

Idaho Ag exports increase 70 percent over 2010

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Led by a large increase in dairy sales abroad, the total value of Idaho agricultural exports has soared this year compared to 2010.

Through the end of September, Idaho ag exports are up 27 percent to \$595.96 million. Dairy exports totaled \$194 million, a 70 percent increase from the same period last year.

While the weaker U.S. dollar is helping, it's not the only factor, said Laura Johnson, manager of the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's market development division.

"The value of the dollar is definitely helping -- it makes Idaho ag exports more competitive compared with those of our foreign competitors -- and right now it's a real benefit," she said. But, the large increase "shows there is growing demand around the world for Idaho agricultural products."

The increase is being driven by dairy exports but other ag products are also faring well, including potatoes, the state's top cash crop, and dry beans. Both of these crops are expected to benefit from Mexico's lifting of its final tariffs connected to that country's trucking dispute with the U.S.

"That is going to further enhance our exports to Mexico," Johnson said. "That was a very significant barrier for Idaho agricultural products."

Through the third quarter, \$124.97 million worth of Idaho ag products were shipped to Canada and \$88.9 million to Mexico. They were followed by Japan (\$64.7 million), China (\$44 million), Indonesia (\$39.6 million) and Malaysia (\$30 million) as the top destination for Idaho agricultural products.

Johnson expects beef and dehydrated potato exports to South Korea to increase significantly because of the two countries' recent free trade agreement. Idaho shipped \$15.9 million worth of ag products to that country through September.

Because of how agricultural exports are tracked -- by the ZIP code where the paperwork is filed rather than the state of origin -- the numbers don't show the complete picture.

For example, exports under the "miscellaneous grain/seed/fruit" category increased 3.58 percent to \$64.3 million, but that doesn't tell the whole story. According to Idaho Bean Commission Administrator Diana Caldwell, most of the state's large bean warehouses have corporate offices in other states and that's where the export paperwork is filed.

Caldwell said exports of Idaho dry bean seed have increased annually but other states such as Texas, which doesn't produce this crop, get the credit.

Still, Johnson said the recent numbers show an encouraging trend.

Through the second quarter, Idaho had exported a total of \$405.7 million worth of ag products, a 21.93 percent increase over the same period in 2010, so the third-quarter numbers show the pace of sales abroad is picking up steam.

The recent numbers show that exports under the state's "cereals" category, which includes wheat, jumped 171.6 percent through September to \$25.6 million. Sales of vegetables, which include potatoes, increased 9.5 percent to \$94 million.