

Letter from the President



Office of the President, president@uidaho.edu

Sept. 19, 2025

Dear Vandals,

As a UI Extension Educator in Minidoka County, Jason Thomas teaches kids about the role barn owls play in keeping vole populations in check one day and discusses pesticide application with alfalfa farmers the next.

Mixing creativity, technology and practicality, Thomas delivers U of I research in creative, engaging ways. The [Pest Friends board game](#), which Thomas and colleague Grant Loomis created, engages players of all ages while teaching lessons in integrated pest management. Farmers in the field can now gain growing insights by listening to the [Idaho Seed Podcast](#) rather than thumbing through a pamphlet.

“It’s tough to try to get people to read full research publications,” Thomas said. “But we can give people some context and include the most important information. When a farmer is out on a tractor, there isn’t much to think about so he could listen to a podcast and learn things to help make his operations more efficient.”

Thomas turned to artificial intelligence to help reach his varied audiences. He feeds U of I research publications into an AI program that translates it into a podcast discussion. He then carefully reviews the podcast to make sure each anecdote is factual, and each statement is accurate. In the end, AI produces an engaging conversation that conveys practical advice for growers.

To reach kids, Thomas used AI tools to produce images for "[Barney the Barn Owl](#)," a coloring book that teaches them about the biology of barn owls, a natural predator of voles which are a common rodent pest in Idaho.

"I'm always trying new things and I'm willing to use new tools," Thomas said. "It's challenging in some ways, and we're still learning where AI works best."

The U of I's [new strategic plan](#) incorporates AI throughout each of the five pillars:

- Ignite student success
- Drive experiential learning
- Adapt the educational model
- Harness research innovation and partnership
- Optimize operational excellence

A university working group is developing guidelines around the technology, gathering best practices to share and building on our leadership in the use of AI in higher education.

From his personal experience, Thomas says it's best to start small and see where AI might help with time-consuming tasks.

"I always try to start with caution and see how AI can help," Thomas said. "It's a learning process, like working with a new assistant. You have to learn how to speak their language to get the results you are seeking."

UI Extension plays a central role in delivering our education and research to communities across Idaho. We're arming the state's farmers with techniques to make operations more efficient, educating children about the value of Idaho agriculture, and supporting adult education in all 44 counties. Through technology and our employees' ingenuity, the U of I is adapting the land grant model to better serve our state.

Go Vandals!

C. Scott Green
President



Snapshots

Idaho caviar business boosted by U of I expertise

The U of I's Aquaculture Research Institute helps Magic Valley caviar producers thrive. Idaho caviar has gained a sterling reputation thanks to innovative studies and technical expertise from scientists at the Hagerman Fish Culture Experiment Station, who work with companies like Blind Canyon Aqua Ranch. [Learn more.](#)

Nappo gains direction, inspiration at U of I as he begins law school

College of Law student Dosa Nappo gained mentorship, community and a new direction as an undergraduate at the U of I. After earning degrees in criminology and sociology, he enrolled in law school with plans to help uplift his hometown community in Fort Hall. [Learn more.](#)

U of I professor helps identify new moon

Professor Matthew Hedman was co-investigator on a team that discovered a new moon orbiting Uranus. The U of I professor of physics helped process imagery from NASA's James Webb Space Telescope to visualize the planet's 29th confirmed satellite. [Learn more.](#)



The 2025 Borah Symposium will be held Monday through Wednesday, Sept. 29-Oct. 1, in Moscow. K.T. McFarland, former deputy national security advisor under President Donald Trump, will deliver the closing keynote address.



University of Idaho

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University of Idaho
875 Perimeter Drive
Moscow, ID 83844
info@uidaho.edu

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