

University of Idaho Extension's farm tour building connections through agriculture

AT A GLANCE

University of Idaho Extension's Blaine County Farm Tour assembled elected officials and business leaders to strengthen relationships with the agricultural community.

The Situation

Agricultural producers in the region face unique challenges, including high-altitude growing constraints, sustainable rangeland management, post-wildfire recovery and balancing working lands with freshwater conservation. Strengthening communication and collaboration between local government officials, commercial business leaders and agricultural producers is essential for long-term community resilience and regional food security.

Our Response

Hosted a comprehensive farm tour on May 18, 2026, engaging over 30 community leaders from inside and outside Blaine County through immersive, hands-on educational stops:

- Hailey Farms explored solar-powered greenhouse production for extended high-altitude growing seasons, herbicide- and pesticide-free farming, and local food distribution with owner Austin Shea.
- Rinker Rock Creek Ranch (University of Idaho) learned about science-based rangeland management, grazing practices, irrigation and wildfire recovery following the 2024 wildfire.



Scott Jensen presents at the Rinker Rock Creek Ranch. Photo by Becka Dahlin.

- Silver Creek Preserve (The Nature Conservancy) 50 years of watershed conservation and habitat stewardship, alongside emerging technologies like virtual cattle fencing.

Provided networking and lunch catered by Future Roots at the Silver Creek Conservation and Education Center, made possible by proactive planning and grant funding (Frontier Community Resources SMILES).

Program Outcomes

Participant reach and engagement of regional leadership convened over 30 participants representing diverse community leadership including local government officials and business leaders from hospitality,

tourism, retail and other commercial sectors from both inside and outside Blaine County.

Utilized hands-on learning experiences that allowed participants to directly interact with working agricultural resources, research facilities and conservation landscapes.

Delivered simple, clear messaging regarding sustainable agriculture and local relevance, laying a strategic foundation for long-term collaboration.

Hailey Farms (local food security and sustainable innovation) participants explored 7,500 square feet of solar-powered greenhouses and over an acre of outside vegetable and cut flower production.

- Attendees gained greater appreciation for how sustainable innovations and solar-powered infrastructure successfully extend the growing season in high-altitude environments, reinforcing that technology and sustainability can work together to support regional food security and community-centered farming.

Rinker Rock Creek Ranch (research, resilience and rangeland management) participants engaged with University of Idaho Extension researchers Scott Jensen, Emily Bedwell, Cameron Weskamp and Tracey Johnson at a working ranch.

- Attendees learned current, science-based practices in rangeland management, stream restoration, irrigation and cattle behavior. Crucially, they saw firsthand how data from the 2024 wildfire provided valuable research opportunities in post fire grazing and recovery, directly informing future land management decisions and ecological resilience.

Silver Creek Preserve (conservation and emerging technology) participants examined 50 years of watershed conservation, tracing its roots back to 1976 when the local community urged The Nature Conservancy (TNC) to establish the preserve which has since

expanded to 882 acres, with over 15,000 watershed acres protected via conservation easements.

- Attendees witnessed how community-based stewardship safeguards complex ecological systems while incorporating cutting-edge tools. Presentations by TNC staff and Emily Pfaller (Halter technologies) demonstrated how emerging virtual fencing technology improves grazing efficiency, reduces infrastructure needs, and actively complements long-term conservation and adaptive livestock goals.

Demonstrating these agricultural innovations to elected officials and business leaders provides value by bridging local government and commercial sectors relationships and fosters long-term community resilience.



Tour group at Hailey Farms. Photo by Austin Shea.

The Future

Leveraging the success of this tour to maintain long-term collaborations between local government, commercial sectors and agricultural producers, ensuring continued support for community-centered farming, watershed protection and agricultural resilience in Blaine County.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Blaine County, Future Roots, Frontier Community Resources, University of Idaho Extension, The Nature Conservancy, Hailey Farms, Rinker Rock Creek Ranch.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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