# **Grant aimed at helping** Idaho's table grape industry

Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — University of Idaho researchers will use a \$163,000 specialty crop grant to try to help the state's emerging table grape industry increase its production performance.

The state's table grape industry has made progress in recent years, but more research aimed at increasing yields and quality is needed for it to expand significantly, said Snake River Table Grape Growers Association Secretary-Treasurer

About 1,200 acres of table grapes are grown in Idaho and four 20-acre vineyards have been added since last year, he

The research that will take place as a result of the grant is what's needed for table grapes "to take the next step to (become) a full-blown industry in Idaho," Elias said. "The industry could actually explode in Idaho."

The grant, which was provided by the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, was awarded to UI's Pomology and Viticulture Program in Parma, which is overseen by Essie Fallahi.

The funding will allow the program



Snake River Table Grape Growers Association Secretary-Treasurer Tom Elias looks at Alborz table grapes growing in the University of Idaho's fruit orchard in Parma June 25. Ul's pomology and viticulture program received a \$163,000 grant to try to improve table grape quality and yield in Idaho.

to significantly expand its current table grape research, Fallahi said.

The project will analyze different canopy techniques to see what type of impact they have on quality, cold tolerance

Researchers will also experiment with different numbers of clusters per vine some will have 64 clusters, others 45 or 32 — to try to increase berry size.

The program's previous cluster trials have already increased yields from 9 tons per acre to 16, Fallahi said.

"The next question in that project is to see if we can change the number of clusters per vine and increase the berry size even further," he said.

Alborz, the main table grape grown in Idaho, will be a major focus of the research. But the program will also study 17 new cultivars that have never been grown in the Intermountain West, Fallahi said.

These new cultivars can become a completely new generation of red and green grapes and could pay big dividends for Idaho growers, Fallahi said.

"Even if we find two of them that are suitable for us — I think we will find more than two — that would be a great step forward for Idaho's table grape industry," he said.

The project will include pilot plantings of the different techniques with local commercial growers and home garden-

An important focus of the research is determining how these new cultivars and techniques work in Idaho, Fallahi said.

"We are trying to see how they do un-

der our conditions," he said.

## University of Idaho identifies more ag college dean candidates

By SEAN ELLIS Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — An advisory committee conducting a nationwide search for a new dean for the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences has expanded its search.

According to UI officials, additional candidates have been identified and will be brought to campus to be interviewed in person.

The 14-member committee had narrowed the pool of candidates from 25 to four and those "final four" were interviewed in Moscow in May. One of those candidates has since withdrawn from consideration.

University officials had told ag industry leaders they hoped to have a new dean in place by July 1, but that won't happen

"We have identified additional well-qualified candidates that will be brought to campus in the next few weeks," UI Provost John Wiencek told university faculty and staff June 25 in an email. "There has been a strong response to our recruiting efforts. ..."

Rich Garber, CALS' director of industry and government relations, said those additional candidates will also be brought to Boise, where ag leaders will have an opportunity to meet

Times for the open sessions in Moscow where stakeholders can meet the new candidates, as well as the candidates' names and biographical information, will be posted on the UI website when the information is confirmed, said UI communications specialist Cara Hawkins-Jedlicka.

UI officials did not say why

more candidates are being interviewed and ag industry leaders haven't been told either, said Food Producers of Idaho President Travis Jones.

David Gerrard, who heads Virginia Tech University's Department of Animal and Poultry Sciences and was one of the final four candidates, withdrew his name from consideration af-

ter being interviewed in Idaho.

Gerrard told the Capital Press in an email not to read too much into the fact the search is being continued and said he was impressed with university officials and industry stake-

"I had a very positive interaction with everyone and the process was handled in a manner reflective of a world-class land grant institution," he said.

Gerrard said UI President Chuck Staben "really seemed 'pumped' about the future of agriculture and the university. He was a dynamic individual and quite down to earth and personal in his approach."

Gerrard also said decisions to continue these types of searches "are hugely complex and involve a number of people, professionally and otherwise. In fact, I applaud organizations that are bold enough to go to such additional lengths to find the right individual."

The search for a new dean was underway before the university's president and provost accepted other positions in spring 2013. The current CALS dean, John Foltz, was appointed in June 2013 to a two-year term to allow time for the new president and provost to get on board.

Foltz withdrew from the dean search for personal reasons, before the candidate pool was reduced to four.

## Idaho sustainability program help improve yields

By JOHN O'CONNELL Capital Press

FORT HALL, Idaho — Thresher Artisan Wheat growers involved in an Eastern Idaho sustainable farming program have enjoyed better yields despite using less water, energy and fertilizer per bushel than other irrigated farms in the area, according to new data.

The sustainability program was started in 2010 by General Mills, before Thresher purchased the company's regional grain handling infrastructure. Done in partnership with Syngenta, it's the longest running sustainability program run under Field to Market, a diverse alliance of 75 major manufacturers and organizations aiming to improve farm productivity.

The program evaluated 92,652 combined acres of irrigated spring wheat in the region from 2010 to 2014, providing participants with confidential yield and input data from their own fields to compare with aggregate numbers from other participants. They were also given general numbers from their seven-county district, compiled by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

Participants yielded 14 percent more bushels per acre than the general district levels. On a per bushel basis, they used 26 percent less energy, which includes fertilizer, electricity and fuel. They also improved water-use efficiency by 19 percent and emitted 10 percent less greenhouse gases.

The program has also evaluated, 10,263 acres of sugar beets, 6,872 acres of barley and 37,863 acres of potatoes, mostly raised for fresh sales.

Bradford Warner, vice president of marketing with Thresher's parent company, Agspring, said similar improvements have been made in those commodities. The program avoids rigid milestones for growers and simply highlights areas for potential improvement, compared with their peers, Warner said. As more consumers and manufacturers begin demanding sustainable products, Warner believes the program evidences the strides growers are already making and could help avert future mandates.

"This gives us the horsepower to tell regulators, 'Hey, we're doing fine, and we've got the data to back it up," Warner said.

Warner said just over 20 wheat growers participate, and Thresher is seeking to recruit additional growers over a

broader area. "We still have a struggle that producers don't like to give their information out, but I think as we continue to grow and they continue to see that it's not being used against them, the growers will come around," said Thresher Chief Operating Officer Don Wille. "I was real happy to see what we're seeing with the numbers, and I'd like to get it out to the industry."



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Sam Thornton, sustainable sourcing lead with Syngenta, presents data from the first five years of an Eastern Idaho sustainable farming program during a recent forum hosted in Fort Hall by Thresher Artisan Wheat. Participants in the program have improved both yields and efficiency.

Now that the program has Sam Thornton, sustainable generated five years of data, sourcing lead with Syngenta, believes buyers such as General Mills can begin using the data to make a sustainability claim to consumers. Potato, sugar and barley will still need a few more years of data before making a sustainability claim, he said. Thornton said J.R. Simplot

Co. is interested in joining in the project and would recruit more processed potato grow-

Each year, Syngenta hosts a gathering for its sustainability participants, where growers and experts share information about their farming practices.

Thornton said growers are also receiving new economic data this season, including specific wheat variety performance comparisons and comparisons of different rotations.



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