

Governor, farm leaders say trade mission will benefit producers

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Gov. Butch Otter and farm industry leaders believe that Idaho farmers and ranchers will benefit from a recently concluded trade mission to Mexico and Peru.

“The trade mission was a great success and I’m confident that even the participating Idaho companies that don’t sign agreements right away opened the door to new business relationships that will benefit them and our economy over time,” Otter told the Capital Press in a statement.

Otter led representatives of several Idaho farm commodities, including potatoes, wheat, dairy, oilseeds and onions, on the May 9-16 trade mission.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture Director Celia Gould called the trip a “tremendous success. In both countries, we made excellent contacts that



Gov. Butch Otter and wife Lori visit the International Potato Center in Peru May 11 during an Idaho trade mission. Farm group leaders say the state’s recent trade mission to Mexico and Peru will result in more opportunities for Idaho farmers and ranchers.

Submitted photo

we are confident will lead to sales.”

Jason Godfrey, president of Mountain States Oilseeds, met with five companies in Peru, a

new market for the company, and three in Mexico, an established market.

“We felt we came out of there with some good success,”

Godfrey said. “We have some pretty good prospects in both countries.”

He was particularly excited about the chances of MSO,

which contracts about 15,000 acres in Idaho, tapping into the Peru market.

“We are very confident that we will be selling oilseed down there in the near future,” he said.

Idaho Farm Bureau Federation Director of Commodities Dennis Brower, who represents the state’s wheat industry on the trip, said a lot of milling companies in Mexico are in the process of merging and the timing was good to meet with them.

One of those mergers will result in the largest conglomerate of flour mills in Mexico, he said, while another will provide the majority of flour for Grupo Bimbo, one of the world’s largest bread makers.

University of Idaho potato researcher Mike Thornton agreed with Idaho Potato Commission representative Seth Pemsler that the highlight of the trip for the state’s potato in-

dustry was a meeting with the director of the International Potato Center in Peru.

The potato center has the world’s largest collection of potato germplasm, as well as 4,000 seed varieties, and UI researchers are trying to establish a close research collaboration with IPC scientists.

If Idaho researchers can find potato traits that are resistant to pale cyst nematode or drought, two major issues facing Idaho spud farmers, that could pay big dividends for the state’s potato industry, Pemsler said.

“I think we made some good inroads in terms of collaboration on potato research projects,” Thornton said.

During the Mexico leg of the trip, Otter met with high-level officials from that country’s ministry of agriculture and reminded them of Idaho’s desire to have all of Mexico opened to fresh potatoes from the United States, Pemsler said.



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Mark Lynas, a former anti-GMO activist, talks about why he now believes genetically modified crops are safe and necessary to feed the world’s population.

Former anti-GMO crusader speaks about his conversion

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — British environmentalist Mark Lynas explained to several hundred people in Boise May 19 how he switched from being a pie-throwing, anti-GMO activist to a supporter of genetically engineered crops.

Lynas showed video clips of him helping fan the flames of the anti-GMO movement in Europe during the mid-1990s.

That included him throwing a pie in the face of a GMO supporter, as well as helping dozens of other people destroy genetically engineered crop trials.

The presentation was hosted by Food Producers of Idaho and titled, “GMOs are green. How an environmentalist changed his mind about biotechnology.”

“Our aim was to chop down ... all the GM crop trials we could (in) England,” Lynas said. “This was an activity that consumed my life for several years. I was involved in all aspects of the movement.”

Lynas even orchestrated the first invasion by anti-GMO activists of Monsanto offices in the United Kingdom, which resulted in them occupying the building, trashing the company’s files and hanging banners from its windows.

Lynas then showed a video clip of him apologizing for his involvement in the anti-GMO movement during the 2013 Oxford Farming Conference.

During that conference, he said he was “very sorry I helped start the anti-GM movement in the 1990s. I now regret it completely.”

Lynas offered several examples of how genetically engineered crops can help farmers in Africa and India but have been banned in large part because of the

anti-GMO movement.

“The humanitarian aspect of this ... whole issue is really lost from the debate,” he said.

He said 88 percent of scientists believe genetically modified foods are safe because that’s what the evidence says and the opposition to genetically engineered crops is based mostly on fear and emotion.

“The science is quite clear. There isn’t much room for dispute about the safety issue,” he said.

To believe genetically engineered foods are unsafe is to disagree with the scientific evidence and believe in a conspiracy theory, he said.

“You have to believe all of those thousands of scientists are in league with ... Monsanto,” he said.

Lynas later told the Capital Press his conversion began when he realized his claims about GMO technology were all based on what other activists were saying and not on scientific evidence.

“I just realized I didn’t have any scientific foundation or validity for what I was saying,” he said.

The crowd included people who oppose the use of genetically engineered crops and many of them lined up to ask questions following the presentation.

FPI Chairman Travis Jones thanked skeptics of GMO technology for taking the time to step out of their comfort zone and learn more about the issue.

“We appreciate your courage for being here among people you may not normally be accustomed to being with,” he said.

Jones later said FPI held the event in downtown Boise rather than in rural Idaho “because we need to engage with an audience that may not think just like us.”

Blackleg continues to spread in Willamette Valley

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

LEBANON, Ore. — Oregon State University plant pathologist Cindy Ocamb reported at a crucifer disease field day May 14 that she is finding seed fields infected with blackleg around the Willamette Valley.

The discovery is not unexpected, she said, given that blackleg infections were severe last year and infected crop residue provides a source for the disease to persist and spread.

Ocamb said she is finding the disease in a “patchwork” pattern and that different fields have different levels of disease — a disparity she attributed to lack of timely management with fungicides.

Ocamb advised growers to refrain from planting susceptible crops within one-quarter mile of a field that hosted a blackleg-infected crop the previous year.

“And the farther apart the better,” she said, noting that the fungus’ windblown spores could be moving “tens of miles” and not just a few miles, as once suspected.

Ocamb also said that she noticed some fields went from less than 1 percent infection to between 80 and 100 percent in a matter of weeks during rainy weather, showing that the disease’s secondary inoculum is readily splashed by rain from infected plant stems and leaves.

While the disease moves systemically down a plant and can cause lesions on storage roots, it does not move systemically up a plant to in-



Mitch Lies/For the Capital Press

Blackleg, shown here on a turnip plant in a field near Lebanon, Ore., is showing up in a patchwork pattern of crucifer seed fields in the Willamette Valley.

fect seed, Ocamb said. Seed infection typically occurs from inoculum splashing onto seed heads during pod development.

Ocamb said she started seeing the blackleg fungus in October in commercial vegetable seed fields and in fields planted as part of a three-year OSU experiment to determine the effect of brassica crops, such as canola, on specialty seed production.

Fields that were treated in the fall with a fungicide were performing better than fields that went without a fall treatment, Ocamb said.

Ocamb also reported she has found light leaf spot in fields in recent weeks, a disease relatively new to North America. It started appearing in valley fields during Febru-

ary, she said.

According to literature, growers in the United Kingdom, where light leaf spot is common, report 22 percent yield loss in oilseed crops infected with the disease, Ocamb said.

Many of the seed treatments and fungicide applications that target blackleg are expected to also control light leaf spot, Ocamb said.

Ocamb said she fears blackleg infection in 2016 in Western Oregon could be even worse than this year.

“Seed fields will probably face more pressure next fall,” Ocamb said.

“I think it is going to be critical that we not only treat seed, but have a fungicide campaign with early sprays in the fall,” Ocamb said.

In addition to increasing chances of plants dying from blackleg, plants infected in the fall are more susceptible to other pathogens, Ocamb said.

An ODA proposal that would mandate field inspections for five years provides an indication of how long the scientific community believes it will take for Oregon growers to get the disease under control.

“The industry and the ODA believe a limited time period (five years) of mandatory inspections ... is necessary to bring the blackleg epidemic back under control,” the proposal states.

Ocamb added: “I think it is going to be important that everybody joins the control party.”

Rule proposed to head off ‘blackleg epidemic’

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is proposing a rule mandating inspection of crucifer fields in the Willamette Valley as part of an effort to quash what is being called “the blackleg epidemic.”

Oregon State University researchers first spotted blackleg infection in the valley last year in certain vegetable seed crops, such as turnips and canola. The disease appears to be more prevalent this year, said Cindy Ocamb, in part because windblown

spores from infected plant residue helped spread infections.

In addition to concerns about seed lots being contaminated, Ocamb said she now fears the disease could be moving into fresh vegetable acreage.

In January, ODA adopted a rule mandating that crucifer seed be tested, found free of blackleg and treated prior to being planted in the valley.

The newly proposed rule would require that growers also apply to the department for an inspection and cover a portion of the program’s cost at a rate of \$6.50 an acre.

Each acre would need to be inspected twice, once early in the growing season and at early- to mid-flowering.

Nancy Osterbauer, ODA’s plant health program manager, said the two inspections will help determine if the department’s recommendations for controlling the disease are working.

“Part of (the motivation behind the rule proposal) is an education process for everybody involved,” Osterbauer said.

Under the proposal, if blackleg is found in a field, certain mitigation requirements would kick in, such as

fungicide treatments.

Osterbauer said the seed industry came to the department seeking the rule.

The rule will sunset in five years, according to the proposal.

A public hearing on the proposed rule is scheduled for June 22, beginning at 11 a.m., at the department’s Salem research farm, 151 Hawthorne Ave. NE.

Interested parties can comment at the hearing or through written correspondence, Osterbauer said.

“We welcome comments,” she said. “This is an industry rule.”

Rice, nuts fuel ag boom in N.E. California, study finds

By TIM HEARDEN
Capital Press

CHICO, Calif. — Agriculture has boomed in northeastern California over the last decade and now accounts for nearly 1 in 5 jobs and 17 percent of all economic activity in the region, a new university study has found.

The report by California State University-Chico agricultural business professor Eric Houk looks at Sacramento Valley and northern Sierra Nevada activity in 2013 and found its nearly \$4.5 billion in agricultural production in 2013 was more

than double that in 2003.

While farm production expenses went up about 50 percent from 2003 to 2013, net farm income increased about 200 percent over the period while total government payments decreased by more than 60 percent, according to Houk’s study.

The highest-valued commodities in northeastern California two years ago were rice at \$903.8 million, walnuts at \$844.9 million and almonds at \$713.1 million, while the mountain region was dominated by strawberry plants at \$150.9 million, timber at \$128.4 million

and alfalfa at \$125.1 million.

A key takeaway from the study should be that agriculture includes much more than farm production, Houk told the Capital Press in an email.

“We often see a focus on production values, but we need to think about agriculture in a much broader way and include agricultural production, processing and related activities,” he said. “The second thing I want people to get from the study is understanding how the economy in some regions is more dependent upon agriculture than others.”

The report covers economic

activity in Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Sutter, Tehama, Trinity and Yuba counties. Colusa County had the highest value of production in 2013, according to the study.

Houk credits ag for creating 60,157 total jobs in the region, or 16.3 percent of all jobs. This includes 40,054 directly in agriculture and another 20,103 created through “multiplier” effects, which include not only processing but also farm machinery manufacturing and support activities for agriculture, he said.