

Idaho processed spud growers take price reduction

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — Southern Idaho Potato Cooperative growers have agreed to a contract that slightly reduces spud prices but requires processors to accept at least 90 percent of their 2014 acreages with individual farms.

SIPCO Executive Director Dan Hargraves said contract prices will be down 1 percent for Lamb Weston growers. He said McCain and Simplot growers will take a 1.5 percent decrease to "make up an inequity from the prior crop year."

Hargraves said SIPCO

sought an acreage guarantee based on slower exports of frozen potato products during the West Coast port labor slowdown.

"There were some reductions by all of the big three in Idaho — Lamb Weston, McCain and J.R. Simplot," Hargraves said, adding that many nonmembers took larger acreage cuts.

Growers approved the contract in mid-March, and processors are now taking it to fields for signing.

A Simplot spokesman declined to comment, and McCain hadn't commented as of press time.

Lamb Weston issued a state-

ment: "We're pleased with this year's negotiations, and appreciate the time and effort that went into reaching a mutually beneficial agreement for the contract year."

With the latest contract, Hargraves said prices are down 4 percent over two years, or about \$120 per acre. Prices vary by region and variety, but Hargraves said Russet Burbanks will still fetch more than \$7 per hundred-weight.

Hargraves said SIPCO offered this season's price decrease to all three companies rather than accepting a request from Lamb Weston for price protection, which he said would

have set an unwanted precedent. The company essentially sought the right to later reduce prices by no more than 2 percent if contracts in other regions were to come in cheaper.

"We didn't want that language in our contract, plain and simple," Hargraves said. "SIPCO doesn't have any ability outside of Idaho to influence negotiations, so why should our price be subject to that?"

The contract also included new language pertaining to genetically modified organisms, mandating that seed and commercial growers dedicate separate equipment, farm land and storage to GMO spuds, and that

they avoid planting conventional potatoes in a field for at least eight years after raising GMOs.

Potato Growers of Washington reached an agreement with processors in November. Executive Director Dale Lathim said his growers accepted the price protection language, described as a "favored nations clause," and were allowed to roll over last year's contract rates. If other growing areas agree to lower contracts, Washington's maximum reduction is capped at 2 percent.

Lathim said Washington growers were also guaranteed 100 percent of their 2014 acreages.

"It's not something we have to look at often, but this was definitely a year we were concerned about that," Lathim said.

University of Idaho Extension economist Paul Patterson estimated input costs were down by at least 1.5 percent last year, and he noted processors are under pressure to keep costs down from customers such as Walmart and McDonald's, which have recently raised employee wages.

Hargraves believes input costs for growers were actually up slightly last season, as growers were forced to add an unexpected late-season treatment for late blight.

Controversy over beekeeping standards defused

Bill revised to recommend best practices

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — A bill that would create standards for residential beekeeping in Oregon is one step closer to becoming law after proponents defused an earlier controversy.

During the initial public hearing for House Bill 2653 in February, beekeeper groups testified against the legislation due to fears of burdensome new fees and regulations.

"We're really terrified of this," Joe Maresh, president of the Portland Metro Beekeepers Association, said at the time.

Rep. Chris Gorsek, D-Troutdale, said the bill's intent was to set a baseline for residential beekeeping rules, which currently vary greatly depending on the city.

Some cities ban beekeeping, while others have no rules to ensure safety and prevent conflicts, he said.

Since then, Gorsek has consulted with concerned beekeepers to overhaul HB 2653's language and overcome their objections to the bill.

The original legislation simply directed the Oregon Department of Agriculture to "establish standards by rule" for residential beekeeping.

Under the new version, ODA will consult with Oregon State University to write "best practices" for residential beekeeping, including recommendations for avoiding nuisance problems.

Those best practices will then be disseminated to cities and counties, which may adopt ordinances con-



Don Jenkins/Capital Press file

The Oregon Legislature is addressing a bill that would set best practices for urban beekeepers. Cities would have the option of passing ordinances based on the bill.

sistent with the recommendations.

"I think we came to a good compromise," said Gorsek, noting that the amended version of HB 2653 emphasizes voluntary action by municipalities.

The revised bill faced no opposition during an April 2 work session of the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources and was unanimously referred to the House floor with a "do pass" recommendation.

After that vote, OSU came up with an "exceptionally large fiscal impact" of \$300,000 to implement the bill, though that funding may be included other pollinator-related bills, said Gorsek.

Due to the fiscal impact, however, the legislation was referred to the Joint Committee on Ways and Means, which handles funding requests.

The House Ag Committee also approved a package of bills to fund bee diagnostics and pollinator health outreach at OSU during an April 7 work session.

Committee Chair Brad Witt, D-Clatskanie, said the bill was innovative and commended Gorsek on resolving the differences of opinion "without getting stung."

Idaho sees potential for winter recharge expansion

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — The Idaho Department of Water Resources and state irrigation companies injected 75,239 acre-feet of surface water into the Eastern Snake Plain Aquifer during their first experiment with winter recharge, according to an end-of-season report.

IDWR Planning Bureau Chief Brian Patton said the program also helped the department identify policy changes and infrastructure improvements necessary to significantly expand the state's recharge potential for future winters.

Recharge involves paying canal companies to let surface water seep through their unlined systems, or through injection wells or basins, to stabilize groundwater levels that have been declining by year since the 1950s.

This winter's total includes 14,170 acre-feet recharged in the upper valley by Aberdeen-Springfield Canal Co., Great Feeder Canal Co. and Fremont-Madison Irrigation District. In the lower valley, Northside Canal Co., American Falls Reservoir District No. 2, Southwest Irrigation District and Twin Falls Canal Co. recharged 61,069 acre-feet.

"Hands down, the best point that came out of this past winter was the fact that these canals were able to keep recharge flowing every single day," Patton said. "I thought there would be shutdowns during extremely cold weather."

Patton said canal managers implemented creative solutions, such as using pumps to recirculate water stop headgates from freezing.

Recharge was shut down March 5 in the upper valley, where canal companies made use of flood control water released from Palisades Reservoir, and it ended March 24 in the lower system due to the early start of the irrigation season.

Patton said the state recharged 84 percent of available water in the upper val-



Courtesy of Brian Olmstead

Winter recharge water bound for Idaho's Murtaugh Lake flows past a weir for measurement in early November. The state recently finished its first winter recharge program and sees opportunity to expand winter recharge in the future.

ley, despite losing four days of recharge while waiting for the Bureau of Reclamation to grant permission for canal companies to divert water prior to the start of the irrigation season. Patton said upper valley recharge is possible in about 50 percent of years, when water is released from reservoirs to clear space for flood control, and IDWR will prioritize finding a way to hasten the approval process

for willing upper valley canal companies.

In the lower valley, where recharge is possible every winter, using water that passes below Milner Dam and can't be put to other beneficial use, Patton said 19 percent of available water was recharged. But more than 300,000 acre-feet of available water spilled below Milner.

The top infrastructure priority entails improving

a 3-mile section of concrete-lined canal on AFRD No. 2's Milner-Gooding system, thereby opening up the Shoshone Basin recharge site for winter operations. An engineering company is also evaluating how to open more of Northside Canal Co.'s system to recharge. The company now has concerns about winter water freezing three hydropower turbines.



Canola debate resurfaces in Oregon

Bill would extend limited production for three years

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — The controversy over canola has resurfaced in the Oregon Legislature in a bill that would extend limited production of the crop in the Willamette Valley for three years.

In 2013, the legislature approved a moratorium on canola production in the region for six years due to fears that it will interfere in the cultivation of related seed crops.

During three years of the moratorium, Oregon State University was authorized to study canola cultivation on 500 acres annually in the valley.

Under House Bill 3382, farmers would be permitted to continue growing 500 acres of canola for the remaining years of the moratorium.

Carol Mallory Smith, an OSU weed science professor,



Eric Mortenson/Capital Press file

An experimental canola field blooms last May near Salem in this file photo. A bill before the Oregon Legislature would extend the experimental propagation of canola in the Willamette Valley for three more years.

said research has uncovered no difference between canola and other brassica seed crops such as turnips and radish in terms of pest and disease risks.

While the Willamette Valley has recently faced an outbreak of blackleg disease in brassica crops, there's no scientific evidence that the pathogen is related to canola production, she said during an April 7 hearing before the House Committee on Agriculture and Natural Resources.

OSU's research indicates

that control practices for "volunteer" canola plants that germinate in fields are the same as for radish and turnips, Malory-Smith said.

"There's nothing unique about canola in that system," she said. "It would not need to be treated differently than other brassica crops."

Kathy Hadley, who farms near Rickreall and Silverton, said canola has helped "clean" fields of weeds that are difficult to kill in grass seed crops by giving farmers additional herbicide options.

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