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Idaho

New bean group will apply for grant

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A newly formed regional bean research consortium will apply for a significant amount of federal grant money that is expected to become available soon for multi-state specialty crop groups.

The grant program, which is authorized by the farm bill, is expected to provide \$3 million in funding during fiscal year 2016 for multi-state specialty crop groups that focus on research, food safety, plant disease and pest issues and other crop-specific projects.

The money available for the project is expected to increase to \$4 million in fiscal 2017 and \$5 million in fiscal 2018.

Although a request for applications has not been issued yet, the basics of the program were made known recently, just as a multi-state dry bean consortium involving Idaho, Colorado and Wyoming was officially forming.

"The timing of this grant was (incredible)," said Idaho Bean Commission board member John Dean. "It's like it was teed up for us. Just as we got going, it was ready for us."

Groups that apply for the grant funding are required to ask for at least \$200,000.

The grant criteria favors groups that combine research efforts and that's exactly what the dry bean consortium is doing, said Colorado Department of Agriculture Interna-

tional Marketing Specialist John Addison, who is leading the application effort.

"We're in a perfect position to apply for this grant," he said. "If you look at what this group is focusing on, it seems absolutely perfect for what this funding is intended for."

Members of the consortium learned about the grant program from Addison when they met in Wyoming last month and Dean said the regional idea is moving much quicker than he thought it would.

"I thought we might get to something like this in a few years," he said. "I was a little surprised."

Colorado is a leader in dry bean genetics, while Idaho is a

leader on the agronomic side of the industry, Addison said. Wyoming, which recently formed a dry bean commission, has a plant pathologist.

A total of \$50,000 was committed between the three states as seed money to get the group going, so it could be in a position to apply for grant money when it became available, said Idaho Bean Commission Administrator Andi Woolf.

The group has agreed to focus on research, the release of new public varieties and water issues, she said.

She said it makes sense for the states to "pool our resources and not ... duplicate our funds on the same projects. We're all farmers and we're all in the same industry."

Well irrigators pleased with shorter renewable power contracts

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — An organization representing Idaho well irrigators considers a recent order allowing power companies to shorten contract lengths with certain renewable energy providers good news for rate payers.

Opponents of the new policy, however, fear it will quash future renewable energy development in Idaho.

Under the federal Public Utility Regulatory Policies Act, utilities must purchase any qualifying renewable power. States set contract lengths and determine how to calculate avoided costs — payments for renewable energy based on what utilities would have to invest to generate the equivalent power.

The Idaho Public Utilities Commission's Aug. 20 order shortens the length of new PURPA contracts for solar and wind projects over 100 kilowatts from 20 years to two years. Shortened contracts also apply to other renewable power sources, such as hydro, over 10 megawatts.

Idaho Power petitioned for shorter contract lengths on Jan. 30, and PacifiCorp and Avista later signed on to the petition.

"We felt if the contract term were kept the same, the rates would be artificially increased before it was needed," said Eric Olsen, a Pocatello attorney who represented the Idaho Irrigation Pumpers Association as intervenors in the case. "Through shortening of the contract period, I think that will appropriately regulate these types of projects into the future."

The association hired Ohio energy expert Anthony Yankel, who testified Idaho Power is often forced to use more costly PURPA energy at the expense of its own facilities. The PUC awarded \$40,000 toward intervenors' expenses, funded by the utilities, including about \$18,000 for the association.

The utilities reason they update their Integrated Resource Plans every two years, and a shorter contract affords them flexibility to revise rates based on actual market conditions.

Randy Allphin, Idaho Power's energy contract lead coordinator, said 20-year renewable energy contracts have consistent-



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Wind turbines produce energy in Power County, Idaho. Well irrigators say a recent order allowing utilities to shorten mandatory contracts to two years with certain renewable energy projects should help keep their rates in check.

ly locked in prices above market rates — a trend his company projected would continue into the future, absent change. Idaho Power anticipates it won't need additional power capacity until 2025.

"No matter what the price would be that we paid for this PURPA energy, when we don't have a need for it, it's a cost that is not appropriate," Allphin said.

Though there's been a flood of applications in Idaho to build solar projects prior to the expiration of a federal credit at the end of 2015, Ben Otto, with the Idaho Conservation League, doubts a single project will come to fruition under a two-year contract.

Otto, whose organization intervened against the shorter contracts, said lenders insist they wouldn't risk approving a project without long-term price assurance.

His organization's energy expert, Tom Beach, said Idaho's avoided cost rates are undervalued, if anything. ICL proposed a compromise contract with fixed rates for 10 years, allowing certain adjustments in ensuing years. Otto pointed out customers pay for 20 years or more when utilities build new infrastructure.

In its order, the PUC emphasized utilities are still obligated to purchase renewable power, and PURPA isn't their only option for acquiring it. The PUC agreed 20-year contracts overestimate costs, and shorter contracts may also benefit renewable power providers if market rates increase.

Idaho partnership helps refugees learn how to farm

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A partnership between Idaho's largest farmers' market and an agricultural training program is teaching refugees the skills they need to become farmers.

Global Gardens, an Idaho Office for Refugees agricultural training program, provides small plots of farmland for refugees.

The Capital City Public Market and community supported agriculture operations provide an outlet for them to sell the produce grown on the plots.

Global Gardens Assistant Director Lauren Greig said the program is "growing and spreading and being able to accommodate more customers each year."

The refugees have been selling their produce at the market for several years, and CCPM Manager Melissa Nodzu recently developed a "pop-up" market program that allows them to sell their products during the week at



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Safiya Abdi, a Somali refugee, sells produce at a "pop-up" farmers' market near St. Luke's Medical Center in Boise. A partnership between Capital City Public Market and an agricultural training program is helping refugees like Abdi learn how to farm.

St. Luke's Medical Center sites around Boise.

Nodzu hopes to expand the pop-up program to other locations around the valley.

Some of the refugees come from farming families and have some experience in agri-

culture but because they spent so many years in refugee camps, have to relearn those skills.

They also have to be taught how to farm in Idaho's climate, which is much different from that of their former countries.

"We try to retrain them to work within our bio-physical climate," Greig said. "Generally, they would have had a longer planting window in Africa than what they have here. We have to teach them which crops are cold-tolerant and (can be planted) earlier and what crops are going to be

damaged by a frost and need to be planted later."

The program focuses heavily on teaching the refugees marketing skills.

"Most of them tend to be more quickly successful at producing quality produce than at marketing, so a lot of our work tends to be on the marketing side," Greig said.

The refugees learn their farming skills and grow their produce on quarter-acre plots at an incubator farm that has an irrigation system, greenhouse, washing station and storage facility.

Adoption of re-introduced herbicide slower than hoped

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Idaho dry bean growers have not purchased the newly re-introduced Eptam 20G herbicide as quickly as distributors and the company that makes it had hoped.

Now it's up to farmers to convince Gowan Co. to keep

making the product and distributors to keep buying it.

At the urging of the Idaho Bean Commission, Gowan agreed to resume producing the product, which it discontinued in 2008 for a variety of reasons, including reduced demand.

Gowan produced 400,000 pounds of Eptam 20G, which company officials estimated to be a two-year supply of the product. Distributors began selling it this spring.

"The growers that have used it like it but it didn't get the adoption we had hoped for," said Ken Reh, Gowan's product manager for Eptam. "Our distributors are holding a bit more than they wanted to at this point."

Gowan produces a liquid form of the herbicide known as Eptam 7E but bean growers say its residual effect is shorter-lived than Eptam 20G, which is the granular version of the herbicide.

Eptam 20G suppresses the

nightshade weed later in the season than other products, said IBC board member Don Tolmie.

Idaho bean growers have labeled nightshade as their No. 1 production challenge and IBC officials estimate the weed costs the state's dry bean industry about \$8 million a year.

Growers who have used the product this year have seen some excellent weed control results, Tolmie said.

"The guys that used it before on nightshade knew how effective it was," he said. "The guys who had not used it before ... are just tickled pink with it."

IBC board member and farmer Mike Goodson said the product costs him about \$26-29 an acre and he has paid hand crews more than \$100 an acre to manually pick weeds.

"It's been working wonderful for my farm," he said of Eptam 20G. "I have very little to no (nightshade) in the fields. It's a lot cheaper."

Tolmie estimates the use of Eptam 20G saves growers between \$60 and \$90 an acre, most of that in reduced manual weed control. Reh said Gowan will work with the IBC this next year to better educate growers about the product.

Whether it will continue to be produced is up to growers now, he said.

"We were more than happy to re-introduce that product to the market," he said. "Now we just need ... some confirmation the market will use it."

Tolmie said Gowan and its distributors did their part and now the ball is in dry bean farmers' court.

He believes more growers will purchase the product next year after seeing the difference in fields where it was used this year.

"It's a matter of getting the word out and the bean commission will be focused heavily on that this year," Tolmie said.

Pea buyers look to Eastern Idaho growers

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

RIRIE, Idaho — Pea production was down significantly among Bert Brocke's Northern Idaho growers following a dry season, but for a second consecutive year, he was astounded by yields from his Eastern Idaho grower, Clark Hamilton.

Last season, Hamilton, of Ririe, yielded 4,000 pounds of peas per acre under irrigation, about double the normal dry-land yield in Northern Idaho. Hamilton said this season's crop exceeded last year's production "by quite a bit."

Hamilton's results have confirmed to Brocke, with Kendrick-based Brocke and sons, that peas hold potential to be a good crop for Eastern Idaho growers, many of whom are seeking an option to break up continuous cereal rotations.

Brocke hopes to spread his company's risk by building his Eastern Idaho grower base. He met with about five regional growers at Hamilton's farm in late July and is planning a second meeting.

Transportation costs put Eastern Idaho peas at a competitive disadvantage, though Brocke is working on finding

a storage facility with rail access to facilitate shipping. He advises growers to research spring pea varieties — Hamilton planted Banner, a variety developed by the Rocky & Sons pea breeder. He acknowledges spring pea prices are currently low, about 11.5 cents per pound.

"It's not just the value of the pea. It's the value of what it does for the next crop," Brocke said.

University of Idaho Extension cereal pathologist Juliet Marshall has been especially impressed by cereal crops following peas in the region.

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