

MINUTES
HOUSE AGRICULTURAL AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

DATE: Thursday, March 02, 2023

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room EW42

MEMBERS: Chairman Andrus, Vice Chairman Raymond, Representatives Boyle, Cannon, McCann, Ehlers, Gallagher, Garner, Nelsen, Pickett, Sauter, Mathias, Nash, Roberts

**ABSENT/
EXCUSED:** Reps. Boyle, Nelsen, Sauter, Mathias, Nash

GUESTS: The sign-in sheet will be retained in the committee secretary's office; following the end of session the sign-in sheet will be filed with the minutes in the Legislative Library.

Chairman Andrus called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

Roger Batt, Executive Director, Idaho Eastern Oregon Seed Association (IEOSA), said seed is the cornerstone of agriculture. In Idaho, seed is valued at approximately \$600 Million. The seed industry is proprietary in nature and develops the varieties, then growers' contract with the industry. Approximately 50 species of seed crops are produced in Idaho and hundreds of varieties from those seed species are produced. The state of Idaho is one of five major global seed production regions. Idaho is one of a very few places that can grow seed crops because of the arid landscape. Idaho ships to over 120 countries worldwide to help feed a global population.

Gina Lohnes, Trinidad Benham, said the dry bean acreage has significantly decreased over the years due to urban sprawl and other crops taking over the land. As a result, prices keep going up based on supply and demand. The Idaho Crop Improvement Association (ICIA) and the Idaho State Department of Agriculture (ISDA) inspect crops to ensure they are disease-free. These inspections lead to tags and other distinguishing marks on the seed as it exits Idaho, which guarantees its disease-free status. Idaho dry bean production ranks fifth in the nation and supplies 8% of the country's edible dry beans. Idaho's seed is considered the best in the world, owing to strict Idaho seed laws and growing conditions enforced by the ICIA and the ISDA.

Brad Smith, Kimberly Seeds, provided a comprehensive summary of rules applying to bean growers, including specific requirements for Idaho-based farmers. These regulations cover a wide range of areas, such as tagging of seed prior to planting and the process for field inspection. There are specific criteria for seed eligibility, and a defined method of irrigation must be followed. While these rules apply to commercial bean growers, there is an exemption for home gardeners.

Anita Kiser, Crookham Co., discussed popcorn seed and onion seed. Idaho is the exclusive home of popcorn seed outside of the Midwest, having grown it for over a century. If you buy popcorn at the movie theater, there's 50% chance it was grown in Idaho. If the popcorn is colored, it's a guarantee it was grown in Idaho. Over half of popcorn seed grown in Idaho is exported worldwide. The only U.S. company that produces and sells onion seed is based in Caldwell, Idaho. Idaho's unique high mountain desert climate provides the ideal environment for growing onion seed as it has water and pollinators like bees which thrive in the state's conditions.

Selena Virden, Illinois Foundation Seeds, talked about sweet corn seed, saying the Treasure Valley is a high desert with low humidity, which contributes to less bacterial and fungal on sweet corn seed crops throughout the growing cycle. Minimal precipitation in the late summer and early fall allows the seed crops to dry down properly leading to less mechanical damage and better seed quality. There is low insect pressure compared to other areas in the United States. Approximately 70% of the world's Global Sweet Corn Seed Production is in the Treasure Valley of Idaho. Urban sprawl and development are encroaching and reducing some of the best seed production land available.

Kevin Osborne, Allied Seed, Idaho's Cover Crop Industry, Forage and Cover Crop Seed Production, defined a forage crop as one specifically grown to be grazed by livestock or preserved as hay or salvage. Idaho alfalfa ranks first in the U.S. for certified organic hay and is the second largest U.S. producer of alfalfa hay. Alfalfa constitutes more than 80% of Idaho's total hay production with over 4 million tons harvested annually. All major USA alfalfa seed genetic suppliers reside in Idaho with support for production and/or operations. Other forage seed crops are legumes, grasses and brassica. Cover crop benefits include nutrient cycling, weed suppression, compaction reduction, increased organic matter, erosion control, improved water infiltration and penetration, pollinator attractant, nematode control, bio-fumigation and carbon sequestration.

Richard Fillmore, The McGregor Company, explained seed treatments are fungicides, insecticides, bio-stimulants, micro-nutrients, polymers, colorants, or other seed applied products. Fungicides and insecticides protect the seed and young plant. Bio-stimulants and micro-nutrients help improve the vigor and emergence of the young plant. Polymers aid in increasing flowability and decreasing dust off (off target pesticide). Colorants signal the seed has been treated and differentiate varieties, treatments, or can be used for marketing purposes. Seed treatments prevent the spread of plant diseases by systemic and non-systemic MOA, protects seed from seedling rot and seedling blights, improves germination and provides protection from insects and pests.

Director Batt concluded saying loss of farm land means some seed companies are within 10 years of not being here. Uncertainty of irrigation water meant bean contractors couldn't plan and bean productions were down 50%. Products are needed to replace the ones the EPA has taken off the shelf.

ADJOURN: There being no further business to come before the committee the meeting adjourned at 2:28 p.m.

Representative Kevin Andrus
Chair

Jayne Feik
Secretary