

Researchers encouraged by spore sampling results

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

PARMA, Idaho — Researchers have confirmed they can use machines that capture airborne spores to detect some of Idaho's most devastating crop diseases before symptoms surface in fields.

They also demonstrated they can analyze samples in Parma and relay results to growers within 24 hours of receiving them.

University of Idaho plant pathologist James Woodhall is leading the effort to set up an extensive network of spore samplers throughout Idaho to give growers advance warning of the arrival of harmful pathogens.

Woodhall and a team of UI researchers conducted their initial trials with the spore samplers this growing season, operating three machines stationed at the university's research and extension centers in Parma, Kimberly and Aberdeen.



John O'Connell/Capital Press File

From left to right, University of Idaho researchers Kasia Duellman, James Woodhall and Juliet Marshall with a spore sampler at UI's Aberdeen Research and Extension Center on April 18. Woodhall is leading the effort to set up an extensive network of spore samplers throughout Idaho to give growers advance warning of the arrival of harmful pathogens.

Woodhall said the samplers suck spores into a different vial each day, with a capacity to collect samples for eight days before vials must be changed. The samples will

be sent by overnight mail to Parma, where Woodhall will use a diagnostic approach known as real-time polymerase chain reaction to test for up to 12 pathogens affect-

ing several crops. Results will then be emailed to industry sources — and eventually posted on a web page that will be developed for the project.

In the "dry run" conducted during the second week of September, Woodhall said testing confirmed the presence of white mold and "it looked like spore levels were increasing as we got to the end of the week."

"It's quite good for us to practice with a small number of spore samplers, doing this in real time," Woodhall said.

In Parma, Woodhall said his sampler detected powdery mildew two to three weeks before the arrival of disease symptoms in sugar beets. Woodhall also demonstrated samplers can detect potato early blight, but he's still refining the diagnostic test. Woodhall is also developing a test to detect fusarium in onions. He has received a \$120,000 USDA specialty crop block grant through the

onion industry to purchase a fourth sampler for onion research.

The Northwest Potato Research Consortium contributed \$16,000 to cover research and develop potato-specific primers. Andy Jensen, with the consortium, said potato growers are especially interested in research to verify whether the lack of spore detection by the samplers means it's safe to skip spraying protectants. Jensen noted Woodhall will use untreated "sentinel" potato plots to determine if diseases may surface near a sampler, even when no spores have been captured.

Processors and fresh packing sheds within the potato industry have contributed funding toward nine additional spore samplers, which will be strategically placed in commercial fields to monitor for potato diseases next season. The Idaho Bean Commission has also

financed a spore sampler to bolster the network, and UI has two more samplers on order.

Next season, Woodhall hopes to begin learning how many samplers are needed to adequately detect diseases, and how they should be distributed.

UI potato pathologist Phil Wharton was recently awarded a \$200,000 specialty crop block grant to assess the relationship between spore levels, weather and potential disease severity. UI Extension seed potato specialist Kasia Duellman will help Wharton develop a website with a map of spore sampler locations, and ultimately "decision aids to help growers identify different risk levels."

"I envision we will have something up and running by next summer that is bare bones, giving the basic information, and over time it will be refined," Duellman said.

Negotiations expected to resume on Columbia River treaty

By JOHN O'CONNELL
Capital Press

BOISE — The Trump administration has vowed to pressure Canada to renegotiate a flood-control treaty with potentially drastic ramifications for Upper Snake River water users, according to an attorney representing Idaho's Committee of Nine.

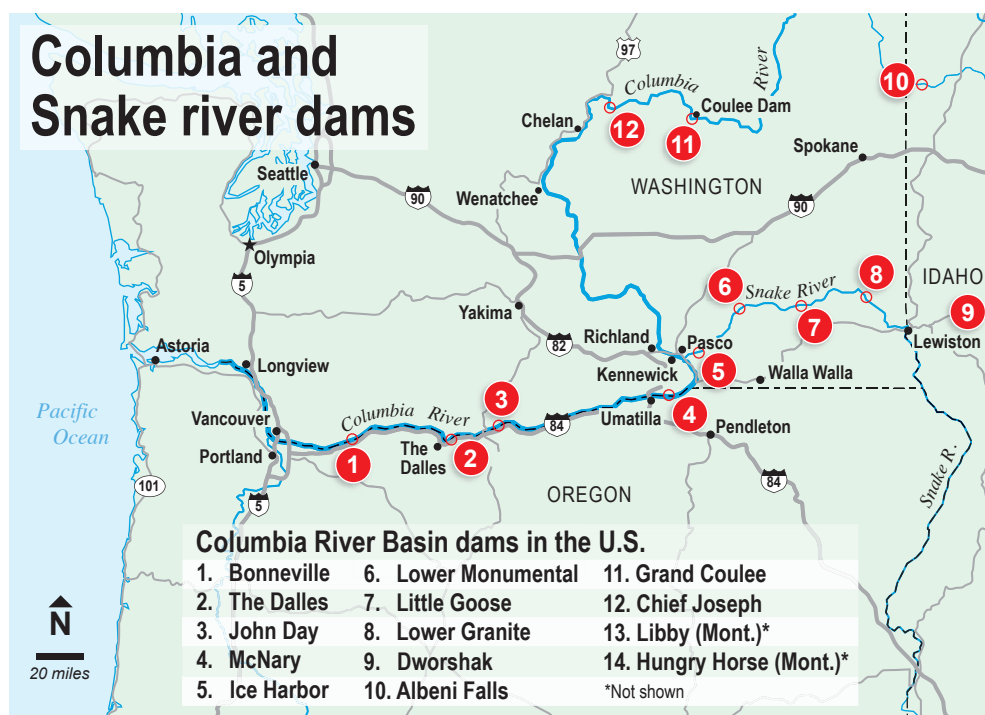
Jerry Rigby, legal counsel for the committee, which represents storage holders in Idaho's Upper Snake reservoirs, explained the U.S. and Canada implemented the Columbia River Treaty in 1964 to control flooding in Portland and Vancouver.

The U.S. agreed to pay Canada to build an Upper Columbia reservoir system for added flood capacity, to be used in conjunction with eight U.S. reservoirs — including Brownlee, Dworshak, Libby, Hungry Horse, Grand Coulee and other federal projects in the Columbia River Basin.

In 2024, the Canadian flood-control rights the U.S. received for its investment will expire, and Canada will be entitled to payment on a case-by-case basis for providing flood control "as called upon." The Canadians have argued the U.S. should be required to exhaust all options to free its own space for flood control — possibly including Upper Snake reservoirs — before seeking their help. U.S. officials maintain the "as called upon" language refers only to the eight reservoirs specifically mentioned in the treaty.

Rigby noted the Upper Snake reservoirs, which aren't named under the treaty, hold water for a single irrigation season.

"If we had to reduce those (Upper Snake reservoir levels) and water didn't come, and we



Sources: U.S. Army Corp. of Engineers

Alan Kenaga/Capital Press

had to go a year with those reservoirs almost empty, it would be devastating to Idaho," Rigby said.

In mid-September, Rigby and several other officials representing Idaho water users met with Trump administration leaders in Washington, D.C. Treaty negotiations have been stalled since 2013, but Rigby said the Trump administration has chosen a woman who will soon be publicly named as the chief negotiator for the talks. Trump officials told Rigby they plan to use other treaties the Canadians would like to revisit as leverage to get them to the table.

Jim Yost, one of two Idaho members on the Northwest Power and Conservation Council — formed in 1980 to aid in providing economical power while protecting fish and wildlife — hopes the new negotiator will quickly schedule a visit to meet with Idaho Gov. Butch Otter and make

her positions formally known.

Since the treaty was enacted, Yost said, there have only been a couple of times when U.S. infrastructure would have been insufficient to accommodate flood control, and a few more years "on the bubble." Yost, who served on a committee that recommended treaty renegotiation goals to the U.S. Department of State in 2013, believes it would take far too long for water in Upper Snake reservoirs to reach the Portland area to provide any practical flood-control management.

Yost considers talk of Upper Snake flood-control requirements to merely be a "negotiating ploy by Canada to threaten the U.S." into paying more money under the renegotiated treaty.

Rigby said Idaho irrigators support reworking a power agreement under the treaty that the U.S. believes overcharges Bonneville Power

rates payers by up to \$3 million per year. The original treaty awarded Canada compensation for extra revenue BPA enjoys when releases from Canadian reservoirs enhance flows through downstream BPA turbines during the peak power season. The U.S. asserts payment rates were based on growth projections that never came to fruition.

Administration officials are also sympathetic with Idaho's position on the proposed inclusion of "ecosystem" considerations in the treaty, regarding minimum flows for endangered fish, Rigby said. The Obama administration, certain Oregon and Washington lawmakers and tribal officials supported adding ecosystem language. Idaho leaders argue the Nez Perce Agreement, the Clean Water Act and other unrelated safeguards already adequately cover wildlife and habitat.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

R-CALF USA CEO Bill Bullard. R-CALF contends a USDA report purporting an industry consensus for expanding its animal identification program is tilted to favor private companies, primarily ear-tag companies, that stand to reap financial gains.

R-CALF: APHIS claim of consensus on animal ID a sham

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

R-CALF USA has filed a complaint with USDA accusing its Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service of falsifying the outcome of meetings and public comments on expanding mandatory animal identification under the disease traceability program.

At issue is APHIS' report on feedback from the cattle industry on its strategy to require the exclusive use of electronic devices for individual animal identification and to expand those requirements to cattle under 18 months.

In the report, APHIS claims there was consensus in the industry to move ahead with both, although "nothing could be further from the truth," said Bill Bullard, R-CALF CEO.

He said there was adamant opposition at the meetings and in public comment. APHIS' report is a falsification of the genuine concerns that many producers expressed, he said.

"The report really constitutes government propaganda," he said.

He maintained that it's a "cheerleading piece" to say there's consensus in the industry when there's nothing of the sort.

That feedback document is critical because USDA said it would be used as a basis for next-step recommendations on whether the government should proceed with expanding mandatory animal ID requirements, he said.

In the complaint, R-CALF contends the report is tilted to favor private companies, primarily ear-tag companies, that stand to reap financial gains if APHIS expands its animal ID program.

The current animal disease traceability rule requires cattle over the age of 18 months to be identified with some type of official ear tag if the animal enters interstate commerce.

APHIS was seeking comment on expanding that to animals under 18 months and requiring the exclusive use of electronic devices.

There are problems with those strategies, he said.

One is that current premiums for providing value-added information on younger cattle will evaporate if animal ID is required in the entire system.

"It would be a free gift to the packers at the expense of producers who will incur all the cost of the devices and recordkeeping necessary to achieve traceability from birth to packer" through a national data base, he said.

Raw milk dairy's defiance prompts WSDA health alert

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

The Washington State Department of Agriculture has issued a rare health alert, advising consumers to not drink raw milk from a dairy that refused to halt production pending an investigation into why its milk tested positive for salmonella.

Pride & Joy Dairy of Toppenish maintains that its milk is safe, though the own-

er said Tuesday that most retailers have stopped selling it.

"The impact is horrible," said Cheryl Voortman, who owns the dairy with her husband, Allen. "It's killing us, inch by inch."

WSDA reported detecting salmonella Sept. 27 during a routine monthly sampling of raw milk from Pride & Joy. The next day, the dairy declined WSDA's re-

quest to suspend production. The dairy stated in a Facebook post that it was being "targeted again."

Pride & Joy distributes milk to more than two dozen retailers in Western and Eastern Washington, as well as 19 drop-off points, according to its website. Voortman said the dairy has about 100 milking cows and has been producing raw milk for nine years.



Courtesy Pride & Joy Dairy

A worker fills containers for Pride & Joy Dairy in Washington. The dairy says it declined the state Department of Agriculture's request to suspend production.

Pulse crop yields in Idaho way down this year; chickpea acreage was up

By SEAN ELLIS
Capital Press

MOSCOW, Idaho — Production of pulse crops — lentils, dry peas and chickpeas — in Idaho was a mixed bag this year.

Production of lentils, Austrian winter peas and dry edible peas plummeted in 2017, the result of fewer acres and much lower yields.

Chickpea acreage, however, continued to soar this year,

although yields are also expected to be lower.

An extremely wet spring plagued the state's main pulse-growing region in North Idaho this year, and that was followed by a string of 80 straight days with no rainfall and unusually high temperatures, farmers and industry leaders said.

The lengthy dry spell "definitely affected yields, but overall quality this year remained pretty good," said

Dirk Hammond, administrative services manager for George F. Brocke and Sons, a processor of pulse crops in Kendrick.

Idaho pulse crops enjoyed yield records last year, "but this year is quite a bit different story," said Tim McGreevy, executive director of the USA Dry Pea & Lentil Council, which is headquartered in Moscow. "The pulses got hit hard with lower yields than last year."

According to USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, lentil yields averaged 900 pounds an acre in Idaho this year, down from 1,550 last year, dry edible pea yields averaged 1,700 pounds an acre, down from 2,500 last year, and Austrian winter pea yields averaged 900 pounds, down from 1,800.

Chickpea yields for 2017 have not been released yet but they are also expected to be down.

Troy farmer Pat Smith planted chickpeas and lentils this year and "both of those crops were down on yields, he said. "We had too much rain at the beginning of the season and after that, we didn't get any rain. The crop definitely felt the toll of Mother Nature."

Smith said his chickpeas yielded between 900 and 1,000 pounds an acre this year, down from 1,800-1,900 last year.

Robert Blair, who farms near Kendrick, said he couldn't get any pulse acres planted this year because of heavy spring rains.

"It was too wet," he said. "We just couldn't get in the field."

Acreage for lentils, Austrian winter peas and dry edible peas in Idaho were all down this year, according to NASS, but chickpea acres continued their steep climb.