



## Ag News

### Idaho's first lady promotes locally grown

By Patti Murphy, Ag Weekly correspondent



**PATTI MURPHY/Ag Weekly**  
**Idaho's first lady Lori Otter shops for locally grown potatoes at the Boise Co-Op in her promotion of local foods and the Idaho Preferred Program**

BOISE, Idaho - As she made her way up and down the aisles of the Boise Co-Op on Wednesday, Idaho's First Lady Lori Otter discussed her commitment to eating locally grown foods, all while filling her basket with fruits and vegetables, cheese, bread, jams, salsa, meat, and wine that had been grown and produced in Idaho.

The shopping trip was organized by the Idaho Department of Agriculture to help kick-off "Idaho Preferred Month" in September, which is designed to draw attention to the benefits of eating locally and to recognize the farmers, growers and producers in the state.

Earlier in the day, Otter's group had eaten an all-Idaho breakfast of fresh eggs, chorizo and salmon at Chef Lou's in Boise, picked fresh peaches "the size of softballs" at the Symms Fruit Ranch in Caldwell, and dined on an Idaho-grown lunch of tomato bisque soup, cheese, bread, and lamb at the Brick 29 Bistro, all

to raise awareness about eating locally.

“It was all amazing,” she said. “It’s just really good, fresh, local food.”

Otter said she and the governor are very aware of what they are buying and try to look for Idaho Preferred products when shopping.

“You’re not only supporting the local economy, but you’re making healthy choices,” she said. “Eating local lets you eat with the seasons, enjoy what nature is producing and celebrate the harvest.”

Leah Clark, manager of the Idaho Preferred program, said she currently works with about 160 Idaho Preferred members who produce and supply bread, dairy products, produce, meats, specialty foods, water, wine, and nursery plants. She also works with restaurants and schools to promote the use of locally grown food.

For a company to become qualify to be a member of Idaho Preferred, a certain percentage of its product must be grown in Idaho.

“The qualification for fresh produce is that it must be 100 percent grown in Idaho,” she said. “For livestock, the animal has to spend a portion of its life in Idaho, and processed products like jams and dressings must have at least 20 percent Idaho-grown ingredients.”

Treasure Valley Salsa, which currently buys its ingredients exclusively from S&G Produce in Twin Falls, has “taken off” since becoming an Idaho Preferred member in January, said owner Jason Hall.

“We currently are selling about 3,000 jars a month in about 30 retail stores,” Hall said. “People are very conscious about buying local products, and seeing that logo is a huge help. It’s been great marketing for us.”

Otter, Clark and Hall all agree that the consumer’s desire to buy local is growing and that they are starting to recognize the blue and yellow Idaho Preferred logo.

“Customers want local but many don’t necessarily want to go out to the orchard or go to a farmers market. If you provide local food, they will come to your store and buy it,” Clarke said. “When they buy local, they get fresh food that is usually picked ripe, so the flavor is phenomenal,” she said, adding that Idaho produce is likely picked only two days in advance as opposed to food shipped in from out of state that is usually picked a week or more early, before it is ripe.

In the Magic Valley area, Clarke said the program is just starting to grow. She mentions the participation of local member Clark Kaufman, who raises sweet corn, melons and tomatoes, and Gooding Middle School.

“The school has developed a relationship with a local farmer who is growing specifically for that school cafeteria,” she said. “So, they all sit down at the beginning of the year and he says ‘what do you want me to plant?’ and they decide together what his planting will be for the year.”

When she first started to work with the Idaho Preferred program, Clarke said she had to convince people to join as members.

“Now we have people calling wanting to know how they can qualify,” she said.

“Our approach for the next year is really going to be to expand the program so we have a presence and can do more things in the Twin Falls area, the Idaho Falls area and up north,” Clark said. “We really see a huge potential in the market and realize this needs to be a statewide program, now that we have the experience and resources to be able to move it forward.”

Otter said that being a locavore isn’t difficult and the benefits are many.

“You’re getting the healthiest food, and you’re able to support our local economy,” she said. “And all you’ve got to do is look around and think about buying fresh and buying Idaho.”