

City of Mountain Home Agriculture Comprehensive Plan

Betsy Lynn & Brad Stokes

Introduction & Overview:

Agriculture is fundamental role in Idaho’s economy, community and for many a way of life. Idaho ranks as the third-largest agricultural state with 25,000 farms and ranches producing over 185 different commodities (ISDA). Elmore County is one of the largest counties in the state of Idaho with ~2 million acres of land, Mountain Home is the largest city in Elmore County and is the county seat. Elmore County is one of the top 10 producers in Idaho with over \$429 million dollars contributing to the market and over 340 farms, ranches and dairies. (UI CALS).

Current Conditions:

Elmore County is made up of a multitude of terrains consisting of mostly public owned land and farmland. The county is 60% mountainous and 40% sloping land down into the Snake River Plain with altitudes ranging from 2,500 feet to over 9,700 feet above sea level (Elmore County). Several government agencies including the U.S. Forest Service, the U.S. Department of Defense and the Bureau of Land Management own much of the land in Elmore County. Approximately 70% of the county is owned by federal government agencies and 22% is designated farmland (Elmore County).

The total irrigated acreage in farmland in Elmore County is 358,454 acres, and the average farm size is 1,054 acres (USDA). There are over 340 farms, dairies and ranches that contribute to Idaho’s economy in Elmore County. Many of these businesses are family owned. Elmore County also hosts larger farms and feed lots, such as Simplot.

Being the county seat, and the largest city in Elmore County, it is vital for Mountain Home to not only be supportive of our local agricultural needs, but also be at the forefront of the future.

Bee City USA & Monarch City USA:

In 2018, the UI Extension Elmore County Office realize the need to protect our pollinators and create a habitat necessary for their survival. The Extension Educator, Brad Stokes, went in front of the Mountain Home City Council and requested their assistance in approving Mountain Home becoming a Bee City USA affiliate. Stokes also promoted the Pollinator Protection Policy for the City of Mountain Home. Later in 2019, Stokes went before the Mountain Home City Council for Mountain Home to become a Monarch City USA affiliate. All three resolutions were approved, and Mountain Home became the most pollinator cautious town in Elmore County.

There are currently street signs at both entrances of town that show that Mountain Home is not only a Bee City USA, but also a Monarch City USA. To further improve the conditions for our pollinators, the City of Mountain Home and the UI Extension Elmore County Office has handed out over 100 showy milkweed plants to the public and holds the annual event “Pollinator Appreciation Day”. This event spreads awareness about



Monarch butterfly taking off from a showy milkweed plant.

Photo credit: The Xerces Society.

our pollinators by offering the public educational information, locally harvested honey-based foods and free activities that promote our pollinators.

Social & Economical Profile:

The agricultural industry in Elmore County employs ~7.45% of the total workforce in Elmore County. The agricultural sector in Elmore County has an annual market value of \$429 million with over 42 million tonnage of total crops (USDA).

Major Crops:

Potatoes:

Potatoes are Idaho's largest commodity. Over 315,000 acres of potatoes were planted in Idaho in 2017 (ISDA). According to the USDA 2017 Census of Agriculture Elmore County harvests 13,069 acres of potatoes.



Potato field in Elmore County. Photo credit: Brad Stokes.

Sugarbeets:

Sugarbeets are known as Idaho's fourth most valuable crop. Idaho ranks second in the nation for its production of sugarbeets. Idaho contributes 20% of the total U.S. sugarbeet yields (ISDA). Sugar beets make up over 9,000 acres in Elmore County with 349,865 tons harvested in 2017 (USDA).

Beans:

Idaho's seeds for dry edible beans and garden beans are considered the best and most disease free in the world (ISDA). Dry beans and peas in Elmore County contribute over \$32 million to Idaho's economy (USDA).

Forage (hay/ haylage):

Forage is land used for all hay and haylage, grass silage and green chop, often either a blend used for livestock grazing, or harvested as feed. Idaho hay is widely known for its high protein content and is shipped to dairy and horse operations around the world (ISDA).



Cows grazing on irrigated forage. Photo credit: Brad Stokes.

Forage grown for (livestock grazing):

In 2017 there were 45,846 acres of land used as hay and haylage in Elmore County (the equivalent of 223,900 tons of dry forage) (USDA). There were 176 farms in 2012 with 41,286 acres contributed.

Harvesting for feed (alfalfa hay):

There are over 130 farms in Elmore County with 36,633 acres of alfalfa. In 2017 170,861 tons of alfalfa was harvested (USDA). In 2012 Elmore County had 149 farms and harvested 141,414 tons.

Corn for Silage or Green Chop:

In 2017 there were over 326,000 tons of corn harvested for feed. There are 16 farms in Elmore County with 10,775 acres of corn being used for silage or green chop (USDA). This is a large increase from 2012 with only 244,800 tons being harvested.

Wheat:

All of the wheat planted in Idaho totaled 1.19 million acres (ISDA). Wheat is one of the largest commodities in Elmore County. There are 19 farms that make up 19,751 acres of wheat. In 2017 there were 1,931,797 bushels of wheat harvested (USDA).



Wheat field in Elmore County.
Photo credit: Brad Stokes.

Corn:

There are 30 farms contributing to 15,296 acres of corn in Elmore County. Corn harvested in Elmore County contributes over \$22 million to Idaho's agricultural economy (USDA). This an increase from 2012. In 2012, there were 28 corn farms contributing over \$17 million in Idaho's agricultural economy.

Mint:

Idaho is the nation's third largest mint producer in the U.S. and has been grown commercially since the 1960's (ISDA). It is an up and coming crop for Elmore County. There are a few mint farmers in Elmore County and one large mint still near King Hill, ID. This would be considered a specialty crop within the county. Mint is grown for oil and is grown on less than 2,000 total acres.

Dry Peas:

As of 2017, there are less pea farms in Elmore County, but economically pea farms are still substantial to Elmore County's economy. There are currently 41 pea farms, which is 19 less than there were in 2012. The current market value of peas in Elmore County is \$32 million, which is up from \$30 million in 2012 (USDA).

Horticulture:

Noxious Weeds:

Noxious weeds are an epidemic not only in Elmore County, but in all of Idaho. They are not only harmful and sometimes poisonous to humans, but also for many domesticated grazing animals and wildlife. Idaho code 02.06.22 lists 67 species of plants as noxious weeds (Elmore County). Elmore County works with the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management in efforts to try and control or eradicate the presence of Noxious Weeds in Elmore County. Early Detection and Rapid Response methods are used by the Noxious Weed Superintendent in Elmore County in response to newly discovered weed species.

Every year, the University of Idaho Extension Elmore County partners with the Idaho State Department of Agriculture and hosts a 3-day course for farmers and their employees on pesticide treatments for noxious weeds and other pests that can be harmful to farmland or livestock. This class provides the ISDA-required credits necessary for a farmer to have his/her license.

Animal Husbandry Sector or Livestock:

Elmore County ranks 5th in the state for livestock, poultry and related products with \$310,574 contributing to the market (USDA).

Cattle & Calves:

As of 2017, there are 167 farms in Elmore County that raise cattle and calves (ISDA Census of Agriculture). These farms include cattle being raised for beef, calves and dairy cows. There are 121 farms in Elmore County that raised cattle for beef in 2017. There are 9 farms with 27,798 dairy cows in Elmore County. Over 146,164 cattle and calves were sold and contributed to Elmore County's Agricultural Economy (USDA).

Goats:

There are 24 farms in Elmore County with over 350 goats (USDA). Goats are used for their meat, as well as their milk. Goat milk can be used for cooking, making soaps, lotions and other commodities. There are currently 8 farms in Elmore County with 116 goats used for milk (USDA).

Sheep and Lambs:

There are 33 farms in Elmore County with almost 600 sheep and lamb raised for meat and wool (USDA). There has been a significant decrease in farms raising sheep for wool in Elmore County. In 2012 there were 17 farms that harvested \$18,718 worth of wool, but in 2017 only 11 farms harvested \$1,645 worth of wool (USDA).

Swine/Pigs:

There are 8 farms with 95 pigs in Elmore County. In 2017 there were 6 farms that sold 193 pigs (USDA).

Community Outreach:

UI Extension Elmore County Master Gardeners:

The University of Idaho Extension Elmore County Office utilizes university resources to assist farmers, ranchers and community members with their agricultural and horticultural needs. The office consists of the Extension Educator (Brad Stokes), Program Assistant (Betsy Lynn), 4-H Program Assistant (Nadine Cook) and Part-Time 4-H Program Assistant (Jami Davis). The Extension Educator teaches a twelve-week course for the home gardener. The class educates community members on horticulture and all the aspects that make a “Master Gardener”. The course requires 30 hours of volunteer hours. The course is designed not only to assist the home gardener, but also assist the community.



The Community Garden in Mountain Home, ID.
Photo credit: Brad Stokes.

In 2019, there were 15 students that graduated from the UI Extension Elmore County Master Gardener class. Many of those students chose to spend their volunteer hours at local community gardens. Gardens that were once desolate and are now flourishing and supplying our local community with fresh fruits and vegetables.

Climate:

Elmore County would be characterized as a semi-arid desert landscape with sagebrush steppe as the dominant native plant community. Temperatures may reach 105°F in the middle of summer and a low winter temperature of 20°F. Wind is a major concern in Elmore County/Mountain Home, as there is a corridor between the Owyhee Mountain Range to the southwest and the Boise National Forest to the north-northeast.

Local Ag Trends/Projections:

According to the 2017 Census of Agriculture performed by the USDA, on average, the number of farms in Elmore County is declining for every crop. However, the harvested amount of the crop is remaining the same or increasing. The UI Extension Elmore County Office believes this may have to do with small/ family owned farms being sold in the recent years. Bigger agricultural conglomerates use expensive and newly developed technology and harvesting techniques/machinery that may outcompete smaller farming operations.

There are also many new up and coming farmers in Elmore County that are contributing to the agricultural economy. As of 2017, there are 90 new farms with 117 new and beginning producers contributing to 67,848 acres in new farmland (USDA).

Goals:

Increase agricultural productivity through newly developed technological advances that decrease inputs and increase yields for all crops grown in Elmore County. Increase infrastructure needs across the City of Mountain Home and adjacent properties to attract more agricultural commodities and companies or grower-owned cooperatives.

CITATIONS:

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Authors:

Betsy Lynn – UI Extension Elmore County Program Assistant

208-587-2136 (Ext. 1250)

elmore@uidaho.edu

Brad Stokes – UI Extension Educator

208-587-2136 (Ext. 1253)

bstokes@uidaho.edu

