

134 Issue 6th Year

# Former students say ag class helped streamline operations

*Associated Press*

POCATELLO — In the midst of slumping agriculture and livestock prices, farming experts are offering a series of classes to help growers improve their operations from the ground up.

The highly touted Western Integrated Resource Education course is being conducted in Soda Springs to teach farmers and stockmen how to make the best out of what they have and plan for the future.

"A lot of farmers are saying, 'It doesn't matter how much I produce. I can't make ends meet,'" University of Idaho agricultural extension agent Reed Findlay said. "These classes go back and begin where you should begin, like setting goals and inventorying resources."

The classes, which began Monday and will run twice weekly for three weeks, come as commodities prices have been ravaged by overproduction and slackening demand.

"Everything we've ever done is operational, and we've left out tactical planning and strategic planning," Findlay said. "With the economic turmoil in their life, one thing they ought to do is take a step back.

"Doing the same things they've always done and expecting a different result is my definition of insanity," he

said.

Farmers who attended last year praise the program, saying that while conditions are tough, they would be worse off without the training.

James and Shannon Hardcastle, who have 400 head of cattle and grow hay and grain on 5,000 acres near Montpelier, said it provided them ample ideas for improvement.

"Boy, it gave us a lot in the few weeks we were there," Hardcastle said. "The main thing that has helped us is to set goals and prioritize, then figure the best way we can make a living in today's market situation."

Roy Dunford on the Tom Blotter Ranch near Bear Lake said he switched to fall calving and fertilizing pastures after the course.

"It really worked for us," he said. "In the last year or two, it's been a losing money situation. I don't think it'll be as bad this year as it would have been without the changes."

Findlay said that is what the program is all about.

"We start from the beginning. We don't just twink around with fertilizer," he said. "We can calculate how much money it will cost to put kids through school. If that's your goal, let's try to see how we can make that possible."