

New 'cutting-edge' system predicts potato pest risk

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

A free cutting-edge system from Washington State University gives Northwest potato growers site-specific information about insect activity in their fields.

The new potato decision aid system parallels WSU's existing system for tree fruit, said David Crowder, associate professor of entomology and interim director of WSU's Decision Aid System program.

"Think about the kind of data you can get on your phone, only way more powerful than that," Crowder said. "You can go out in your backyard and get your temperature; we have the professional version of that, that's been tested and checked by lots of meteorologists."

Farmers must register to use the free site.

Agriculture is weather-dependent, including crop growth and the development of insect populations and diseases.

Those risks "change quite rapidly," Crowder said. "You could be facing risk from a disease today but not two days from now."

The system takes weather data and forecasts what will happen on the farm.

The potato system is operating for the first time this year in Washington, Oregon and Idaho.

It includes risk assessments of major insect pest outbreaks, using WSU Extension vegetable crops specialist Carrie Wohleb's weekly pest alerts. She collects data on about 10 different insect species on 40 to



Washington State University entomology professor **David Crowder**.

60 farms.

"If you're a grower and you come into our site, you can actually zoom down to the level of your individual field and see our prediction of what the insects are doing

at that scale," Crowder said.

It won't necessarily give growers an exact number of aphids, Crowder said, but it will tell them how populations are developing in the region. They can plan

DECISION AID SYSTEM

<https://potatoes.decisionaid.systems/>

their insecticide program accordingly.

"Just like people in the weather industry are forecasting what the next week is going to look like temperature-wise, we're forecasting what the next week is going to look like in terms of Colorado potato beetle (or) potato psyllid."

Insect abundance models the university uses capture about 50-80% of the variability in the insect populations in the Columbia Basin, Crowder said.

"This is actually quite high because there are a lot

of other factors that affect insects — insecticides, management, et cetera," he said.

Models that capture the timing of life stages are able to predict what will occur with over 90% accuracy, he said.

Growers say the system has allowed them to save an average of \$62 per acre through improved pesticide application timing and increased crop yields, Crowder said.

"All hubris aside, WSU has the best system in the entire world," he said. "There are very few institutions that have systems like this in the United States. They're not as advanced as ours. Not only is this new for potatoes, this is really innovative in the world of pest management in general."

UI Parma ag center reaches funding goal for its renovation, expansion

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The University of Idaho has the \$7 million it needs to renovate and expand its agricultural research station near Parma.

Gov. Brad Little on March 17 signed House Bill 225, which directs nearly \$90 million to the state's Permanent Building Fund to pay for repairs and projects at public buildings.

The legislation includes \$3 million for the Parma Research and Extension Center. The Parma project already has \$1 million from UI and recently met its \$3 million fundraising target from private industry.

Carly Schoepflin, UI College of Agricultural and Life Sciences communications director, said next steps include bidding and other processes with the state Division of Public Works, and state Board of Education approval of final design and a construction schedule. Groundbreaking is expected in the late summer or early fall of 2022.

"We are really grateful to the governor and Legislature for supporting this research," CALS Dean Michael Parrella said.

He said Parma Research and Extension exemplifies a project possible only because of a public-private partnership. Industry stakeholders in southwest Idaho contributed to the design and helped determine programs to add or expand.

Six researchers are based at Parma. UI plans to hire four — in fruit and viticulture, weed, irrigation and soil, and pollination specialties, Parrella said. They will support needs in southwest Idaho



The University of Idaho plans to expand and update its **Parma Research and Extension Center**.

and statewide while restoring some past capabilities.

"That didn't come from the university," he said. "We are following through on stakeholders telling us what they want."

Schoepflin said industry investment includes \$1.9 million from corporate and foundation partners, \$685,000 from agricultural commodity groups and \$415,000 from individual donors and ag producers. Contributing commodity groups include Amalgamated Sugar and state commissions for alfalfa and clover seed, apples, barley, beans, hops, mint, onions and wine.

Plans call for developing the Idaho Center for Plant and Soil Health at the facility, which is more than 50 years old. Parrella said the renovation and expansion will position it to attract faculty and

additional grant funding while taking on research important locally and statewide.

Food Producers of Idaho Executive Director Rick Waitley said a 2018 meeting that focused on the value and future of the Parma Research and Extension Center included various commodity and farm-organization leaders who support its mission. Several faculty "provide research in hard sciences that impact all commodities," he said. Research in agronomy, entomology and nematology "have helped to make Idaho commodities to be some of the best quality in the U.S."

He said the Treasure Valley is home to many specialty crops, especially in seed production, "and supplies quality seed around the world. The Parma R and E Center and research conducted there is important to sustaining the future of the Idaho seed industry."

Meyer receives Spokane Excellence in Agriculture award

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Spokane Conservation District production ag manager Ty Meyer has received the Excellence in Agriculture Award for his work supporting growers in their conservation efforts.

"It's quite an honor to be included in even the thought of receiving an award like that," Meyer told the Capital Press. "There's so many people around this region that do some pretty tremendous things in agriculture, so it means a lot. It was just a great honor to be considered for it."

Meyer received the award during the Spokane Ag Show, held virtually Feb. 23-24.

"(Meyer and his team) are doing everything they can do in order to further soil conservation, quality of water and agriculture, and to continue to have production practices that will be sustainable into the future," said Tim Cobb, chairman of the award committee, in a video presentation.

Meyer said his goal is to help make farmers more successful and implement conservation practices at the same time.

"I think the two can exist together," he said. "We have to be comfortable on the other side knowing there's a conservation benefit coming out of it, but it's got to be profitable first, on the farm. I'm not going to ask somebody to do something on the farm



Ty Meyer

that jeopardizes their economic viability."

Meyer also previously served

as executive director of the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association. He is now an ex-officio member.

He grew up on a farm in Colton, Wash., that raised wheat, canola and chickpeas. He graduated from Washington State University with an agriculture business degree.

Meyer joined the conservation district 17 years ago.

"We're continuing to work on I think some pretty forward-thinking practices in production ag, in terms of soil health, cover cropping and maybe transitioning into more regenerative ag practices," he said.

Rebuilding soil health is the biggest need, Meyer said. He expects no-till systems to be at the forefront of carbon sequestration efforts.

"The focus is not just nationwide but worldwide," he said.

The award is given to a company or an individual who has made a significant contribution to agriculture in the Inland Northwest. The award committee considers innovation, economic and environmental stewardship contributions, positive impact and industry awareness and outreach.

State seeks to expand its shared stewardship program

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The Idaho Department of Lands wants to expand its shared stewardship program, which pursues thinning and other management treatments to improve forest health across jurisdictional and ownership boundaries.

The department now gets \$500,000 for the work from the general fund, most of which comes from state income and sales taxes.

The department is asking for an additional \$450,000 for the next fiscal year. Of that, \$250,000 would go toward projects on federal land while \$200,000 would go toward shared-stewardship restoration project planning and implementation on private land.

The private-land por-



Ara Andrea

tion includes \$100,000 that would leverage federal funds to contract private forestry consultants to complete assessments and to plan treatments, the state Legislative Services Office said.

The other half of the money for private lands would be used to carry out projects such as targeted restoration in the area of the 2020 Woodhead Fire and in forests defoliated by the 2019 Douglas fir Tussock Moth outbreak.

Department Shared Stewardship Coordinator Ara Andrea said some of the planned additional spending will be on outreach and project-related work with private

landowners. More such work is required in recent years as an abundance of smaller parcels under varied ownerships or homeowners associations replaces what once were large tree farms or ranches.

"When it comes to outreach, it's multiplied over and over again," she said. "It's the type of work we have to do."

IDL State Forester Craig Foss said working with smaller-scale landowners can help them understand forest fire and disease risk. Other potential benefits include finding opportunities for funding or for working on private land in a key location.

"You might have 300,000 or 400,000 acres that need some kind of treatment," he said. "Is there a (smaller) strategic component that

ends up protecting the rest of the resource?"

On federal land, Good Neighbor Authority enables the state department to partner with the U.S. Forest Service on restoration work. Idaho and the Forest Service signed an agreement in December 2018. The state in 2019 identified two priority areas, one in the northern Panhandle and the other in the west-central mountains.

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