

News from the Potato Lab



March 2011

Weather Monitoring and Disease Forecasting Workshop held in Missoula

On February 16, an educational program was provided to all potato growers on using the www.USPEST.org website to access weather data and disease forecasts. Dr. Len Coop from Oregon State University unveiled specific tools for late blight and early blight forecasting that are being tailored to Montana needs. Dr. Barry Jacobsen followed up with specific disease updates and control recommendations. Nina Zidack provided information on the epidemiology of late blight and how it relates to the occurrence of the disease in Montana. The meeting was wrapped up with a presentation on multi-peril crop insurance for potatoes by Shawn Fladager from NW Farm Credit Services in Great Falls. The development of the disease forecasting tools and the funding of the workshop was provided for by a grant through the USDA Extension Integrated Pest Management Program. "Pest Management Recommendations for 2011" were distributed at the meeting, as well as directions to access the www.USPEST.org website. We will be distributing these materials to those of you who didn't attend the workshop via mail.



Steve Streich and Barry Jacobsen working through disease forecasting models

Montana Trade Mission to Brazil and Colombia – From Batata (Portuguese for potato) to Papas (Spanish for potato)

Nina Zidack recently participated in a Trade Mission to Brazil and Colombia with Max Baucus and 15 other Montana Ag and Business representatives.



Max Baucus and Montana Delegation in Colombia

The official schedule of the Mission started with a day in Rio de Janeiro where we were briefed on the economic status of Brazil which is the largest economy in Latin America, and the eighth largest economy in the world. Agriculture is a dominant force in the Brazilian economy and accounts for 25% of total GDP. The second day in Brazil was spent in the nation's capital Brasilia, which is located on the central plateau. There, the ag delegation visited with agricultural attaches from the US National Agricultural Service where we learned about phytosanitary and customs requirements for seed potatoes and other crops. This was followed by a meeting with the Minister of Agriculture, Wagner Rossi, and 6 of his deputy ministers. During this meeting, Minister Rossi specifically stated that farmers in Brazil needed new sources for clean seed potatoes. 70% of their potato production is for fresh market, 20% for processing, and 10% for seed. Half

of the processing market is for chips and the other half is for fries and other products. Their largest seed supplier is the Netherlands at 45% of total imports. Canada supplies 18% of their imported seed and the US only supplies 2%.

From Brazil we traveled to Bogota, Colombia. The first day we were briefed on the political and economic situation in Colombia. Their recent history has been heavily influenced by the drug and guerilla warfare in the countryside which has displaced millions of people, many of whom are farmers. US aid over the last 10 years is approaching \$10 Billion, and the Colombians credit that assistance with reducing the kidnapping rate by 90% and the murder rate by 70%. Of premier importance to the Colombians is ratification of the US/Colombia Free Trade agreement which was negotiated in 2006, but has not been ratified by the US. If the FTA is not ratified by the end of 2011, 15% tariffs will be applied to most agricultural products. The US currently exports \$1 billion of agricultural products to Colombia, half of which is grain. After the morning briefing, I had a one-on-one meeting with the head of the Potato Research Unit, Carlos Nustez of the National University of Colombia. Dr. Nustez is a potato breeder who has made significant yield and quality improvements on potato varieties from the species *Solanum andigenes* which are potatoes indigenous to the Andes. I provided Dr. Nustez with a presentation on our certification program and methods. He was astounded at the technological scope of our testing and inspection methods. In Colombia, they rely on production of seed potatoes at very high altitudes (8-10,000 ft) to limit exposure to aphids and other diseases. Their “basic” seed originates from in-vitro culture, but virus testing is limited to research. Colombia actually restricts imports of potatoes to exclude varieties originating outside of the Andes. The next meeting was with the Colombian Minister of Agriculture. This meeting again highlighted the importance of the FTA to Colombia. The Minister indicated that if the FTA is not signed, much of the imported small grains, peas and lentils would be purchased from Canada rather than the US. The last day of the Mission started with a speech by Senator Max Baucus which again, highlighted the importance of the FTA, and where he pledged support and leadership for getting the FTA passed. My trip was topped off with an excursion to a seed potato farm in the mountains above Zipaquirá, which is 20 miles north of Bogota. The mountainous

areas surrounding Bogota are the largest seed potato region in the country. I visited a farmer by the name of Enrique Trevino who is the seed potato representative for the Federation of Potato Growers “Federopapa”. He showed me his storage facility and seed potatoes ready for market. All seed was bagged and had individual certification tags very similar to ours. We then traveled to see his fields, which were very high in the mountains above the town. Most of the potatoes are planted on steep slopes which preclude mechanical planting and harvest. In the more level areas, tractors are used for soil preparation, but planting and harvest are still performed with hand labor. The elevation was so high that we were not able to reach our final destination due to the mis-calibration of the fuel system in the car I had contracted. We had to get out and walk at one point so that the car could make it up a hill. We weren’t able to pull the final hill and had to turn around. In that particular area, there were crops that were in flower through harvest. Unfortunately it was raining heavily and the workers harvesting potatoes had left the field. The trip culminated with lunch at a local restaurant that served a chicken stew with 3 kinds of potatoes. We also had potatoes for an appetizer! On the way back through Zipaquirá we stopped at a fresh market where they sold a vast array of fruits and vegetables, including many native potatoes in all shapes and colors. While Colombia is not a target market for seed potatoes, both Dr. Nustez and Mr. Trevino were very excited to explore the idea of informational, research and educational exchange.



Mr. Enrique Trevino with seed potatoes from his farm in Zipaquirá, Colombia

I have only described a very small part of my overall experience, and haven’t even touched on the

endeavors of the other Montanans. In the Ag sector, Lola Raska represented the Montana Grain Growers and Kim Murray represented peas and lentils. Other businesses included a company that develops secure communications systems for municipalities (police, fire, etc.), the owner of Corporate Air in Billings, a welding and fabrication company that produces landing platforms for Blackhawk helicopters, a civil engineering company that designs water drainage systems for roads and wetlands remediation, and the Director of the Montana Manufacturing Center. All of these businesses made contacts in both countries which will hopefully lead to future exports.

The arrangements for the Trade Mission were coordinated by Baucus staffer Chelsea Cole Thomas, daughter of Bill and Barbara Cole of Manhattan. Chelsea did a tremendous job and is truly a credit to her Montana seed potato heritage.

Elections for Directors settled by nomination process

This year there were four directors up for election. Nominations have been collected and tabulated. For District 1B and 1C, Steve Streich and Jack Lake received multiple nominations each. While there were other nominees for District 1, none of those individuals received more than one nomination. For District 2, the sole nominee was Steve Cottom. For District 3, John Venhuizen received multiple votes and similar to District 1, other nominees had single votes. The bylaws of the Montana Potato Improvement Association state that the 2 persons with the highest number of nominations shall be on the ballot. Since the incumbents were the only members receiving more than one nomination, they are the only names that would be on the ballot, precluding the need to put them forward for a vote.

Cull pile inspections

Formal cull pile inspections will be performed from June 1-10 throughout the state. Montana State University rules and regulations for certification of Montana seed potatoes states that all cull tubers must be disposed of and rendered non-viable by June 1 of each year. Viable tubers, once germinated, should be treated with a desiccant and late blight fungicide. If a grower is still planting at the time of inspection, an assessment will be performed on cull piles from the shipping season and a follow-up inspection will be performed after planting has been completed. You

will receive the schedule for inspections by May 27, 2011

Senator Jon Tester will host Small Business Opportunity Workshop on March 26.

Tester's next workshop will be held on March 26, at the Strand Student Union Building at Montana State University, from 8 a.m. until 1 p.m.

The free event focuses on agriculture in Montana and how farmers and ranchers can plan for the future, take advantage of new technology, research and USDA programs, and add value to their family farms and ranches.

"Agriculture built our state and continues to be the backbone of our economy because Montana's family farmers and ranchers produce the finest food in the world," said Tester, the only farmer in the U.S. Senate. "This is about bringing producers together to make sure they have the best information available to grow their farms and ranches in order to keep our rural communities strong."

Tester's Bozeman workshop builds on the success of his previous small business and jobs workshops in Great Falls, Bozeman, Kalispell and Missoula over the past two years. Over a thousand of Montana small business owners and entrepreneurs have attended Tester's workshops.

Tester's Bozeman jobs workshop is open to the public. Montanans interested in attending are encouraged to RSVP at tester.senate.gov/workshop <<http://tester.senate.gov/workshop>>.

Dates to remember:

May 13 – Winter Testing Fees Due

June 1-10 – Cull Pile Inspections

June 10 – Registrations Due

June 16 – MPIA Directors Meeting - Bozeman