

A YEAR OF IDAHO INNOVATION



Farmer Randy Hardy stands in his shop in Oakley, Idaho. As president of the National Potato Council, Hardy has been involved in grower issues on the national level for the past 20 years. Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

Potato grower champions industry interests

Randy Hardy takes national stage on behalf of fellow growers

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

OAKLEY, Idaho — Running the family farm since the age of 19 after the unexpected death of his father, Randy Hardy is no stranger to challenge.

He's been farming for 42 years, growing the family farm in Oakley, Idaho, from 300 acres to nearly 3,000 acres. And for the last 20 years, he's championed the cause of potato growers at the national level, serving at the helm of grower organizations to promote potatoes and protect the industry's interests.

After high school, Hardy went to college, but decided to marry his high school sweetheart and returned

Western Innovator Randy Hardy

Hometown: Oakley, Idaho

Age: 61

Partners: Wife, Karlene, and son, Ben

Children: 5

Grandchildren: 27

Acres: 2,800

Main crop: Potatoes

Offices: President, National Potato Council; former chairman, U.S. Potato Board; chairman, Sun Valley Potatoes fresh potato co-op; board member, IdaGro dehydrated potato supply co-op



a year later to farm with his father. But those plans changed overnight, when his father died two months after Hardy's return to the farm.

Taking over the family farm involved a huge learning curve, he said.

"I knew a lot of the farming, but I didn't have a clue about finances and seed and fertilizer," he said.

But he set about providing for his mother and new wife, asking questions of his uncle and mentor, W.B.

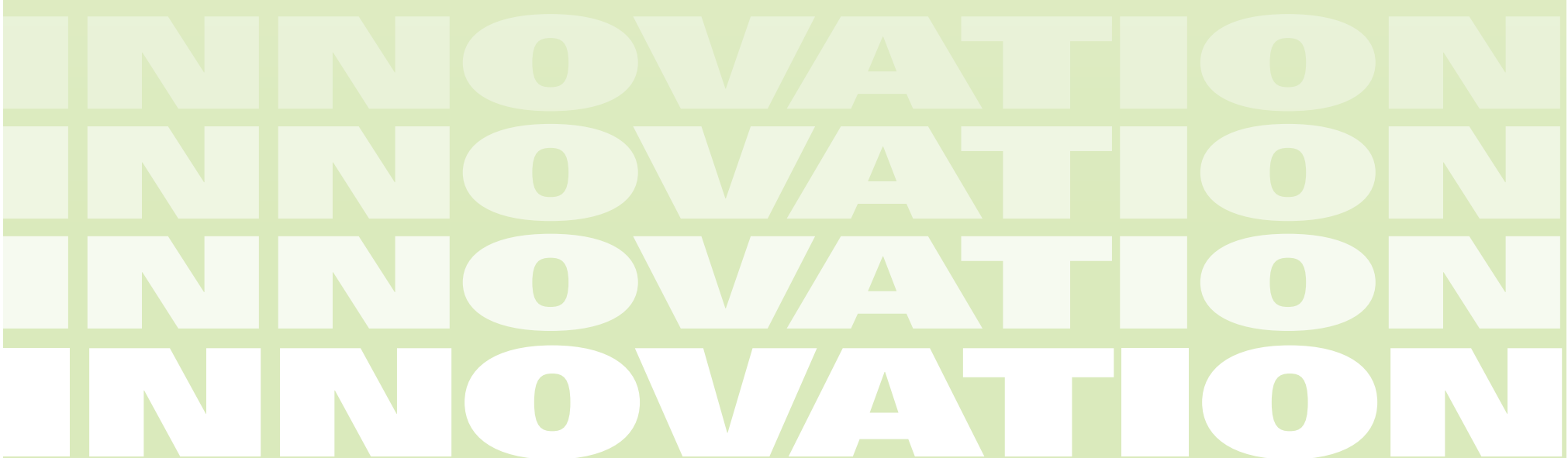
Whiteley, and neighboring farmers, he said.

It wasn't easy, and he made a lot of mistakes the first 10 years. But it made him better. He had to learn, and learn in a hurry, he said.

Three hundred acres was big back then, and the whole valley was flood irrigated, demanding long hours and a lot of labor. But he held steady to the task and along the way, picked up more ground.

He also became involved in national potato grower organizations, following in the footsteps of his uncle, who was partially responsible for getting the National Potato Council established and served as its chairman in 1955.

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