

Idaho officials seek funding in pesticide cleanup

KATHRYN HAAKE, Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Idaho's top agriculture official said Monday that \$250,000 being sought to dispose of 2,000 tons of contaminated hay is just the beginning of an ongoing pesticide cleanup in eastern Idaho.

Department of Agriculture Director Celia Gould made the request in front of the Joint Finance Appropriations panel.

She said the agency will likely request additional funds in upcoming years to treat the negative impacts of a pesticide known as methyl bromide, applied on potatoes in Bingham and Bonneville counties in 2006

She said \$50,000 of the requested funds will go toward collaborative research with state universities.

"Yes, it is a mess," she said. "What the research hopes to show is how we get it out of the soil."

Gould said the pesticide seeped into the soil after state and federal agencies used it to eradicate a potato pest called pale cyst nematode. Government officials were allowed to use the pesticide, but they weren't expecting it to contaminate over 2,000 acres of crops.

"There are tort claims and there's continuing money going toward research," Gould told the committee. "But in the meantime, people need to have some kind of game plan. That's why the research is so critical."

The contamination wasn't noticed until a ranching family reported deformities and sickness in their herds in 2014.

After an extensive investigation by state and federal agencies, research confirmed high levels of bromide in alfalfa hay grown on the treated fields. Additionally, test samples of wheat, barley, potatoes, alfalfa, tomato, corn and straw grown on other treated fields also showed some level of bromide.