

WSU announces ag dean search committee members

Provost hopes to interview finalists in April

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Several ag industry representatives are on the search committee that will hire the next dean of Washington State University's agriculture college.

The university recently announced the members of the committee, tasked to find the dean of the College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences.

Committee members represent-

ing agriculture include Jay Gordon, executive director of the Washington Dairy Federation; Mike Miller, chairman of the Washington Grain Commission; and Mike Willett, manager of the Washington State Tree Fruit Commission.

"We're going to be wanting to see somebody who is familiar and comfortable reaching out to agriculture, out on the farms, getting out and understanding the sheer volume of exports our state produces," Gordon said.

Miller said the next dean will help WSU position itself for the next 25 years as a leading agriculture college in the U.S.

"You have to rely on leadership to take you to the next level," he said. "They've assembled a dream team below that, with some of the best researchers around. Now they just have to fill that position to go forward."

Current dean Ron Mittelhammer was appointed to a two-year term in 2014, after a year as interim dean.

Provost Dan Bernardo hopes to interview finalists in April and have a new dean identified shortly after. CAHNRS is one of the "most important and largest" colleges at WSU, he said.

"Developing a search commit-

tee for that college is complex, to say the least," Bernardo said. "We have 14 academic departments, four research and extension centers, Extension with three departments of their own as well as faculty in 39 counties, faculty on three different campuses — that just represents the internal component of the process. And then obviously, we have a wide array of interested and valuable stakeholders whose input we would like to have as well."

University representatives on the search committee include Ian Burke, associate professor of weed science; Scot Hulbert, chairman of

the Department of Plant Pathology; Dorrie Main, associate professor of bioinformatics; Chad Kruger, director of the Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center; and Holly Neibergs, associate professor in the Department of Animal Sciences.

"We understand the significance and the importance of this position to continue to move us forward in our relationship with Washington's food and agriculture industry," Bernardo said. "We are certainly looking for somebody who appreciates that and will continue the work we've done over the past decade."



John O'Connell/Capital Press

A truck is loaded Nov. 8 at Scoular's Bancroft elevator with dryland wheat being shipped to feeders due to low protein content. Much of the dryland crop in Southern and Eastern Idaho will be used as feed this year.

Low protein pushes Idaho dryland wheat to feeders

By **JOHN O'CONNELL**
Capital Press

ARBON VALLEY, Idaho — Grain merchandisers in Southern and Eastern Idaho say upwards of half of the regional dryland wheat production has been sold into feeder channels, due to widespread problems with low protein levels.

In a typical year, buyers would blend low-protein wheat with high-quality grain and sell it to millers.

But there's a glut of wheat on the market now, and prices of milling wheat are so low, growers are finding they can get a better deal by selling their wheat for feed once discounts for low protein are factored in, explained Denis Capson, an Eastern Idaho merchandiser with Scoular.

With so much good wheat to choose from, Capson said, feedlots are being more selective and have been turning away wheat with a low test weight, which they would normally buy. In the American Falls and Aberdeen area, Capson said feed wheat is selling for \$3.40 per bushel.

"We're moving huge volumes of feed wheat — a couple of hundred thousand bushels per month (in Eastern Idaho)," Capson said.

According to an Oct. 9 USDA report, projected U.S. ending wheat stocks for 2016-2017 are 1.14 billion bushels, compared with ending stocks of 752 million bushels from the 2014-2015 season.

"The mills are filling up quickly," Capson said, adding a decline in exports has contributed to the surplus.

For several reasons, the region's dryland growers had an especially hard time meeting protein benchmarks this season. Arbon Valley dry-

land grower Hans Hayden explained his yields were up 25 to 50 percent, leaving less nitrogen for each kernel. Nitrogen is needed to boost protein levels, and irrigated growers have the advantage of applying nitrogen throughout the season in their water. Hayden also suspects a lack of summer rain prevented nitrogen from moving deeper into the soil profile to plant root zones.

Hayden had hard red winter wheat protein levels at 8 percent — buyers start to discount below 11.5 to 12 percent — but he had enough good spring grain to blend up his protein levels to just meet milling standards.

"Most of my neighbors found the price at the feedlot better than the price at the mill," Hayden said.

Arbon Valley dryland grower Ken Campbell sold about 90 percent of his wheat to feeders.

"They're giving me a better price, and you don't have to make grade," Campbell said.

Soda Springs dryland grower Sid Cellan sold 30 percent of his crop as feed.

"It was protein levels that caused me to sell for feed," Cellan said, adding his spring crop had much lower protein than his fall crop. "I had great yields, and that is probably why protein was so low."

For feedlot owners such as Dwayne Skaar, of Lewisville, an ample supply of feed wheat cuts costs significantly. His ration is typically half wheat and half corn.

"We can get wheat in there cheaper than corn because of the freight," said Skaar, who buys corn mostly from the Midwest and is now feeding his cattle locally sourced soft white wheat.

WAFLA hires COO, opens training center

By **DAN WHEAT**
Capital Press

KENNEWICK, Wash. — The state's largest farm labor association, WAFLA, has hired a new chief operating officer and opened a new office and training center in Kennewick.

Both moves are intended to help the former Washington Farm Labor Association with its exponential growth as the largest H-2A visa guestworker provider on the West Coast.

George Zanatta left his position as CEO of Atkinson Staffing, an agricultural and industrial labor contractor in Washington and Oregon, to become COO of WAFLA on Nov. 1. He continues to live in Kennewick and operates WAFLA's new office and training center at 3180 W. Clearwater Ave.

"George has previous COO experience as well as he is a very experienced bilingual trainer, among many other traits that are important to WAFLA in our mission for growth and serving members' needs," said Kimberly Bresler, a WAFLA spokeswoman.

"We are excited to have him on board with us," she said.

WAFLA will host an open house at the new center from 3 to 6 p.m. Dec. 1. The 2,200-square-foot facility includes audio-visual equipment, a video studio and space to train groups of 50 or more workers and growers.

The facility is closer to the majority of WAFLA's more than 800 members and 160 client contracts, Zanatta said.



Dan Wheat/Capital Press

George Zanatta, right, talks with a conference attendee at last February's WAFLA labor conference. He's now WAFLA's new COO.

It can also be used by members for their training.

WAFLA hired about 10,000 H-2A workers in 2016 for growers, most of whom are in Washington but are also in Oregon and Idaho.

"We plan to bring in 12,000 in 2017 and our goal is 25,000 — maybe 50,000 as we grow into other states," Zanatta said.

"My job is to lay the foundation for a system strong enough to accommodate that," he said.

A new pilot program next year is complete worker management for a couple of small growers, he said. WAFLA will handle applications, recruitment, transportation, housing, payroll and in-field supervision, he said.

Zanatta, 58, was born and

raised in Mexico, obtained a degree in business administration from the University of Mexico in 1978 and said he came to the U.S. illegally for business opportunities in the 1980s.

He gained legal status through the Simpson-Mazzoli Act of 1986 and spent years in manufacturing, import-export and advertising, he said. He has done business consulting and coaching through his firm, Results Oriented Strategies, in Las Vegas and later Kennewick.

Zanatta was a motivational speaker at WAFLA's annual labor conference in Ellensburg, Wash., last February. Any consulting or coaching he does now will be through his position with WAFLA, he said.

Dan Fazio will continue as WAFLA CEO from the association's headquarters near Olympia. Zanatta will help Fazio with the processing and tracking of H-2A applications with state and federal agencies and coordinating recruitment, transportation and orientation of workers, most of whom come from Mexico. He will help with training and mock compliance audits.

Heri Chapula, WAFLA field services director, also will work in the new Kennewick center. He previously managed WAFLA's 96-bed Ringold Seasonal Farmworker Housing southwest of Basin City. Greg Vazquez, member relations manager, is in WAFLA's Yakima, Wash., office.

Researcher makes first finding of disease strain in Idaho spuds

By **JOHN O'CONNELL**
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — A researcher has confirmed the Idaho potato industry's first known infection of a strain of the fungal pathogen *Rhizoctonia solani* that thrives in rotations with crops in the brassica family.

University of Idaho plant pathologist James Woodhall found the infected tuber while digging spud samples in Ada County, scouting for a bacterial disease affecting potatoes called zebra chip.

Woodhall said the potato showed symptoms of *Rhizoctonia*, but he was surprised when it tested positive for the AG2-1 strain, which he researched while working in England. Though AG2-1 had never previously been identi-

fied in an Idaho potato field, Woodhall suspects it's been present in the state for a long time but had gone unnoticed.

It's also present in potatoes in other states.

Woodhall acknowledged AG3 — the strain that causes more than 70 percent of Idaho's *Rhizoctonia* infections — is far more aggressive than AG2-1 in potatoes. Nonetheless, he worries AG2-1 may be cutting into yields of rotations that include brassicas such as mustard and canola before potatoes.

AG2-1 tends to cause more stem canker lesions on potato plants than AG3, but less black scurf, which is a black fungus that can't be washed from skin.

Rough skin, resembling an elephant hide, is also a general symptom of *Rhizoctonia*,

which attacks roots and can cause potatoes to drop setting tubers.

"Brassicas in the rotation may increase soil levels of it, leading to higher levels of stem canker and elephant hide in potato crops," Woodhall said. "It could explain why sometimes we get higher levels of stem canker but do not see much black scurf, since AG2-1 sometimes causes very aggressive stem canker, more so than AG3."

Idaho potato growers are increasingly planting mustard in potato rotations — both as a cover crop and a commercial crop — to take advantage of the brassica's ability to create a natural fumigant.

Woodhall advises growers who suspect they may have AG2-1 to avoid brassicas in those fields. Woodhall be-

lieves Idaho should consider an extensive survey of *Rhizoctonia* strains to assess the situation.

"We don't know how prevalent it is in Idaho where it's a one-off find," Woodhall said.

UI Extension potato pathologist Phil Wharton said extreme *Rhizoctonia* infection levels in his research trials have reduced yields by up to 30 percent, but even light infections can skew the tuber size profile to make crops less marketable.

Wharton said the disease is most prevalent when growers plant early to increase yields, when soil temperatures are below 55 degrees.

"The longer it takes for plants to emerge, the more chance there is for *Rhizoctonia* to infect the stem," Wharton said.

U.S. Wheat Associates names Peterson as new president

New leader hopes to build bridge to next generation

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

A 31-year veteran of U.S. Wheat Associates will assume the marketing organization's top executive position next summer.

Vince Peterson will become president of U.S. Wheat in July. He succeeds current president Alan Tracy, who will retire.

Peterson is currently vice president of overseas operations.

"Wheat has been my career since I got out of college," he told the Capital

Press. "It's in my blood and it's more than a job, it's really part of my life."

Peterson said he believes the organization is currently in a good position, as well-placed as it's ever been.

"What I'd like to do when I leave U.S. Wheat is have it in the strong hands of a bunch of bright, young, energetic people who can carry the torch out into the next generation," he said. "I'm looking at myself as that bridge into the next younger group that's going to carry it forward into the next decade or two."

In his current position, Peterson directs 50 overseas offices and 60 people employed outside the U.S.

The primary markets for

U.S. wheat have moved out of the Middle East as competition from Black Sea nations has grown.

Sales are now growing in Latin America and around the Pacific Rim of Asia.

"Our money focus is changing, our personnel allocation and resources are changing, and that will continue because that's the direction the marketplace is taking us," Peterson said.

The U.S. Wheat board of directors unanimously selected Peterson.

Past chairman Brian O'Toole, a farmer in Crystal, N.D., said in a press release that Peterson was the most qualified person for the position.

Ritzville, Wash., wheat

farmer Mike Miller, who will become chairman in July, said Peterson's selection "solidifies" the organization's future.

"Vince is known around the world for his understanding of world economies and grain markets," Miller said. "He has enormous respect, from governments to bakers and millers and wheat buyers, the whole grain chain."

U.S. Wheat promotes overseas consumption and demand for the wheat grown by U.S. farmers.

Miller said some farmers don't necessarily understand how important it is to have representatives overseas.

"In order for us to protect, maintain and grow

new markets, the work Vince will provide through his leadership and overseas staff — we as farmers actually see those benefits in our bottom line," Miller said.

Peterson said he will continue to foster a dialogue between growers, the board and staff.

Since he spends so much time considering the markets, what's his outlook on price?

"If I wanted to be a little facetious, I'd say I might be coming in as president at the lowest price point of the last four years," Peterson said. "Maybe I could be bold enough to say, I think the price is going to be better by the time I finish."



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File
Vince Peterson, vice president of overseas operations for U.S. Wheat Associates, talks with members of the Idaho, Oregon and Washington wheat and grain commissions on Nov. 11, 2015, in Spokane. Peterson will assume the presidency of U.S. Wheat in July.