



Giant Idaho potato tour could roll on well past 2016

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — The Big Idaho Potato Truck will roll on next year and possibly well beyond that.

Idaho Potato Commission board members have unofficially given the commission their blessing to continue the promotion beyond 2016.

To celebrate its 75th anniversary in 2012, the IPC built a gigantic potato and hauled it around the country. It brought to life an iconic Idaho postcard that shows an enormous potato on the back of a truck.

The truck has toured the nation for four years now and IPC commissioners have already approved a 2016 tour.

During a recent meeting, commissioners informally asked the public relations firms that handle the promotion to attempt to quantify its value.

But they were also clear they believe the promotion is a big benefit to the industry and they want it to continue.

"I'm sure the day will come when it will lose its luster but until that day comes, I say let's run it till the tires fall off," said IPC commissioner Lynn Wilcox,



Submitted photo

The Big Idaho Potato Truck is shown on a Times Square billboard on April 23, 2015. Idaho Potato Commission commissioners have unofficially given their blessing for the truck promotion to continue into the future.

a fresh potato supplier. "The longer it's out there, the better it gets."

Other IPC commissioners told the Capital Press later they feel the same way.

"It's done a great job promoting the Idaho potato brand," said Aberdeen grower and IPC member Ritchey Toevs. "It's probably never

sold a potato but it promotes the Idaho potato brand. I don't think anything that we've done can touch the amount of PR we get from that investment."

"I'm firmly behind it," said Oakley grower and IPC commissioner Randy Hardy. "Idaho has to keep putting its name out there."

The commission spends about \$750,000 a year on the big potato truck promotion.

The amount of exposure the truck gets as it winds its way through dozens of major cities and approximately 22,000 miles each year is huge, said Sue Kennedy, director of public relations for Evans, Hardy and Young,

which handles the promotion along with Foerstel Design.

While the groups will try to assign a value to the promotion, it's impossible to track the amount of exposure the giant potato gets on social media or while driving along the highway, she said.

After four years, "The interest we see is not waning, at all," she said.

IPC President and CEO Frank Muir said psychological research has shown that people connect with brands at a young age "and they never forget that emotional experience they had with that brand."

"What we're trying to do with the truck is make it something where people will never forget when they saw that truck," he said. "We're going to do our best (to put a value on it) but it's hard to measure those things."

Coca-Cola and Pepsi are two of the most recognized brands in the world but they still spend millions of dollars on advertising every year "because they recognize that if you stopped advertising within one generation, you're forgotten," Muir said. "That would happen to Idaho potatoes if we stopped advertising and we're not about to let that happen."

Sakuma, workers near deal on lingering pay issue

Sides send rest break agreement to judge for approval

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Washington state berry company Sakuma Brothers Farms has tentatively agreed to pay \$87,160 to compensate pickers for rest breaks in 2014, resolving an issue left over from a federal class-action lawsuit that changed agricultural wage practices statewide.

Lawyers for Sakuma and the workers notified U.S. District Judge Marsha Pechman in Seattle in writing Monday of the agreement, which must be approved by the court.

Approximately 480 people did piece-rate work for Sakuma in 2014, according to a plaintiff attorney, Seattle lawyer Marc Cote.

The company will also pay workers 12 percent interest on the back wages.

The two sides also reported that they are still negotiating how much Sakuma will pay the plaintiffs in legal fees.

Two farmworkers sued Sakuma in 2013 alleging several wage and workplace violations, including failing to provide paid rest breaks.

The Burlington, Wash., company denied any wrongdoing, but agreed to an out-of-court settlement. A \$500,000 pool will be shared by 407 workers. The two lead plaintiffs received \$3,000 each, and their legal representatives received \$344,000 in fees and expenses.

The workers' attorneys said the payout was apparently the largest class-action settlement involving farmworkers in state history.

It didn't, however, resolve whether piece-rate farmworkers must be compensated separately for 10-minute rest breaks.

Pechman referred the question to the state Supreme Court, which ruled last July in favor of the workers.

The decision led the state Department of Labor and Industries to instruct all employers to pay agricultural piece-rate workers the amount they could have made by working through rest breaks.

By 2015, Sakuma had already changed its wage structure, but the Supreme Court's ruling meant the company had to go back and negotiate a settlement for 2014 rest breaks.

Sakuma attorney Adam Belzberg said Tuesday that calculating the back pay was fairly straightforward. "We basically showed how the math worked," he said.

Arriving at an agreement over legal fees may be more difficult and require the court's intervention, he said.

A total of 923 workers were initially eligible to share in the original \$500,000 settlement. Plaintiff attorneys tried to contact workers through meetings, door-to-door visits, mailings and radio advertising on Spanish-language stations in California, according to court records.

A relatively high percentage filed claims, Cote said of the 407 workers. "It's an extraordinary number for a case that involved migrant farmworkers."

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