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Idaho

S.E. Idaho growers brace for stripe rust pressure

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

AMERICAN FALLS, Idaho — Cereal crop experts have discovered stripe rust infections in three areas of southeast Idaho and warn that cool, wet weather could result in heavy disease pressure this season.

"Last year was a moderate year for stripe rust, but the susceptible varieties were hit hard," said University of Idaho Extension cereals pathologist Juliet Marshall. "I suspect higher disease pressure this year."

Marshall said the potentially devastating fungal disease, spread by orange and yellow airborne spores, has been widespread in Logan, Utah, with infections continuing north into Preston, Idaho.

Stripe rust has also been reported in the Seagull Bay area near American Falls Reservoir and in Arbon Valley.

"If it's locally established very early in the season, there's a higher chance of it exploding," Marshall said. "Our (recent) cool, wet weather and cool nights are really good for stripe rust to continue to expand."

In recent weeks, Marshall said stripe rust has spread into California, Oregon and Washington, and heavier spore loads could soon blow into Idaho.

Marshall said no stripe rust has been found yet in UI cereal variety trials in Aberdeen and Teton.

About a month ago, Chris Merrigan, a crop consultant with J.R. Simplot, Co., confirmed stripe rust in a field in the Seagull Bay area near American Falls Reservoir. Merrigan said between 10 and 20 percent of the irrigated field, planted in a resistant wheat variety, was infected.

However, Merrigan said the field was planted to wheat for consecutive seasons, elevating the infection risk, and he doesn't believe a fungicidal seed treatment was used. Merrigan said spring grain growers still have time to mix fungicides with their herbicide sprays to prevent the spread of stripe rust, and he urges them to do so.

Lonnie Sparks, a crop consultant with CHS Bingham Cooperative, identified stripe rust in downy brome growing between two irrigated spring wheat fields in Arbon Valley. Based on the discovery, Sparks said the grower mixed fungicide with herbicide used on fall wheat fields planted to a susceptible variety, Brundage, and plans to spray fungicides on his spring wheat as well. Sparks also advised the grower to kill the weeds with a mixture of glyphosate herbicide and fungicide.

Marshall said she's beginning to see cases of root rot in fall wheat fields that were heavily saturated with moisture, as well as pythium outbreaks in spring wheat. Pythium is a water mold that thrives when crops are planted in cool, wet soils, and can cause heavy damage to newly emerging crops with undeveloped root systems.

The good news, Marshall said, is that barley yellow dwarf virus doesn't appear to be widespread in Idaho this year, as it has been during the past few seasons. Marshall said the virus, which is spread by aphids, has been confirmed in a few fall barley fields in the Murtaugh, Rupert and Burley areas. She believes growers have minimized the spread by delaying planting of fall crops until aphid migrations have passed and by using insecticidal seed treatments.

Change in Idaho's fugitive dust law protects ag

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Since the Idaho Legislature approved a change to Idaho's fugitive dust law in 2015, no one has been fined for creating dust while engaged in agriculture-related activities.

In the three years before the rule change, six people were fined by the Idaho Department of Environmental Quality for creating dust while working on farms or ranches. Those fines ranged from \$1,200 to \$4,300. The law allows for penalties of up to \$10,000.

No enforcement actions have been taken against people for creating dust while conducting agricultural activities since the new rule was approved in 2015, said Tiffany Floyd, who manages DEQ's air quality division.

"The added clarification under the 'rules for control of fugitive dust for agricultural activities' appears to have addressed the concerns of the ag



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

A dry bean field is harvested near Nampa, Idaho, last September. No one has been fined for creating dust while engaged in agricultural activities since the Idaho Legislature changed the state's fugitive dust law in 2015.

industry," she said. "The clarity has proven to be beneficial to them and to DEQ."

Idaho farm groups got involved in the issue in 2013 after learning that a southwestern Idaho farmer was fined for creating dust on his property.

Before that, they weren't aware of the state's 1972 fugitive dust law, which requires that all reasonable precautions

be taken to prevent particulate matter from becoming airborne.

The law states that if a farmer or rancher operates in accordance with generally recognized agricultural practices, that constitutes reasonable control of fugitive dust.

But farm groups and DEQ differed somewhat over what generally accepted farm prac-

tices were.

For example, the southwestern Idaho farmer who brought the issue to light was fined for creating dust while grinding grain at a feedlot, a common practice.

DEQ and farm groups agreed to define common agricultural practices. The definitions were largely taken from Idaho's Right to Farm Act.

The list includes preparing land for agricultural production, applying or handling pesticides, herbicides or other chemicals, planting, irrigating, growing, fertilizing, harvesting or producing agricultural, horticultural, floricultural and viticultural crops.

It also includes breeding, hatching, raising, producing, feeding and keeping livestock, dairy animals, swine, fur-bearing animals, poultry, eggs, fish and other animals, animal products and by-products, animal waste and compost and bees.

The rule allows the Idaho State Department of Agricul-

ture, if there is uncertainty, to determine whether an activity is a generally recognized agricultural practice.

Ag groups involved in the negotiations that led to the dust rule change told Capital Press they haven't heard of any of their members being fined or bothered for creating dust since.

"I haven't had anybody from industry say they have had any issues with DEQ," said Roger Batt, executive director of the Idaho Heartland Coalition, which includes several farming groups. "We came to a real good agreement on that. I think it's resolved the issue."

Russ Hendricks, director of governmental affairs for Idaho Farm Bureau Federation, said his organization isn't aware of any of its members being bothered for creating dust since 2015.

"It appears to be working well and we are appreciative of DEQ for making the necessary adjustments," he said.

Farmers seek referendum on planned community

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — Farmers and other residents of the Dry Creek Valley just north of Boise are fighting a proposed planned community that would eliminate 1,400 acres of prime farmland.

The \$100 million development has been approved by Ada County commissioners but opponents have turned to a little-known section of Idaho Code to try to overturn that decision through a public vote.

Idaho Code 31-717 provides a mechanism by which people who gather a certain number of signatures can put a county decision to a vote of the people. The section allows for "people at an election to approve or reject legislation adopted by the board of county commissioners."

Stephanie Rael, a local farm hand, submitted the initial 20 signatures necessary to prompt a county review of the petition for a special election. If approved, she and others who oppose the project will have 180 days to collect the estimated 40,000 signatures it will take to prompt an election.

Brian Ertz, an attorney who lives in that area, is assisting those opposed to the development with free legal advice.

Idaho Code "allows any ordinance passed by a county, which is legislative in nature, to be subject to a referendum," Ertz said. "The mechanism ... really hasn't been used in Idaho."

Dry Creek Ranch is a pro-

posed development about 5 miles north of Boise that would include 1,800 homes and 85,000 square feet of commercial space on what farmers in the area say is some of the best soil in the county.

"I've never farmed on land in my whole life that is so nice," said Justin Moore, co-owner of Fiddler's Green Farm. "It seems kind of foolish to take that away."

He said he understands the region is growing fast and people have to live somewhere.

"But does it necessarily have to be here?" he said. "It would be nice to preserve this unique soil and farming area here. It's really special agricultural land."

Since the original development application was approved in 2010, the developer, number of houses and square footage of commercial space have changed, according to a website, savedrycreek.org, that was created by opponents of the plan.

The county this year approved an amendment to the original plan but opponents of the development believe the developer, Boise Hunter Homes, should have been required to submit a new plan.

Rael said the commission signed an ordinance that changed certain conditions in the original development agreement.

"According to our understanding, that is a piece of legislation and subject to the referendum process," she said.

She said if the county doesn't approve opponents' petition for a referendum, they are prepared to challenge that decision.



John O'Connell/Capital Press

Blake Isaacs, left, visits with Idaho State University microbiology professor Peter Sheridan at Sheridan's lab on May 12. Sheridan has obtained a state grant to test a machine Isaacs sells that removes airborne pathogens from potato storage.

Grant funds research in potato storage sensors, filtration system

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

POCATELLO, Idaho — An Idaho State University researcher has obtained a grant to evaluate a filter-less machine that removes airborne pathogens from potato storage while humidifying the air.

Blake Isaacs, CEO of Blackfoot-based Isaacs Hydropermutation Technologies, said his father, Garry, invented the concept of humigation in 1985, and the company's engineering staff has worked during the past three years to make the machines more compact, affordable and effective.

ISU microbiology professor Peter Sheridan will start testing humigators beginning June 5, releasing yeast cells into a sealed room and then growing them out on cultures to compare populations before and after treatments. They'll also evaluate the efficacy of humigators in conjunction with an ultraviolet light, which now comes on the machines to kill additional pathogens.

Another grant will aid Boise State University researchers who plan to collaborate on the experiment to assess the sensitivity of paper-thin sensors they've developed to

detect the metabolic signatures of pathogens in potato storages.

BSU, working with Emerson Electronics, hopes its network of sensors will precisely identify locations of pathogen "hot spots" in storage.

The Idaho Department of Commerce's Idaho Global Entrepreneurial Mission grant — which awards funds to state universities working with industry partners to further technologies — recently approved about \$414,000 for the ISU and BSU projects, with about \$190,000 going toward the humigation research.

Humigation relies on the Venturi effect. Air is run through a chamber with constrictions of varying sizes, creating low-pressure zones. In the absence of pressure, water introduced into the chamber atomizes into tiny droplets, which absorb airborne particles that are captured in the dirty water tank.

The company's testing has confirmed the machines are effective at ridding the air of mold spores, protecting potato storages from diseases such as black dot and silver scurf.

"The testimonials are very consistent," Isaacs said. "Everyone who has used it for that purpose has continued to use it or expanded their (use)."

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