

Potatoes USA hires global retail marketing manager

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press



Russ Johnson

DENVER — Potatoes USA has hired a former ConAgra Foods official to oversee its effort to bolster retail potato sales domestically and abroad.

Ross Johnson, 34, the former national account manager with ConAgra, joined the nation's potato promotion board as its global marketing manager for retail this month.

With ConAgra, Johnson worked closely with several East Coast grocery chains. He also has experience working with West Coast grocers during a previous position with Kraft Foods.

"One thing I've learned is each grocer has its own strategy. It's important to learn what their strategy is,"

Johnson said.

For example, he said some grocers are now placing emphasis on offerings in the periphery of their stores, prioritizing larger produce sections and more comprehensive delis, which should open new opportunities for fresh potatoes.

In addition to working with U.S. grocers, he'll aid grocery chains abroad, with an emphasis on China, Taiwan, Mexico, Indonesia and

South Korea. He'll head to China during the first week of May to attend a trade show, where he'll meet with retailers and learn what it will take to get U.S. potatoes in their stores.

Johnson said Potatoes USA has representatives under contract in different export markets and works to help buyers understand consumer trends and to make sure they have the right mixes of potato products. They use

Nielsen Perishables data and conversations with buyers to identify trends, he said.

"I will work with them and we will come up with promotions or display opportunities or sampling events," Johnson said.

He said Potatoes USA sometimes prepares potato dishes to serve in foreign markets to introduce consumers to the vegetable.

"We'll help fund promotions as long as it meets our

requirements," Johnson said.

Johnson graduated from Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, with a bachelor's degree in business management, with an emphasis in marketing. He's married with five children.

Potatoes USA once had separate domestic and international retail positions but has combined those. Sarah Reece is tasked with the organization's efforts to work with consumers.

Capitol buzzing with ag's littlest lobbyists

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Olympia Beekeepers Association members, from left, Duane McBride and Mark Emrich, place honeybees on the Capitol Campus April 20. State lawmakers have passed several pieces of legislation to help pollinators.

OLYMPIA — Honeybees, agriculture's tiniest ambassadors, are so popular on the Capitol Campus that 25,000 of them were welcomed Wednesday to the governor's mansion.

The Olympia Beekeepers Association placed the bees — just back from pollinating California almond orchards — in boxes on the lawn as the governor's wife, Trudi Inslee, watched.

The boxes also are within yards of the Legislative Building. The beekeepers association's president, Laurie Pyne, assured the assembled media that the bees won't sting lobbyists or lawmakers — unless provoked.

"Honeybees are gentle by their very nature, so they're not out to get you," Pyne said.

The honeybee agenda has fared well in Olympia the past two years, since a state Department of Agriculture task force made recommendations on preserving the pollinators.

To encourage the planting of pollen- and nectar-rich plants, lawmakers this year approved a small pilot project by the State Weed Board.

The board will work with county weed boards, conservation districts and private landowners to replace eradicated weeds with bee-friendly plants.

Last year, lawmakers classified beekeepers as farmers, making apiarists eligible for agricultural tax breaks, helping to offset the increasing cost of replacing bees and keeping them alive over the winter.

The Legislature also this year appropriated \$135,000 to fund a new bee biologist position at Washington State University for one year.

Commercial beekeeper Tim Hiatt, legislative chairman of the Washington State Beekeepers Association, said the group will ask lawmakers next year to permanently fund the position.

Hiatt said beekeepers hope the biologist will provide practical advice on "how to keep your bees alive."

In his presentations to lawmakers, Hiatt has stressed how important honeybees are to Washington's food production.

"It's been great to work with Republican and Democrats, both," he said. "It shows

how nonpartisan bees are."

The honeybees near the governor's mansion are part of an effort to give the Capitol Campus a more natural and less manicured look, said Brent Chapman, horticulturist for the state Department of Enterprise Services.

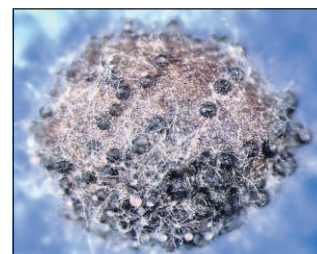
The department will install boxes of mason bees at the other end of the campus to pollinate native plants that are being added to the landscaping, he said.

"It's not just about honeybees being on campus because it's cool," he said. "It's part of a bigger objective."

Growers urged to scout fields for black leg

Washington concerns at 'heightened' level

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press



Courtesy of WSU

Pacific Northwest farmers should scout their winter canola, brassica and crucifer crops for black leg fungus.

"Industry concern is still at a heightened level," said Victor Shaul, seed program manager with the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

Black leg was found in Oregon and Idaho, but not yet in Washington, which has a crucifer quarantine and accepts only seed certified as black leg-free.

Black leg affects brassica and crucifer crops, including spring and winter canola, rapeseed, mustard, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, kale, bok choy, Brussels sprouts, turnips and tillage radish.

Also a concern is volunteer canola or mustard. Reports of volunteer canola in fields and ditches are up over past years, said Karen Sowers, an oilseed cropping systems research associate with Washington State University.

Spring canola is being planted, but farmers will want to check their fields shortly, Sowers said.

Fungicides won't help existing black leg, Sowers said, but will prevent it from spreading.

WSU, University of Idaho and Oregon State University researchers are available to answer grower questions or test possible instances of black leg, Sowers said.

OSU recently held a workshop to train people to spot black leg symptoms in canola. Symptoms first appeared on trials in February, which means they were infected at some point last fall, OSU extension soil scientist Don Wysocki said.

Black leg could have been around a while before people started noticing it, Wysocki said.

"That suggests to me it hasn't been a big bust on

This photo shows a close-up of black leg fungus on cauliflower. Farmers are urged to scout their fields for the fungus.

yield — we would have noticed huge yield losses, and we haven't seen that," he said. "We've had it, but maybe it's a tolerable level."

Wysocki would like to research fungicide treatments, to determine if a preventive fall or spring treatment would prevent the infection, including the costs and benefits.

"How much more seed would you get by putting on a fungicide at those times?" he said. "Those are questions we can't answer at this time."

Sowers recommends awareness.

"It's not a fear factor at all," she said. "It's a treatable thing, but we need to keep it under control so it doesn't get to Washington state."

A WSDA public meeting in Yakima, Wash., on the crucifer quarantine, slated for May 12, was postponed. Researchers expressed concern over language proposing variety trial ground be isolated from crucifer production, said Shaul, the WSDA seed program manager.

"Certain trials need to be in a production field so it's treated just like commercial canola would be," he said. "Having that requirement kind of negates the point of having a trial."

Introducing black leg through trials is not a concern, Shaul said.

Sowers recommends a four-year crop rotation between brassica or crucifer crops and planting only seed certified as free of black leg.

Shaul asked industry members to alert the department if they find a seed lot that isn't certified.

Farmer, researchers release plant guide

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Idaho farmers have published a guide to native plants, agricultural crops and weeds in their region.

Thom Creek Native Seed Farms and Thorn Creek Ranch Inc. have produced 600 copies of the "Palouse Prairie Field Guide," designed to identify plants found in the prairie regions of Idaho, Oregon, Washington and Montana.

Genesee, Idaho, farmer Jacie Jensen worked with David Skinner, retired after 30 years with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service Plant Materials Center in Pullman, Wash., and Gerry Queener, retired biology teacher and native flower photographer, to publish the guide.

Skinner died in January. The guide is dedicated to him.

Jensen wanted to provide an introductory guide for landowners and for "the curious — people who want to learn about the plants around them." The guide is intended for the public, she said. Crops covered in the guide include wheat, barley, canola, mustard, lentils, chickpeas, dry peas, native grasses and forage grasses.

Jensen believes including agricultural crops in the guide may be unique.

"We just have a lot of people who want to know what are all the plants in our region," she said.

Jensen and her husband raise commodity crops and native seeds on 4,000 acres.

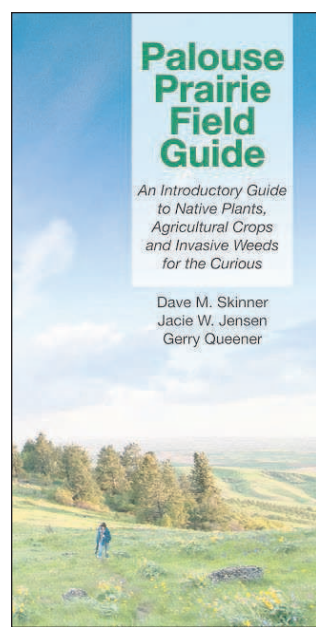
Farmers benefit from a

knowledge of native plants, she said.

"We learn some things about our soils by looking at our native land we have that has not been tilled," she said, noting researchers are comparing agriculture land with native soil and Conservation Reserve Program land.

The guide is available in Clarkston, Wash.; Colfax, Wash.; Cottonwood, Idaho; Lewiston, Idaho; Moscow, Idaho; Pullman, Wash.; Spalding, Idaho; Spokane; and Uniontown, Wash.

Jensen will speak about the guide at 11 a.m. April 30 at And Books Too in Clarkston, at 9 a.m. May 1 at Artisans at the Barn in Uniontown and at 3 p.m. May 7 at Auntie's Bookstore in Spokane.



Courtesy of Thorn Creek Native Seed Farms

The "Palouse Prairie Field Guide" is a book about native plants, agricultural crops and invasive weeds in the region.

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