

The Idaho Potato Conference addresses integrated pest management needs

AT A GLANCE

The 2025 Idaho Potato Conference offered an opportunity to provide seminars, workshops and hands-on training to enhance the understanding and incorporation of integrated pest management.

The Situation

Potato production stakeholders need new and relevant information on integrated pest management (IPM) that addresses potato diseases, weeds and arthropod pests. Travel to multiple sites in Idaho for commodity schools during the winter months can be challenging due to unpredictable weather and stakeholder schedules. To this end, the Idaho Potato Conference has been held annually at one location since 1982. The Conference extends over two days in January and provides an ideal venue for IPM training. Feedback from previous attendees has emphasized a need for more technical information for the seasoned professionals as well as basic information for the growing number of new members of the industry.

Our Response

Recognizing the need for both basic and advanced training in IPM, we have developed a series of seminars and workshops that align with differing levels of complexity. In 2025, we offered a series of Potatoes 101 workshops that focused on fundamentals of potato pathology, entomology and integrated pest and disease management. A hands-on exhibit allowed participants to test their knowledge on disease, pest and weed



Attendees at the conference attempt to identify potato diseases, pests and weeds during a hands-on workshop.

identification. A simulation game that allows participants to learn about, practice and implement the fundamentals of IPM was offered in the Spanish language session. We also distributed a survey to identify industry needs with respect to integrated pest, disease and weed management for potato production to inform future training events.

Program Outcomes

Participants in the hands-on disease, insect and herbicide damage identification exhibit increased their confidence in correctly identifying the problem by 31%, 15%, 72% and 15% for insects, diseases, nematodes and weeds, respectively (n=46)

With previous data indicating a 98% positive shift in pest management mindset among players, the simulation effectively engaged 80 Spanish-speaking attendees in a high-impact experience designed to transform their decision-making processes.

In a post-conference survey (n=52):

- 73% of attendees responded that they improved their understanding of the identification of potato pests
- 68% of attendees indicated they increased their knowledge of management of potato pests because of attending the conference

In an IPM-specific survey distributed to conference attendees and online:

- 38% of respondents had five years or less experience in the potato industry (n=135)
- Self-assessment of knowledge on potato pathogens was lowest for early career professionals and highest for seasoned professionals (see Table)
- On a scale of one to 10, the average perceived value of a potato IPM course was 8.0 (n=115)
- Cost and time were the two most-cited limitations to implementing IPM

Table. Self-reported knowledge of different potato pest types on a scale of one to four, where one is the least knowledge and four is the most knowledge (n=137)

Years in the Industry	All Pathogens	Insects and Nematodes	Weeds
0-5	2.4	2.5	3.0
6-20	3.0	3.0	3.4
21+	3.3	3.4	4.0

The Future

Future workshops at the Idaho Potato Conference will rotate between basic, intermediate and advanced curricula to ensure members of industry with different levels of expertise are offered relevant skill-building opportunities. In the future, such workshops may be eligible for University of Idaho course credit to be applied towards a yet-to-be developed integrated pest management certificate from the University of Idaho.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Extension personnel (educators and area/state specialists), researchers, federal and state partners, and industry members contribute to or guide content of the Idaho Potato Conference and participate in presenting research, by contributing to panels and workshops, and by sponsoring breaks. Spectra Productions provides logistical support and garners sponsorships.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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