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# Idaho



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

Vineyard owner and bee scientist Ron Bitner stands in front of his Caldwell, Idaho, vineyard on Aug. 19. Bitner has teamed up with two people from the semiconductor industry to try to create solutions for farmers.

## ‘Geeks meet dirt’ as company seeks farm solutions

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

CALDWELL, Idaho — A new company that matches the Idaho’s farm and hi-tech industries hopes to develop solutions that will save farmers money and boost productivity.

The company, Kairosys, matches the agricultural knowledge of vineyard owner and bee scientist Ron Bitner with the technological savvy of two former employees of Boise-based Micron Technology, a global leader in the semiconductor industry. Tony Brower has 20 years of diverse experience in the semiconductor industry, including in business planning and data base access, and Jai Jaiprakash, an engineer, is an expert in the use of sensors and product development.

The company’s motto is, “Geeks meet dirt,” and Bitner believes it has the ability to solve many problems farmers face by making sense of the large amounts of information being collected on the farm and figuring out how it can be used to benefit farmers.

“People are collecting thousands of points of data but what does it mean?” he said. “That’s what Jay’s background is: taking all of that historical data (and) looking for trends.”

The company’s first project is developing an app that uses sensors placed in leaf-cutter bee incubators to predict when the bees will hatch for the alfalfa seed industry.

“That way, a farmer can predict pretty accurately when his bees are going to hatch and how long he can hold them if the weather’s cold or if he has to spray,” said Bitner, who has four

decades of experience in the alfalfa seed industry.

During the spring, alfalfa seed growers have about \$100,000 worth of bees in incubators “and they just can’t hardly sleep at night,” Bitner said. “But if they have something tracking the bees for them, it’s just insurance for them. We’re trying to help them time the release of their bees and user fewer bees.”

He expects to have the app developed by next spring.

“We have to work out the details (but) farmers are ready for it,” he said. “We already have people asking for it.”

The company is also studying bloom times in alfalfa seed and how it ties in with the bees, as well as bug counts in seed fields to determine how chemicals affect them.

More projects will follow, Bitner said.

Kairosys is also partnering with USDA researchers to see how its technology can be used to help the nation’s honeybee industry.

Matt Borud, chief business development officer for the Idaho Department of Commerce, said Kairosys is exactly what former IDC Director Jeff Sayer had in mind when he kicked off an effort last year to bring the state’s ag and tech sectors together to create jobs and solve problems for farmers.

“I think it’s the poster child example,” he said. “It’s exactly the type of venture Jeff had in mind and we think there are still plenty more opportunities like this out there.”

He said current IDC Director Megan Ronk shares Sayer’s vision of turning Idaho into a Silicon Valley of agricultural technology.

# Late grain planting in Idaho could check barley disease

By JOHN O’CONNELL  
Capital Press

IDAHO FALLS — A late start to planting fall grains in Eastern Idaho and the Magic Valley should reduce the risk of rampant barley yellow dwarf virus, according to University of Idaho Extension cereal experts.

Further improving the outlook for growers in Eastern Idaho: Recent frosts in the region have killed aphids, which spread the disease, said UI Extension cereal pathologist Juliet Marshall.

Magic Valley, however, still awaits a killing frost, and aphid populations remain extremely high, said Jerome County Extension educator Steve Hines.

“I’ve seen aphid pressure in this valley like I’ve never seen it before,” Hines said. “Growers have had aphids in everything.”

Hines said many growers in his region opted to cut hay early to displace the aphids, and area corn crops this fall have been “loaded” with aphids.

“It would not surprise me to see some barley yellow dwarf this spring if we get a long, warm fall,” Hines said.

The good news, Hines said, is that the valley’s growers appear to be taking precautions against the disease, planting fall grain as late as possible to minimize aphid exposure.

“I have not seen many planters rolling yet, so I think producers are taking to heart late planting,” Hines said on Oct. 10, adding he expected growers to start planting within the week, before the scheduled end of irrigation deliveries.

Hines said his region experienced some barley yellow dwarf this season, though plants were healthy enough to outgrow the symptoms.

He said growers also had some fusarium headblight and more widespread stripe rust, though he believes disease pressure was greater this season in Eastern Idaho.

Marshall said barley yellow dwarf, which stunts the development of plant roots, was widespread throughout Eastern Idaho early this season, but ideal growing conditions helped crops recover and avoid significant yield losses.

She said recent rainfall in Eastern Idaho has delayed planting of fall grain, protecting growers from aphid exposure.

“We’re probably better off to be holding off here, anyway,” said Aberdeen farmer Ritchey Tovey, who was delayed from planting by at least a week but finds



John O’Connell/Capital Press

Fall grain is planted in southeast Idaho. Cereal experts say a late start to fall planting should help reduce the risk of diseases such as barley yellow dwarf virus.

late-planted fall grain tends to fare better.

Headblight, a fungal disease that led to significant losses in both Idaho wheat and barley last season, also wasn’t much of a problem this season, Marshall said. She said headblight thrives in hot and moist conditions, and the summer brought little moisture and moderate temperatures.

However, another fungal disease, stripe rust, fared well in the mild and dry weather, and was especially devastating within susceptible varieties.

Marshall said that in a UI experiment conducted in Aberdeen this season, a plot planted to the susceptible variety Brundage, and treated with a single early fungicide application at the same time

ing as herbicide spray, yielded just 20 bushels per acre.

Fortunately, Marshall said dry weather following grain harvest and prior to planting killed volunteers and other weeds that could sustain fungal spores as a “green bridge.”

“I don’t think it will be a good year for stripe rust to overwinter her,” Marshall said.

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