



News Release

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NPC Awards 2013-14 Academic Scholarship to Washington State University Grad Student



Washington, D.C. – The National Potato Council (NPC) is pleased to award Rhett Spear, a horticulture Ph.D. graduate student at Washington State University (WSU), its 2013-14 Academic Scholarship. Spear’s research is focused on identifying new, viable fresh-pack varieties as alternatives to the Russet Norkotah, the leading fresh-pack variety that is susceptible to the Potato Virus Y (PVY).

In 2011, Spear initiated a three-year fresh-pack variety trial, which is evaluating the economic value, bruise resistance, storability, and overall consumer preference of 12 varieties. He has also initiated reduced-input trials in an effort to identify new varieties that use fewer resources than traditional processing and fresh-pack varieties.

“I have gained valuable experience through this research and, as a result, will be able to assist U.S. growers in maintaining global competitiveness and profitability in my future endeavors,” Spear said.

Mark Pavek, Ph.D., associate professor and research extension horticulturist at WSU, praised Spear’s academic work: “The projects Rhett has implemented could favorably alter the cultural practices and variety selections of U.S. potato growers. I have no doubt that Rhett will be in high demand when he leaves my program.”

Each year, NPC awards one \$10,000 scholarship to a graduate student pursuing advanced studies that will improve the future of the potato industry. Final scholarship selection is based on academic achievement, leadership abilities, and the potential commercial value of the applicant’s academic work.

In addition to his coursework, Spear is the financial chair of the WSU Horticulture club, a member of the Potato Association of America, and the chair-elect of the Tri-State portion of the Pacific Northwest Potato Variety Development Program. A graduate of Utah State University, he lives in Pullman, Wash., with his wife Aria. The couple has two daughters, Jenae and Brooke, and is expecting their third daughter any day.

The National Potato Council is the advocate for the economic well-being of U.S. potato growers on federal legislative, regulatory, environmental, and trade issues. NPC supports the U.S. potato industry by monitoring issues affecting the strength and viability of the potato industry, influencing regulators and legislators on issues crucial to the industry’s long term success, ensuring fair market access for potatoes and potato products, and bringing the unique issues and interests of diverse growing regions in the U.S. together on a national level.

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