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Six Countries Attend USPB International Seed Symposium



DENVER—(September 9, 2009) Countries representing the continents of Africa, Asia and South America attended the United States Potato Board's (USPB's) International Seed Symposium in Las Vegas, NV, on July 27, 2009. The Symposium was attended by six US grower operations along with 22 international participants from the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua, Egypt, Brazil, Sri Lanka and Uruguay.

This one day seminar featured presentations from US experts on US seed varieties, seed certification standards, the role of Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) in exports

and seed cutting. USPB International Marketing Manager Sarah Mahler welcomed the visitors and gave an introduction on the USPB's activities. "The 2009 USPB Seed Symposium was a great opportunity for the US seed potato industry to meet foreign buyers and to develop new business relationships," she said.

Dr. Richard Zink from USDA APHIS PPQ highlighted the plant health aspects of international trade, and gave a brief overview of the programs available through the federal government to assist growers and allied industry members in exporting US potato seed to foreign markets. "Export certification works well when everybody coordinates and is informed about the plans to export," he said. "The USDA will verify the requirements are met to allow entry of the cargo into a country."

A summary of the different seed potato certification programs in the US and other countries was presented by Willem Schrage, Director of Potato Programs with the North Dakota State Seed Department (NDSSD). "The seed potato inspectors are the ones closest to the growers and to the crop," he said. "Therefore, a close cooperation between inspectors and export officials proves to be most beneficial to the industry."

Heartland Farms, Inc., and Walther Farms Director of Research and Development, Dr. Charlie Higgins, demonstrated the advantages of using certified seed instead of farm saved seed. He also showed by creating the conditions optimal for suberization, it is possible to cut seed under less than favorable conditions which may exist in many of the countries importing US potato seed.

Many of these countries like varieties that produce a high percentage of large tubers. European varieties tend to have a higher percentage of smaller tubers than US varieties, so US varieties match well with the markets. The downside of several US varieties is that they are so productive in making large tubers it is uneconomical to produce single drop seed. Importing markets are generally accustomed to single drop seed, as they typically import from Europe. It makes sense for importing growers in many countries to learn how to cut seed so that they can economically handle US varieties.

Presentations were also given by each of the international delegations on their country and its potato production. US growers attending the 2009 Seed Symposium were able to learn about growing conditions and foreign potato markets firsthand from each delegation.

"The US seed potato industry benefits from seed potato export opportunities when the initial hurdles are overcome with each new foreign market," Schrage said. "Those growers who choose to export seed potatoes are able to because of the USPB's work in developing these new markets."

The 2009 Seed Symposium provided US growers the opportunity to meet potential new buyers and learn about their needs. Likewise, the international participants had the opportunity to learn from US industry experts and discuss quality US seed potatoes with US growers and shippers.

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David Fairbourn is Manager, Industry Communications & Policy, at the United States Potato Board in Denver. The mission of the USPB is to increase demand for potatoes and potato products through an integrated promotion program, thereby providing US producers with expanding markets for their production. David can be contacted at 303-369-7783 or david.fairbourn@uspotatoes.com. For complete information about the programs, ROI results, resources and tools available to all members of the industry through the USPB, please visit www.uspotatoes.com. The United States Potato Board—Maximizing Return on Grower Investment.

