one focus," says Sherise Jones of the Idaho Grape Growers and Wine Producers Commission.

4-H helps Idaho youth tangle with credit

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HOW MANY YEARS will it take to pay off a \$2,000 credit card debt if you only repay the minimum, and how much interest will you pay? These pivotal questions become jarringly real to Idaho youth who participate in a new 4-H Kids Kredit Cards program.

Designed by two University of Idaho Extension educators, the exercise begins when participants are issued pretend credit cards with \$1,000 or \$2,000 limits. They shop in a simulated mall, buying cell phones, music CDs, iPods, ski passes, Xboxes and clothes.

"They're very excited," says Lyle Hansen, who created the program with Donna Gillespie. "Do we really get these things?" they ask. After shopping, the youth, ages 8 to 18, start doing the math. Answers are sobering. Youth who spend \$2,000 at 18 percent interest, with a 3 percent minimum payment, learn it will take 11 years and an extra \$1,654 interest to pay the debt.

"I hope it helps them avoid mistakes I made," says Hansen. So far 100 youth in Minidoka and Jerome counties have participated. On March 8 in Boise Hansen will share the program at a Western extension conference.

DID YOU KNOW?

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IS IDAHO'S RANK AMID 50 STATES FOR 2005 PER CAPITA INCOME AT \$29,395 FOR THE YEAR. TOP RANKING COUNTY, BLAINE, \$53,029. BOTTOM, MADISON, \$17,020.

Source: Northwest Area Foundation Indicators Web site, <http://www.indicators.nwaf.org/>