

PVMI Progress OR Money for Nothing and Your Chips for Free

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It was Dire Straits, the British rock band, who originally came up with the idea and the lyrics in 1985, which became a number one hit here in the U.S. PVMI (the Potato Variety Management Institute) does not play guitar or drums, it does not own its own jet airplane nor has it raised a million dollars (yet). But there is something in common, both PVMI and Dire Straits (in their time) collected money apparently for nothing from outside the Tri-State area, and even outside the U.S. for the Tri-State Potato Breeding and Research Program.

To explain, we have to go back to 1994, when the Plant Variety Protection Act was amended by Congress to include potatoes. Until that time all potato varieties were “public” releases, which meant that anyone could use them, anywhere in the world, without charge. This meant that potato varieties released after 1994 could be “protected,” making them a type of intellectual property. Not only can Tri-State potato varieties be protected by PVP, but they **should** be protected to avoid having others make ownership claims to the varieties developed by our program.

Monetary Advantages

Once a variety is protected by having PVP applied for, then it can then be licensed to growers and fees and royalties can be charged for its use. Until PVMI was formed in 2005 by the potato commissions in Washington, Oregon and Idaho, the majority of usage of new protected potato varieties were not administered; that is, no licenses were issued to use them, nor royalty fees collected when seed was sold. PVMI has set up the system to manage the administration of potato varieties released by the Tri-State program, and to collect and pass licensing and royalty proceeds back to the variety development research programs in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho. This is especially important in these hard times when state and national governments are reducing both existing funding and grants for agricultural research.

So, what kind of money are we talking about here? First you need to know that because the Tri-State Research Program is supported by both national and regional funds, including those from the local potato commissions, the fees are structured so that they are proportionately less for Northwest growers. This is meant to reflect the Northwest’s investment in establishing PVMI and in supporting the research program over the last 20 or more years. That is, Washington, Idaho and Oregon pay a set fee of \$250 for an annual license and \$0.25/cwt for royalties on seed sold. Within the U.S., but outside the region, the annual fee is \$500 and royalties are \$.50/cwt, or double that paid by Tri-State seed growers. International fees at \$1,000 per year and \$1.00 U.S./cwt are four times higher than those for Pacific Northwest growers!

Since PVMI started collecting license fees in 2006, 128 annual licenses have been paid for in the Tri-States, 160 in the U.S. and 68 internationally, and this does not reflect the majority of 2009 license fees that are in the process of being received. In money terms, a total of almost \$350,000 has been collected in license and royalty fees to date, with 57 percent from licenses and 43 percent from royalty fees—bearing in mind that 2008 royalty fees are only now starting

to come in. The important figures and the reason for the alternative title of this article is that more than 70 percent of the \$350,000 has come from outside the Tri-State region. This money would have not been collected and made available for the promotion of the new varieties and to fund future activities of the Tri-State Research and Breeding Program if PVMI was not in place.

Pursuing Grants

Another activity of PVMI has been to pursue Federal grant money to help establish the program. To date PVMI has secured \$250,000 in matching funds from the USDA Value Added Producer Grants. PVMI has also received a CSREES grant and is currently working on additional funding to promote the conservation benefits of the new varieties including requiring less water, nitrogen and pest resistance.

PVMI looks after foreign protection of newly released Tri-State varieties including pursuing PBR and registration in Canada and working with international partners for variety development and protection. Work is currently being undertaken with partnerships in The Netherlands, Australia and the UK. Besides its administrative role, PVMI also works with end-users to increase adoption of new varieties in processing, grocery, foodservice and restaurant trades. Also, by working in conjunction with the universities and industry, PVMI works to improve communication between all sectors of the Northwest Potato Industry. PVMI publishes a biannual Newsletter, "**Variety News**," maintains a website www.pvmi.org and participates in regional and national industry meetings.

Besides being a non-profit administration company PVMI works to promote the new varieties as well as to inform growers about the characteristics of the varieties and the suggested agronomic practices recommended by the universities and state research organizations. The website www.pvmi.org includes comprehensive management information from the Tri-State Program as well as full lists of seed growers and other useful information about each variety and important links.

Newest Tri-State Releases

Finally, a plug for the newest releases from the Tri-State Program:

Alpine Russet (A9305-10): A processing russet with excellent storage characteristics, it is a high yielding, medium-to-late maturing cultivar with oblong tubers, light russet skin and good processing quality following long-term storage.

Classic Russet (A95109-1): This alternative for Norkotah is an early-maturing, russeted clone that produces a high percentage of U.S. No. 1 tubers. Its attractive tubers make it very suitable for use by the fresh-pack industry and could also be used as an early processor.

Clearwater Russet (AOA95154-1): This new dual purpose russet with high protein and excellent processing qualities is medium-late maturing, with oblong-long tubers that have medium-russet skin. Tubers exhibit excellent fry color out of storage and their attractiveness make this variety suitable for both processing and fresh market usage.

Owyhee Russet (AO96160-3): A new russet with excellent grade and processing qualities. It is a medium to late maturing selection from Oregon with medium yields and long, medium heavily russeted tubers. An attractive tuber with high counts of U.S. No. 1s,

Red Sunset (AO93487-2R): Produces high marketable yields with excellent fresh market quality. This bright red-skinned, mid-to-early maturing variety also has high Vitamin C content.