

# impact

University of Idaho Extension programs that are making a difference in Idaho.

## Growing Benewah: Supporting community success amidst rural growth

### AT A GLANCE

Programs update local professionals on regulations and connect residents with vital resources, fostering networking and sustainable rural development.

### The Situation

Situated in the Idaho Panhandle, Benewah County is a small rural community of approximately 10,000 residents that has experienced steady population growth in recent years. This sustained growth has injected new energy into the local community, including the real estate market and need for community programs. With more people calling Benewah County home, there is an escalating need to bridge the gap between residents and the area's infrastructure.

### Our Response

In partnership with county officials, the local health district and economic development agencies, a specialized one-day workshop updated realtors and contractors on policies and developments. A separate community resource fair connects both new and existing residents with vital community resources.

Cultivating these meaningful connections and fostering a robust support network will be essential to maintaining Benewah County's spirit and ensuring its growth remains sustainable for everyone.



Mel Topping, Maddie Goebel and Lauren King tabling at the 3B Community Resource Fair in 2026. Photo by Aaron Nelson.

### Program Outcomes

The inaugural "Growing Benewah" workshop was launched in 2024. This full day workshop provides vital community updates, resource networking and professional development for local realtors and contractors serving Benewah County. Offered completely free of charge, this voluntary event regularly draws dedicated participants who take time off their work to attend, gather updated county forms and bring relevant insights back to their clientele. This workshop's growth reflects a conscious effort to balance high demand with meaningful engagement.

The workshop debuted in 2024 with 24 participants and six staff, but rapidly expanded the following year

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to nearly double its capacity with 43 participants and 12 staff. In 2026, coordinators intentionally scaled attendance back to 33 participants and nine staff. This strategic reduction directly addressed program feedback from previous years, successfully restoring the smaller, more intimate setting that participants valued for connecting and networking.

Complementing the targeted training of “Growing Benewah” workshop, the “3B Community Resource Fair” serves as a full-day public facing event designed to bridge the gap between local residents and community resources. While the workshop focuses on professional development for those serving new clientele, the resource fair opens its doors to the broader public for direct, face-to-face networking with public organizations and neighbors. Operating strictly as an informational and service-oriented venue rather than a commercial market. The fair provides a dedicated space for local entities to showcase their community impact and available resources without the pressure of commercial sales.

Featuring an array of local agencies, non-profit organizations and service clubs, the “3B Community Resource Fair” functions as a reciprocal networking hub. It not only connects residents with essential services but also allows participating organizations to identify and engage future clients, volunteers and collaborators.

The inaugural year in 2025 successfully engaged nearly 300 individuals including both vendors and members of the public. In 2026, participation increased significantly to 480 individuals. This growth was largely driven by two strategic program adjustments: transitioning the event to a new venue and shifting the schedule from a weekday to a Saturday. This eliminated the workplace scheduling conflicts and allowed for a more seamless event in a single location rather than between multiple buildings.

### The Future

Moving forward, both “Growing Benewah” and the “3B Community Resource Fair” will remain staples of local community programming. Community feedback consistently highlights the value of these events, with participants particularly appreciating the opportunity to engage directly with local leaders and public organizations in an accessible, approachable environment.

### Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

These programs were made possible by partnerships with the Benewah County Assessor, Benewah County Clerk’s Office, Panhandle Health and Timber Plus – Greater St. Joe Development Foundation.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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