

# Washington records year's first West Nile virus case

Mare in Yakima County sick, but may live

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

A 2-year-old Andalusian mixed-breed mare in Grandview in Yakima County, Wash., has been sickened by West Nile virus, the state Department

of Agriculture announced Monday.

The horse is the first infected by the virus this year in Washington, which last year had more equine cases of the disease than any other state.

The virus, spread by mosquitoes that have fed on infected birds, typically begins showing up in horses in late July or early August.

The infected horse was not vaccinated for the disease and

was stumbling and had trouble eating, according to the WSDA.

WSDA field veterinarian Thomas Gilliom said Monday that the horse was still alive and may recover.

Gilliom said he expected the virus to sicken horses for several more months. The disease is fatal to horses in about one-third of the cases in which the animal shows signs of illness.

"I'm going to assume

we're going to have quite a few horses infected," he said. "Sadly, a lot of people seem to not put much stock in vaccinating their horses, for whatever reason."

WSDA identified 36 horses with the virus in 2015, the most in Washington since 73 horses were sickened in 2009. All cases were in Eastern Washington.

In addition, 24 humans were infected by the virus. No humans have contracted

the disease this year, according to the state Department of Health.

Mosquitoes trapped this summer in Adams, Benton, Grant, Franklin and Yakima counties have tested positive for West Nile virus.

"It's never too late to vaccinate your horse for West Nile virus," Gilliom said. "We've had cooler days, but when hot summer days return, the risks of mosquito bites will increase."

Besides vaccination, horse owners can protect their animals by limiting exposure to mosquitoes, especially by eliminating standing water.

Veterinarians who learn of potential West Nile virus cases in horses or other animals should contact the State Veterinarian's Office at (360) 902-1878.

The USDA in 2015 tallied 225 cases of West Nile virus in horses nationwide.

# Potato researcher warns of new disease threat

By JOHN O'CONNELL  
Capital Press

PARK CITY, Utah — A plant pathologist has advised the potato industry to prioritize research and testing to combat a new threat to U.S. spud production — the bacterial pathogen *dickeya dianthicola*.

University of Wisconsin Associate Professor Amy Charkowski, who also directs Wisconsin's seed potato certification program, told growers at the National Potato Council's summer meeting *dickeya* caused heavy damage to spud fields throughout the East Coast in 2015 and has been troublesome again this season.

Charkowski said the pathogen has posed a major challenge to European potato production since the 1950s, but it didn't surface in the U.S. until the fall of 2014, when a sample from the Northeast tested positive. It's since been confirmed in most of the major potato states, including Idaho, North Dakota, Texas, New Mexico, Indiana, Ohio, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, New York, New Jersey, Maryland, Maine and Florida. It's also been found in Canada in New Brunswick and Ontario.

"If it gets too entrenched in the seed system, it could be a real problem," Charkowski said. "I'm really worried about seed testing right now. We don't have the capacity to test in our system."

Charkowski said the bacteria can survive in irrigation water and thrives in warm, humid environments and poorly ventilated potato cellars. She said *dickeya* is easily confused with its close relative, *pectobacterium*, which is common in states including Idaho and causes similar "black leg" symptoms, including curling and wilting leaves, low emergence and stem-base rot.

Charkowski said *dickeya* symptoms may remain latent, and it takes fewer *dickeya* bacteria to infect a plant. Both pathogens need an open wound to infect tissue.

No resistant commercial varieties have been developed. Fortunately, European researchers say the pathogen doesn't tend to survive longer than nine months in soil, and it can be effectively controlled by good sanitation practices, Charkowski said.

Charkowski said a researcher from Scotland has been working with Maine growers to understand *dickeya*, and she and several colleagues applied for a grant to work with him as a consultant. She'd also like funding to research environmental conditions that favor *dickeya* and how to keep *dickeya* from spreading on seed cutters, believing seed is the primary way the disease spreads. She would also like to see seed certification programs single out black leg in test results.

University of Idaho Extension potato storage specialist Nora Olsen spotted symptoms of *dickeya* at the Kimberly Research and Extension Center in 2015, after learning of it during a meeting with Maine growers. The center's samples tested positive, along with about six other samples subsequently submitted that season by commercial growers, she said. Charkowski said her lab tested a positive sample from an Idaho commercial potato farm this season.



Courtesy of Amy Charkowski  
University of Wisconsin plant pathologist Amy Charkowski.

Idaho Potato Commissioner Ritchey Toevs, of Aberdeen, advocates *dickeya* testing of nuclear and first-generation seed as part of his state's seed certification program, using samples growers must already submit for ring rot testing. Though

Toevs acknowledges Idaho's conditions appear to be unfavorable for widespread *dickeya*, he noted, "We see problems come up so quickly, and you don't know which ones are big threats and which ones you can live with."

# No progress made on Idaho field burning changes

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

BOISE — An EPA official's proposal to solve a disagreement between Idaho farm and environmental groups over proposed changes to the state's field burning program was not accepted during a negotiated rulemaking meeting July 20.

The two sides left the meeting far apart on proposed program changes that Idaho Department of Environmental Quality officials say are necessary to avoid a large reduction in the number of allowable field burning days for Idaho farmers.

Patti Gora-McRavin, who represents clean air advocates in the negotiations, said the lack of progress made during the meeting and the failure to agree on the EPA official's idea was a huge disappointment.

"I'm frankly stunned at the way the meeting ended up," she said. "I'm super disappointed about what didn't happen today."

DEQ can only approve a burn request when ozone and small particulate matter levels aren't expected to exceed 75 percent of the national standard for those air pollutants in a 24-hour period.

EPA tightened the federal ozone standard in October, which would result in the number of allowable burn days for Idaho farmers being reduced by a third to half, according to DEQ estimates.



Submitted photo

A farm field is burned to control diseases and eradicate pests in this undated Idaho Department of Environmental Quality photo. Idaho farm and environmental groups appear far apart on proposed changes to the state's field burning program.

To prevent that, DEQ has proposed loosening Idaho's ozone standard to 90 percent of the federal standard. Environmental and public health groups want an equal tightening of the small particulate matter, or PM 2.5, standard, to maintain current public health protections.

That would mean tightening Idaho's PM 2.5 standard to 60 percent of the federal standard, something farm groups are opposed to and something DEQ's proposal does not do.

Mike McGown, EPA's regional smoke management coordinator and a member of the advisory committee, last week floated the idea of leaving the current 75 percent standard in place for all pollutants, unless ozone levels are expected to exceed that level. In that case, DEQ would reconsider the burn

decision based on the criteria of the ozone standard being 90 percent of the federal standard and the PM 2.5 standard being 60 percent.

But farm group representatives oppose lowering the PM 2.5 standard that much and said McGown's idea doesn't address the main issue, the percentage changes. They are also concerned that EPA, which is reviewing the federal PM standard, will soon tighten that standard as well.

With the likelihood of EPA tightening the PM 2.5 standard, "There's a level of unease taking that drastic of a cut," Idaho Grain Producers Association Executive Director Stacey Katseanes-Satterlee said about public health groups' desire to lower the PM standard to 60 percent.

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