

French spud growers tour Idaho farms

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

ABERDEEN, Idaho — French potato growers said during a tour June 10 of Idaho's spud industry they consider themselves well positioned to better compete with the U.S. for export market share in South America.

The 11 French growers with UNPT, a union representing 80 percent of that country's 10,000 commercial spud farmers, made several stops, including Eastern Idaho commercial and seed potato farms, the University of Idaho's Aberdeen Research & Extension Center and Spudnik Equipment in Blackfoot.

UNPT President Arnaud Delacour said his growers were intrigued by comments during a recent U.S. potato summit about growing competition



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Arnaud Delacour, president of a union of French potato growers, wearing the tan suit coat, and other French growers tour the a greenhouse where new potato varieties are developed at the University of Idaho's Aberdeen Research & Extension Center.

with European potato producers. Indeed, U.S. Potato Board Chief Marketing Officer John Toasperm predicted in a recent economic forecast that global demand for spud products will

continue growing 10 percent per year, but competition will also increase from Europe and China.

Delacour said technology and input costs appear to be

similar in both France and Idaho. He believes the French have a freight advantage in South America, where their ships are already importing a large volume of beef. Furthermore, he said, France has stepped up its frozen production this season based on depressed fresh-market prices.

"We had noticed a new export market in South America, and we have understood that now we are good competition to you," Delacour said. "If we share the world between the States and Europe, I would say the states are very well placed to supply the Asian market, and in Europe, we are very well placed to supply the South American market."

Panama and Colombia have been among the brightest spots in South America for U.S. spud growers, who have been gaining

market share since a 2012 trade agreements began phasing out steep tariffs on potato exports.

Farm size was a key difference Delacour noticed during his visit. His own farm in Northern France is typical of a French potato farm, encompassing 600 acres, with about 120 acres per year planted in spuds. By contrast, he saw U.S. farms covering thousands of acres, with "a few growers managing the market."

As in the U.S., French fresh potato consumption has been flat or declining, and fry consumption is on the rise — though his country doesn't use the term "french fries."

"All of our fries are processed in Belgium. We'd better call that Belgian fries," Delacour joked. "I'm quite pleased of that (name) anyway. It's a good product."

The French growers met a

familiar face during the tour when they visited Idaho Potato Commissioner Ritchie Toevs' farm in Aberdeen. Toevs was in France meeting with officials and industry officials in late April seeking advice on branding the Idaho name abroad — a concept readily embraced by the makers of products such as Champagne and Roquefort cheese.

"We're just talking to see if Idaho potatoes would be a good geographical indicator, and to see how their system (of protecting geographical brands) works," Toevs said.

IPC President and CEO Frank Muir said there's been a recent uptick in foreign spud growers visiting Idaho, including Japanese potato growers who visited in late May and German growers who visited a few months ago."

Leaf rust found in Willamette Valley

Fungicide not likely economical, OSU cereals specialist says

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Willamette Valley farmers are advised to check their wheat fields for a fungus that hasn't typically been seen in the area for more than a decade.

Oregon State University Extension cereals specialist Mike Flowers recently notified growers that leaf rust has been found in several research plots and grower fields in the northern and southern regions of the Willamette Valley.

Leaf rust is generally a warmer-season rust pathogen that typically arrives later in the season.

"We're seeing it about a month earlier than we would normally see it," Flowers said.

Leaf rust has largely been absent for the last 10 to 15 years, but the relatively unusually warm and moist weather has allowed it to infect earlier, Flowers said.

Leaf rust has dark orange pustules that appear in a random pattern across the leaf, unlike the stripes and bright orange pustules of stripe rust, a more common wheat disease, according to Flowers.

Leaf rust has been found on the varieties Bobtail and Cara, which are typically less susceptible to stripe rust.

When temperatures get hot, stripe rust usually shuts down, Flowers said. Leaf rust doesn't fare well in cold temperatures, but does well in warmer temperatures.

"If it gets into irrigated spring wheat fields, it will act a lot like stripe rust," Flowers said. "It probably won't be slowed down by warmer temperatures, whereas stripe rust might."

Similar to stripe rust, a heavy infection of leaf rust reduces yield, he said.

"We don't have a very



Courtesy Robert Zemetra/Oregon State University

Leaf rust appears on a leaf from the wheat variety Cara at Hyslop Research Farm north of Corvallis. Oregon State University Extension cereals specialist Mike Flowers is advising the industry to be aware of the fungus, which has been largely absent from the Willamette Valley area for the last 15 years.

good idea of the susceptibility of our varieties to leaf rust, because we generally don't see it to a point where we can actually take notes on it," Flowers said. "Generally, when it comes in, it comes in late enough that it doesn't really cause any economic harm. So it's not really been worth the time and effort to screen varieties for it."

Most wheat in the Willamette Valley is past flowering, so fungicides aren't likely to be economical. Flowers recommends an application if fields are heavily infected or have not flowered yet.

"I don't think it's worth controlling, it's not a heavy enough infection to try controlling," he said. Flowers wants to be sure the industry is aware of the situation and can identify it if it comes up.

"I don't think it's a big concern," Flowers said. "There is this pathogen out there they may or may not run across ... this is not something a lot of the younger field men have probably seen."

White Lily takes PNW wheat national in premium flour line

Partnership broadens Shepherd's Grain's audience

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

REARDAN, Wash. — A flour company primarily based in the South is launching a line of premium flours using wheat produced in the Pacific Northwest.

White Lily, owned by the J.M. Smucker Company, debuted its line of flours at an event for food bloggers and travel media at the home of Reardan, Wash., farmer Fred Fleming, co-founder of Shepherd's Grain.

"We love the passion they have for the land, for the farming, and thought it was a good quality product to put into our premium flours," said White Lily spokesperson Andrea Lindsley. "They were a perfect fit."

Lindsley said the company is meeting with retailers through August to gauge interest. The goal is to be nationwide, she said. Target has committed at least 475 stores.

The flours use wheat from Shepherd's Grain and red or white wine grape seeds from WholeVine Vineyards in Northern California.

Shepherd's Grain, LLC, founded in 2002 by Fleming and farmer Karl Kupers, is a general partnership of roughly 34 wheat farmer families from Washington, Idaho



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

White Lily spokesperson Andrea Lindsley debuts the company's new premium flours to food bloggers and travel media June 9 in the outdoor kitchen on Shepherd's Grain co-founder Fred Fleming's farm in Reardan, Wash. The new flours will use wheat provided by Shepherd's Grain, giving it a national audience, said Shepherd's Grain general manager Mike Moran.

and Oregon focusing on direct seeding, no-till farming. Twenty-one of the 34 growers will be producing the hard red winter wheat White Lily will use, said Mike Moran, general manager for Shepherd's Grain. The flour is being milled in Spokane.

Shepherd's Grain expects to increase the bushels it

grows by 10 to 12 percent as a result of the partnership, Moran said. This year, the company is contracting 814,000 bushels, Moran said. A 10 to 12 percent increase would boost that total by 81,400 bushels or 98,000 bushels.

Fleming said Smucker and White Lily are working to develop natural, sustainable

Online

<http://www.whitelily.com/Products/Category.aspx?categoryid=501>

and local products. They were drawn by Shepherd's Grain's certification as a non-GMO wheat flour. Shepherd's Grain is one, and maybe the only, brand of flour certified as non-GMO in the marketplace, Fleming said, even though there is no GMO wheat currently in the commercial marketplace.

"It's all about traceability, knowing where your food comes from and having a face behind the food," Fleming said. "We're marketing now to the nation as a traceable, local company. It gives us a national presence."

The flour bags include a code. By entering the code on White Lily's website, customers will be able to see one of the farmers who contributed the wheat in that particular bag of flour.

Shepherd's Grain hopes to reconnect customers with the farmers who provide their food, Moran said.

"Partnering with White Lily is allowing us to reach a much broader audience than we reach right now," he said. "They're taking us nationally, and also down to a consumer level, where primarily our interaction right now is business-to-business."

Washington snowpack officially gone

By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

Washington's mountain snowpack officially hit zero June 9 which also was one of the hottest days of the year so far with temperatures around 100 degrees.

"We had one site left in the North Cascades with snow but it hit 70 degrees there that day so we knew it wouldn't last," said Scott Pattee, water

supply specialist of the Washington Snow Survey Office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Mount Vernon.

Normally, zero snowpack is reached about July 1 but little winter snow and a warm spring sped up snow melt, Pattee said.

Snow remains at very high elevations and in glaciers which isn't calculated, Dan Partridge, state Department of

Ecology Water Resource Program spokesman, wrote in a department blog.

Zero snowpack now compares with 105 percent of normal on the Olympic Peninsula and 113 percent of normal in the Lower Yakima Basin a year ago, Partridge wrote.

About 84 percent of Washington's rivers are flowing below normal levels, 66 percent are flowing at levels

typical less than once a decade and 27 percent are at record lows, he wrote.

Drawdown of Yakima Basin reservoirs started earlier than normal. Keechelus Lake, along Interstate 90 east of Snoqualmie Pass, was at 96,730 acre feet on June 15 which is 61 percent of capacity. Kachess Lake was at 86 percent and Cle Elum Lake at 85 percent, according to the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Growers respond to hot psyllid with spray programs

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — Spud growers throughout Idaho are preparing to implement costly insecticidal programs following the recent confirmation of a potato psyllid trapped in a commercial field harboring the bacterium that causes zebra chip disease.

Zebra chip, caused by the *Liberibacter* bacterium and spread by the tiny, winged insects, reduces yields and creates bands in tuber flesh that darken when fried.

University of Idaho Extension entomologist Erik Wenninger said the infected psyllid was trapped in an Ada County commercial field, on a sticky card collected during the last week of May. It marked the earliest confirmation of an infected psyllid in a commer-



Submitted by Oregon State University

Potato psyllids, like the insect pictured above, can spread the *Liberibacter* bacterium that causes zebra chip disease in potatoes. An infected psyllid has been discovered in an Ada County, Idaho, commercial field.

cial field, compared with July 6 last season and mid-June in 2012.

Psyllids found in Canyon, Gooding and Owyhee counties have tested negative. Idaho's psyllid monitoring program detected its first psyllids this season on traps collected May 17. Also in

May, three infected psyllids were found on Twin Falls County bittersweet nightshade plants, marking the first time that infected psyllids were ever found on the host plant, Wenninger said.

The disease first arrived in the Pacific Northwest in 2011, and a larger outbreak

followed in 2012, when growers invested heavily in insecticides. Since then, zebra chip pressure has been light, and most growers have relaxed their spraying.

"We've been on a downward (zebra chip) trend for the last three years, and it looks like we're on an upward trend this year," Wenninger said.

This season's field scouting program includes 13 intensive monitoring sites and 75 light monitoring sites. Wenninger is also conducting 21 different insecticidal treatment scenarios at the UI Kimberly Research & Extension Center, using mesh sleeves to trap infected psyllids on potato foliage.

Insecticide trials have been inconclusive thus far, either due to inadequate natural disease pressure or

excessive pressure from artificial inoculations. Jeff Miller, with Rupert-based Miller Research, has been invited to address growers about insecticidal programs for zebra chip during the June 22 Southern Idaho Potato Cooperative meeting at the Burley Inn.

Miller said growers in the Magic Valley and Eastern Idaho may opt to wait until hot psyllids enter fields in their areas, though spraying is advisable in Western Idaho.

He said Abamectin, for example, is cheap and effective but shouldn't be used more than twice in a season. Movento is effective but costly, and Midwestern growers warn Pyrethroid insecticides entice greater psyllid egg laying.

In Wilder, grower Doug Gross is starting a spraying program he estimates will

cost \$200 per acre, roughly \$150 per acre more than he spent on insecticides last year.

"We think this is a game changer," Gross said. "It takes a big chunk out of (our profits) and we've already been squeezed down to little or no margin with a pretty high-risk deal."

Declo grower Mark Darrington expects to spend \$170 per acre on his spraying program.

"I don't believe it's a secret that there's a great spud crop coming, and of course people don't want to put themselves in jeopardy by having a substandard crop," Darrington said.

In Eastern Idaho, where zebra chip has posed little problem to date, grower Ritchey Toevs still plans to implement a \$70 per acre spray program.