

# People & Places

## Researcher to study potato storage

Yi Wang goes from trials to studying physiological mechanisms

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

KIMBERLY, Idaho — Yi Wang aims to help the Idaho potato industry better understand the physiological mechanisms responsible for problems that may take place in potatoes during storage.

Wang, 29, who will start March 20 as University of Idaho's new potato storage physiologist, has already made a name for herself as a national leader in the potato industry.

As a post-doctoral researcher with University of Wisconsin-Madison, she supervised agronomic trials in six states — Wisconsin, Maine, North Dakota, Minnesota, Idaho, Washington and Oregon — to test new, low-acrylamide potato breeding lines.

In 2002, scientists discovered acrylamide, a chemical found in carbohydrate-rich foods cooked at high temperatures, was a possible carcinogen. In response, potato processors launched the National Fry Processing Trial, funded with a Specialty Crop Research Initiative grant, to develop low-acrylamide potato varieties. As supervisor of the agronomic trials, Wang maintains a database on yield, quality and other attributes of varieties coming out of the fry



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Yi Wang, who will start in March as the University of Idaho's potato storage physiologist in Kimberly, holds a Payette Russet. She has overseen the agronomic trials that evaluated the new line, developed through a multi-state breeding effort to find potatoes low in acrylamide, which may be linked to cancer.

processing trial.

She'll continue leading the national agronomic trials while in Idaho, until the project ends in August of 2016.

Wang, originally from Central China, earned her Ph.D. in potato physiology at Wisconsin, where her dissertation focused on causes of stem-end disorder in chipping potatoes. She learned the crop problem is strongly correlated with late-season heat stress.

She has three major areas of interest for research when she starts work at UI's Kimberly Research & Extension Center. She plans to investigate the underlying physiological mechanisms affecting performance of potato varieties

in storage, and to identify predictors of success that may be useful to breeders. She hopes to find what causes potatoes to have the light, fluffy texture that processors and quick-serve restaurants favor.

"This is really a new research area," Wang said. "Almost no one has done anything on it before, but it's very important to the industry."

Finally, she intends to evaluate lines from the Aberdeen UI and USDA potato breeding programs for tuber-end defects, with the goal of pinpointing the mechanisms that cause them.

Wang's arrival will free UI Extension potato specialist Nora Olsen to spend

more time in the field and to focus greater attention on variety-specific storage management techniques. Olsen, who will work closely with Wang in Kimberly, explained Wang's position has been mostly vacant since Gale Kleinkopf retired in 2003, with another scientist filling in for a few years in the interim. Wang will be in charge of the unique potato storage research facility in Kimberly.

"What she's figuring out will help us make a lot of recommendations to growers," Olsen said. "We see the (storage) responses. We need to understand at a more minute depth what are some of the mechanisms going on and



### Western Innovator

Yi Wang

Age: 29

**Job:** Incoming potato storage physiologist with the University of Idaho's Kimberly Research & Extension Center

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in biology from Nanjing Agricultural University in China; Ph.D. in potato physiology from University of Wisconsin-Madison; post-doctoral researcher with UW

**Family:** Her mother, Minsang Zhang, and father, Hong-peng Wang, live in Central China, and her uncle, Renyi Zhang, is an atmospheric scientist at Texas A&M.

**Hometown:** Currently Madison, Wis., but soon to be Twin Falls, Idaho.

why we see those responses."

Wang believes working in Idaho's famous potato industry will open up grant opportunities, as well as the potential for her research to have a big impact on a large number of growers.

"Idaho is the center of potato production in this country, and I'm really glad I can be near to those crucial growers and processors," Wang said. "I'm very sure I will learn a lot from them."

## Miller crowned Oregon dairy princess-ambassador

SALEM, Ore. — Emma Miller, representing Linn and Benton counties, was crowned the 2015 Oregon Dairy Princess-Ambassador during recent ceremonies.

The 56th annual coronation was hosted by the Oregon Dairy Women at the Red Lion Hotel in Salem. Miller was among six county contestants vying for the 2015 title. Megan Sprute, representing Washington County, was named first alternate, according to a press release.

Miller, 20, originally from Independence, is a student at Oregon State University where she is studying agricultural sciences in hopes of becoming a high school agriculture educator.

"I am passionate about agriculture," Miller said in the press release. "I hope to help students find their passion as well."

In college, she is actively involved in the Oregon State Dairy Club, the Agricultural Education Club and is second vice



Photos courtesy of Oregon Dairy Women

Emma Miller reacts as she is announced the 2015 Oregon Dairy Princess-Ambassador by 2014 Princess-Ambassador Danielle Bull.

president of Sigma Alpha, a professional agricultural sorority.

Her speech during the contest, titled "Dairy Farming and America's Future Generations," discussed her pas-

sion and appreciation for the hard-working dairy farmers who produce one of her favorite things, milk. Miller spent two days in interviews, giving impromptu speeches and in-



Newly crowned 2015 Oregon Dairy Princess-Ambassador Emma Miller, left, with Megan Sprute, First Alternate Oregon Dairy Princess-Ambassador.

teracting with the three judges before she was selected.

Miller will spend the next 12 months traveling statewide attending fairs, town meetings and public events as a representative of Oregon's dairy farmers. Much of her reign will be spent in Oregon elementary schools delivering educational presentations about life on a dairy farm and the nutritional benefits of consuming dairy products.

Upon being crowned, Miller

received over \$3,000 in scholarships. Outgoing Dairy Princess-Ambassador Danielle Bull received over \$14,000 for her year. She met with over 15,000 students, telling them of the benefits of dairy products and about life on a dairy farm.

Megan Sprute, representing Washington County, was named first alternate Oregon dairy princess-ambassador. Also a recipient of scholarships, Sprute will assist in the promotion of the dairy industry throughout the state in the coming year. Courteney Ellis of Clackamas County was voted by her peers to receive the congeniality award.

The other finalists included Teri McGettigan of Columbia County, Sara Pierson of Marion County and Charish Ingram of Tillamook County.

Oregon Dairy Women is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization with the main objective to promote the dairy industry.

## Teams show off potato peeling skills at spud conference

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — No blood, no glory when it comes to peeling spuds.

The Washington-Oregon Potato Conference kicked off last week in Kennewick, Wash., with the first potato peeling competition.

Conference board members hatched the idea to offer a potato peeling contest, said Ryan Holterhoff of the Washington State Potato Commission.

Six teams with three members each paid a \$100 entry fee. The conference shared the proceeds with the Hanford Reach Interpretive Center agriculture exhibit in Richland, Wash.

Each team had 90 seconds to peel as many potatoes as possible using contest-assigned peelers. The winners from the first two rounds then squared off for



Priscilla Griffith, Minerva Garnica and Jesse Mercado of AgWorld Support Systems peel potatoes Jan. 27 during the first potato peeling competition at the Washington-Oregon Potato Conference in Kennewick, Wash.

Matthew Weaver  
Capital Press

the title, and had two minutes to peel as many potatoes as cleanly as possible.

Priscilla Griffith, Minerva Garnica and Jesse Mercado of AgWorld Support Systems in Moses Lake, Wash., took home the trophy.

The winning team members said their company CEO informed them

they would be competing.

"We're here to support our growers and processors, just like we do in our everyday duties," Mercado said.

They did not practice beforehand. Garnica attributed the victory to wanting the win.

Bandages were on hand, which was

good — Griffith cut herself during the competition.

The teams peeled a test variety of potato, A06021-1T, supplied by Washington State University potato specialist Mark Pavek.

The variety has a high fresh-pack yield, stores well and doesn't seem to bruise too badly, Pavek said.

The Russet variety was also on the lunch menu to determine what conference attendees think of its taste, Pavek said.

Pavek said the variety has been raised in trials in Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Colorado and Texas, and still has four years before its commercial release.

Holterhoff said he hopes to continue the potato peeling contest.

"It may be one of those things that we'll get a few people involved this year, and I would expect that next year there will be more interest," he said.

### Calendar

#### FEBRUARY NATIONAL

**Feb. 19-20** — Family Farm Alliance annual meeting, Monte Carlo Resort and Casino, Las Vegas, 707-998-9487 or [ffameeting@aol.com](http://ffameeting@aol.com)

**Feb. 23-26** — Potato D.C. Fly-In, sponsored by the National Potato Council, Mayflower Renaissance Hotel, 1127 Connecticut Ave. NW, Washington, D.C., [www.nationalpotatocouncil.org](http://www.nationalpotatocouncil.org)

#### OREGON

**Feb. 7** — Oregon Pork Pro-

ducers Annual Meeting and Educational Workshops, 8 a.m.-4 p.m., Oregon State University, Corvallis, 541-737-1906, [mattthew.kennedy@oregonstate.edu](mailto:mattthew.kennedy@oregonstate.edu)

**Feb. 19-21** — Oregon Logging Conference, Lane County Fairgrounds and Convention Center, Eugene, 541-686-9191, [www.oregonloggingconference.com](http://www.oregonloggingconference.com)

**Feb. 24-25** — Oregon Dairy Farmers Annual Convention, Salem Conference Center, [www.dairyfarmers.com/101-convention-general](http://www.dairyfarmers.com/101-convention-general)

#### CALIFORNIA

**Feb. 10-12** — World Ag Expo, International Agri-Center, Tulare, <http://www.worldagexpo.com/>

**Feb. 25** — Sutter-Yuba-Colusa-Yolo-Solano-Sacramento Walnut Day, Veterans Hall, Yuba City, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu>

#### IDAHO

**Feb. 26-27** — Idaho Hay and Forage Conference, Best Western Burley Inn, [www.idahohay.com](http://www.idahohay.com), 208-888-0988 or [cindy@amgidaho.com](mailto:cindy@amgidaho.com)

**Feb. 27** — Drones for Forestry

workshop, 1:15-4:30 p.m., University of Idaho Extension, 1808 N. Third Ave., Coeur d'Alene, 208-446-1680

#### MARCH OREGON

**March 16-17** — Oregon State University Blueberry School, LaSells Stewart Center and CH2M Hill Alumn Center, OSU campus, Corvallis, <http://osulblueberryschool.org/>

**March 20-23** — Oregon FFA State Convention, Silverton, [www.oregonffa.com](http://www.oregonffa.com)

**March 20-22** — Northwest

Horse Fair & Expo, Linn County Fair and Expo Center, Albany, [www.equinepromotions.net](http://www.equinepromotions.net)

#### CALIFORNIA

**March 3** — Walnut (7-year-olds) No Pruning-Pruning Comparison Field Meeting, morning, Nickels Soil Lab, Arbuckle, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu>

**March 3** — Walnut (2-year-olds) No Pruning-Pruning Comparison Field Meeting, afternoon, Nickels Soil Lab, Arbuckle, 530-822-7515, <http://cesutter.ucanr.edu>

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#### Index

California ..... 9  
Dairy ..... 14  
Idaho ..... 8  
Livestock ..... 14  
Markets ..... 13  
Opinion ..... 6  
Oregon ..... 11  
Washington ..... 10

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