

Research shows fungicide appears to boost spud yields

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

RUPERT, Idaho — Crop scientists at Miller Research say they've seen a significant yield boost in potatoes treated with Valent's Quash fungicide.

Jeff Miller, the research company's president and CEO, said the boost has been observed in all 14 research trials involving Quash that he's conducted during the past four growing seasons.

Miller believes it is caused by a physiological

change in potato plants, which tend to be shorter and greener when treated with Quash, rather than due to improved disease control. The product is a broad-spectrum triazole fungicide containing metconazole.

"It varies from year to year, but you could probably get 30 to 40 sacks (of potatoes) more," Miller said, adding Quash had no impact on tuber size or quality.

He said a boost of just a few sacks would more than cover the added expense of using Quash. Miller said a

few of his trials were funded by Valent, initially to test the product's efficacy for diseases it's labeled to control in potatoes, including white mold and early blight.

Valent's competitor, BASF, funded additional Quash trials, hoping to find good products to mix with its flagship fungicide, Endura. The Idaho Potato Commission also funded some of the Quash trials.

Miller said a single treatment with Quash near the row-closure stage seems to be sufficient to produce the

yield boost. Though Miller advises against using Quash as a stand-alone treatment for white mold and early blight — noting testing shows it's less effective than top-line products such as Endura and Luna Tranquility, by Bayer Crop Science — he sees great potential to mix Quash with other fungicides to delay the onset of resistance. Miller said it's been a hard sell to get growers to use "multiple modes of action," due to the added expense.

"If anything, the disease

control wasn't quite as good with Quash, yet yield-wise it's performing better," Miller said.

Though Quash is labeled for potato use in the U.S., Northwest growers are avoiding it until maximum residue limits for the product are set in foreign markets, removing the threat of export challenges, Miller said.

"The thinking is it could come at any time, or we could go a whole season without using it under the worst-case scenario," Miller said.

Miller said some chemical companies have made claims that strobilurin fungicides produce a similar physiological yield boost in spuds by affecting enzymes responsible for producing ethylene, a chemical that causes plant senescence.

Miller said he's never noticed any yield bump from strobilurin on par with Quash. Once MRL issues are addressed, he plans to encourage growers to plant their test strips to see if they experience the same results.



Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

A Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife file photo shows a member of the Teanaway wolf pack. A federal judge has ruled that the USDA Wildlife Services must prepare an impact statement before killing wolves in Washington state. The state has relied on the agency for advice and help in controlling the growing wolf population.

Judge: Feds too quick to help Washington with wolf control

WDFW warns about damaging wolf recovery

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

A judge has ordered the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Wildlife Services to stop shooting wolves at the behest of Washington state wildlife managers.

The federal agency must take a "hard look" at the environmental consequences of killing wolves before it can resume providing lethal services to the state Department of Fish and Wildlife, according to Judge Robert Bryan in the U.S. District Court for Western Washington.

Conservation groups that sued Wildlife Services last spring hailed the ruling as a victory over an agency that they claim is too quick to control animals by killing them.

Tim Coleman, executive director of the Kettle Range Conservation Group, said he hopes the decision will keep Wildlife Services from having a role in the state's management of wolves.

"I just don't like any agency that by its very nature is wildlife assassins," he said.

WDFW manages wolves in the eastern one-third of Washington, where wolves are not federally protected but remain a state-protected species. Wildlife Services has an agreement to advise and assist WDFW.

WDFW wolf policy coordinator Donny Martorello said Dec. 21 that Wildlife Services will continue to help the state trap and collar wolves,

investigate depredations and use non-lethal means to deter attacks on livestock.

If it comes down to shooting wolves to stop depredations, WDFW will do it, he said. The ruling won't change WDFW's policy about when it will lethally remove wolves, he said.

"The Department of Fish and Wildlife has both the authority and abilities to do lethal removals," Martorello said.

At the request of WDFW, Wildlife Services shot one wolf last year in northeast Washington to deter a pack that was preying on sheep.

It is the only time WDFW has enlisted Wildlife Services for lethal removal. Wildlife Services also advised WDFW in 2012 when the department shot seven wolves from another northeast Washington wolf pack.

Bryan ruled Wildlife Services shirked federal laws by not writing an environmental impact statement before agreeing to help WDFW with lethal removal.

"Wildlife Services misjudged the scope of its responsibility by deferring to WDFW," Bryan wrote in the ruling issued Dec. 17. "Wildlife Services erred by not taking a hard look at the ecological effects of lethal removal."

The USDA has not indicated whether it will write an environmental impact statement on lethally removing wolves. The USDA referred questions to the U.S. Justice Department. A Justice Department spokesman said the department had no comment.

In a court filing, the WDFW said that if Wildlife Services couldn't assist it,

the state "would continue to implement the program using the same tools and methods."

WDFW warned, however, about "a short-term negative impact on wolf recovery."

Managing conflicts without Wildlife Services' assistance would be "initially difficult," and livestock owners may suffer greater losses and social tolerance for wolf recovery could go down, according to WDFW's brief.

Washington Cattlemen's Association Executive Vice President Jack Field said the ruling was a setback for resolving conflicts over wolf management through WDFW-organized talks between ranchers, environmentalists and hunters.

"I'm very disappointed. I think the decision represents a step backwards," Field said.

He said the ruling also could slow responses to livestock depredations, he said. "By removing Wildlife Services from the picture, it's putting a bigger burden on the state."

Coleman of the Kettle Range Conservation Group said that without Wildlife Services to rely on, WDFW will have to accept more responsibility for lethal removal of wolves.

"I think they would be far more responsive as a state agency, than a federal agency," he said. "They are much more closely connected to people on the ground."

The other conservation groups that filed suit are Cascadia Wildlands, WildEarth Guardians, The Lands Council and Predator Defense. The Western Environmental Law Center represented the groups.

Idaho's New Year's Eve potato drop has gained national attention

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A little seed money from the Idaho Potato Commission has helped Boise's New Year's Eve potato drop draw extensive national and international attention.

The event, in its third year, is similar to New York City's New Year's Eve ball drop, except for the substitution of a giant potato, which is lowered slowly from a crane as the new year is counted down.

During its first two years, Idaho Potato Drop Founder Dylan Cline conservatively estimates the event generated 200 million media impressions worldwide.

"They have gotten so much coverage, international as well as national," said Sue Kennedy, director of public relations for Evans, Hardy & Young, which handles the potato commission's PR efforts.

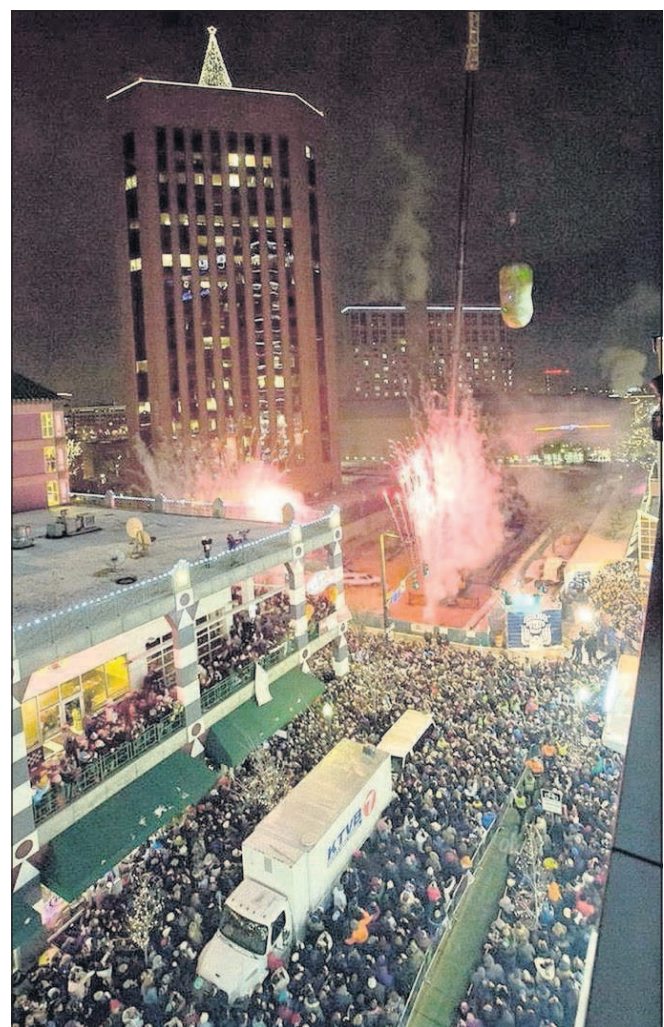
Each year, major networks do a highlight reel of the most iconic New Year's Eve drops.

"That first year, they were showing Sydney, Dubai, New York, New Orleans and then they showed Boise, and right after that they showed the Pope celebrating in the Vatican," said Idaho Potato Commission President and CEO Frank Muir.

The IPC provided \$5,000 to the event the first year and after seeing how successful it was, became the title sponsor and now provides \$25,000.

Muir said the commission is always thinking of ways it can best leverage small amounts of money "and make them look bigger." He considers the potato drop sponsorship as money well spent.

"The things I do in Idaho, I want to do it in a way that I leverage it to get national exposure from it," he said. "That coverage was something that was shown not only around the U.S. on national



Submitted photo

A giant potato is dropped from a crane in downtown Boise on Dec. 31 last year to ring in the new year. The annual event has drawn extensive national and international coverage, according to organizers.

television but it was sent out syndicated across the world, too."

Cline said he organized the potato drop as a way to bring the community together on New Year's Eve in a social event that didn't involve going to a bar.

He also wanted it to celebrate the state's famous potato.

"I love my state and ... I recognize that agriculture is one of the things that made our state what it is today and I'm proud of that," he said.

The initial event drew an estimated 40,000 spectators

and last year's event, which was impacted by temperatures that dropped to 5 degrees, drew about 30,000. Those events were held in the city's downtown.

This year's event will be held in front of the Idaho Statehouse, which will provide a much larger space for people to gather, and will include a major fireworks display and the Big Idaho Potato Truck, Cline said.

"This year is going to be even more iconic and I'm absolutely confident we can get more TV pickup this year," Muir said.

Chipotle tweaks its kitchen practices after E. coli scare

By CANDICE CHOI
AP Food Industry Writer

NEW YORK — After an E. coli outbreak that sickened more than 50 people, Chipotle is tweaking its cooking methods.

Onions will be dipped in boiling water to kill germs before they're chopped. Raw chicken will be marinated in re-sealable plastic bags, rather than in bowls. Cilantro will be added to freshly cooked rice so the heat gets rid of microbes in the garnish.

"When you're given a project like this, you look at the universe of hazards," said Mansour Samadpour, CEO of IEH Laboratories, which was hired by Chipotle to tighten its procedures.

The changes mark a dramatic turn in fortunes for Chipotle, which has surged in popularity by touting its "Food With Integrity" slogan. As it expanded to more than 1,900 locations, the company also sought to draw a distinction between itself and other fast-food chains that executives said use "chemical additives" and "cheap artificial ingredients."

Now, Chipotle Mexican Grill Inc. may be suffering from traits that helped define it. In its annual report in February, the Denver company noted it may be at a higher risk for foodborne illnesses because of its use of "fresh produce and



Stephen Brashear/Associated Press

A Chipotle Mexican Grill employee prepares food Dec. 15 in Seattle. After an E. coli outbreak that sickened more than 50 people, Chipotle is changing its cooking methods to prevent the situation from happening again.

meats rather than frozen," and its traditional cooking methods, rather than "automation."

The warning began coming to life this summer when the chain was tied to foodborne illnesses in California and Minnesota, although those cases didn't get as much attention.

Then, at the end of October, E. coli cases were reported in Oregon and Washington, prompting the company to shut down 43 restaurants in those states. YouGov Brand Index said customer perceptions about Chipotle sank to their lowest level since it began tracking the company in 2007. That was before additional cas-

es popped up in seven more states.

In November, sales crashed 16 percent. Then, an unrelated norovirus outbreak sickened dozens of students at Boston College. And this week, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reported five more cases of E. coli in later November linked to Chipotle, which it said might be part of a wider outbreak.

In an editorial Wednesday, The Wall Street Journal said Chipotle's fast-food competitors could be forgiven if they indulge "in a little Schadenfreude" about the chain's recent troubles.

Wallowa FFA brings home top honors

WALLOWA, Ore. — After bringing home a first place at the District State Ag Sales Competition, the Wallowa FFA Advanced Ag team has gone on to win at state.

The Ag Sales Competition events test students' skills in areas of sales and selling, dealing with customer concerns, prospecting for new customers, understanding advertising and telephone ordering.

The top placers on the advanced team at district were: Emily George, who took first in customer relations and second in sales presentation; Jordan Ferre, who took second in order-taking; Caitlin Robb, who took second in advertising; and Robert Delancy, who took third in prospecting.



Courtesy photo

The 2015 Wallowa FFA State Ag Sales Team is shown in Ontario. From left to right are Robert Delancey, Ashley Starner, Emily George, and Jordan Ferre. Emily George placed first in customer relations.

Other members of the team were: Teagan Miller, Bryce Melville, Ashley Starner, Megan Jones, Oriana Wandschneider and Maddi Tracy.

The Wallowa FFA Greenhands also brought home a fourth at district. Team members were: Riley Ferre, Rylee

Goller, C.J. Horn, Michael Diggins, Katelynn Diggins, Ashley Wilson and Zane Hermens.

George, along with Robert Delancey, Ashley Starner and Jordan Ferre went on to state, where Emily George took first place in customer relations.