

First potato psyllids arrive in Eastern Idaho

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

KIMBERLY, Idaho — Potato growers throughout Eastern Idaho are starting insecticidal programs to protect their crops from zebra chip disease following the recent confirmation of potato psyllids in the region.

The tiny, winged insects can harbor the *Liberibacter* bacterium that causes zebra chip — a crop disease that forms bands in tuber flesh that darken during frying.

The University of Idaho has conducted an extensive potato psyllid scouting program since 2012, which was the season after the disease first surfaced in the Pacific Northwest.

During the week ending July 2, UI Extension entomologist Erik Wenninger, who administers Idaho's monitoring program, said psyllids were found in a quarter of the 97 fields where sticky traps have been deployed to capture the pests.

The cards contained 48

psyllids, including from a field in Bingham County and a field in Power County in Eastern Idaho, where psyllid pressure has been light compared with other parts of the state.

The monitoring program also detected psyllids in a dozen fields in Canyon County, three fields in Payette County, two fields in Owyhee County, two fields in Twin Falls County and one field each in Elmore County, Ada County and Malheur County, Ore.

"I know a lot of growers have been waiting until we report psyllids in their area until they start spraying, which in a lot of cases has saved growers a lot of sprays," Wenninger said. "If a grower is inclined to start spraying when we detect psyllids in their area, I think that's a reasonable course of action."

Wenninger said infected psyllids were confirmed from Canyon County samples in late May, but all samples tested since then have been negative for *Liberibacter*. Test

results have not been returned from the most recently captured psyllids.

It takes about three weeks from infection for zebra chip symptoms to surface — including aerial tubers, leaf rolling, purplish discoloration, yellowing leaves and swollen nodes.

"It was a little bit surprising to see (psyllids) show up that early in Eastern Idaho, but not terribly surprising," Wenninger said.

Wenninger said the recent hot, dry weather has favored

psyllids. During last season, which was also unseasonably hot, the first psyllids also arrived during the first week of July.

Aberdeen, Idaho, grower Ritchey Toevs applied insecticide in-furrow at planting and plans to move up his first foliar insecticide spray by nine days to July 11, due to the recent detection of psyllids in Eastern Idaho.

"With my next fungicide application I'll need to add (insecticide)," Toevs said.



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Jay Byrne, president and CEO of v-Fluence Interactive, a public relations agency that tracks issues in agriculture, speaks about the growing influence of conservation organizations and others who oppose conventional agriculture during the National Potato Council's summer meeting in Park City, Utah. Byrne said he believes future attacks on agriculture will center on water and climate issues.

Ag opponents plan attacks using water, climate issues

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

PARK CITY, Utah — Future attacks on conventional agriculture will focus on water and climate, an analyst who tracks activist groups predicts.

Jay Byrne, president and CEO of the intelligence-gathering agency v-Fluence Interactive, told the National Potato Council's summer meeting that agriculture's opponents are working together more closely than ever and spending large sums to convey their messages.

Byrne said their campaigns are beginning to shift from labeling genetically modified organisms to water quality concerns — especially algae blooms

and "dead zones" in water bodies.

"This is the most intense advocacy period we've seen in over 20 years of tracking," Byrne said. "Today in the U.S. it's GMO labeling. Very quickly, that's going to turn around and be issues associated with water, and it's going to affect every aspect of conventional production." Byrne said a "trial balloon" lawsuit filed in Iowa alleges farming is creating downstream environmental challenges, and opponents are already lining up litigants for future cases.

Byrne estimates the groups tracked by v-Fluence have increased spending by 50 to 100 percent annually since 2012.

In 2011, opponents in North America spent \$2.5 billion campaigning against

GMOs and conventional agriculture, v-Fluence estimated.

Globally, advocacy groups targeting agriculture are likely to spend more than \$10 billion this year, he said.

Charlie Cray, research specialist with Greenpeace USA, agrees water and climate will undoubtedly be key issues heading into the future. He questions Byrne's financial estimates, however.

"I don't think the entire environmental movement has that much money," Cray said. "I would love to see him break (his estimates) down."

Supported by "black marketers" seeking to increase organic sales by discrediting conventional competitors, Byrne said opponents have relied on a relentless "ghost

army" of baseless research claims published in "pay-to-play" journals.

Cray agrees the organic sector supports campaigns to point out the benefits of the production system relative to conventional agriculture, but he disagrees that they're being covert.

v-Fluence estimates water-centric attacks on agriculture have increased by 110 percent during the past year, Byrne said.

He believes opponents' messages resonate with consumers because they craft stories with regulators as the heroes, consumers as the victims and big agriculture as the villain.

Luther Markwart, executive vice president of the American Sugar Beet Growers Association, believes farmers should respond with their own narrative.

"Activists have demonized the technology, and farmers can't leave it to anybody else to educate the American public," Markwart said.

By contrast, Cray advises farmers to respond to mounting criticisms by being more transparent about their water usage and "reduce petrochemical intensity of their production systems to show they recognize and are addressing any contribution they make to greenhouse gases."

WSDA: Yakima and Whatcom dairies show progress in reducing nitrates

Hundreds attend manure workshops

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Nearly 350 people this year have attended state-funded workshops on judiciously applying manure, while the percentage of acres with elevated levels of nitrates has declined in two dairy-rich counties, according to a new report by the Washington State Department of Agriculture.

The report, released July 11, draws no connection between the workshops and reduced levels of nitrates, though a WSDA spokesman said the report suggests dairies are improving their management of manure.

The Washington State Dairy Federation hailed the report as evidence farmers are embracing training and reducing the risk of groundwater contamination.

"This is real environmental protection," the federation's policy director, Jay Gordon, said.

At the federation's urging, state lawmakers in 2015 gave WSDA a two-year \$575,000 appropriation to offer manure-management workshops with the help of conservation districts and Washington State University. WSDA also hired two more inspectors to advise dairy farms.

The federation lobbied for the funding as part of a push to respond to concerns about dairies polluting groundwater.

The report updates lawmakers on how WSDA has spent the money so far and what the latest soil tests show.

Since the beginning of the year, conservation districts in eight counties have hosted 15 training sessions attended by 347 people.

Besides dairy farmers, the workshops have been attended by berry growers, ranchers, other farmers, crop consultants and manure applicators.

Average attendance at each workshop in the winter exceeded 30. Fewer have attended workshops in the spring

and early summer. Gordon said he suspects attendance declined as field work increased.

"Any extension agent on the planet will tell you that if they get 30 farmers to show up at a meeting, they'd do back flips," he said.

A four-hour workshop in Whatcom County drew 81 people.

"I think it shows farmers in this area are trying to be proactive," said Whatcom County Conservation nutrient management specialist Nichole Embertson.

Embertson last year organized manure-management workshops in Whatcom and Yakima counties. The workshops were well-attended and built momentum for a larger continuing-education program.

WSDA also reported that the percentage of acres with elevated levels of nitrates is dropping at dairies in Yakima and Whatcom counties, where concern about manure polluting groundwater has been the highest.

In Yakima County, WSDA tested more than 28,000 acres in 2016. The percentage of acres that "needs attention" dropped to 6.6 percent from 11.9 percent in 2014. In Whatcom County, WSDA tested about 29,000 acres. The percentage that needs improvement dropped to 2.9 percent from 4.4 percent in 2014.

Gordon said the test results reflect adjustments dairy farmers have made over the past several years when applying manure.

"These are wonderful numbers. They're heading in the right direction," he said.

Statewide, WSDA tested more than 176,000 acres at nearly 400 dairies. The percentage of acres that needs attention was 3.1 percent, virtually unchanged from 3.2 percent in 2014.

WSDA also reported that the percentage of dairies in compliance with their manure management plans was 92 percent as of March 31. The compliance rate on the same date two years ago was 87 percent.



Don Jenkins/Capital Press

A lagoon holds manure at a dairy in Whatcom County, Wash. A new Washington State Department of Agriculture report shows fewer acres at dairies in Whatcom and Skagit counties have nitrate levels that "need attention."

OSU hires new seed laboratory manager

By MITCH LIES
For the Capital Press

Oregon State University's College of Agricultural Sciences has named David Stimpson, who has spent the past 20 years working in seed science and technology for Dow AgroSciences, as its new seed laboratory manager.

Stimpson will start in his new position July 29.

He replaces Adriel Garay, who retired Dec. 31 after 19 years as the lab's manager.

Dan Curry, director of seed services for OSU, said

he has known Stimpson for 15 years through their participation in the Society of Commercial Seed Technologists. Stimpson currently is vice president of the organization and is in line to be its president next year.

"He is a good guy," Curry said. "A lot of people are telling me, 'You picked the right person.' We feel pretty good about it."

"Dave has extensive experience in seeds, seed industry development, seed physiology, seed analysis and commercial seed quality and compliance," said Jay Noller,

head of the college's Crop and Soil Science Department.

Curry, who has been serving as interim director of the lab since Garay's retirement, said he is anxiously awaiting Stimpson's arrival.

"My arms are open for Dave to get here," Curry said. "We need a full-time manager, and we are really happy that Dave has decided to take the job."

"He is the right person, and we are anxious for him to get started," Curry said.

Curry said the college conducted an international search to fill the position.

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