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Idaho

Legislators applaud commission's potato marketing efforts

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — During the recently concluded Idaho legislative session, many lawmakers gave an unofficial thumbs-up to the Idaho Potato Commission's marketing and promotion efforts.

"Obviously you are doing an incredibly great job of promoting the Idaho potato," Rep. Randy Armstrong, R-Inkom, told IPC President and CEO Frank Muir.

His remark was representative of the feedback Muir received during his annual presentations to the state House and Senate ag committees.

Armstrong then asked Muir how much the commission spends on advertising.

Muir used the opportunity to present a breakdown of the commission's marketing



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Potatoes are harvested in Eastern Idaho last fall. Idaho legislators last week lauded the marketing efforts of the Idaho Potato Commission.

and promotion efforts and explain the reasoning behind them.

More than 80 percent of the commission's \$15 million budget goes toward marketing and promotion, including

\$5.3 million spent on advertising.

The promotion efforts include big-ticket programs such as the Big Idaho Potato Truck and the commission's sponsorship of the Famous

Idaho Potato Bowl Game. Keeping Idaho potatoes in front of consumers in a favorable light is the main goal, Muir told Capital Press.

"If you stop promoting your brand for one generation, you're going to lose your brand equity," he said. "Idaho is known more for potatoes than any other state is known for anything else. That's how strong we've built this brand."

Muir told lawmakers the IPC also chooses to put as much money as possible into what he terms "working dollars," money that is directly spent trying to build demand and expand markets.

As an example, the commission collected \$130,000 more than it budgeted for potato assessment revenue during fiscal year 2016 because of higher than expected

yields, and obtained an unexpected \$147,000 federal grant to support its export efforts.

The commission also spent \$728,000 less than was budgeted for "targeted programs," which are programs that are implemented if the commission's marketing committee, which represents shippers, opts to launch them.

The total amount of that additional and unspent money, \$1.05 million, was put right back into the commission's fiscal 2017 budget.

"Instead of building up a reserve, I want to put grower dollars right back (to work)," Muir said.

IPC board members told Capital Press they support Muir's promotion and marketing game plan.

"I think we get an amazing return for what we invest in

the value of the Idaho potato brand," said Aberdeen farmer Ritchey Toevs, an IPC board member.

"We don't have a big pool of money so we try to get the most leverage out of our promotions as we can," said IPC board member Randy Hardy, an Oakley farmer. "We think Frank does an excellent job getting the most bang out of our buck."

Hardy and Toevs said board members field questions from some growers who want to know how their potato assessment dollars are spent and why potato prices aren't higher.

"The brand alone doesn't return anything to the grower but the brand itself has great value," Toevs said. "The growers have to manage the return separate from what the commission does."

Ag fares well during 2017 legislative session

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho's farming industry fared well during the state's recently concluded 2017 legislative session.

The Idaho Legislature's 105 members sided with agriculture on many issues, from water to field burning, dyed fuel, immigration and additional funding for research.

"We didn't have any big-ticket items ... but we did have a lot of different issues" that legislators supported ag on, said Roger Batt, who represents several farm groups at the legislature.

Additional funding to strengthen Idaho's transportation infrastructure was hailed by ag industry leaders as one of the session's main achievements.

Food Producers of Idaho, which represents 40 ag groups, sent a letter to lawmakers pointing out how important transportation is to the state's farmers and ranchers.

"Idaho's agriculture industry depends upon local, state and federal highways to move product from farm to market and from market to consumers," the letter stated. "We cannot maintain a viable and aggressive agriculture sector without an adequate transportation infrastructure."

Legislators approved a bill that will provide \$300 million to upgrade important transportation arteries, including widening a bottleneck stretch of Interstate 84 near Nampa that is an important thorough-

fare for a lot of Idaho farm commodities, including grain, potatoes, cattle and sugar beets.

"There are a lot of ag commodities that travel that freeway," said Sen. Mark Harris, a Republican rancher from Soda Springs. "I think the transportation bill was a big plus for agriculture."

Another big win for the industry was a bill that codifies into state law a 2007 Idaho Supreme Court ruling on who owns stock watering rights on federally administered land.

Siding with two Owyhee County ranchers, the court ruled that the U.S. Bureau of Land Management can't own the rangeland water rights because it doesn't own cattle and therefore can't put the water to beneficial use.

Senate Bill 1111 opens the door for potentially thousands of Idaho ranchers to file deferred claims to those rights. Companion legislation lays out the process for filing a claim.

A large chunk of Idaho is federally owned and water is the key to using that land, Harris said. "Those bills protect those water rights that people depend on."

A bill that would have done away with Idaho's dyed fuel program and required people who use the diesel fuel, such as farmers and ranchers, to pay the taxes on it up front and apply for a tax refund never made it out of committee.

Dyed fuel is used heavily in agriculture and is exempt from state and federal taxes

because it's only for off-road use.

"That was a ridiculous idea to begin with," Idaho Farm Bureau Federation Director of Governmental Affairs Russ Hendricks said about the proposed bill to end the program. "We were very glad that bill was withdrawn."

Idaho lawmakers approved an additional \$1.85 million for University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences. The money will be used to fund major lab renovations and new graduate student housing at some of the college's ag research stations.

"These upgrades — plus the addition of housing for graduate students — are desperately needed at many of our research and extension centers throughout Idaho," said FPI Executive Director Rick Waitley.

CALS also got \$10 million for its proposed \$45 million livestock and agricultural research facility in the Magic Valley area.

Legislators approved an 11 percent increase in the Idaho State Department of Agriculture's overall budget, with most of the additional money going to buttress efforts to prevent quagga mussels from invading Idaho waterways.

The legislature also approved \$750,000 that will be used by the ISDA and Idaho Brand Board to develop animal tracking software to electronically manage animal identification numbers and livestock movement data.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Bianna Clizer of the Bonners Ferry FFA chapter reads to kindergartners at the Boys & Girls Club in Twin Falls for an ag literacy lesson during the FFA State Leadership Conference's day of service on April 7.

Idaho FFA members engage youngsters to boost ag literacy

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — Photosynthesis, pollination, seed dispersal. They might seem like pretty heady topics for kindergartners and first-grade students, but it's never too early to start learning about the workings and importance of agriculture.

In fact, the earlier the better, according to Idaho FFA members involved in an ag literacy event at the Boys & Girls Club on Friday.

The Idaho FFA State Leadership Conference was winding its way to Saturday's climax when hundreds of FFA members swapped their formal attire for blue T-shirts and jeans and spread out across Twin Falls for some 30 service events to thank the community for hosting the conference.

A few chapters chose to educate children on agronomy, forestry, livestock production and career opportunities in agriculture, and the Boys & Girls Club was a perfect, if noisy, venue.

Ag literacy and knowing where food comes from is really important, said Shawna Siver, an FFA member from Bonners Ferry.

There's only so much space in the world to grow food, and people need to know it's important to devel-



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Members of the Salmon FFA chapter help youngsters at the Boys & Girls Club in Twin Falls make eggs.

op and manage that, she said.

Having knowledge about agriculture and where their food comes from will hopefully foster support for agriculture, said fellow chapter member Mary Fioravanti.

"Maybe one day when their older, they'll want to be a part of that, too," said Bailey Myers.

But they don't necessarily have to be a farmer to support agriculture and future food production, said Brittany Spangler.

"I think it's really important to do these fun activities to spark an interest so they remember it," she said.

Teaching the future generation so youngsters have a general understanding that ag is an aspect of every part of their life is critical to keeping ag viable, she said.

The Bonners Ferry members gave about 90 youngsters an agronomy lesson — compliments of Dr. Seuss Books and the Cat in the Hat — explaining everything involved in growing food from seed, answering questions and helping the children plant seeds in cups bound for their own windowsills or gardens.

In another room, FFA members from Salmon were helping youngsters make eggs from Play-Doh, explaining each part of the egg and its function and how eggs are produced.

Katie Cooper, ag education instructor and Salmon FFA adviser, said hands-on activities are a good learning tool for young students and eggs are a food they're familiar with.

LEGAL

PUBLIC NOTICE

The Oregon Soil and Water Conservation Commission (SWCC) will hold its regular quarterly meeting on Monday, May 1, 2017, from 12:30 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. The meeting will be held at the Red Lion Hotel, 304 SE Nye Avenue, Pendleton, OR 97801. The meeting agenda covers SWCC reports, advisor reports, Soil and Water Conservation District programs and funding, Agriculture Water Quality Management Program updates, and other agenda items.

The Oregon Department of Agriculture complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). If you need special accommodations to participate in this meeting, please contact Sandi Hiatt at (503) 986-4704, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting.

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