August 2008

UNITED POTATO GROWERS OF IDAHO

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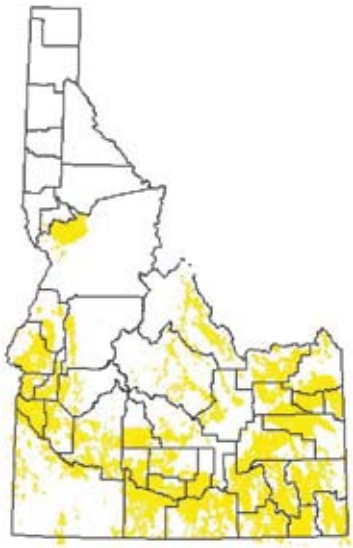
United Announces First-Ever Actual Acreage Count

At the All-Grower Summer Meeting, United Potato Growers of Idaho (UPGI) President and CEO Jerry Wright announced the results for the first, statewide actual acreage count. For the growing year 2008–2009, UPGI projects that growers planted 300,266 potato acres statewide, a decrease of 12.3% over the acres counted by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) in 2007–2008. This number also represents the lowest number of potatoes planted in Idaho since 1980.



Prior to this year's acreage count, Idaho potato growers relied solely on the acreage survey conducted by the National Agricultural Statistical Service (NASS). Now, Idaho's potato growers have an actual count versus a statistical estimate of all potato acres planted in Idaho. "The acreage count represents United's continued commitment to helping Idaho growers achieve long-term profitability," said Jerry Wright, CEO and President of United. "For years, growers only had the incomplete information provided by the NASS survey, and we've managed to gather data that provides an actual acreage count versus a statistical estimate."

An actual acreage count gives growers much-needed information for the upcoming market season. If a grower knows the number of acres potentially available to the market, better decisions can be made about when to sell or to hold the crop, increasing the grower's profit potential. The marketplace also responds to this key information as highlighted by the market's reaction with the release of NASS's survey number every year.

"Knowing the actual number of acres is a critical first step," said Wright. "Throughout the remainder of the growing season and thru harvest United will take a large number of field samples to monitor both the quality and the yield of this year's crop. We are committed to providing United growers with the most accurate crop

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This Month

NASS Yield Survey

NASS needs strong grower participation for accurate results.

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2008 Field Digs

Field digs will help with next year's market projections.

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Acreage Count cont.

forecast possible. Information gives growers knowledge and power. It's all about helping growers manage their markets and improve their returns."

How United Counted

Earlier this year, United contacted the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and requested actual field maps for the entire state of Idaho. Using these maps, United created an acreage counting program. Starting May 15, 2008, seven teams traveled throughout the state of Idaho physically counting potato acres by ground and air. All told, these teams reviewed more than 122,000 fields and counted 4,262,449 acres.

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To count acres, United used a combination of GPS and mapping software to record the crops planted in each field. Fields were recorded as either potatoes or 'other.' In order to properly verify a field's crop, a team member, at minimum, had to be close enough to see the field using field glasses. United required that teams visually verify a field before recording its crop. Each team transmitted its data to the home office. For tracking purposes, each team's data was tagged electronically to ensure that if errors arose they could be linked back to a specific team.

Following the count, United conducted an audit to verify the accuracy of its findings. Of the 122,000+ fields, 793 fields were audited, representing 41,161 acres. The audit results indicated an error rate of 0.74%. This number means that out of almost 800 fields, only six were identified as mislabeled. United's counters achieved an accuracy rate of 99.2%.

Protecting Data

As part of this counting process, United established a data policy for the handling of all acreage data. By adhering to a data policy from the beginning, United believes it can best serve the grower community and still maintain privacy for landowners. See unitedpotato.com for an electronic version of the policy.

Briefly, the policy states that United will only provide and/or publish acreage data in aggregate by United districts, counties and by state. Within the system, individual fields are not identified by owner name, only by map location. Any maps published as part of a presentation or article, for example, will have all identifiable characteristics (e.g., road names, county names, etc.) removed to prevent disclosure of specific field locations. United will take every necessary measure to ensure that this data is protected to maintain program standards and security.

NASS Announces Potato Objective Yield Survey

The USDA NASS Idaho Field Office will conduct its annual Potato Objective Yield Survey later this fall to estimate the state's total potato production. Through selection from known potato acreage, 340 samples will be chosen in Idaho for the Objective Yield digs, and later, 450 growers will be contacted to collect yield information. Sample collection will begin with this year's potato harvest.

To collect the most accurate yield and acreage data possible, NASS needs strong grower participation. All individual data collected will be held confidential, as required by federal law. The information collected is used to produce state, regional, and national potato production estimates, which will be released November 10. The estimates issued by NASS are unbiased and made available to all persons. Individual potato growers and local marketing associations can use this data to make sound marketing decisions. A representative of NASS will soon contact these operations to explain the survey procedures. If you have any questions, feel free to call Brad Early or Bill Meyer at 1.800.691.9987.

2008 Field Digs Second Step to Forecasting Production

Coming on the heels of United successful statewide acreage count, Jerry Wright announced at the recent summer meeting all Idaho potato growers are invited to participate in United's 2008 Field Dig Program. All data will be kept confidential and provided in aggregate to participating growers by district. District aggregates will be available to participants upon request six to eight working days after the dig.

The program consists of three digs with the first happening August 1, the second August 21, and the third during harvest. The first two digs are handled by the growers with the third dig conducted by each district's fieldman.

United is interested in collecting information related to Burbank, Ranger, Western, Shepody, or Norkotah potatoes. To create as accurate a projection as possible, growers are asked to retrieve samples from each potato field, with a single pivot or less being considered a field. Multiple digs from the same field are not needed.

2008 Idaho Field Digs

Please reproduce this form and complete 1 copy for EACH field sampled.

Grower Name :_____ Farm Code:_____
Farm Field Name:_____
Date Planted:_____ Est. Kill Date: _____
Variety Planted_____
Row width_____ Soil Type:(circle one) Sand Dirt
Dig GPS coordinates (if available) _____

Each dig should be exactly a 10-ft. strip.

First Dig: Aug 1st or the exact date of the dig _____

- Rank Plant Health: *(circle one)*

Least Healthy				*Healthiest*
1	2	3	4	5

- Total Plant Count:_____
- Total Tuber Count:_____
- Total Lbs._____

Second Dig: Aug 21st or the exact date of the dig _____

- Rank Plant Health: *(circle one)*

Least Healthy				*Healthiest*
1	2	3	4	5

- Total Plant Count:_____
- Total Tuber Count:_____
- Total Lbs._____

	Less than 2" or 4 oz. (Idaho only)	4 oz. – 6.9 oz. (all states)	7 – 9.9 oz. (all states)	10 oz. and up (all states)	US #2 (all states)
Total Lbs.					

Third Dig: Harvest (Your United Fieldman will conduct this dig for you)

Please fax this form to (208) 535-8509 after each dig

CONTACTS:
Audie Trudell – (208) 520-8981 Districts 1, 2 and 3
Eric Duffin – (208) 221-4445 Districts 4 and 5
Jack Puyear – (208) 731-7054 District 6
Mike Leavitt- (208) 520-3757 SIPCO Growers

2008 Idaho Field Dig Form

Field Dig Process

As growers sample each field, United suggests that they follow the process outlined below for each sampled field to help create consistency between the dig results:

The program consists of three digs with the first happening August 1, the second August 21, and the third during harvest.

- Choose a location in the field that represents average soil and growing conditions, avoiding corners and areas with poor drainage.
- Dig a 10-foot strip in the sample location.
- Use the United field dig form (see sample, left) to record the following:
  - Plant count and health
  - Tuber count
  - Spud sizes and total weight

If growers have the capability, United also asks that they supply the GPS coordinates for each dig to allow for future reference. Once growers complete their digs, they can fax the completed forms to the United office at 208.535.8509 no later than five working days after the scheduled dig date.

Growers can download a copy of the field dig form at unitedpotato.com. If they have any questions, growers can contact their district fieldman:

- Audie Trudell, 208.520.8981; Dists. 1, 2, & 3
- Eric Duffin, 208.221.4445; Dists. 4 & 5
- Jack Puyear, 208.731.7054; Dist. 6
- Shane Wright, 208.241.4438; Seed Dist.
- Mike Leavitt, 208.520.3757; SIPCO Process Growers

6109 S. Yellowstone Highway
Idaho Fall, ID 83402

www.unitedpotato.com

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To learn more about United Potato Growers of Idaho, contact:

Jerry Wright, CEO & President

Email: jerry.wright@united.com

Phone: 208.535.8500

To learn more about this newsletter, or to be added to our mailing list, contact:

Britt Raybould

Email: braybould@gmail.com