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# Idaho

## Spud commission rejects request to fire employee

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho Potato Commission board members unanimously voted to support IPC employee Pat Kole June 17 and rejected a request to terminate him.

Members of the Idaho PCN Group asked for Kole's immediate resignation or termina-

tion during the IPC's regular monthly meeting in May.

Kole is the IPC's vice president of legal and government affairs.

The request to IPC commissioners was made during a conference call with growers affected by a federal pale cyst nematode quarantine in East Idaho.

They accused Kole of

working behind the scenes to support the eradication program, which they oppose in its current form.

The request for Kole's termination caught IPC members by surprise and the call was discontinued after commissioners said they weren't comfortable continuing the conversation without legal advice.

Members of the PCN group in April filed a federal lawsuit targeting the quarantine and accompanying eradication program, which they say is unreasonable and has cost them millions of dollars.

Idaho State Department of Agriculture and USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service are defendants in the lawsuit, but IPC is not.

PCN group members say Kole exceeded his responsibilities by attempting to elicit industry support for the continuation of the current eradication program.

But IPC commissioners said Kole did nothing wrong in discussing the lawsuit with another industry organization.

IPC members approved the following motion: "The

IPC has completed its investigation as to the claims made by some members of the PCN group on May 29 against Pat Kole and have determined that (Kole), as vice president of legal and government affairs, did not exceed his responsibilities in talking to the National Potato Council about the pending lawsuit against USDA and ISDA."



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Arbon Valley, Idaho, dryland farmer Hans Hayden looks over experimental plots on his farm during a June 17 University of Idaho field day. Hayden said heavy rain in May helped his crops recover from lack of moisture and barley yellow dwarf virus, and though test weights may be affected, he's optimistic he'll have at least an average crop.

## Grain rebounding from barley yellow dwarf

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

ARBON VALLEY, Idaho — Heavy May rainfall has enabled cereal crops infected by Idaho's widespread barley yellow dwarf virus outbreak to recover, thereby minimizing yield losses, according to University of Idaho cereals pathologist Juliet Marshall.

Furthermore, Marshall said stripe rust infections haven't been nearly as rampant as she initially feared, given the abundance of May moisture and the disease's early arrival throughout the West Coast.

Marshall began warning of a high potential for problems with the virus last fall, when heavy August rains shattered grain heads and resulted in more volunteer plants to support disease and insects, including the aphid vectors of barley yellow dwarf.

This spring, she said yellow dwarf was rampant from Treasure Valley to Utah, with the heaviest infections in Filer, Twin Falls and Buhl. She advised a few growers to destroy crops and replant.

Marshall said yellow dwarf stunts roots and hinders a plant's ability to absorb water, so the problem was exacerbated by extremely dry weather from February through April.

Though crops had ample

moisture in May, enabling them to outgrow the virus damage, Marshall warned symptoms, including yellow-and-red flag leaves, will return at heading. Some yield losses and reduced test weights are still expected.

"Before the rain, I was predicting 30 to 50 percent damage," Marshall said, adding losses should be greatest on dryland farms. "I still think we're going to have 10 to 30 percent damage."

Marshall anticipated stripe rust would be abundant this season, too, but has found only isolated cases, including in Soda Springs, Magic Valley and Ririe. She believes the combination of growers moving away from susceptible varieties, such as Brundage, and growers applying fungicides along with their herbicides kept stripe rust in check.

Arbon Valley dryland grower Hans Hayden said stripe rust hasn't been a problem in his grain this season, even on some fields he didn't spray with fungicide. He believes he minimized his yellow dwarf damage by spraying insecticide last fall, but he still feared his crops were a lost cause until rains arrived in May.

"It's had so many things pick on it," Hayden said, "but I think it will be at least an average crop."

## Iris virus detected early in Treasure Valley onion fields

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — The iris yellow spot virus, which can severely impact onion yields, has made an early appearance in the Treasure Valley.

Southwestern Idaho and Eastern Oregon produce about 25 percent of the nation's fresh bulb onion supply and the virus normally appears in onion fields in this region later in the summer.

But it was detected in commercial bulb fields in Payette County, Idaho, June 12 and in Malheur County, Oregon, last week, said Oregon State University Cropping Systems Extension Agent Stuart Reitz.

The advanced symptoms seen on some of the infected onion plants suggests they were probably infected around the first of June, he said.

"That would be really early," said Oregon farmer Bruce Corn, who said the virus can devastate onion fields.

"It can take a whole field out in a pretty short amount of time," he said.

The virus is transmitted to onion plants by thrips and growers are being encouraged to aggressively manage the tiny insects.

"Keep vigilant about watching what's happening in your fields," Reitz said. "Don't wait until you get a full-blown infection across your field."

Reitz said thrips populations didn't experience their normal die-off rate this year because of a relatively mild winter and he believes that is a factor in the early appearance of the virus.

The mild weather also permitted the survival of more volunteer onions, which allow thrips to over-winter, he said.

The region faced less virus pressure than normal last year and a big reason for that was onion farmers sprayed for thrips earlier and more often, said Nysa farmer Paul Skeen, president of the Malheur County Onion Growers Association.

Skeen said it's critical that



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

An onion field near Ontario, Ore., is irrigated May 26. The iris yellow spot virus, which can significantly reduce yields in onion plants, has appeared in the region earlier than normal. Growers are being encouraged to aggressively manage thrips, which transmit the virus.

growers stay on top of their thrips management programs. Skeen, who has farmed for 43 years, used to never spray before the first of June but sprayed two times before that date this year.

"If people are not staying on top of their spraying, they're going to get in trouble" he said.

Skeen said his fields are free of the virus but he's also spraying

a lot, which raises his production costs substantially.

"We're at the point now where we're spending more money trying to fight back the thrips than we do on fertilizer," he said.

Plant health plays a major role in controlling the impact of the virus, Reitz said, since healthier plants are less susceptible to it.

Growers can minimize the stress on their onion plants by ensuring they have adequate moisture and fertility levels, he said.

"It's every bit as important to try to minimize the stress on your plants," said Corn. "If you can keep your plants healthy, (the virus) seems not to be as devastating."

## Hail causes damage in Pleasant Valley

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

ABERDEEN, Idaho — Growers in the Pleasant Valley area of southeast Idaho say potatoes and sugar beets are beginning to rebound from a June 15 hail storm, but wheat losses will be more acute.

According to the National Weather Service's Pocatello office, the storm brought pea-sized hail 8 miles west of American Falls at 5:11 p.m. and quarter-sized hail southwest of Aberdeen by 5:39 p.m. A meteorologist said hail in the Aberdeen area was abnormally large for the area, and hail completely covered the ground.

Aberdeen grower Dirk Driscoll said his potatoes, sugar beets and wheat all sustained damage. Driscoll is waiting for his insurance adjuster to finish a review of his potatoes and wheat, which are both covered by crop insurance.

Estimated damage to his wheat ranges from 15 percent to 40 percent.

He said spuds should recover, but he might lose a few tons in yields.

Aberdeen grower Alex Tiede said in two of his potato fields the hail "took (plants) down pretty much to stems."

Tiede said he was fortunate that the fields were planted in

Ranger Russets, which are known to recover from damage better than many other varieties, and he'll watch them closely to see if they yield odd-shaped tubers.

"I was pretty pleasantly surprised when we dug they hadn't dropped any sets," Tiede said.

Tiede said his sugar beets should have time to recover,

but he lost up to half of his wheat in one grain field.

Tiede said the storm covered a roughly 3-mile-wide swath near Aberdeen in hail, with the heaviest hail limited to about a half-mile-wide area.

"Some fields half looks good and the other half you've got hardly anything left," Tiede said.