

Western Michigan University Geologists work with entrepreneur to find potash that may be worth billions

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KALAMAZOO (WKZO) -- It's not the most glamorous mineral, it won't be turned into jewelry or fuel our cars but it may just produce a brand new industry in West Michigan, one that will be bigger than the state's oil and gas industry combined.

It's Potash, potassium chloride, a critical ingredient in fertilizer, which is something that there is a large demand for in this corner of the Earth.

Michigan farmers use about 300-thousand tons a year, and right now much of it has to be imported from overseas or Canada at some expense.

The driving force behind the discovery is Theodore A. Pagano, a potash geologist, engineer and entrepreneur from Denver.

He contacted William and Linda Harrison at the Western Michigan University Michigan Geological Repository for Research and Education. Its a warehouse that stores the geological structure of Michigan using mineral samples and well data preserved from all over the state.

A search of the records found a huge and largely untapped deposit of high grade potassium in northwestern Michigan,

He says this mineral, the remnants of an ancient ocean, is a precious and increasingly rare resource globally, because its so much in demand and only found in a few locations.

They just pump water into the deposit. It dissolves and is pumped out and then dried.

Dr. Harrison say the potential is for a 65-billion dollar industry in Mecosta and Osceola counties, that will employ 300 people and provide a cheaper source of high grade fertilizer for Michigan's second biggest industry; farming.

Pagano is now general manager of Michigan Potash Co. LLC. That firm now controls the rediscovered potassium ore reserve called the Borgen Bed that sits under more than 14,500 acres in the two counties.

He is working with the state and private lenders to come up with the financing to build the infrastructure necessary to recover the Potash, which is more than a mile underground.

And that's how fortunes and industries are born.
