



EARLY WARNING SYSTEM



Spore samplers give farmers an upper hand

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — Change is in the air for farmers who battle wind-borne diseases that attack their crops, costing them millions of dollars each year in lost production and added expenses.

Plant pathologist James Woodhall, working with other researchers, has acquired four cutting-edge instruments that sniff out airborne spores in farm fields.

Woodhall, who works for the University of Idaho Extension, believes the data he collects will provide growers with the information they need to treat for crop diseases even before symptoms surface, saving them a fortune



James Woodhall

in chemical applications and improving disease control.

"We're currently spraying with little or no knowledge of if spores are in the air," Woodhall said. "They'll spray based on historical occurrence, but things vary year to year."

With industry support, he hopes to grow the network of spore samplers in the coming years to give farmers in each region a more comprehensive look at the threats that are blowing in the wind.

Each sampler costs about \$4,500.

Woodhall, a native of England who has been at UI about a year, believes the variety of diseases he plans to target will set his work

apart from other research projects using spore samplers. Plans are already in the works to use spore samplers for early detection of diseases that attack potatoes, barley, wheat, sugar beets, beans, onions, oilseeds, grapes and hops.

How it works

A spore sampler is similar to a vacuum cleaner, sucking in air and capturing spores in a vial. Airborne spores can spread many diseases from infected plants, which are often far away.

The spore DNA is then extracted and identified using an advanced diagnostic technique called real-time polymerase chain reaction,

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Courtesy of Oregon State University
Walt Mahaffee, a USDA Agricultural Research Service plant pathologist who is also on the Oregon State University faculty, and graduate student Lindsey Thiessen pick a vineyard location to set up a spore trap.

New ODA director tackles issues from farm bill to GMOs

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

SALEM — With the 2014 Farm Bill expiring next year, agriculture leaders are already preparing for the struggle over its successor.

Alexis Taylor, the Oregon Department of Agriculture's new director, is no stranger to farm bill negotiations.



Alexis Taylor

She helped work on the 2008 and 2014 versions of the legislation as a congressional staffer before being hired by USDA, where she most recently served as Deputy Under Secretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services.

Barely a week into her new role as ODA's chief, Taylor headed back to Washington, D.C. to meet with her counterparts at a policy meeting of the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture.

Taylor said the 2018 Farm Bill is expected to be a prime subject of conversation at the meeting, which took place Jan. 30 to Feb. 1.

It's too early to tell what changes are in store for the monumental piece of farm legislation, particularly in light of uncertainties about federal budget priorities, she said.

In the 2014 Farm Bill, Congress moved away from traditional farm subsidies and toward greater reliance on the federal crop insurance program.

Taylor said she expects this trend to continue, with crop insurance serving as the "cornerstone" of farm programs for commodity crops and playing a larger role in support for specialty crops.

"It's not a one-size-fits-all," Taylor said during a meeting with Capital Press.

Farm bill negotiations have grown increasingly contentious in the past decade. The 2008 Farm Bill took a year longer to enact than expected, and the 2014 Farm Bill went into effect two years after its predecessor expired.

Now that Republicans control the Senate, the House of Representatives and the White House, though, some expect the process to be less turbulent.

Trade relations was to be another hot topic at the NAS-DA meeting, particularly with the questions that loom over the Trump administration policies, Taylor said.

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Oregon hazelnut crop soars

2016 crop is 40 percent larger than previous year

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Oregon saw a major upswing in hazelnut production in 2016, with growers harvesting 40 percent more nuts than the previous year.

At 43,300 tons, the state's

hazelnut crop also outperformed the USDA's projection by 14 percent.

The situation is a big improvement over 2015, when the crop's size fell 25 percent short of the USDA's estimate.

Even so, experts say the uncertainty complicates the Oregon ha-

zelnut industry's sales planning.

"For the processors and the handlers, knowing what that crop is makes it much easier to market it worldwide," said Garry Rodakowski, a hazelnut farmer near Vida, Ore.

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Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press

Hazelnuts are processed at the Willamette Hazelnut Growers facility in Newberg, Ore., in this Capital Press file photo. Oregon's 2016 hazelnut crop increase roughly 40 percent from the previous year.

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