

Commission-Funded Research – Full Cooperation as the Northwest Potato Research Consortium

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Formal cooperation in research among the potato commissions of Washington, Idaho, and Oregon began back in the mid-1980s when the Tri-State breeding program was launched. In those days the commissions successfully advocated in Washington D.C. for federal research funding specifically for breeding and variety development. Since then there has been a formal cooperation among the three universities (University of Idaho, Washington State University, and Oregon State University) plus the USDA-Agricultural Research Service in conducting the breeding and variety development in the Northwest, partially funded by the federal grant program created in the mid-1980s by the Northwest potato commissions, and partly funded by the commissions themselves. Eventually, the three commissions worked together again when PVMI (Potato Variety Management Institute) was created in 2005. A nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation, PVMI handles the licensing and royalty collection on Tri-State potato varieties. It was developed as a grower-controlled alternative to the universities' efforts to manage protected varieties and interact with industry in royalty collection.

In February 2012 the state potato commissions in Idaho, Washington, and Oregon took a leap toward almost complete integration of their research funding programs by officially launching the Northwest Potato Research Consortium (an entity in name only, without formal legal status). The commissions employ one staff for the Consortium, this author as Manager, and each appoints three persons to serve on a board of directors for the Consortium. The aim of this team is to receive and review proposals for research and extension work in the three states we refer to as the Northwest, then make formal funding recommendations to the commissions on a complete research portfolio each season. As of this writing, two funding cycles have been completed, with \$1.5 million in shared project funding each year. See the end of this Proceedings article (and our website, <http://nwpotatoresearch.com/>) for a complete list of the projects funded in our first year, fiscal year 2014-15.

This joint funding of research is motivated by a few considerations:

- The potato industries of our states are very similar and closely tied in various ways including contiguous geographical areas, common pest and disease pressures, common cultivar needs, abundant trade in seed, etc.;
- With similar research needs there is potential for duplication of efforts in states conducting separate research programs, and duplication is obviously to be avoided;
- A long-term trend toward much-reduced agricultural research/extension faculty in all three states had led to a need to bring research talent across the borders for several years previous to 2012;
- A desire to see Northwest potato research teams join together in federal grant programs – such joint proposals will be made stronger when supported by a formal cooperation of the three state commissions.

Two cycles of research proposal review have seen many strong cooperative projects emerge, and the commissions have been pleased with these new collaborations across state borders. In brief, the proposal review process looks like this:

- Fall research planning discussions.

- Dates: Usually late October.
- Location: Rotating in the states, e.g. Moscow, Idaho in 2014.
- Format: Concept proposals (2 pages max) are discussed among all present, i.e. scientists and industry members from all three states. Industry members in attendance represent the research committees (or similar entities) from each state commission. All discussions are actively facilitated. Following the discussions, the Consortium board decides which projects, teams, and ideas will be expanded into full proposals for Consortium consideration in January.
- Full proposal deadline: Mid-December. All full proposals to the Consortium must have been invited following the concept proposal process.
- During January each commission's research committee reviews the full proposals and creates a ranking or scoring system that represents their state's interests and needs.
- Late January: Final Consortium proposal review. Consortium members review written proposals and base funding recommendations upon them.
- Funding announcements (tentatively): following the March meetings of the three commission boards of directors.
- Formal reporting requirements for funded projects include two quarterly status reports in July and October, and one annual results report due in January.

In addition to the formal funding process and reporting requirements, the Consortium has a website (<http://nwpotatoresearch.com/>) and a newsletter, (*Potato Progress*) which was carried across from the Washington State Potato Commission, for extension of its research output and activities. Other major points of contact between research programs and industry are the Washington/Oregon Potato Conference and the Idaho Potato Conference in January each year. We will aim to have each of our research projects present results at these conferences at least once during the life of the project.

For any questions or comments about potato research in the Northwest, please feel free to contact this author (Andy Jensen) any time at ajensen@potatoes.com.