impact

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# Field day gives producers research-backed ways to save water and manage manure

## AT A GLANCE

**Ninety percent of 67 attendees at a dairy forage field day plan to change how they manage water, forage or manure. Demonstrations connected producers with research that fits their operations.**

## The Situation

Forage production is central to Idaho's dairy industry, and growers face rising pressure to conserve water, manage manure nutrients responsibly and maintain crop health. Many of the people who advise dairy and forage operations, including natural resource professionals and agricultural contractors, need current, locally relevant information they can pass on to producers.

## Our Response

On Aug. 27, 2026, University of Idaho Extension hosted the Sustainable Dairy Forage Field Day at the University of Idaho Kimberly Research and Extension Center. Extension educators and specialists presented field demonstrations and results on:

- Irrigation management and deficit irrigation for forage crops
- Specialty crops
- Interseeding and intercropping
- Manure application, including emissions measurement and management



Attendees enjoy discussing topics learned during the 2026 Sustainable Dairy Forage Field Day over lunch in Kimberly.

Participants saw the work in the field and talked directly with the researchers. The day closed with an advisory meeting where producers and industry personnel identified research and Extension priorities, such as water availability and manure management.

## Program Outcomes

Ninety percent of respondents stated that they plan to implement practices discussed at the event. Most respondents were natural resource professionals (70%), while 17% were agricultural or farm contractors, and the rest identified as family farm owners or professional farmers and technicians. 77% had attended another field day in the past four years.

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Self-rated knowledge of irrigation and sustainable management practices rose from an average of 2.6 to 4.1 on a five-point scale, a gain of 1.5 points (about 58%).

Ninety-five percent of participants (28 of 30) increased their knowledge rating, and none decreased. The two who did not change had already rated themselves four or five.

The share of participants rating their knowledge four or five grew from 20% to 83%.

Every participant who began at three or below (24 of 24) reported an increase.

Eighty-nine percent said they would likely implement or improve soil moisture sensor and irrigation practices, 86% intercropping and crop health practices, and 74% manure application and nutrient management practices.

Table 1. Self-rated knowledge before and after the field day (n = 33).

| Measure | Before | After | Change |
|---|---|---|---|
| Average rating (one-five) | 2.6 | 4.1 | +1.5 |
| Rated knowledge high (four or five) | 20% | 83% | +63 points |
| Rated knowledge low (one or two) | 47% | 3% | −44 points |

Table 2. Participants likely to adopt practices (n=27-28).

| Practice | Yes or probably |
|---|---|
| Soil moisture sensors/sustainable irrigation | 89% |
| Intercropping/crop health | 86% |
| Manure application/nutrient management | 74% |

## The Future

The advisory meeting gave researchers a clear picture of what producers and industry personnel need most. Priorities included water availability and manure management. UI Extension and its research partners will use that input to guide current and future research and Extension efforts. Most participants were professionals who advise dairy and forage operations, so the practices shown are likely to reach many more producers than attended.

Next steps include:

- Sharing results from the field demonstrations through Extension bulletins.
- Following up with participants on adoption of soil moisture sensing, intercropping and nutrient management practices. Ninety percent said they were likely to adopt at least one of these.
- Hosting another Sustainable Dairy Forage Field Day in future years.

## Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Pacific Northwest Dairy Research Consortium, Idaho Dairymen Association, Dairy West, Idaho Hay and Forage Association, Chobani and USDA-ARS Kimberly.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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