impact

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Boundary County crop tour: a collaboration between Extension, industry and farmers

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho partners with The McGregor Company and Houck Farm to host a crop tour aimed at disseminating research-based information about agronomy to Boundary County stakeholders.

The Situation

The Kootenai valley is an isolated agricultural system, with most of the prime agricultural land in Boundary County. Compared to neighboring Bonner County, Boundary produces over three times as much in agricultural product market value, despite having two-thirds of Bonner County's land area and only a quarter of its population. This highlights Boundary County's status as a regional agricultural powerhouse compared to surrounding areas. Despite this, local farmers have limited options to attend workshops and crop tours focused on current research in grain and oilseed farming. This is even more important given how different the valley's climate and soils are compared to other dryland farming regions that grow similar crops (primarily oilseed, grains and forage).

In an isolated agricultural hub, partnering with like-minded local agricultural entities is vital. The McGregor Company is one of the primary sources of technical assistance and agricultural supplies for large-scale farmers in Boundary County. McGregor conducts variety trial and agronomic research in collaboration with the Olson farm, located near the U.S.-Canada border. Nearby, University of Idaho Extension partners with Houck Farm, to conduct yearly variety trials on spring barley, winter wheat and spring canola.



Farmers and community members at one of University of Idaho's barley variety trials. Photo by Rachel Bickerton.

Our Response

On June 26, 2026, we joined forces with The McGregor Company and Houck Farm to host a crop tour showcasing variety trials as well as other agronomic research and educational information relevant to the Kootenai valley agricultural system. The McGregor Company, which hosts similar crop tours across the Inland Northwest co-hosted and sponsored the tour. The Houck Farm hosted the event on their property, but also contributed directly to the tour, having two of their farmers as speakers. Several University of Idaho faculty and staff from north central Idaho attended the tour to present and teach. Boundary County

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Farm Bureau also sponsored the tour and provided handouts for resources for local farmers. This highly collaborative nature with different entities working towards a common goal formed a sturdy foundation for the tour. Samuel DeGrey from Boundary County, organized the overall program. We offered three ISDA pesticide applicator license credits, a further resource for licensed pesticide applicators in the county.

The tour began with opening statements from Jeff Hood (Houck Farm) and Samuel DeGrey (UI Extension). Doug Finkelnburg (UI Extension) provided an update on recent relevant developments at the University of Idaho. Attendees then traveled to Kurtis Schroeder's (U of I) winter wheat variety trial plots, where Sky Reinhardt (Houck Farm), U of I alumni and local farmer, gave an excellent talk on soils and how they shape farming along the Kootenai river. We then moved to Schroeder's plots for an update on his winter wheat and spring barley trial results. We then had an unscheduled update from Sydney Anderson (Idaho Barley Commission). Heading back to the shed, Cat McGregor spoke about their variety trial results and hosted a roundtable discussion about local agriculture. We finished off the tour by visiting Kamal Khadka's canola variety trial plots featuring a canola update with Khadka's technician Caitlyn Horsch. The event ended with a meal back at the shed and a free raffle, both sponsored by The McGregor Company.

The tour was advertised in the Extension Boundary County newsletter, Facebook page and The McGregor Company website.

Program Outcomes

The crop tour had 37 attendees, with 16 completing and returning program evaluations at the end of the tour. Among the respondents, 63% self-identified as farmers, 31% were from the U of I and 6% identified as "other." Respondents reported managing between zero and 3,000 acres, with a mean of 479 acres. 50% of the respondents had attended a U of I crop tour in Boundary County before, while 50% had not. Of those that had attended previous tours, 100% said that they applied the information from past tours in their operations.

Of the respondents to the surveys, 100% said that they had gained knowledge about dryland cropping systems from attending the tour, and 100% stated that the information gleaned from the tour would be useful in their occupations and related activities.

The survey included an option to give comments on the tour, which included the following:

- Presenters were extremely knowledgeable and well prepared
- Always good to learn what producers are doing in the valley. Good to connect with our neighbors.
- Great job
- Awesome tour
- I would like to see a nursery/tree farm tour in the future
- Was interesting about the soils, great lunch

Additionally, 17 attendees gave their pesticide applicator license for ISDA applicator credits.

The Future

The crop tour will continue in 2027, hopefully annually with continued collaborations. The Idaho Barley Commission will fund next year's tour.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Thank you to The McGregor Company, Houck Farm, Olson Valley Ranch, Boundary County Farm Bureau and Cassie Olson in catering the event.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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