

impact

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difference in Idaho.

Idaho potato industry tour: connecting graduate student education and research

AT A GLANCE

The Idaho Potato Industry Tour is a grower-endowed multiday experiential learning course designed to connect graduate students and the industry via teaching, research and Extension.

The Situation

The University of Idaho, College of Agricultural and Life Sciences (CALS), has faculty and staff located in 42 of Idaho's 44 counties and on the reservations of three federally recognized tribes. CALS offers 47 undergraduate and graduate degree programs.

Potato is one of the most important among these programs, with 12 faculty directly involved with teaching, research and Extension with this crop and 16 others indirectly involved with many aspects of potato production.

Many of CALS' Idaho Agricultural Experiment Station (IAES), provide real world, hands-on opportunities for undergraduate and graduate students to interact with potato industry stakeholders across Idaho. At IAES locations and on-campus, students develop new agricultural practices, evaluate new potato varieties, and identify new pest and diseases management practices, which help grow Idaho potato's industry.

In recognition of CALS commitment and excellency in potato crop education, and the important role that the potato industry plays in Idaho agriculture, in 2014 passionate potato grower alumni established the Idaho Potato Industry Program Endowment to help advance



A photo collage of graduate students interacting with industry professionals at the biennial Idaho Potato Industry Tour.

the potato industry through the education of students and unbiased research.

Our Response

Every other year since 2014, U of I faculty have been organizing the Idaho Potato Industry Tour for graduate students to gain exposure to all aspects of the Idaho potato industry, including: production, storage, biotechnologies, fresh pack systems, processing, equipment, irrigation, food science, seed certification, and production, marketing and agribusiness.

The students participated in a multiday tour across the state engaging with various industry representatives and touring facilities, laboratories, fields and storages. The tour extended across southern Idaho ranging from

the Idaho/Oregon border to seed growing region of Ashton.

In the 2026 tour, students dug side-by-side with a grower in a potato field to check for soil moisture; viewed step-by-step how potatoes are processed into French fries or washed and packed for retail; stood on top of a pile of potatoes and heard how quality impacts price of the crop; and watched steel precisely cut to manufacture harvest equipment (Figure 1). Students freely asked questions and interacted with industry personnel, making this a relevant and experiential learning experience. Companies hosting the tour stops provided real-world education for the University of Idaho graduate students.

The tour is intended for graduate students interested in pursuing a career in the potato industry or in an agricultural focused field. Exposure to the various aspects of the potato industry have prepared students for the diverse positions available in agriculture.

Program Outcomes

Since 2014, the Idaho Potato Industry Tour has been offered six times, in 2015, 2017, 2019, 2022, 2024 and 2026 (Table 1).

A total of 46 graduate students at master's or doctorate level have participated in the potato industry tours. U of I students had developed their research studies on the main campus in Moscow and/or on various Idaho Agricultural Experiment Stations and through the tour saw how their research directly benefits the industry. The opportunity to assemble students with interests in pursuing a career in the potato and agricultural industries allowed students to interact with dozens of different stakeholders, including the Idaho Potato Commission, Idaho Crop Improvement Association, commercial seed growers, commercial potato growers, storage facilities, biotech laboratories, fresh pack operations, processing plants, equipment factories, retailer and

grocery shops, marketing, food services and agribusiness.

In addition to educating graduate students about various aspects of the potato industry, the Idaho Potato Industry Tour provided an excellent opportunity for students to explore career opportunities and establish connections with potential employers. Most students were subsequently hired by potato industry companies or are working in agricultural industries or conducting valuable agricultural related research.

Table 1. The Idaho Potato Industry Tour in numbers.

Year	Students No.	Duration	Visited sites
2015	8	6 days	15
2017	7	6 days	16
2019	7	5 days	18
2022	10	5 days	17
2024	4	5 days	17
2026	10	4 days	12

The Future

Due to the success of the Idaho Potato Industry Tour throughout these years, and the positive feedback from graduate students and potato industry stakeholders, this tour will continue being offered as long as the Idaho Potato Industry Program Endowment has funds for future editions. The connection between education, research and Extension and the potato industry will continue to provide work force development for U of I graduate students.

Cooperators and Co-Sponsors

Special thanks to Rhett Spear and Pamela Hutchinson who organized this tour in the past.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Nora Olsen, Professor and Extension Specialist in Potato and Horticulture • University of Idaho Kimberly Research and Extension Center • 208-423-6634 • norao@uidaho.edu

Gustavo Teixeira, Associate Professor and Potato Postharvest Physiologist • University of Idaho Kimberly Research and Extension Center • 208-423-6678 • gteixeira@uidaho.edu

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