

# IMPACT

University of Idaho  
Extension

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## Idaho Potato Growers Adopt Practices Offered in Newsletter

### *The Situation*

Potato producers are continually challenged to remain economically viable in an ever-changing agricultural environment where costs of equipment and inputs continually rise. Research on potatoes helps producers obtain maximum yields, thus minimizing their cost to raise a given unit of potatoes. Yields in Idaho have continually risen over the past ten years. The average potato yield in 1996 was 346 cwt. per acre, and climbed to 386 cwt. per acre in 2006. This increase in yield is partially due to newer varieties; yet in 2006 Russet Burbank, the most popular variety, still occupied approximately 66 percent of the harvested acres. However, to increase yield, producers must be continually updated with new information when it comes available. Keeping producers well informed is the challenge.

### *Our Response*

University of Idaho personnel present many workshops and seminars on numerous occasions. Even though these events are usually well attended, we know there are many producers who do not hear the information that may be useful to them. Consequently, a newsletter, *the Spudvine*, has been regularly disseminated since 1991. It is currently delivered nine times annually to approximately 280 producers as well as others in the potato industry.

Total distribution was 415 in 2006. The newsletter has been a very useful tool for providing information directly to potato producers.

*Survey indicates Idaho potato producers regularly read a nine-times-yearly published newsletter and put into practice information presented potentially adding millions of dollars to the industry.*

The mailing list has been updated several times, and each time we have had a good response from producers telling us they want to continue receiving the newsletter. Nevertheless, to better assess the usefulness of the information, a survey was developed and administered in January 2007

asking them if they learned anything from the articles published in 2006, and more importantly, if they changed any farming practices in 2006 as a result of reading a particular article.

### *Program Outcomes*

Of the producers on the distribution list, 95 percent read at least one of the newsletter articles published in 2006. Also for producers, 42 percent said they sometimes use information presented while 44 percent said they often use information, and nearly 11 percent said they use information from *the Spudvine* all the time in making decisions about their farming operation. Less than 4 percent rarely or never use the information. Nearly 61 percent of the producers said the information was important or very important to them, and slightly less than 5 percent indicated the information was not very important or not important.

To better understand how using information from *the Spudvine* can impact producers and the potato industry as a whole, consider the information presented in the April 2006 issue titled, “Pay Attention to Planting Details.” This article described best practices for five different aspects of potato planting. One of the five practices discussed was seed piece planting depth. Idaho research has shown that planting Russet Burbank (the most widely grown variety in Idaho) 9 inches vs. 6 inches deep resulted in approximately 17 percent less yield. Our statistically valid survey indicated that 81 percent of the growers receiving the newsletter read the article on planting (227 growers), and nearly 65 percent said they changed a practice in 2006 as a result of reading that article (147 growers). Assuming that those readers who reported adopting a recommended practice actually used only one of the five best practices, about 29 growers in Idaho would have adopted the practice of planting potatoes at 6 inches vs. some deeper depth.

Based on reader responses to our survey and assuming that the number who adopted each of the recommended practices was about equal, then it can be estimated that potato producers in Idaho would have realized a gain of approximately \$3.8 million in annual gross receipts by changing the depth of their potato planting operation. Benefits received by growers who adopted the other best practices recommended in the article can be shown to include increased productivity, improved quality, and reduced costs of production.

The survey has shown that *the Spudvine* newsletter is a valuable resource to Idaho potato producers. We will continue sending the newsletter to producers and others in the potato industry to keep them updated on issues of concern to the potato industry.

### ***For More Information***

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