

# Idaho potato group extends bowl game deal

By SEAN ELLIS  
Capital Press

EAGLE, Idaho — The Idaho Potato Commission has announced a five-year extension of its sponsorship of the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl.

The IPC has sponsored the college football bowl game since 2011 and will continue to spend \$450,000 a year for at least the next five years to remain its title sponsor.

The IPC this year commissioned a study by an independent group to determine the return on investment the commission gets from its sponsor-

ship of the game, which aired Dec. 22.

The study put the media value of the sponsorship at \$13 million annually, said IPC president and CEO Frank Muir.

“We see this as a very good return on investment in terms of the media value we get from it,” he said.

During the commission’s regular meeting Dec. 21, IPC board member and Oakley farmer Randy Hardy asked fellow board members some questions to demonstrate the value of the sponsorship.

He asked them if they

knew who the title sponsor of that day’s bowl game — the Gasparilla Bowl — was? The answer was a unanimous “no.”

The contract the IPC negotiated with ESPN to sponsor the game requires that every time the network mentions it, they have to refer to it by its full title — “Famous Idaho Potato Bowl.”

Hardy said that leaves viewers with no doubt about which industry sponsors the game.

“No other bowl does that,” he told Capital Press later. “It can’t be the spud bowl or the

Idaho bowl. It has to be the Famous Idaho Potato Bowl.”

Hardy also asked fellow board members if they knew what a Gasparilla was? Again, the answer was a unanimous “no.”

“Most people don’t even know who the sponsor of the Rose Bowl or Cotton Bowl is,” said Muir. “With our game, the title sponsor is in the name of the bowl.”

The game, which aired on ESPN, draws more than 2 million viewers per year and because everything about the game is centered around potatoes, those people watch what

is essentially a four-hour infomercial about Idaho potatoes, Muir said.

Hardy said some growers and even a few commissioners have questioned the IPC’s sponsorship of the bowl game and asked, “Are we really selling potatoes by sponsoring the bowl game?”

He said he believes the IPC gets a tremendous return on investment from the sponsorship.

“For the amount of money we spend on the game compared to the media value we get out of that, it’s a no-brainer,” he said.

The game pits teams from the Mountain West Conference and Mid-American Conference. Four of the five largest potato-consuming states have teams in those two conferences.

During the IPC meeting, MAC Commissioner Jon Steinbrecher thanked board members for their sponsorship of the game and told them, “We’re in a part of the world that consumes a lot of your product.”

He said the bowl game “provides incredible exposure for your product across the country.”

## Researcher honored for clean water innovations

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS  
Capital Press

University of Idaho researcher Greg Moller has been elected a fellow of the National Academy of Inventors for his innovative work to clean wastewater.

An environmental chemist and toxicologist, Moller works to lessen the environmental footprint of communities and businesses by developing filters to remove pollutants, including phosphorus and nitrogen, from wastewater.

He holds six patents, which are licensed to industry, and has three patents pending final approval. His filter systems now treat billions of gallons of wastewater a year across the U.S. and in Great Britain and South Korea.

Moller said he is humbled to be included with such a distinguished group of individuals.

Along with the honorary distinction, the fellowship recognizes research that solves problems, gets innovation into the marketplace and generates economic activity, he said.

Moller is preparing to take his newest technology — the University of Idaho Clean Water Machine — to Canada to test its effectiveness in treating agricultural runoff water from the Holland Marsh near Toronto.

The technology is being developed by Moller and University of Idaho soil scientist Dan Strawn and mechanical engineer Martin Baker. The team is among 10 semifinalists in the Everglades Foundation’s \$10 million George Barley Water Prize competition, an incentive for developing cost-effective technology to remove phosphorus from fresh water.

“The new norm in many of the impact sites is large algae blooms that have toxic impacts on aquatic systems,” Moller said.

The pilot test in Canada is the university team’s third stage of a four-stage challenge in the Barley Prize competition.

The Holland Marsh is the salad bowl of Canada with high agricultural production. It is triangulated by Lake Erie, Lake Huron and Lake Ontario. The Great Lakes account for 21 percent of the fresh water on earth, he said.

The three-month field trial will begin in mid-February to address the huge runoff that occurs with the spring melt to try to remove and recover nutrients and aid the agricultural community, he said.

“The regional problem is an overabundance of phosphorus leaving the fields into drainage canals and feeding into the Great Lakes,” he said.

### The technology

The Clean Water Machine is a mobile research unit on the back of a 40-foot trailer. It can process 21,000 gallons of water a day. Commercial partner installations of earlier versions of the technology process more than 15 million gallons a day, Moller said.

The university team is working to establish a water-filter platform modeled on nature for how soil cleans water, he said.

It addresses highly contaminated water from urban, suburban and agricultural systems to keep those systems from releasing pollutants into surface water for a smaller environmental impact.

Inputs for the process are simple — water, air, sand, rust, electricity and charcoal. The filter is able to strip out many contaminants of concern, such as phosphorus, nitrogen, heavy metals and pharmaceuticals, which current wastewater processes do not address very well, he said.



University of Idaho

Mechanical engineer Martin Baker, left, chemistry student Amber LaVigne and Greg Moller stand with the N-E-W Tech Nutrient Energy, Water Innovation Phosphorus Extraction system at the Moscow water treatment plant in 2015.

The charcoal used is called biochar, which is carbonized matter recovered from biofuel production, Strawn said.

Research has shown adding biochar to soil is beneficial. The process recovers phosphorus and nitrogen. The biochar can then be used in agricultural systems, he said. It often increases plant production and decreases the amount of water needed by plants because it increases the soil’s water-holding capacity, he said.

The whole system is an interesting convergence of several ideas of sustainability. It’s a multi-tool approach, which is where progress in sustainability will be made, he said.

Water treatment and nutrient recycling reduce costs, and practices that are economically sustainable are more likely to be implemented and

make it into agricultural systems and water-treatment processes, he said.

With this filtration system, agriculture would be able to participate in pollution credit programs, he said.

Next year, the team also plans to test the technology’s ability to remove phosphorus and nitrogen from waters in Idaho’s Treasure Valley and the Boise Basin.

A couple of years ago, the team started testing the filter system on dairy lagoon water at the university’s research dairy in Moscow. That research, aimed at recovering nutrients in the wastewater and recovering water for reuse, is ongoing.

The results thus far show the technology has the potential to do that, Moller said.

## Washington in strong apple supply position

By DAN WHEAT  
Capital Press

WENATCHEE, Wash. — Washington has good opportunity for strong apple shipments domestically and overseas this season, Todd Fryhover, president of the Washington Apple Commission, says.

“We really hold all the cards a little earlier than normal,” Fryhover told commissioners at a Dec. 14 meeting in Wenatchee.

Fryhover noted that as of Dec. 1, Washington has 85 percent of the remaining available U.S. fresh apple crop to be sold in the next eight or nine months versus New York at 4.9 percent, Michigan at 3.2 percent and Pennsylvania at 1.2 percent. Those U.S. Apple Association numbers show Washington in a stronger position about four to six weeks earlier than usual, he said.

Michigan had a smaller crop this fall therefore creating greater East Coast demand for Washington apples a little earlier, Fryhover said.

While the 2017 Washington fresh crop is large, at 142.3-million, 40-pound boxes, the situation is better than 2014, the last crop of that size, because of smaller fruit size, smaller crops elsewhere and no work slowdowns at West Coast seaports, he said.

“I’m optimistic about domestic and export sales. I’m not referencing pricing, just sales movement and volume,” he said.

The World Apple and Pear Association shows European apple production at 9.2 million metric tons, down 22 percent this year, Fryhover said.

That gives Washington less European competition and greater opportunity for exports to the Middle East and Southeast Asia, he said.

China is normally a 10-million-box export into India but is shut out of India on political issues giving Washington greater opportunity in India, he said.

Fryhover provided commissioners with USDA Foreign Agricultural Service numbers showing 2017-2018 total world fresh apple production at 76.2 million metric tons.

Of that, China produced 44.5 million, the European Union 10 million and the U.S. 4.6 million. Turkey is 2.7 million and India is 2.3 million.

China consumes 38.4 million metric tons and exports 1.2 million. The European Union exports 1 million and the U.S. exports 890,000 metric tons.

## Five grain co-ops set to merge

CEO: Move allows companies to improve services and logistics

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

Five grain companies in Eastern Washington plan to merge next spring.

Central Washington Grain Growers Inc. of Waterville, Davenport Union Warehouse Co., Odessa Union Warehouse Co-Op and Reardan Grain Growers Inc. will all merge on April 1. They are purchasing Almira Farmers Warehouse Co. to form HighLine Grain Growers Inc.

“HighLine Grain focuses on delivering value to our patrons through the products and services we provide, while

delivering competitive market access and opportunities for the crops they produce,” Paul Katovich, CEO of HighLine Grain LLC and general manager of Central Washington Grain Growers Inc., said in an email.

Katovich will become CEO of HighLine Grain Growers Inc.

In response to a BNSF Railway request, the five companies in July 2012 began work on a \$30 million facility to load grain onto 110-car trains to maintain their rate structure. They formed HighLine Grain LLC to combine trading operations and logistics.

The members worked together for years to make the merger happen, Katovich said. The focus remains on the needs of the companies’ patrons moving forward, he said.

HighLine Seed and Special

Services will allow the company to expand “top-flight” testing programs that focus on the needs of patrons, Katovich said.

“HighLine will streamline harvest by managing speed and space in ways that were unavailable to the individual partners,” he said. “Economies of scale will allow us to compartmentalize tasks, increase our buying and selling power and provide research that concentrates on our region.”

Ryan Higginbotham, currently director of Washington State University’s cereal variety testing program, will serve as manager of seed and special services.

Audited financials for the company will be available at its first annual meeting, he said.

Once combined, the membership will include more than 3,700 patrons, he said.

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