

Hop, hemp testing lab opens in Ontario

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Western Laboratories plans to test hop and hemp samples this summer at its new facility in Ontario, Ore.

Owner and soil scientist John Taberna said the move reflects continued growth of the local hop industry and the need for convenient, accurate hemp testing in southeastern Oregon.

Western's main laboratory is in Parma, Idaho. He said the satellite lab will be well-positioned if Idaho eventually legalizes hemp.

Many hop labs are processor-owned, and hemp-testing facilities use various techniques, Taberna said.

Growers and buyers can use the independent lab, which aims to return results in one to two days. Tests are run twice; if one is not nearly identical to the other, the lab runs a free additional test.

One half of the sample is placed in a specialized oven to determine moisture percentage. The other half, kept at the original moisture level, is broken down for subsequent cell-level analysis by a high-performance liquid chromatography



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press

Rows of hemp plants grow in Oregon. A new laboratory will offer tests of hemp and hops this summer.

machine for alpha and beta acid levels in hops — which influence harvest timing — and cannabinoids in hemp.

Hops and hemp belong to the Cannabaceae family of flowering plants.

Idaho and Oregon last year ranked second and third, respectively, behind Washington in hop production, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service reported.

In hemp, high percentages of cannabidiol, or CBD, and other com-

pounds can increase financial returns. It must be destroyed if tetrahydrocannabinol, or THC, content exceeds the 0.3% federal limit.

Western will pursue hemp-testing accreditation.

Taberna said some of Oregon's 2019 hemp crop exceeded THC limits, and some growers didn't use ideal harvest methods. Mildew reduced quality on the west side, and an early October freeze in much of the state made many buds

unharvestable.

"Despite those problems, we had a record harvest," said Jay Noller, director of the Global Hemp Innovation Center at Oregon State University. "Tens of millions of pounds of biomass were successfully harvested."

Registered outdoor hemp acres in Oregon at the end of May dropped 54% from a year ago to 29,604, including an 84% plunge in Malheur County, from 2,832 to 455. Statewide

acreage was 29,772 including greenhouse plantings.

Vale, Ore., hemp grower Randy Fletcher planted 3 acres, down from 17 last year. That partly reflects last year's market saturation and corresponding price plunge. Prices are expected to rebound this year.

He expects bigger, heavier plants and thus a larger overall flower yield in 2020 due to improved soil and more management of individual plants. He has incorporated three cover crops to suppress weeds.

"We built the soil organically in 2019," Fletcher said. "The benefit comes this year."

Receiving lab test results last year from a provider out of the area took about a week, he said.

Western will offer weekly monitoring of hops' alpha and beta acids and hemp cannabinoid levels starting in mid-July. The company around June 1 started testing hop foliage for fertilizer needs, as it has for years, and by July 1 will start analyzing Oregon hemp for nutrient needs.

Taberna said the lab, at 201 SE Second St. in Ontario, also is suited to university trials.

Idaho pest management tour to include COVID-19 adjustments

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

The annual University of Idaho Snake River Pest Management Tour in Aberdeen is slated for June 30 in an in-person format modified to help reduce COVID-19 risk.

The event, to feature potato field trials in weed control and other pest disciplines, is scheduled from 9 a.m. to noon at UI Aberdeen Research and Extension Center, 1693 S. 2700 W., Aberdeen. Registration is at 8:30 a.m. Three Idaho pesticide applicator recertification credits will be offered.

Pamela Hutchinson, UI potato cropping systems weed scientist based at Aberdeen, said several weed-control trials in potatoes will be featured. They include evaluations of tank mixtures, planned versus rescue post-emergence applications, and simulation of excess rainfall — and its impact on crop safety and weed control. Other trials look at potato variety herbicide tolerance and herbicide mechanism-of-action plots.

"There has not been a new active-ingredient herbicide for about 30 years," she said. "So now more than ever, it's important to choose the right tank-mix partners to control the weeds in each field, and make sure that we slow down or prevent the development of herbicide-resistant weed populations."

Attendees will have forehead temperature readings taken at registration, and drive to tour stops in their own vehicles instead of riding together on trailers. UI will require and provide masks and hand sanitizer. A virtual tour is planned for those who cannot attend.



Pamela Hutchinson

NASS: Potato stocks, processor demand down as of June 1

By BRAD CARLSON
Capital Press

Potato stocks as of June 1 in Idaho, Washington and Oregon totaled 47.1 million hundredweight combined, down 6.7% from 50.5 million a year ago, the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service reports.

Stocks included 26 million cwt. in Idaho, 17.5 million in Washington and 3.6 million in Oregon.

NASS a year earlier reported stocks of 29 million in Idaho, 17 million in

Washington and 4.5 million in Oregon.

Idaho leads the U.S. in potato production, followed by Washington. Oregon is a consistent top-10 producer.

Production in the past year increased by 2% in Washington, and fell in Idaho and Oregon by 8% and 7%, respectively.

NASS said the 13 major potato-production states reported a 3% year-to-year decline in disappearance. Idaho, Washington and Oregon saw reductions of 5.5%, 3.4%

and 8.9%, respectively.

Processors in the eight major potato-processing states used 1% less volume, including drops of 2% in Idaho and Malheur County, Ore., and 0.3% in Washington and other Oregon counties.

The share of dehydrated products in the eight-state total fell by about 12%.

Potato Growers of Washington Executive Director Dale Lathim said current processing volume in the Columbia Basin is down more than NASS shows,

partly because figures don't reflect recent closures of several Washington processing plants as COVID-19 reduced foodservice demand. Reporting variables, like whether a month has four or five weeks of data, impact year-to-year comparisons.

He said potatoes have been moving recently, including many to food banks and for cattle feed.

"Just in the last week, there seems to be an uptick in the demand for potatoes for frozen processing, which is the vast majority of our market here in the Columbia Basin," Lathim said. "So we are more optimistic that we will be able to utilize the remaining storage crop from 2019 in a somewhat timely manner, and move on and focus on the new-

crop harvest of 2020."

He said 85% of the basin's frozen potato products go to the foodservice segment, in which demand was reduced greatly by COVID-19 closures of restaurants, bars and sporting events.

Moreover, much of the region's exports go to Pacific Rim countries where restaurants did not switch to take-out.

Demand for processed potatoes "is starting to come back," Lathim said.

Idaho Potato Commission Chairman Nick Blanksma, who farms near Hammett, said that as states ease restrictions, "foodservice business is picking back up, although it is nowhere near where it was pre-COVID-19."

Retail potato sales remain strong, he said.

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