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CROPS—Growers benefit from improved varieties of potatoes, wheat, and beans

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WITH CONSUMER TASTES continually changing, with growers and processors squeezing every conceivable cent from input costs, and with pests evolving into ever-more-aggressive forms, plant breeding dare not stand still. At CALS, it doesn't. CALS breeders have released six new varieties of potatoes, wheat, and beans since fall 2008. They include:

- **Classic Russet**: a high-yielding, early-maturing russet potato with attractive tubers and outstanding culinary qualities that could replace the Russet Norkotah
- **Alpine Russet**: a late-season russet potato that can be successfully processed out of long-term storage, like Russet Burbank, but that exceeds it in yields and fry quality
- **Clearwater Russet**: a late-maturing russet potato with a high percentage of U.S. No. 1s, resistance to low-temperature sweetening, and exceptional processing quality
- **UICF-Lambert**: a soft white winter wheat that performs much like Lambert—a UI variety released in the 1990s—and that offers the highest level of tolerance to imazamox currently available to wheat producers
- **VCW 54 and VCW 55**: two dry beans derived from the scarlet runner bean that CALS breeder Shree Singh intends for worldwide use in transferring white mold resistance to different market classes

CALS agronomist Jeff Stark, who coordinates the Tri-State Potato Variety Program, calls the trio of new russets "definite improvements over what's available." All are joint releases with the USDA Agricultural Research Service, Oregon State University, and Washington State University.

New Aberdeen-based wheat breeder Jianli Chen is focusing on heat-, drought-, and pest-resistant varieties as well as on varieties that tolerate herbicides and that meet the distinct demands of domestic, Asian, and biofuel markets. Topnotch varieties are essential to the profitability and sustainability of Idaho grain growers, Chen says.

Wheat varieties on the docket for release later this year: two full-waxy wheats with potential for licensing as biofuel and blending wheats, a partial-waxy soft white spring wheat targeted to the Asian noodle market, three more imazamox-resistant varieties, and a soft white winter wheat with superior yield potential and end-use quality that veteran UI wheat breeder Bob Zemetra expects will excel in both domestic and foreign markets.

Helping Idaho crop producers manage costs

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IN 2008, THE OPERATING COSTS of producing potatoes spiked 20-24% over 2007, led by fertilizer price surges of 75-82% and machinery operating expense hikes of 33-40%. In 2009, if fuel and fertilizer expenses remain subdued, UI Extension economist Paul Patterson expects costs to rise no more than 5%.

Patterson keeps Idaho producers informed of the operating and ownership costs of bringing their crops to market. "We've been seeing extreme volatility in both commodity and input prices," he says. "Growers can't control commodity prices but they can control their input costs—and they need to focus their management attention on factors they can control."

Last year, Patterson and his colleagues updated 58 of CALS' 85 representative crop budgets, along with a Windows-based Crop Enterprise Budget Worksheet program that helps growers track their own field-by-field costs. This year, he'll add such newly in-demand budgets as organic potatoes and Roundup Ready® sugarbeets, and a spreadsheet for calculating the fertilizer value of dairy compost and manure.

Web site helps potato growers ace GAP audits

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FARMS WHOSE PRODUCE is used in federal food programs or sold to an increasing number of major processors and freshpackers must pass USDA Good Agricultural Practices audits. To help Idaho's potato growers clear audit hurdles, Idaho Extension and Experiment Station research faculty developed a Web site on which producers can learn about audit procedures and requirements, familiarize themselves with paperwork an Idaho State Department of Agriculture auditor might ask to see, and fill in forms electronically.

The site at www.kimberly.uidaho.edu/potatoes/gap.htm includes Spanish-language components. It has received well over 1,200 hits since April 2008.

"We are trying to make it really easy and offer a one-stop source so growers can get all of the needed information in one accessible location," says UI Extension potato specialist Nora Olsen, who worked on the site with UI Extension educators Steve Hines and Dale Baker. It is a proactive site because potato products have not been implicated in contamination incidents.

Nearly 80% of survey respondents who attended a GAP workshop at the 2008 University of Idaho Potato Conference said they would adopt all or most of the practices presented.

DID YOU KNOW?

11.7 MILLION

ACRES OF IDAHO LAND IN FARMS IN 2007. THAT IS ABOUT 22% OF IDAHO'S TOTAL 53.9 MILLION ACRES.

Source: www.nass.usda.gov/Statistics_by_State