

Smoke, heat knock Washington potato crop down to average

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Heat and smoke have hindered Washington's potato crop, industry leaders say.

The early part of the crop had been slightly above average in quality and yield, said Dale Lathim, executive director of the Potato Growers of Washington.

Smoke from wildfires became more dense, interfering with the potato plants' photosynthesis, Lathim said.

"Basically it did nothing this week in terms of growth," Lathim said. "The guys had to turn off their water because the plants just weren't taking it up because they weren't photosynthesizing."

During field samples two weeks ago, Lathim said, the crop looked well-above average for yield and quality. Last week, samples showed closer to average because of heat and he expects even lower this week.

"By the time we get to harvest, we're still going to be above average, but not by much," he said. "But the quality should be very good. We're going to have a very manageable crop. Nothing bountiful, but very good quality, manageable size crop."

Heat hasn't affected earlier varieties Shepody or Ranger, but the question is whether it will impact potatoes that go into storage, said Chris Voigt, executive director of the Washington Potato Commission in Moses Lake.



Washington Potato Commission

About 91 percent of Washington state's potato crop is grown under contract.

Shepody and Ranger varieties go straight from the field to processing plants in the region.

The Columbia Basin is one of the first areas in the country to begin harvesting potatoes for processing.

Harvest will continue through October.

Potato farmers in the Columbia Basin began harvesting Shepody in mid-July, and are wrapping up that part of the harvest, Voigt said.

Shepody yields were a little light at first, but then bulked up, Voigt said.

Farmers are now harvesting Ranger and Russet Norko-

tah fresh potatoes for packing sheds and to go into storage. Yields look good, Voigt said.

Farmers will begin harvesting Russet Burbank in mid-September. Yield and quality are promising, Voigt said.

"There's going to be a decent supply of big potatoes, a decent supply of small potatoes and then a decent supply of potatoes in the middle," he said.

Disease and insect pressure has been "pretty mild," Voigt said.

Prices are "OK," he said. A larger Idaho supply is moderating some potato prices.

"The last six years haven't

been fabulous for the fresh potato industry," Voigt said. "Last year was one of the first years where it was semi-OK. We're hoping for good things this season."

Prices depend on variety on a per-acre basis, but Lathim estimates an overall breakeven average price of \$7 per hundredweight. Prices so far are roughly \$6 to \$6.50 in most cases, he said.

About 91 percent of the crop is grown under contract. Farmers who make average yield and quality will be profitable, Lathim said.

The fresh market, about 9 percent of the crop, is subject to market whims.

Court takes chlorpyrifos chemical away from farmers

EPA has 60 days to ban insecticide

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

Growers may find alternatives to a widely used insecticide that a federal court says must be banned by early October, but substitutes may be less effective and more expensive, and leave fewer ways to suppress ever-evolving bugs, according to farmers and crop advisers.

Farmers use chlorpyrifos on more than 50 food crops. Christmas tree farmers use it on bugs, and ranchers use it to kill horn flies. Banning the chemical won't be simple, Oregon State University entomologist Stuart Reitz said Friday.

"The reality is, yeah, you can pull out any product, any chemistry, and growers would have to adapt to that reality. But can we provide them with alternatives that work as well?" Reitz said. "I think that's something the public and regulatory agencies need to think about."

A three-judge panel of the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled 2-1 on Aug. 9 that the Environmental Protection Agency must cancel all registrations for chlorpyrifos within 60 days. The EPA has yet to announce whether it will appeal or ask for a hearing by the full circuit court.

The ban stems from a petition filed in 2007 by pesticide opponents. The Obama EPA tentatively proposed

a ban in 2015, but missed court deadlines to make a final decision. The Trump administration inherited a new deadline and dismissed the petition last year. The EPA, however, hasn't made a final decision on whether chlorpyrifos residue on food is safe enough to comply with the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act.

An EPA lawyer told the three judges at a hearing in July that the agency needed another year and that a ruling by the court would be premature. One judge agreed, but two decided that EPA had run out of time. Rather than set a new deadline for EPA to make a decision, Judges Jed Rakoff and Jacqueline Nguyen banned the chemical, which has been used in U.S. agriculture since 1965.

Willamette Valley seed farmers use chlorpyrifos to control cabbage root fly and garden symphytan, crop adviser Ted Hake said.

Farmers can use other chemicals, but none, including chlorpyrifos, are 100 percent effective, he said. If farmers are reduced to using one product, pests will develop resistance more rapidly, he said.

"It's a pretty big deal. We don't have a lot of other options," he said. "They've been working on new things for quite awhile. The issue is, there are only so many ways to attack a pest."

The EPA's position is that the medical science on whether chlorpyrifos causes birth defects is unresolved.



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4-H has a lot to offer

4-H has a lot to offer kids in our communities. In addition to the requisite animal projects commonly associated with the program, it also brings STEM and arts education. These projects lead to family engagement and provide a positive social outlet for youth out in the community and away from digital screens.

In rural and isolated Pacific County, Wash., youth-serving organizations partner with 4-H to offer high-quality, low- to no-cost events. Since 2014, the Pacific County Fair has hosted 4-H "Super Saturday," a day of hands-on learning for youth of all ages.

2018 was the most successful program to date with over 200 young participants. Know and Grow Coalition for Early Learning and Timberland Regional Library offered a space for babies and toddlers up to age 5 to engage in developmentally appropriate, hands-on activities, allowing families with children of all ages to participate.

Pacific County 4-H leaders provided free lunches with funding from Willapa Community Network and Pacific County Youth Alliance. Support from the South Bend Kiwanis Club brought magician Jeff Evans and his "Science Magic" show to wrap up the day.

However, the real magic of Super Saturday are 4-H projects for youth ages 6 and up. Participants choose classes taught by 4-H leaders, 4-H senior members, and community members on a wide

range of topics, coordinated by Washington State University Pacific County Extension 4-H Youth Development.

Based on evaluation responses, these expert-led workshops enabled participants to bring home new ideas and skills to share. This year, 35 percent of participants learned about small animal care, 20 percent learned new sewing and cooking skills, 10 percent learned new craft skills, 20 percent learned about showing livestock and 20 percent were excited to use science as a tool.

Older youth reported that they not only learned complex new information and skills, but they also plan to raise a healthier animal.

Caregivers indicated youth are more likely to join the family for a meal if the family meals as



Sewing and other activities are featured.



Small animal projects are always popular.

child helped prepare it, leading to more family meals as participants use what they learned. When shared with friends and family, these new ideas, skills, and knowledge not only enrich lives but also broaden the reach of 4-H all over the county.

In Pacific County, we do our best to offer learn-by-doing experiences that encourage kids to experiment, innovate, create and think independently – the fundamental 4-H ideal.



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