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LITTLE PEST, BIG PROBLEM

Potato growers say they need relief from regulations aimed at eradicating pale cyst nematodes

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

SHELLEY, Idaho — Potato growers in a small federally regulated quarantine area in Eastern Idaho say they've been asked to bite the bullet for the entire Idaho potato industry for too long.

They have turned to state legislators for help. "We're tired of carrying the load," Bryan Searle recently told members of the House Agricultural Affairs Committee. "If we're going to carry one for the team, we need help to continue."



John O'Connell/Capital Press

ABOVE: A worker at Mickelsen Farms in Firth, Idaho, fills a front end loader with potatoes to load into a spud planter on April 13.
TOP PHOTO: An Eastern Idaho potato field infested with pale cyst nematodes is prepared for a methyl bromide fumigation. Courtesy of USDA APHIS

Searle and a handful of other potato farmers told legislators that federal and state regulations designed to eradicate pale cyst nematode from the quarantine area are burdensome, might be unnecessary in some cases and have cost growers millions of dollars.

Federal and state officials say the regulations designed to eradicate PCN, which is considered a quarantine pest by more than 80 nations, are necessary to protect the state's \$900 million potato industry.

The PCN — a tiny worm that feeds off potato plant roots — can cause wilting, stunted growth, poor root development and early plant death and significantly reduce yields.

Turn to PCN, Page 12

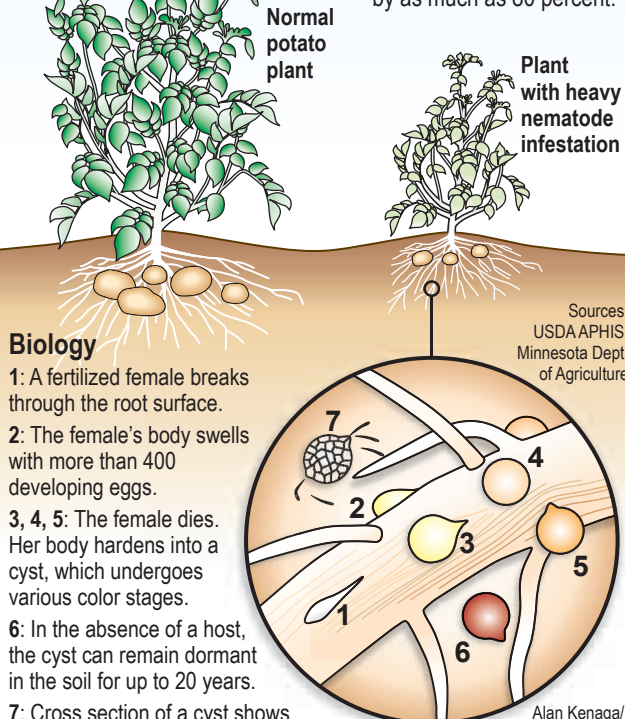


ISDA
Director
Celia Gould

It was "hugely frustrating (to hear) allegations that they had not been listened to or had not had any voice in the process because from day one they had a voice."

Pale cyst nematode explained

PCN are small, worm-like organisms, around one millimeter in length, that feed on the roots of potatoes, tomatoes, other plants of the Solanaceae family. A serious infestation can reduce potato yield by as much as 80 percent.



Sources:
USDA APHIS;
Minnesota Dept.
of Agriculture
Alan Kenaga/
Capital Press

GMO critics, proponents agree on mediation system

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — Disputes over genetically modified crops would be mediated by Oregon farm regulators under legislation that has won support from biotech critics and proponents.

Mediators from the Oregon Department of Agriculture would help resolve coexistence conflicts among growers of biotech, conventional and organic crops as part of House Bill 2509, which is headed for a vote on the House floor.

A farmer who refuses to participate in such mediation and later loses a lawsuit in the dispute would be required to pay the opposing party's costs and attorney fees.



Bushue

In conflicts over infringing farm practices — such as unwanted cross-pollination between crops — ODA officials would also oversee the collection of samples to establish a "chain of custody."

Barry Bushue, president of the Oregon Farm Bureau, said if passed the legislation will cast a light on the number and type of such disputes, which are currently largely anecdotal. "We feel this is highly preferable to any kind of mandates and practices that favor one type of crop over another," Bushue said during an April 14 hearing before the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water.

Committee Chairman Brian Clem, D-Salem, said the proposal emerged from a work group on genetically modified organisms and has not met with any opposition from participants.

The bill was unanimously referred for a vote on the House floor with a "do-pass" recommendation during the April 14 work session.

"It creates an incentive for people to mediate coexistence

Turn to GMO, Page 12

ICE: Don't help workers with immigration programs

No safe harbor for employers who find workers are illegal

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement rejected a request from a farm labor association for safe harbor for employers helping employees apply for temporary legal work status even though a sister agency granted safe harbor for employees.



Fazio

On Feb. 27, Dan Fazio, director of the Washington Farm Labor Federation, sent a letter to Sarah Saldana,



AP File photo

Farmworkers pick paper trays of dried raisins off the ground and heaping them onto a trailer in the final step of raisin harvest in 2013 near Fresno, Calif.

director of ICE, requesting safe harbor for employers.

Through executive action, the Obama administration has

created two programs to grant certain illegal immigrants temporary work permits and deferral from deportation.

INSIDE

• Immigration action back in limelight

Page 12

In preparing to apply for two immigration programs — Deferred Action for Parents of Americans (DAPA) or an expanded version of Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA 2.0) — employees might seek employment records from employers, Fazio said. If they admit they are in the country illegally, or say they need the records to apply for DAPA or DACA 2.0, the employer has to fire them or be liable for

audit and prosecution for hiring ineligible workers, Fazio said.

Workers apply for DAPA or DACA 2.0 with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) which has said it will not disclose applicants to ICE or Customs and Border Protection for immigration enforcement, Fazio said.

In a March 30 reply to Fazio, Traci Lembke, ICE assistant director, wrote that employees must be authorized to work at the time of hire.

There is no special consideration for unauthorized workers who may be eligible for DAPA or DACA 2.0, she wrote.

Turn to ICE, Page 12

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