

# Pumpkin seeds may be a crop for Treasure Valley

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

ONTARIO, Ore. — Efforts to explore whether pumpkin seeds for the snack market could be grown on a large scale in the Treasure Valley area continue despite a challenging 2016 growing season.

Companies that sell hull-less pumpkin seeds continue to show significant interest in having farmers in southwestern Idaho and Eastern Oregon provide them the product, said Kit Kamo, executive director of the Snake River Economic Development Alliance.

“We continue to pick up more interest from a number of companies ... that want to buy pumpkin seed from this area,” she said. “We just need to make sure it’s profitable for the farmer.”

Funded by a \$91,000 specialty crop grant from the Idaho State Department of Agriculture, SREDA is working on the unique harvesting and processing requirements for that crop.

The crop is harvested by what researchers describe as a pumpkin seed combine, which beats the pumpkins into



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Oregon State University Cropping Systems Extension Agent Bill Buhrig hands out a sample of pumpkin seeds July 13 at OSU's Malheur County experiment station. Buhrig and others are trying to determine whether pumpkin seeds for the snack market can be grown effectively in the Treasure Valley area.

pieces with a hammermill, separates the seeds and loads them into a truck. The pumpkin seed has to be washed and dried quickly after harvest, before the starch solidifies.

Oregon State University Cropping Systems Extension

Agent Bill Buhrig is conducting field trials to try to determine how to grow the crop in an economically feasible way here.

A handful of farmers in both states are also conducting their own field trials.

# Progress made on accessing U.S. potato markets

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

PARK CITY, Utah — U.S. potato industry leaders say they've made significant headway recently in their efforts to bolster access to some key foreign markets.

During the National Potato Council's summer meeting here on July 13, officials updated their progress in markets including Japan, Panama, China, Korea, Mexico, Costa Rica and Indonesia.

Japanese officials recently announced plans to open access to Idaho fresh chipping potatoes, said Matt Lantz, who works to open foreign markets for U.S. potatoes on behalf of Bryant Christie, Inc. Leaders from Japan and USDA met in Idaho Falls during Memorial Day week to discuss the issue.

“Today at lunch, they called and said by September they think they'll have the whole thing through the Japanese system,” Lantz said, adding shipments could commence by next January.

Japan agreed to accept fresh Idaho chipping potatoes in 2006, but access was abruptly severed after a sin-



John O'Connell/Capital Press

A field of potatoes flowers July 5 in southeast Idaho near Pocatello. U.S. potato industry leaders say they've made significant headway recently in their efforts to bolster access to some key foreign markets.

gle load was delivered, based on the discovery of pale cyst nematode in Eastern Idaho. Pat Kole, vice president of legal and government affairs with Idaho Potato Commission, said R&G Potatoes in American Falls is the state's only fresh chipping potato supplier, but he believes the improved access could spur growth in the sector.

“It could be a big deal because the quality of chipping potatoes from Idaho is very high,” Kole said.

Lantz said the next goal will be convincing Japan to

grant year-round access to U.S. chipping potatoes, which may now be shipped only during a six-month window.

Earlier this month, Panama agreed to start accepting U.S. seed potatoes.

“At this point, we'll notify growers that the opportunity exists, and they'll start to build a customer base,” said NPC Vice President and CEO John Keeling.

Keeling said Panama raises a lot of potatoes, and the U.S. has been active in opening markets throughout Central America.

# Environmentalists shut out of Oregon forest litigation

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

Environmental and fishing groups will be shut out from high-stakes litigation over Oregon's forest management policies, according to a judge's order.

Linn County Circuit Court

Judge Daniel Murphy has denied a request by several non-profit organizations to intervene in the lawsuit, which seeks \$1.4 billion from Oregon on behalf of multiple counties.

“Passionate concern about something does not qualify an

applicant for intervenor status,” Murphy said in the ruling.

The proposed intervenors included the Wild Salmon Center and its policy director for Oregon and California, Robert Van Dyk, as well as the Association of Northwest Steelheaders, Association of Northwest Guides

and Anglers and Pacific Rivers Council.

Linn County filed a complaint against the State of Oregon earlier this year, arguing that 15 counties turned over 650,000 acres of their forestlands in the early 20th Century to the state in exchange for promises of future revenues.

In addition to Linn County, Benton, Clackamas, Clatsop, Columbia, Coos, Douglas, Josephine, Klamath, Lane,

Lincoln, Marion, Polk, Tillamook, and Washington counties turned timberland over to the state.

Oregon has since breached that contract by enacting a “greatest permanent value” forest policy rule that prioritizes wildlife, water and recreation over logging, costing the counties \$1.4 billion in past and future timber revenues, the complaint said.

The non-profit groups ar-

gued they should be allowed to intervene in the case because they have an interest in forest health and Linn County was effectively trying to increase logging in state forests.

However, the judge has held their participation is unnecessary in the litigation, which is focused on whether Oregon has violated contractual obligations to maximize timber revenues for the counties.

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COMBINES	COMBINES	COMBINES
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# Potato, sugar leaders laud GMO labeling bill

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

PARK CITY, Utah — Leaders of the potato and sugar beet industries say they consider a bill that passed Congress requiring labels on food containing genetically modified organisms to be a good compromise.

The House of Representatives approved the bill July 14 by a 306-117 vote and sent it to the White House. President Barack Obama has indicated he intends to sign the legislation, which agricultural interests laud for creating a single

national standard to prevent a patchwork of state regulations. The GMO labeling bill recently implemented in Vermont will be suspended. New rules for the federal standard will go into effect within two years.

The bill allows companies to label GMO content using an icon that will be developed by USDA, on-package language or a bar code linking to online messaging when scanned by a smartphone — a major point of contention among critics, who argue the requirement is too weak.

“It gives the food companies options,” said John Keeling, executive vice president and CEO of the National Potato Council. “They have to convey information, but it gives them options in how they do that.”

NPC had initially made it a top priority to lobby for a voluntary GMO labeling standard, introduced by Rep. Mike Pompeo, R-Kan., but that bill failed to gain traction in Congress.

NPC President Jim Tiede, of American Falls, Idaho, lobbied for the current bill with leaders from the major U.S. commodities, including corn and soybeans, in a July 7 meeting with House Agriculture Committee Chairman Michael Conway, R-Texas.

Tiede said Conway “apologized profusely” that the voluntary labeling bill failed, but agricultural interests agree the new bill is still “a good compromise.”

Ashton, Idaho, potato farmer Britt Raybould, who chairs NPC's Legislative and Government Affairs Committee, said suppliers had already started pulling products from Vermont shelves. Raybould supports the bill's definition of a GMO crop, noting it regulates the introduction of traits from one organism into another but omits promising new “gene editing” techniques that don't introduce foreign DNA.

Furthermore, the bill doesn't require labeling of ingredients derived from GMO crops in which all traces of GMO traits are removed in processing, such as beet sugar.

“Food companies now can breathe a bit easier,” said Luther Markwart, executive vice president of American Sugarbeet Growers Association. “They're not going to have to do different sourcing of ingredients and drive up consumer food prices over a ridiculous Vermont bill.”

National Organic Coalition officials said in a press release the bill avoids “fully transparent, on-package labels” and includes no enforcement provisions or penalties.

The vast majority of U.S. sugar beets are genetically engineered to withstand glyphosate herbicide. Idaho-based J.R. Simplot Co. is in the early stages of marketing the only commercially available GMO spud, called Innate.

“This bill blocks Vermont's law and gives USDA two additional years to set labeling rules under this weak and meaningless framework,” the coalition's press release reads.

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