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AGRICULTURE IN IDAHO

UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO AGRICULTURAL ECONOMIST CHRIS MCINTOSH RECENTLY ESTIMATED THAT POTATO VIRUS Y (PVY) COSTS IDAHO'S ECONOMY ABOUT \$34 MILLION A YEAR AND 184 JOBS. BASED ON A FIVE-YEAR AVERAGE, THE ANALYSIS SHOWED PRODUCERS AND PROCESSORS LOST 2.3 MILLION HUNDREDWEIGHT OF POTATOES TO THE VIRUS.

Source: Chris McIntosh

Olsen leads Potato Association of America, sixth UI researcher to serve as president

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UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO EXTENSION POTATO SPECIALIST Nora Olsen of Kimberly leads the Potato Association of America as its first female president, and the sixth with University of Idaho ties.

Olsen serves as president of the association, which includes representatives of more than 30 nations around the world. Her term is notable also because she served during the group's centennial year.

"We are really a world-wide organization, even though the majority of our membership is in North America," she said. The group has a sister organization, the European Association of Potato Research, which she will address later this year.

Potato production tends to follow population. China is the world's leading producer. India's another major producer. In those countries, however, potato production typically occurs in quarter- or half-acre family plots. In Idaho and across North America, potato farms can span thousands of acres.

Markets vary widely, too. "We are a global market. We are growing potatoes to export and feed the world," she said.

The Potato Association of America represents a wide spectrum of production, from scientists to potato farmers, she noted.

"We encompass all of the people who want to be part of this strong scientific exchange," Olsen said. "That's what's interesting about it. It's not just academia, it's industry people. We have the unique ability to bridge industry and academia together to talk about the science and where we need to go in the future."

Native plants bring beauty, water thrift to gardens

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WITHERING DROUGHT CONDITIONS IN 2005 started University of Idaho Extension horticulture specialist Stephen Love thinking about native plants as a key to water-conserving landscapes.

Nine years later, Kimberly-based business Native Roots is launching a line of native plants into the wholesale and retail trade. The company is an offshoot of Conservation Seeding and Restoration, which built its reputation reclaiming damaged public lands.

Back in 2005, Love found few if any water-efficient plantings in Idaho home and

business landscapes.

He searched the Intermountain West for native plants that could beautify gardens and save water. He grew promising finds at the Aberdeen Research and Extension Center and selected the best from several generations.

The Native Roots lineup grew from Love's quest and his expertise as a plant breeder. The company now is selling seed of its first 30 native species products. It has 80 more products in the wings with more than 300 under development.

Dairy experts focus on cow fertility genes to boost efficiency

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UNIVERSITY OF IDAHO EXTENSION dairy specialists are working with Washington State University on a project to help producers address cow infertility in their herds. The project's goal is to help dairy operations increase their efficiency and competitiveness.

Caldwell-based Joe Dalton, together with WSU scientists Tom Spencer and Holly Neibergs, are overseeing the collection of thousands of blood samples from dairy heifers. The blood samples will provide the genetic information to better understand the origins of infertility.

The study will be the largest effort so far to look at the genome, essentially the genetic catalog of all genetic traits, in dairy cattle to find the group of genes influencing fertility.

Since the 1980s, the conception rate for dairy cows has dropped to 35 percent from 50 percent. The financial implications for dairy producers are enormous. A cow that doesn't conceive in a timely manner costs the producer more money for feed and care, costs that cannot be recouped until the animal bears a calf and starts producing milk again.

Dalton, Dale Moore, WSU Veterinary Extension Director, and Mireille Chahine, UI Extension Dairy Specialist based in Twin Falls, will work with dairy producers to explain the implications of the study.

The \$3 million, five-year study is funded by the USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture.