

**HERMISTON**

# Potato research at center of HAREC field day

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
East Oregonian

Potato lovers rejoice. Two new spud varieties are coming soon to the Pacific Northwest.

Echo Russet and Castle Russet — developed by the Tri-State Potato Breeding Program that includes Oregon, Washington and Idaho — are just about ready to be released commercially, according to Sagar Sathuvalli with Oregon State University.

Sathuvalli, a potato breeder at OSU's Hermiston Agricultural Research and Experiment Center, discussed the traits of each variety with local growers during the station's annual potato field day Wednesday. Both varieties boast high yields and good cooking quality, and can be used either for french fries or fresh market.

Getting to this point is no small feat, Sathuvalli explained. From the time breeding begins to when the potatoes are approved for release, it usually takes 12-15 years of rigorous field trials.

Echo Russet — named for the nearby town — and Castle Russet are about to cross that finish line. The Capital Press reports that the Potato Variety Management Institute, which handles licensing and royalties for Tri-State varieties, has decided to release the latest creations in December.

"We should have approval very soon," Sathuvalli said.

Potato field day also featured updates on research projects to help farmers control pesky Lygus bugs, manage various diseases and thwart parasitic nematodes.

Sapinder Bali, who works with Sathuvalli in the potato breeding program, said they are still working to pin down the specific genes in potatoes



Staff photo by George Plaven

**Brett Husey, with BioWest Ag Solutions in Richland, Washington, looks at nematodes under a microscope during potato field day at the Hermiston Agricultural Research and Extension Center.**

responsible for nematode resistance. Nematodes are microscopic parasites that infect potato roots and suck out the plant's nutrients, causing both internal and external defects that can make the crop unmarketable. Once the genes are identified, breeders like Sathuvalli can use them to boost the resistance of new varieties over the next decade.

"Probably next year, I will have some exciting findings to share with you all," Bali said.

Josephine Antwi, a postdoctoral researcher at HAREC, later transitioned into talking about Lygus bugs and how the insects may affect potato yields.

There are two species of Lygus bugs in the area, Antwi said, which are widely distributed and should not be confused with aphids. What Antwi is still trying to figure out is whether the bugs are capable of transmitting harmful purple top virus, and how many insects are too many for potatoes to handle.

"We are trying to relate the presence of Lygus bugs to yield," Antwi said.

Wednesday marked the

first potato field day for Ruijun Qin, the station agronomist who was hired last year to replace Don Horneck. Qin recently started field trials with Sathuvalli looking into the best nutrient management practices for Echo Russet and Castle Russet potatoes, so farmers will know what to do and what to expect if they decide to plant new varieties in their own fields.

Ken Frost, plant pathologist at HAREC, wrapped things up by delving into disease concerns this year. Late blight has an especially high probability of turning up around Hermiston given the region's cool, wet spring.

"We're going to see it sometime this year," Frost said. "The problem is we don't know when or where."

HAREC station manager Phil Hamm said field day is an opportunity for growers to see (and touch) for themselves how the facility's research can help them improve their success.

"This station is about you," Hamm told them.

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# Crashed gas tanker requires finesse

East Oregonian

Firefighters and a fuel supplier joined forces Tuesday to deal with a wrecked semi north of Pendleton hauling two tankers full of gas.

The East Umatilla County Rural Fire Protection District in a written statement reported five of its members and one firefighter from the Helix Fire Department responded around 10:45 a.m. to Highway 37 between milepost 15 and 16 for a tanker truck blocking the road and leaking oil. The fire district team arrived about 11:30 a.m. and the second of the two gas tankers had rolled on its side and back onto all four wheels.

The second tank had a "crimp" on the front end and several on the side from the impact, the district reported. After assessing the situation, crews applied large absorbing mats to the crimps to stop the leaks and absorb oil on the ground.



Contributed photo by Suzie Reitz

**A tanker truck wreck Tuesday on Highway 37 required a complex cleanup that took hours to complete.**

The location made for tough communication, according to the district, and firefighters had to rely on close-range radio communication between each other and the Oregon Department of Transportation to relay messages "in case anything went awry."

Jim Byrnes of Byrnes Oil Co., Pendleton assessed the situation and left to return

with what was needed to take care of the tanker. Around 1:30 p.m., according to the statement, workers pounded grounding rods into the dirt to discharge static electricity, which can build up when transferring fluid fuel. And 20 minutes later they started offloading fuel from the tank, completing the task at 2:12 p.m. The firefighters left an hour later.

## Children's Museum of Eastern Oregon

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Forms available at CMEO or online at [www.cmeo.org](http://www.cmeo.org)

Proceeds help maintain and update exhibits at the Children's Museum

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