Simplot GMO potatoes kept in 'closed loop'

2,000 to 3,000 acres to be in 2015 crop

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
Kerwin Bradley, director of commercialization for Simplot, speaks about the Innate potato Jan. 28 during the Washington-Oregon Potato Conference in Kennewick, Wash.

KENNEWICK, Wash. — The J.R. Simplot Co. plans to keep its GMO potato in a "closed-loop" system while it builds industry acceptance, a company representative says.

The system will ensure the potatoes don't go outside controlled farms or anywhere else by accident, said Kerwin Bradley, director of commercialization for Simplot. Seed grown by Simplot on controlled farms will go only to licensed growers. The potatoes then will go to isolated packing sheds, which will not provide them to non-GMO market channels.

Bradley spoke about the company's plan to release its GMO potatoes, called Innate, during the Washington-Oregon Potato Conference in Kennewick, Wash.

Simplot received USDA approval for the first generation of Innate potatoes in November, and is going through the voluntary Food and Drug Administration process, Bradley said. The company expects to receive approval from Japan and Canada this year.

The company believes it is "absolutely critical" for the potato industry to embrace the innovation and apply it to potatoes in a meaningful way, Bradley said.

Innate potatoes use DNA from wild or cultivated potatoes to improve the Russet Burbank, Ranger Russet, Atlantic and Snowden varieties. The first release of Innate potatoes do not brown when cut, have reduced black spot bruising and have a 50 to 70 percent reduction in acrylamide, a compound created when potatoes are fried and that has been possibly linked to cancer. Simplot is committed to the Innate technology for the long haul, he said. It also committed to releasing it in a way that it will not disrupt the non-GMO segment of the industry, Bradley said.

"A significant concern is what happens when a potato that's GMO that's been approved for use in the U.S. gets into a country where it's not approved," Bradley said. "In order to ensure that you don't get those kinds of disruptions, you go into those other countries and get approvals for your potatoes to be sold there, too."

Simplot hopes to get approvals in 80 to 90 percent of its export market.

About 400 acres of Innate potatoes were planted in 2014. That will increase to 2,000 to 3,000 acres in 2015, Bradley said.

The second generation of Innate potatoes, with late blight resistance and low sugar traits, is being considered by USDA for approval. The third generation will have potato virus Y resistance and more late blight resistance.

OSU touts effort to improve rural life

By ERIC MORTENSON
Capital Press

Eric Mortenson/Capital Press
Oregon State University President Ed Ray says the university's ag, timber and marine science programs directly benefit rural Oregon.

PORTLAND – Oregon State University's commitment to improve life in rural Oregon will includes major expansion of its forestry and marine sciences programs and strengthening the statewide system of agricultural and forest research and extension stations, President Ed Ray said.

Ray, in Portland Jan. 30 to deliver his "state of the university" address, met afterward with the Pamplin Media Group's editorial board and the Capital Press.

He said Oregon State's forestry, marine science and other initiatives are in line with Gov. John Kitzhaber's goal of bringing economic prosperity to a wider slice of the population. Rural Oregon has not fully shared in the economic recovery enjoyed by urban areas such as Portland, Ray said.

In 2017, OSU will open a $60 million forest science complex that will focus on research and development of advanced wood products that can be used in high-rise buildings, Ray said. The center will increase the value of Oregon's wood products and restore jobs to rural areas where natural resources are located and can be milled.

Money for the forestry center will be split between $30 million in state bonding and $30 million in private fund raising. Ray said OSU's wood products expertise could be paired with the University of Oregon's School of Architecture and Allied Arts

An anonymous donor has pledged $20 million toward construction of a new building at OSU's Hatfield Marine Science Center in Newport, Ray said. Up to 500 students will be studying at the center by 2025, and coastal communities will benefit from the development, research and education associated with it, he said. The governor has asked the Legislature to match the gift with $25 million in bonding authority.

In another development significant to rural Oregon, the OSU-Cascades campus in Bend will expand next fall to accomodate four-year students, Ray said.

On another front, OSU is part of an 11-university alliance working to increase admission, retention and graduation rates for low-income, minority and first-generation students.

Ray said inequality in the U.S. higher education system is such that a student from a family with an annual household income of $90,000 or more has a 1-in-2 chance of graduating from college, while a student from a family making $30,000 or less has only a 1-in-17 chance.

"We are in the process of creating a country of haves and have nots," Ray said, "which tears at the fabric of our society and undermines our democracy."

Ring rot sparks $1M potato lawsuit

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

An Idaho potato seed producer is accused of selling spuds infected with bacterial ring rot and causing more than $1 million damages to an Oregon farm.

Allen Farms of North Powder, Ore., has filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Idaho claiming that it planted 600 acre of potatoes with infected seed purchased from R. Lloyd Brothers of Grace, Idaho, resulting in more than $1 million in reduced yields, equipment cleaning costs and wasted inputs.

The lawsuit alleges that the seed producer was negligent and violated a contract because there's an "implicit understanding" that seed potatoes are supposed to be certified free of the disease.

The seed producer was "either knowledgeable or willfully ignorant" of the contamination and is liable for damages, Allen Farms claims.

A representative of R. Lloyd Brothers declined to comment on the case.