

**PARMA RESEARCH STATION
MUST CONTINUE ITS ESSENTIAL WORK**

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**Fruit Grower Cancels Scholarship Endowment because of Closure Decision
Faculty Union Attorney is Preparing a Restraining Order Against the Closure**

By Nick Gier

The U.S. leads the world in agricultural innovation primarily because of research done at the nation's land grant universities. One of the most successful experiment stations in Idaho is located in Parma, but the UI has just announced that it will be closed at the end of the year.

Esmaeil Fallahi, a world renowned fruit expert at Parma, is responsible for the fact that Idaho now grows Fuji apples, table grapes, and white peaches. Farmers initially thought they should concentrate on wine grapes, but Fallahi convinced them to grow table grapes instead. In the recent years, hundreds of thousands of boxes of white peaches and table grapes have been shipped to Asia, and this trend is increasing rapidly because of research at the Parma station.

Southern Idaho's soil and climate is perfect for several fruit varieties. The soil in the San Joaquin Valley is becoming so alkaline that some California growers are thinking about leasing land in Idaho. The Parma station would be critical in servicing the needs of these new growers.

Saad Hafez, another researcher at the Parma station, brings in \$500,000 a year in research and service funds for Idaho agriculture. Because of Hafez's work, Idaho farmers saved \$8.1 million annually over a 20 year period.

Since 1982 Hafez has identified 53 species of nematodes, small worms that infect potatoes, apples, sugar beets, cherries, and alfalfa. Hafez has also discovered

two new species, the latest one named after him. When I visited the station in 2006 a number of federal officials were there to consult with Hafez about his discoveries and his general research.

During a meeting with Parma faculty and staff on June 16, John Hammel, dean of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, was hammered about the closure decision and his mismanagement of the station.

Ron Mann, founder of the Idaho Table Grape Association and former advisor to President Reagan, asked Hammel why the growers were not consulted. Mann offered several viable alternatives to save money short of closing the station.

In a phone conversation with Mann, he told me that the UI administration is not only "inept in the management of people and budgets," but it is also "corrupt and filled with deceit."

In response to Hammel's proposal that farmers could continue experiments on their own land, Mann explained that Hammel simply does not understand why it is essential to have separate experimental plots run by experts. This allows farmers full use of their land for growing proven varieties.

In a letter to a local editor Parma employee Kent Wagoner wrote that Hammel's "lack of preparation" and "inability to adequately defend the UI's position should be an embarrassment to anyone who claims an affiliation with our state's land grant university."

I have also spoken to a number of Idaho apple growers and they are aghast at the mismanagement at the Parma station. A spokesman for the Symms Fruit Ranch, Idaho's largest apple grower, said that the UI "has an agenda that does not coincide with the purpose of a land grant institution."

Gerald J. Henggeler, co-chair of the Tree Fruit Working Group and UI business graduate, told me that financial accounting at the Parma station "was probably the worst that I have encountered in all my years of doing business." What was especially infuriating to Henggeler was that, until recently, UI officials

told Parma faculty that there were no research funds left for their projects even though the apple growers always got surplus project funds returned to them.

Apple grower Jon Trail is so upset about the UI decision that he has revoked his agreement to provide scholarships for students from Southwest Idaho. In a phone conversation Trail told me that the endowment amounted to seven figures. In his letter to Dean Hammel Trail states: "I can no longer be associated with such embarrassment, ignorance, and misguided decision making. I cannot in good conscience encourage students to attend your college."

The Parma faculty will be transferred to the experiment station in Caldwell but the 16 staff employees will lose their jobs. The cost of building news offices for the faculty will far outweigh the \$177,000 a year the UI now pays the Parma employees. Furthermore, costly renovations at the Parma station have just been completed.

Professor Hafez says that he is glad that he still has a job, but at Caldwell, as he told a Moscow reporter, "I can't do my job." Both Hafez and Fallali need the Parma labs and technical staff to do their work. Furthermore, there is no land at the Caldwell station for experimental plots and the 200 acres at Parma will not be maintained. Henggeler told me that if the Parma fruit is not sprayed, then there will be a threat to his own orchards adjacent to the station.

Tom Elias, one of the founders of the Idaho Grape Growers Association, told me on the phone that the closure of the Parma station would set back Idaho's fruit industry at least ten years. He stated that the Taiwanese alone will take all the fruit that Idaho farmers can grow.

A faculty union attorney will soon prepare a restraining order to prevent the station's closure, but we hope that we can reverse this decision by lobbying the UI administration. We urge all concerned Idahoans to contact their legislators and UI administrators and tell them that the Parma station must continue its essential work.

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