

Potatoes USA research programs evolving

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

DENVER — The head of Potatoes USA said significant changes are in the works for three research programs his organization helps fund — the Alliance for Potato Research and Education, the National Fry Processing Trials and the National Chip Program.

APRE — which has representation on its board from growers, Potatoes USA, the National Potato Council and the major potato processors in the U.S. and Canada — was established in 2010 to spearhead research defending the nutritional value of potatoes and potato products, including french fries.

Potatoes USA board members voted during their recent annual meeting in Colorado Springs, Colo., to reduce their annual contribution to APRE from \$1 million to \$500,000. The organization last adjusted its APRE contribution in September 2012, when it qua-



John O'Connell/Capital Press

A team of dietitians invited by the Alliance for Potato Research and Education and food bloggers invited by the Idaho Potato Commission tours the Wada Farms fresh packing facility in Pingree, Idaho. APRE, which aims to use science to change perceptions about potatoes, is now focused on the 2015 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.

drupled the \$250,000 it had been giving.

Potatoes USA President and CEO Blair Richardson said the reduction was in

line with a recommendation APRE's board made last fall to cut the research entity's \$2.25 million budget by roughly 50 percent.

"It was primarily driven by the cost of research projects coming in lower than the previous several years," Richardson said.

Richardson couldn't offer a clear vision of APRE's future. APRE President and CEO Maureen Storey could not be reached for comment.

"Over the next couple of months, we'll be visiting with other funders of APRE to see where we go from there," Richardson said.

APRE has supported research or conducted its own studies to emphasize the key nutrients and fiber in potatoes, and to make certain the commodity is treated fairly in federal nutrition guidelines and policies.

Potatoes USA board member Karlene Hardy, of Oakley, Idaho, credits APRE with providing the scientific data to get fresh white potatoes finally included in the federal nutrition program for Women, Infants and Children. Furthermore, she believes APRE has helped make spuds more accepted by the national school lunch program.

"It's all about having science-based information," Hardy said.

Richardson said it's unclear if the National Fry Processing Trials will continue, as the trials were created to help industry develop varieties with low levels of a potentially unhealthy chemical found in certain fried and baked starchy foods, acrylamide.

The federal Food and Drug Administration recently issued final voluntary guidelines for reducing acrylamide, which cover mostly current industry practices.

David Parish, who held the contract to lead the trials, has announced he won't continue his consulting agreement past June.

"I don't know where that's going to go," Richardson said.

Richardson said the chip program, which has a broader goal of facilitating variety development and chip research, will continue, and the board has invested "a tremendous amount of energy" to revamp the program for the future.



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Anya Gehley participates in the OSU Extension, Marion County 4-H Food Preparation Contest. This particular contest is called the "Mini Meal Contest" where the 4-H members prepare two recipes in the menu, and design a full menu complete with cost analysis and nutritional value.

Anya Gehley, 13, moved around the contest kitchen with the confidence of a seasoned chef. The Salem 4-H member prepared, served, cleaned up and explained the costs and nutritional value for a full meal with such finesse that it earned her a Championship ribbon from both Marion County and State Fair 4-H Food Preparation Contests.

Home Grown
Most of the menu items used in Anya's meal were prepared with food grown or raised on the Gehley's small farm in S.E. Salem. "I like raising my own food," says Anya. "You know where it came from and what went into it." The main dish in the menu was a family favorite, a spaghetti pie made with beef raised in her pasture, fresh eggs collected that morning from her chickens and home-canned tomato sauce.

Anya is recognizing the health benefits of home-raised food through her 4-H project work. The fourth "H" in the 4-H pledge stands for Health. "4-H allows youth to find an interest and build on it," says Melanie Mintken, Extension 4-H Coordinator. "We call that 'the spark' — Anya's spark is growing food that can be used to feed her family."

Once the spark is identified, 4-H professionals and volunteers can help the young person develop other life skills such as understanding the economic and nutritional value of food preparation, communications, volunteerism and recordkeeping.

Developing Healthy Habits
"Anya is learning to prepare healthy meals. For example, she is discovering the difference between a hamburger prepared at a fast food restaurant and one you prepare yourself," says Mintken. "She is learning about balancing proteins, carbohydrates and fats in her diet and which foods help her get through the day better."

According to Anya's mother and co-4-H leader, Molly Gehley, the young cook is adventuring out to try new recipes and cooking techniques. "4-H allows kids to find some new paths they didn't know about before," she says. At the same time, the Cascade Jr. High School student does her share of the work around the farm.

The successful 4-H'er is busy beyond the kitchen. She carries 4-H projects in pigs, horse, beef, expressive arts (such as quilting), food drying, and gardening. "4-H has been a great avenue of building leadership, education and a little adventure for Anya," says Gehley.

Takeaways
Anya has learned that goals can be accomplished within a comfortable time period. "Not everything takes forever," she says. "I also show pigs and have learned that it's OK to be adventurous and to try different things. People have different opinions and ideas — and that's OK."
Mary Stewart, OSU Extension Service

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