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Idaho

New high-level UI position to focus on agricultural issues

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — The current interim dean of University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences will become a special assistant to the UI president for ag initiatives.

John Foltz, who has been interim dean for two years, will begin that newly created job when the new dean, Michael Parrella, begins work Feb. 1.

Having a person who works on special initiatives important to the farming industry and reports directly to UI President Chuck Staben — the dean reports to the provost — is a major development, Foltz and industry representatives said.

"In my opinion, that raises the stature of agriculture in the state," Foltz said.

Foltz said he would be careful not to step into the new dean's space, "but I think there are some opportunities to focus on some things that are important to our state."

Foltz has a lot of knowledge on issues important to Idaho's farming industry and having him focus 100 percent of his efforts on major ag issues could result in big benefits, said Rich Garber, CALS' director of industry and governmental affairs.

"There are a lot of exciting things out there that could happen if we had somebody with the time to focus on these is-



John Foltz, interim dean of the University of Idaho's College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, meets people during an informal "coffee with the dean" event in April. Foltz will become a special assistant to the UI president for ag initiatives.

ses," Garber said.

Foltz said he will likely initially focus on the livestock research center the university and industry have talked about creating for more than a decade.

Momentum on the multi-faceted facility, which is estimated to cost around \$30 million and will focus on dairy and beef cattle research, halted during the recession.

"The need for this center has not gone away but in fact ... it's really increased in terms of nutrient management, waste management, labor and all the issues the industry faces," Foltz said.

The center would focus on

production efficiency, waste management, animal health and welfare and a host of other issues and a lot of focus will be put on environmental issues, "which are really some of the major challenges the livestock industry faces," Garber said.

"I think the research center that we've been talking about for years will really benefit, and we will really have the potential to move this thing forward, if we have somebody available to ... focus their full-time energy on it," Garber said.

Idaho Dairymen's Association Executive Director Bob Naerebout said having Foltz dedicated solely on the live-

stock center is an exciting development.

"It will be the first time we have an individual who will be singularly focused on this," he said. "That is going to be his main job and responsibility and we're looking forward to seeing ... how we can help the college and university in their endeavor."

Other areas that Foltz might focus on in the future include the use of drones and precision agriculture to help farmers become more efficient, as well as the Dubois sheep experiment station, which is jointly operated by USDA and UI and has in the past been targeted for closure.

Meetings highlight sage grouse mining reforms

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

IDAHO FALLS — Members of Idaho's mining industry are concerned that proposed federal land-use restrictions to protect sage grouse in designated habitat go too far and were developed with too little public input.

Bureau of Land Management officials say the mining restrictions were key in the U.S. Fish and Service's recent decision against listing sage grouse as an endangered species. If such habitat protections aren't implemented, officials say a listing could still result, extending new burdens to protect the bird to private land and impacting a broad range of activities, such as ranching.

The BLM and U.S. Forest Service held public scoping meetings on Dec. 15 in Boise and Dec. 16 in Idaho Falls on a proposal to stop all new mining claims within 10 million acres of focal sage brush habitat in the West, including 3.6 million acres in Idaho. The withdrawal affects so-called locatable minerals — which include metals such as gold, silver, copper and molybdenum. The action requires a full environmental impact statement, given that filing claims is authorized by Congress. Valid claims made prior to Sept. 24, when the proposal was printed in the Federal Register, will be grandfathered in.

Public comments may be submitted by Jan. 15 at sagebrush_withdrawals@blm.gov. Input will help shape a draft

EIS, planned for release by next winter, triggering additional public meetings. The prohibition on new claims would be up for renewal in 20 years.

The BLM and Forest Service implemented changes affecting mining, grazing and other activities within focal areas when they updated 98 Western land-use plans, addressing the Fish and Wildlife Service's prior concerns that the government lacked adequate regulatory mechanisms to protect sage grouse. The bird's status will be reviewed every five years.

BLM special projects manager Brent Ralston explained grazing permits within focal areas will be prioritized for review, and permit changes may be necessary where bird populations are declining.

Ethan Lane, who advocates for the cattle industry as executive director of the Public Lands Council, argued that in some cases the land-use plan changes are more restrictive than a listing would have been. Furthermore, he said sage grouse numbers have increased 63 percent during the past two years.

"A not-warranted decision isn't truly not warranted if the conservation ledger is being balanced on the backs of public lands permittees," Lane said.

Ralston explained prohibitions on new sand and gravel leases are already in place within focal areas, and new oil and gas leases in focal areas won't allow surface alterations, requiring drilling to originate from private land.

Idaho growers plan precautionary late blight programs to limit expenses

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

RUPERT, Idaho — Farmer Tim Eames will take no chances with late blight this season.

Following a widespread late blight outbreak in Ida-

ho potato country in 2015, Eames plans to apply foliar fungicides with efficacy against late blight every two weeks. When rain is in the forecast, he'll spray every week — even before the first report of late blight surfaces in his area.

He's among a group of Idaho growers hoping to limit late blight expenses by being proactive.

"You start with the cheap sprays," Eames said. "If you get behind, it's a big problem. Nobody wants to spend the money, but I'd rather

spend the money than have a catastrophe."

Aberdeen farmer Ritchey Toevs also plans to switch to spraying a low-cost fungicide on a weekly basis at the first sign of wet weather.

"In Idaho, we just wait for someone to get burnt," Toevs

said. "With the presence of seed-borne (late blight) and the chances for overwintering and volunteer issues next year, it's best we do a full preventative program."

Toevs said "playing catch-up" requires growers to use premium products, though a preventive program involving cheaper products is more effective.

"If we have the weather there, it's going to be a tight program," Toevs said.

Jeff Miller, who studies late blight with Rupert-based Miller Research, now suspects late blight cases in Minidoka County originated from tainted seed, due to the clustered distribution and the common seed source of the infected fields. He advises growers who are concerned about their seed source to treat seed with products such as Mancozeb or Curzate.

In Power and Bingham counties, he still believes spores overwintered on volunteer potatoes or cull piles.

He advises growers to manage cull piles and volunteers, scout their fields and watch the weather.

"We'll have to wait until March to see what the overwintering does," Miller said.


He said fields treated with fungicides before storms arrived fared much better than fields treated following storms, regardless of the programs.

Miller believes growers in the Magic Valley and Treasure Valley may be OK spraying every two weeks next season, and waiting until late blight is reported in their areas before stepping up their programs. In Bingham County, he agrees a weekly spray program may be advisable, especially if overwintering poses a threat.

"You're looking at (potato) psyllid management on top of this, too," Miller said. "It's getting very, very expensive."

Idaho's 2015 late blight strain was U.S.-23, which can be treated effectively with Ridomil, unlike other strains. Miller said growers who used Ridomil to treat pink rot at row closure delayed the onset of late blight by roughly a month compared with other fields, demonstrating the local strain is especially sensitive to the chemical.

His field trials also confirmed J.R. Simplot's Innate line of biotech potatoes was highly resistant to late blight.



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