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Crop protection industry needs to speak up, CropLife leader says

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

TWIN FALLS, Idaho — The benefits of modern crop protection are proven and substantial, and with continued innovation production agriculture can meet the growing demand for food created by a global population expected to reach 9 billion by 2050, an industry leader says.

Agrochemicals enable farmers to grow a safe, abundant and affordable supply of food, fiber and renewable fuels. But the crop protection industry faces many challenges, including questionable policies resulting from a barrage of information that creates public confusion and distrust, CropLife America President and CEO Jay Vroom told the Far West Agribusiness Association winter conference on Jan. 14.



Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press
Jay Vroom, right, president and CEO of CropLife America, chats with Jim Fitzgerald, executive director of Far West Agribusiness Association, at the close of the trade association's winter conference in Twin Falls on Thursday, Jan. 14.

While crop advisers already do a lot to educate people on the safe use of crop protection products, they need to do even more to make a difference in

CropLife America is a crop protection industry trade association.

Online

For more information on ag advocacy, go to tellmemore.croplifeamerica.org or foodialogues.com

the public policy arena, Vroom said.

"You need to be ambassadors, and an audience of one is the minimum," he said.

An important cross-over point happened globally in 2012, illustrating a shift from subsistence farming and a growing dependence on agriculture, he said.

"It was the first year in history over half of us lived in urban settings ... we are going to depend on the farmers left behind all over the planet to support us," he said.

The extra income luring people to urban areas, even if

they make \$2 a day and live in a slum, is spent on food, he said.

"The growing population is very complex and very huge, and it's on us" to feed that population, he said.

Thanks to rapidly advancing technology, farmers are able to deliver nutrients to crops in a much more precise manner, increasing yields and quality while protecting the environment, he said.

Corn yields, for example, have skyrocketed from 138 bushels per acre in 1994 to 171 bushels per acre in 2014, pushing U.S. corn production from about 6 billion bushels a year to more than 14 billion bushels, he said.

That increase represents 20 million virtual acres thanks to modern technology at roughly the same time 23 million acres of farmland — the size of In-

diana — was lost to development, he said.

The sales of agrochemicals and seed is a \$100 billion global industry, with chemical sales at \$63.2 billion and seed sales at \$40.5 billion in 2014. In 2013, the sale of biotech seed exceeded sales of conventional seed for the first time, he said.

"We crossed that line, and we're never going back," he said.

In addition, gene silencing is on the horizon, he said.

"It's really exciting stuff. What we have to do is figure out how to be better at communicating the safety than we were on biotechnology," he said.

With further advances in technology, U.S. corn production is on track to hit 23 billion to 24 billion bushels by 2053, he said.

Monsanto hiring in Idaho, despite cutbacks elsewhere

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

SODA SPRINGS, Idaho — Officials with Monsanto say their company's locations in the Northwest likely won't be hard hit by planned layoffs, driven by a slowdown in product sales.

The St. Louis-based agricultural company announced on Jan. 6 its board of directors had approved the final details of a plan to cut 3,600 positions globally in order to save \$500 million annually by the end of Fiscal Year 2018. With sales slowing and commodity prices down, Monsanto announced last June it would seek to cut costs, said Christi Dixon, a spokeswoman based at the corporate headquarters.

Dixon said the company disclosed plans to cut 2,600 positions in October to save up to \$300 million per year, and announced plans to cut another 1,000 positions in January.

"When complete, we expect the changes will enable us to transform and innovate the way we work, resulting in a more agile and focused organization," Dixon said.

Monsanto has five facilities in Idaho, including a plant in Soda Springs that refines phosphate for making Roundup herbicide, a new Wheat Technology Center and a Seminis Vegetable Seeds, Inc., facility in Filer, and vegetable seed plants in Nampa and Payette. The company also has a vegetable seed plant in Morton, Wash.

Dixon said the company has avoided offering specific details on "changes or reductions by function or region" because its plans are still

evolving.

But John Anderson, a human resources official with Monsanto's Soda Springs plant, takes it as a good sign for his facility that the company is currently adding staff.

"We had put in a request for an additional headcount last year," Anderson said. "After they announced the additional layoffs, they told us we were still OK to go ahead with the hiring."

Anderson said Monsanto added 15 new workers at the Soda Springs plant in November and December and will be adding three new employees in January.

Dixon said Monsanto will also be adding jobs at some other U.S. locations "as part of our transformation."

"We're still hiring in areas where skills are needed," Dixon said.

Anderson said some of the Soda Springs hires are replacing employees who have retired, but there are also several newly created positions. Anderson explained Monsanto is installing high-tech robot arms to remove molten slag from the Soda Springs furnaces — a process that has been done manually. He said the technology is intended to protect workers from exposure to the slag, which is loaded into a pot and poured down the side of a hill. Following the change, workers will still be needed to control the robot arms, plus new specialists will have to be hired to repair them.

Monsanto spokesman Trent Clark said the arms incorporate advanced technology.

"It's not just safer. We're pushing the edge of robotics with this arm," Clark said.

Report finds cost of raising Idaho spuds up

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — The cost of raising potatoes in Idaho was generally up in 2015 because growers had to increase spraying for potato psyllids and late blight, according to a new report.

Paul Patterson, a retired University of Idaho Extension economist who authored the report as a consultant for the Idaho Potato Commission, estimated the cost per hundredweight of producing fumigated Russet Burbanks at \$7.25 in southwest Idaho, up 3.7 percent; \$7.02 in southcentral Idaho, up 1.4 percent and



John O'Connell/Capital Press
Potatoes are hauled from the field during the 2015 harvest in Idaho Falls. University of Idaho economists say the production costs increased for most producers because of increased spraying for potato psyllids and late blight.

\$6.73 in Eastern Idaho, down 1.9 percent.

Per-acre production costs, with fumigation, were up 1.7 percent in southwest Idaho,

2.6 percent in southcentral Idaho and 2.2 percent in Eastern Idaho.

"Growers in Idaho are only getting about 75 cents on the

dollar for what their production cost is," Patterson said. His estimates factor in costs such as what growers who own their land could earn by leasing it.

Patterson was also hired by United Potato Growers of America to do production cost reports for Washington, Wisconsin and Colorado. He estimated the per-hundredweight cost of producing fumigated Burbanks in Washington at \$7.24.

He said the cost of raising Russet Norkotahs without fumigation in Colorado at \$7.29 per hundredweight and the cost of raising fumigated Norkotahs in Wisconsin at \$6.96 per hundredweight.

Proposal would codify landmark stock water decision into law

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A bill will be proposed during the 2016 Idaho Legislature that seeks to codify into state statute a landmark Idaho Supreme Court decision on who owns stock watering rights on federal land.

After fighting the U.S. Bureau of Land Management in court for more than a decade, Owyhee County ranchers Tim Lowry and Paul Nettleton were vindicated when the state's supreme court ruled in their favor in 2007.

The parties filed overlap-



Lowry

ping claims to in-stream stock watering rights during the Snake River Basin Adjudication. The Supreme Court unanimously ruled in the ranchers' favor because the federal government doesn't own cows and can't put the water to beneficial use.

The BLM argued that because the federal government allowed the ranchers to graze their animals on the land, the ranchers were agents of the

government, so the government owned the water rights.

But many ranchers in the area started grazing on that land long before the BLM even existed, said Justice Dan Eismann, who wrote the court's decision.


"People did not come West to be agents of the federal government, so that was easily rejected," he told legislators and ranchers recently during an Idaho Farm Bureau Federation water rights conference.

In this case, "water fights on federal land are appurtenant to the person who is watering the stock," Eismann said.

Rep. Judy Boyle, R-Midvale, will propose legislation that codifies the ranchers' victory into state law, something the Utah Legislature did in 2008.

"These people are heroes," Utah Farm Bureau CEO Randy Parker said of Lowry and Nettleton during the Farm Bureau event. "What they've done has underpinned the reality that these waters are the property of the state and they are private property rights that belong to the individuals."

Boyle said it's shameful that Idaho still hasn't followed Utah's example eight years later.




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