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Idaho

Produce manager joins IPC retail team

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

EAGLE, Idaho — As a produce manager with Marsh Supermarkets, Dave Rhodes found it paid to make time for his Idaho Potato Commission sales representative.

"I felt that there was always some type of value he brought to the table every time he came in," said Rhodes, who learned market trends, competitors' strategies and tips for growing the fresh potato category from the IPC official.

Now Rhodes, 57, will be the one delivering information to help produce managers move more Idaho spuds.

In mid-August, Rhodes joined the Idaho Potato Commission as its retail promotion director for the Northeast, based in Indianapolis. He's replacing Ken Tubman, who is retiring after a 15-year career with IPC.

He has more than 40 years of experience in the produce industry, tracing back to 1977 when he joined Marsh as a service clerk.

"I think I have that side of knowledge, being on the retail side for so many years," Rhodes said. "I always valued the guys more who had worked retail and could communicate with me on that same level."

Rhodes said he also favored the Idaho potato brand, which his store considered to be a higher-quality product than regionally grown spuds and priced at a premium.

Rhodes spent a year in college before joining the Marine Corps and completing a four-year tour.

He then returned to Marsh, becoming a produce manager before leaving to join a Michigan supermarket chain. He was recruited back to Marsh in 1999, and was ultimately promoted to vice president of produce and floral for the chain in 2007.

Marsh had 120 locations in Indiana and Ohio at its peak but has sold or closed all of its stores.

In his new role with IPC, Rhodes will be the "eyes and ears of the Idaho shippers," explained Seth Pemsler, IPC's vice president of retail and international programs. In addition to providing market insight to shippers, Pemsler's three retail team members meet with every major retailer about twice per year.

"They travel three out of four weeks per month visiting customers, or attending regional trade shows," Pemsler said.

Last year, Pemsler said the potato commission significantly increased the volume of data it purchases to highlight market trends for grocers.

"We're figuring out what sorts of reports to bring in," Pemsler said. "We'll have data availability for many more customers and many more markets than in the past."

Based on the team's efforts, Pemsler said more retailers are running advertising singling out Idaho potatoes, and the Idaho Potato Lovers Month promotion has grown to include more than 5,000 participating stores.

Rhodes and his wife, Angela, have been married for 33 years and have two grown children, Megan and Kyle.

In his free time, Rhodes serves on the football coaching staff at Warren Central High School in Indianapolis, which has the nation's 19th ranked team. He also coaches a youth traveling football team.



Dave Rhodes

Agriculture's importance growing

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

BOISE — A University of Idaho report shows that farming's contribution to Idaho's overall economy is continuing to grow.

Not too many years ago, with the high-tech manufacturing sector booming in Idaho, some people assumed agriculture was a dinosaur whose importance was on the wane, said UI Agricultural Economist Garth Taylor.

"That just simply has not been true," Taylor said. "Agriculture is big and we're growing; we're not declining."

That is backed up by the UI report, "Economic Contribution of Idaho Agribusiness."

The report, based on 2014 data, is an update of a previous report based on 2012 data. The latest version shows that agriculture directly and indirectly is responsible for 16 percent of the state's total Gross Domestic Product. That's up from 14 percent in the previous report.

"Agriculture is still a powerhouse in the state's econ-



Sean Ellis/Capital Press File

Hay is cut in a field near Kuna, Idaho, on June 27. A University of Idaho report shows that agriculture's contribution to the state economy is continuing to grow.

my despite the weakening ag economy in the United States overall," Taylor said.

Taylor said it's no surprise that agriculture is big in Idaho; everybody knows that.

But a deeper dig into the data shows a not-so-well-known story.

GDP from production agriculture has grown twice as fast as the state's over-

all GDP since 1997 while the food processing sector's percentage of state GDP has increased slightly during that time.

The report was authored by Philip Watson, an associate professor in UI's Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology. It is based on several sources, including data from USDA and the U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis.

It shows that Idaho agriculture was responsible for \$27.8 billion in sales in 2014, up from \$25.1 billion in 2012, as well as 128,200 jobs, up from 124,000.

"That's certainly a sizable amount of Idaho's economy," Watson said.

Watson said that before the recent recession, many people assumed high-tech manufacturing would replace agriculture as the most important part of the state's economy.

"That hasn't materialized yet," he said, adding that agriculture has strengthened its hold on that top spot since the recession. "Tech manufacturing took a hit during the recession and agriculture

didn't. It hasn't been booming like agriculture has."

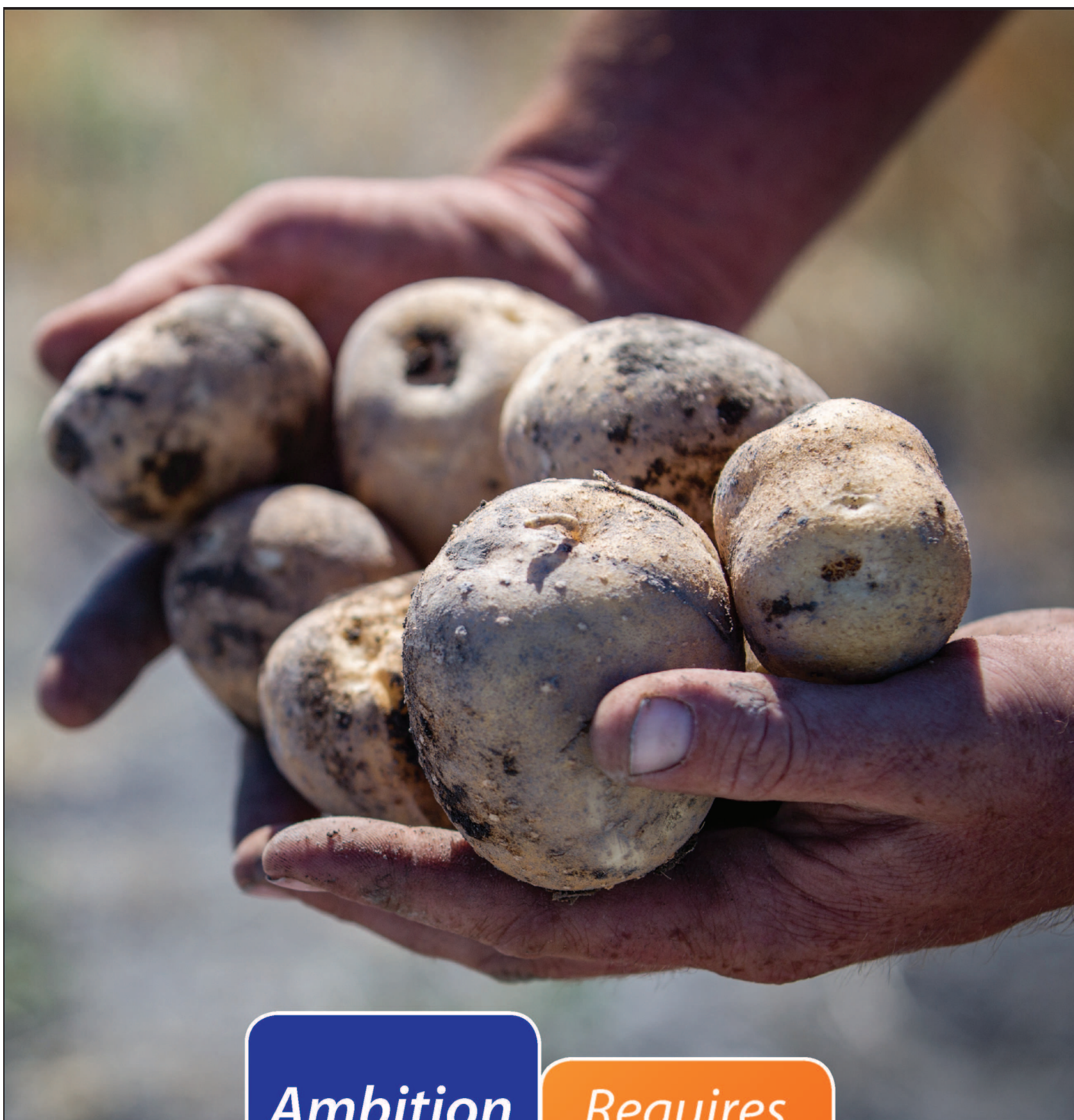
UI Agricultural Economist Ben Eborn said that while the latest report is great news, it should be noted that 2014 was a record year for Idaho agriculture in terms of total farm cash receipts.

Still, he added, agriculture's importance to the state's economy should remain large in the next report, which will be based on 2016 data.

"It's not going to change much," Eborn said. "Agriculture is still going to be a major, major factor in our economy."

The report also shows that agriculture is much more important to Idaho's economy than it is to the economies of surrounding states, even rural, ag-driven ones.

Agriculture's share of Idaho's economy is 10.5 times greater than in Nevada, 4.75 times greater than in Wyoming, four times greater than in Utah, 3.75 times greater than in Washington, three times greater than in Oregon and 1.75 times greater than in Montana.



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