

WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

APRIL | 2021

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WHEAT LIFE

Volume 64 • Number 04
www.wheatlife.org

The official publication of



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WHEAT GROWERS**

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Wheat Life (ISSN 0043-4701) is published by the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG): 109 E. First Avenue • Ritzville, WA 99169-2394

Eleven issues per year with a combined August/September issue. Standard (A) postage paid at Ritzville, Wash., and additional entry offices.

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Advertising in *Wheat Life* does not indicate endorsement of an organization, product or political candidate by WAWG.

President's Perspective



It's not mine, it's just my turn

By Ryan Poe

Washington agriculture is dominated by family farms, and my Grant County operation is no exception. We are a centennial farm, which means we have owned and operated some of the same land within my family since prior to statehood. My great-great grandfather, grandmother and her two sisters homesteaded a quarter section each. That section is still farmed by my family today. If you search for centennial farms on the Washington State Department of

Agriculture's website (agr.wa.gov), you'll see two publications celebrating these farms, the original publication from 1989 and an updated version 25 years later.

Growing up, all I wanted to be was a farmer/rancher. Family is why I am here, living my dreams. My son, who just turned 9, is a little farmer to the core. That might change as he grows older, but if he is anything like me, I kind of doubt that will happen. I'll do everything I can to keep our farm going so that my children have the opportunity to farm if they so choose, but there's many factors out there that threaten our ability to make a living "scratching dirt."

This legislative session, we have seen several bills that could potentially have a huge impact on family farms in Washington state. The low carbon fuel standard, coupled with a potential carbon tax, would have a significant impact on the price of fuel. Most of us in rural Eastern Washington simply drive further to get most everything. The ag overtime bill will definitely have an impact on family operations. A lot of benefits that farms have traditionally offered to their employees, like housing, vehicles, fuel and paid time off in the off season, will likely have to change. We tend to treat our employees like family, and ultimately, I believe this will hurt all of us. The capital gains tax could also hurt family farms, especially if it applies to farmland sold between family members or within certain tax structures.

I sure hope that our state and national legislators fully understand the importance of family farms to our nation. We do care about the land that we work. We have a vested interest in it, and we want to pass it along to the next generation. There's an idea that I think perfectly sums up how most farmers feel about their land—it's not my land, this is just my turn. I think this is very fitting for most of us farmers. If you are a multigenerational farm—and even if you aren't now, but hope to be one day—speak up. We have a good story to tell, and a lot of people like hearing it. ■

Cover photo: For the past month, wheat growers have been using Zoom to meet with state and federal legislators to discuss trade, carbon regulations, agricultural overtime and other legislation. See page 8. All photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

The Utt Farm, est. 1888.

This Centennial Farm land is one of four parcels, comprising all 662 acres of Section 4 of Township 24 North, Range 30 East, that were acquired by Katie Utt, her husband, James Harris, and her sisters, Nora and Abbie, around the time of statehood. All the land is still owned by family, and all is currently operated by Terry Poe, his nephew, Ryan, and stepson, Dean Thompson, under the name, Poe Farms Joint Venture. Terry is a great-grandson of Katie Utt and James Harris. ■

The Washington Wheat Foundation is starting a new project highlighting Washington's centennial farms. See page 24.

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Dialogue

The case for setting minimum wages at the county level

A controversial feature in the Biden Administration's economic proposals was its pitch to double the national minimum wage to \$15 an hour across the board, which became snagged procedurally and then scrapped in the U.S. Senate. Even if it returns later in the year as free-standing legislation, it faces an uphill battle for enactment. Not only is GOP opposition strong, but members of Congress who represent rural areas, including some Democrats, worry about a one-size-fits-all national mandate's impact on their local businesses, existing jobs and tax revenues, not to mention their economic development efforts to add jobs and expand the tax base. Much the same dynamic is in play in state capitals, where proposals to raise state minimums have become perennial agenda items.

Some studies have found that minimum-wage hikes can kill jobs rather than boosting incomes, at least for unskilled workers who are then frozen out of the labor market. It's a controversial topic that typically divides along party lines and political ideologies. To find middle ground for a sensible compromise, the minimum wage laws need to take into account the fact that living costs in rural and small-town America—most notably housing costs—are significantly lower than in more populous cities and counties. Nobody will dispute that a dollar buys far more in Odessa or Pomeroy than in Seattle or Bellevue.

The federal minimum wage of \$7.25 was last revised in 2009. That rate sets the floor in a dozen states; the rest are higher, at various levels. Almost half the states are now over \$10, and \$15 prevails in a few places, mostly California cities. Washington has one of the highest statewide minimums in the country, at \$13.69 in 2021. The recent congressional proposal wouldn't have topped today's Washington state minimum wage until 2025, after stair-stepping up from an initial \$9.25 in 2021.

Based on inflation alone, an increase in the national wage mandate is overdue. With the national poverty-income level estimated at \$26,500 for a family of four, it's hard to argue that a new \$15 minimum wage—only 13 percent above the poverty standard—is too high in many localities. At \$7.25 an hour, the current federal mandate is below the poverty line for even a one-person household. And while polling finds that most Americans support an increase, the opposition is deeply rooted in places where wage mandates defy local financial realities.

There is an approach, though, that could allay some employers' fears and match policy with economic realities—indexing the minimum wage to the local cost of living. Even if Congress enacts the \$15 benchmark, it should first make this adjustment, which ought to enjoy bipartisan support. Likewise, Olympia lawmakers should adopt a similar recalibration.

It's a sensible mathematical equalizer for obvious urban-rural economic disparities. The national minimum-wage standard could be adjusted—both up and down—for local cost-of-living differences on a county-by-county basis. The tools for such adjustments are readily available. For years, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development has calculated a fair market rent index for

metropolitan statistical areas for various housing assistance programs. Separately, some federal workers are paid a wage premium for high-cost locations, based on similar measures. Such methodologies can readily be enhanced to use local apartment and house rental rates, along with “bottom tier” house prices, for data points.

Using such measures, the national wage minimum could be adjusted up or down locally, based on each county's index level. Workers in urban, high-income, high-cost counties like King County would be eligible for a federal minimum wage several dollars above the national or statewide standard. Those working in lower-income, low-cost rural counties would be subject to a commensurately lower minimum wage.

Washington state is a microcosm of the national divide between urban and rural communities. Politically, the issue is that acres don't vote, people do, so rural interests take a back seat in our increasingly urban society. But Olympia legislators should think twice before they hoist another mandatory wage floor. Longer term, political progressives seeking to achieve a higher living-wage benchmark will find better odds of bipartisan support using local cost-of-living adjustments.

This approach displays sensitivity to long-standing economic differences between lawmakers' rural and urban constituencies. Equal opportunities need not compel identical interventions, as long as they are commensurate, just as civic unity requires respect for inherent differences across this vast nation. ■

Girard Miller, otherwise known as (Adams County farmer) “Grant Miller’s brother,” graduated from Lind High School and the University of Washington. A retired public finance and investment executive now residing in Southern California, he writes a biweekly column for Governing Finance from which this article was adapted. See more of his work at governing.com/authors/Girard-Miller.html

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Family \$200 (2 family members)	X	X	X			X
Partnership \$500 (1-5 family members)	X	X	X	X		X
Convention \$600 (2 individuals)	X	X	X		X	X
Lifetime \$2,500 (1 individual)	X	X	X	X		X
Non-Voting Membership						
Student \$75	X	X	X			
Industry Associate \$150	X	X	X			

WAWG's current top priorities are:

- ✓ Protecting agriculture from liability for complying with state overtime laws.
- ✓ Fighting mandatory carbon regulations that would raise prices on fuel and fertilizer.
- ✓ Maintaining a safe and sound transportation system that includes rail, river and roads.
- ✓ Protecting existing tax policy.
- ✓ Preserving the Snake River dams.

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WAWG at WORK

ADVOCATING FOR THE WHEAT FARMERS OF EASTERN WASHINGTON

Wheat growers meet with state, federal legislators

Most of the wheat growers' advocacy trips to Olympia and Washington, D.C., are a whirlwind of activity, hurrying from one appointment to another to fit in as many meetings as possible in just a couple of days. This year's efforts involved a whole lot less walking but just as much advocacy.

Since early March, the leaders and staff of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) have connected virtually with almost every congressional office and more than 30 state legislators (as of press time), with more meetings scheduled. While growers miss the personal interaction with lawmakers, the ability to meet with legislators later in the session means growers can react to specific bills and bill details.

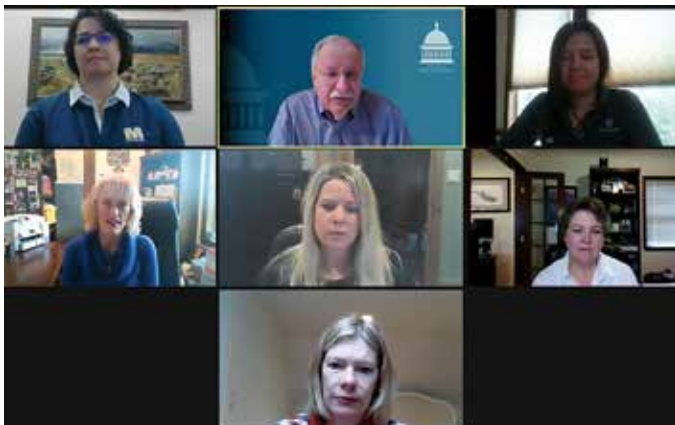
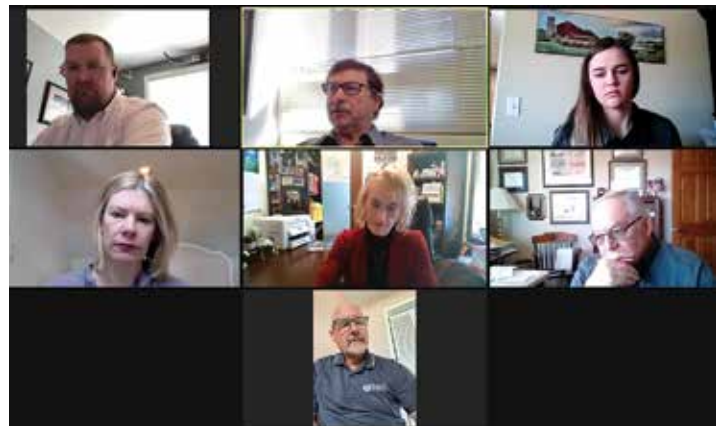
"It's an unusual legislative session for sure," said Ryan Poe, WAWG president. "We are fighting hard to protect agricultural employers from paying retroactive overtime pay and encouraging legislators to allow an overtime seasonality exemption. We are also defending our need for an ag exemption in any carbon policy or low carbon fuel standard for fuels used on the farm and in transporting our products to market. Finally, we are working to make sure that agricultural real estate is not subject to a capital gains tax."

Some of the issues WAWG leaders are discussing with state legislators include:

- **Overtime in agriculture and retroactive overtime pay.** WAWG supports a phased approach to overtime pay, as well as a seasonality exemption. WAWG opposes agriculture having retroactive liability when state law did not require such payment at the time.



Washington grain industry leaders have spent much of the last month meeting with state and federal legislators, including (from top) Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-Wash.), Sen. Mark Schoesler (R-Ritzville), Rep. Kim Schrier (D-Wash.), and Rep. Frank Chopp (D-Bremerton).



- **Carbon policies.** WAWG opposes any carbon policies, whether it's a low carbon fuel standard, a cap and trade program or a carbon tax, that will raise fuel, fertilizer, transportation and processing costs. Furthermore, WAWG supports that any revenue generated by a carbon policy or tax should be reinvested in transportation infrastructure projects. Any carbon policy should be based on science and recognize agriculture's ability to sequester carbon.
- **Preserving the Snake River dams.** WAWG opposes any efforts to remove or disrupt transportation on the Snake River, including Rep. Mike Simpson's (R-Idaho) proposal. See page 26.
- **Funding for construction of research facilities at Washington State University (WSU).** WAWG supports WSU's \$8 million request in the 2021-23 capital budget to demolish 60-year-old Johnson Hall to leverage \$104.9 million in federal funds to build a new USDA Plant Biosciences Building.
- **Department of Natural Resources (DNR) ag leases.** WAWG supports legislation sponsored by Rep. Chris Corry (R-Yakima) requiring fair compensation to farmers for the remainder of their lease term when DNR chooses to terminate an ag lease early.

In federal meetings, WAWG is discussing many of the same topics as in their state meetings. Other federal issues include:

- **Enforcing existing trade agreements and addressing nontariff trade barriers.** WAWG supports full implementation and enforcement of existing trade agreements to allow fair trade to occur within the export marketplace. WAWG also strongly supports the enforcement of sanitary and phytosanitary

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agreements with its trade partners.

- **Renewing Trade Promotion Authority (TPA).** WAWG supports the renewal of TPA, which is set to expire July 1, 2021, in order to aid in the development of future fair trade agreements.
- **Funding for market promotion activities.** WAWG supports continued strong federal funding through the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development program to maintain the progress achieved with the increased support of Agricultural Trade Program funds.
- **Keeping the agricultural safety net strong.** WAWG strongly supports future farm bills to continue to offer agriculture and nutrition support programs, including maintaining the current structure of the crop insurance program and current cost-share levels.
- **Increasing the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) reference price.** WAWG supports making adjustments to the PLC wheat reference price so it is closer to \$6.50 per bushel to truly enable the program to function as an effective safety net. The price and yield functions of Agricultural Risk Coverage formulas should be adjusted so it can be a viable option for producers.
- **Research funding.** WAWG supports the PNW Herbicide Resistance Initiative and a FY2022 programmatic funding increase of \$3 million for USDA ARS salaries and expenses.
- **Investment into broadband infrastructure.** WAWG supports extending and improving broadband in rural, unserved and underserved areas.

“Our meetings with state and federal legislators have been very productive, and I feel we’ve made our voices heard despite the restrictions on in-person meetings,” said Michelle Hennings, WAWG’s executive director. “There’s still a lot of work to do and a lot of issues we need to educate on. We’ll continue to utilize every method available to get our message heard.” ■

Legislative news dominates March state board meeting

With spring field work right around the corner, Washington Association of Wheat Growers’ (WAWG) county representatives moved through association business quickly and efficiently at March’s state board meeting.

State and federal legislative news dominated the meeting. Diana Carlen, WAWG’s lobbyist, updated growers on legislation moving through the legislature, including

a capital gains tax; climate and carbon policy; environmental justice; overtime and retroactive overtime pay in agriculture; labor and paid family leave issues; and budgets. See WAWG’s website at wawg.org for Carlen’s latest legislative updates.

Growers also discussed the proposal by Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) that would breach the four lower Snake River dams and create a \$33 billion fund to help mitigate the impacts of breaching.

In national legislation, WAWG leaders had just returned from Dallas where they participated in the National Association of Wheat Growers’ (NAWG) annual conference. Similar to what’s happening at the state level, carbon and climate policy were major topics of discussion in committee meetings. Nicole Berg, NAWG’s vice president and a Benton County grower, said there were lots of different approaches to the climate issue, with the organization deciding to focus on supporting policies that recognize certain agricultural practices as a benefit to the environment and compensating producers for providing those benefits. See page 20 for more on the NAWG annual meeting.

Several U.S. Department of Agriculture agency representatives joined the board meeting. Chris Mertz, regional director of the National Agricultural Statistics Service, talked about upcoming surveys and reports and the need for growers to talk about the impacts of COVID-19 on their operations.

Travis Martin, Farm Service Agency (FSA) district director, said with the confirmation of Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack, the agency is starting to see other political appointments come on board. Washington still does not have a state executive director. Several FSA programs have had their deadlines extended, including the Conservation Reserve Program and the Quality Loss Adjustment Program. He encouraged growers to get their planting reports filed with their county offices as soon as possible. All USDA offices are still closed to the public.

Roylene Comes At Night, state conservationist for the Natural Resources Conservation Service, reviewed the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), which she described as the next level to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program. Under CSP, growers receive financial incentives for adding new or advanced conservation activities to existing conservation practices. From 2014-17, more than \$4 billion was invested in conservation practices under CSP. Growers interested in the program should

See page 26 for more on Simpson’s proposal and what the Washington wheat industry is doing about it.

The scientific explanation.

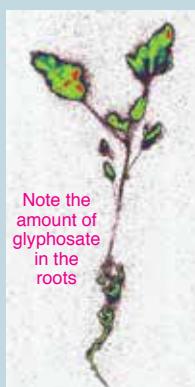
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The meeting wrapped up with committee reports, including a report on this year's Washington Grain Commission Research Review. Jim Moyer, chairman of the Research Committee, talked about some of the varieties in the pipeline, including a spring club wheat with Hessian fly resistance.

There will be no state board meeting in April. The next meeting is scheduled for May 11. ■

County growers resume holding local meetings

Counties are slowly beginning to hold meetings, some in person and others virtually.

"We've missed being able to sit down with growers and hear what's happening at the county level," said Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG). "We are looking forward to having more opportunities to visit with growers in person as the year progresses."

Here's the counties that met last month.

Asotin County

In Asotin County, it's no wonder that discussion about the lower Snake River dams dominated the conversation at last month's meeting, as many growers in the county ship their grain downriver by barge.

Bruce Petty, county president, said growers are feeling pretty downbeat about the situation with the dams and Idaho Rep. Mike Simpson's proposal to breach them. Many in the county are also still dealing with damage being done by elk. Petty said they haven't had much of a winter, but something, possibly predators, seems to be keeping the elk out of the backcountry and in farmers' fields.

Growers also discussed their county's scholarship program and elected a new county president. Leif Claassen is taking over the position of county president and state board representative from Petty.

Benton County

Benton County growers Zoomed into their first meeting in almost a year to hear from local state legislators and Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) staff.

Sen. Perry Dozier, the newly elected senator from the 16th District that includes parts of Benton County, spoke about some of the bills going through the Legislature, including a low carbon fuel standards bill, environmental

justice and Republicans' proposed transportation package.

"That's going to have some effects if it gets passed. A lot of it will be adding directly to (fuel) costs," he said, referring to carbon regulation legislation. He added that he missed the personal interactions between constituents and other legislators.

Michelle Hennings, WAWG's executive director, talked about the work the association is doing to protect the lower Snake River dams, including responding to a proposal released by Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) that would breach the dams and use a \$33 billion fund to help the region recover. See page 26 for more on Simpson's proposal and what the wheat industry is doing about it.

Nicole Berg, vice president of the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) and a Benton County grower, updated growers on what's been happening in Washington, D.C. She said the Biden Administration has suspended many U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs while it reviews them and appoints agency leadership. NAWG is engaging with the new administration and Tom Vilsack, the new secretary of agriculture, on farmers' behalf. Some of the issues NAWG is monitoring include wheat eligibility in the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program, the Conservation Reserve Program and accessibility of USDA local offices.

"It's been interesting working with everybody in D.C. with the constant changeover," Berg said. "A lot of us are still trying to understand who is in what role right now."

WAWG leadership had just returned from NAWG's annual conference where agricultural overtime and carbon regulation were big topics of discussion. See page 20 for more on NAWG's annual conference.

Finally, the group discussed the need for broadband coverage in rural areas.

Whitman County

By Randy Suess

After more than a year, Whitman County growers held their first in-person meeting in Colfax since the COVID-19 pandemic started. All social distancing guidelines were followed by the 17 growers and wheat industry stakeholders who attended.

Washington State University (WSU) spring wheat breeder Mike Pumphrey gave growers an update on his program and answered specific questions on new variety releases and varieties that are in the pipeline. He has a two-gene Clearfield variety spring club wheat (8325) that is Hessian fly resistant. He believes it will easily replace JD. Hail, a hard red spring, is also Hessian fly resistant. Pumphrey talked about the funding cuts to his program,

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and where he will have to make changes. Unfortunately, he thinks the cuts will hit funding for graduate students who do a lot of the work in the field and in the greenhouse. He also talked about how neither WSU nor many of their grants provide any funding for equipment. That money would likely have to come through the Washington Grain Commission.

Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), gave an update on the bills in Olympia affecting wheat growers, including agriculture overtime rules, low carbon fuel standards and carbon credits. She spoke about the frustration with remote testifying in Olympia, that people only have one minute to speak. In addition, no one really knows what happens to the information when stakeholders sign in for or against a particular issue, as far as affecting a legislator's position. She also talked about Idaho Rep. Mike Simpson's plan to remove the four lower Snake River Dams.

Steve Van Vleet, Whitman County extension agent, spoke about the work he is currently doing, and how he has been working with other counties since they no longer have extension agents. This led to a lengthy discussion of what growers could do to help fill those open positions. It was decided that we would try to get a meeting with WSU leadership about our concerns and explain the need for Extension in Eastern Washington.

Washington Grain Commissioners Gary Bailey and Ben Barstow gave an update on the recent Research Review and touched on the commission's finances. They also talked about some possible funding of equipment requests from WSU.

In other business, we had a drawing for a \$50 Amazon gift card that

the county won in WAWG's Legislative Action Fund (LAF) drawing held at the organization's annual virtual meeting in December. Larry Cochran was the winner. We also auctioned off the TV that we won in that drawing. It was bought for \$250 by Leslie Druffel from The McGregor Company.

It was so nice to actually be able to visit with people we had not seen personally for a long time, and we are looking forward to returning to more normal (in-person) meetings in the future. ■



Jim Moyer, a grower from Columbia County and a Washington Association of Wheat Growers board member, testified in front of the Washington State Senate Ways and Means Committee on SB 5126, a Climate Commitment Act (implementing a cap and trade program).

Growers testify in committee hearings

As the 2021 Legislative Session moves forward, Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) leaders and staff have continued to provide testimony during committee hearings.

SB 5373

Ryan Poe, WAWG president, testified in a hearing in the Senate Environment, Energy and Technology Committee on SB 5373, a carbon tax bill. While he thanked the sponsor, Sen. Liz Lovelett (D-Anacortes) for the outreach she's done to the agricultural community to better understand its concerns, he made the point that farmers and people living in rural areas would be disproportionately impacted by carbon pricing legislation.

"In rural areas, families need to drive farther for everything: for work, for groceries, for medical care. We don't have access to nearly as much public transportation as people in urban areas do. This means rural families will bear more of the financial burden caused by a cap and trade policy, which is an important equity issue," he said.

While the bill excludes on-farm usage and provides a five-year exemption for off-farm fuel usage, Poe testified that he was concerned about what happens after that exemption expires.

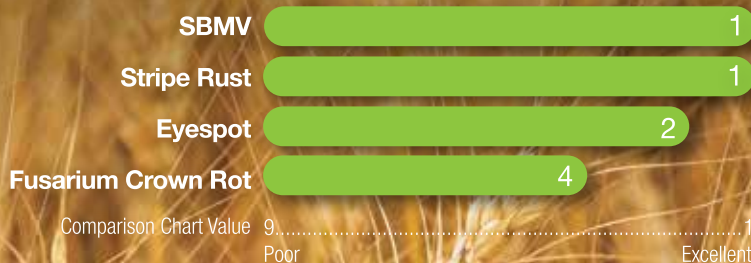
"Unlike other industries, when the cost of doing business goes up, farmers cannot simply raise the price tag on our product. The price for most agricultural products is set by the global market over which we have no control," he said. "Any higher costs we're faced with—like higher fuel prices caused by a carbon

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Grant County student awarded national scholarship

Maguire Isaak, a sophomore at Washington State University (WSU), is one of two recipients of the Jerry Minore Scholarship, a national scholarship available to college students pursuing a career in agriculture. Isaak will receive \$2,500.

"I'd just like to say, I'm thankful for the opportunity to apply and receive this scholarship," Isaak said. "It means a lot to me, and I know my family and I have been blessed by the wheat community and the ag community over the years. I hope, going forward, that I'm able to give back even more than I've been given by being part of the ag community."



Isaak, son of Brian and Corinne Isaak, is studying agricultural economics and plans to return to his family's farm in Coulee City, Wash., after graduation to join his father and uncle as the fifth generation. At school, Isaak keeps busy with fraternity life and works in the spring wheat genetics program at WSU's Department of Crop and Soil Sciences.

The Jerry Minore scholarship recognizes students who have shown a passion for agriculture both inside and outside the classroom and encourages the next generation to teach others the importance of wheat and agriculture and the significant role both play in society. Minore was a BASF Senior Market Manager and a liaison to the wheat industry. Since his unexpected death in 2012, BASF has partnered with the National Wheat

Foundation to fund scholarships and honor his advocacy efforts for wheat growers.

Isaak said he was pretty surprised when he learned he'd won the scholarship.

"Anytime I've been able to receive a scholarship, it feels good and makes me feel like I'm working hard and the hard work is paying off a little bit," he said. "When I first applied, I wasn't expecting to win. I generally don't apply for things on a national level with the expectation I'm going to win; it's usually too competitive. But with this one being advertised locally and with my background in agriculture and future in agriculture, I thought I might as well give it a go."

As part of his application, Isaak had to submit a written essay and a letter of recommendation.

Isaak has helped out on his family's farm since he was little, manning the scale house during harvest and eventually graduating to driving combines. He said this past year, when WSU transitioned to online learning, he spent his afternoons working with his father and uncle to learn as much as he could. He said having such a tight-knit family and community is what makes agriculture so meaningful to him, not to mention how important the industry is.

"There's always going to be a demand for agriculture. It's an industry that the world absolutely needs in terms of providing food and safe and healthy products. I think it is a great industry to be in, because you are doing something for the world that is needed and definitely isn't a luxury. It's honest work, which I think is pretty cool." ■

tax—is a financial hit that my farm is expected to absorb somehow. It's a struggle because we're already operating on a thin profit."

As of press time, SB 5373 had not been passed out of committee. You can read Poe's full testimony at wawg.org/wawg-president-testifies-again-in-carbon-tax-hearing/.

HB 1199

Poe also testified in support of HB 1199, compensation for the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) terminating agricultural leases early, in a hearing in the Senate Agriculture, Water, Natural Resources and Park Committee.

"The Washington Association of Wheat Growers

strongly supports HB 1199," he said. "If DNR enters into a lease with farmers, they must be held accountable and honor the terms of the lease. If DNR needs to terminate a lease early under the best and highest use of the property, then it needs to compensate the farmers for the remainder of the lease."

HB 1199 was passed out of the Senate Ag Committee and as of press time was waiting to be heard on the Senate floor. You can read Poe's full testimony at wawg.org/wawg-president-testifies-in-support-of-dnr-lease-bill/

E3SHB 1091

Michele Kiesz, a grower from Adams County and a WAWG board member, testified for a second time against E3SHB 1091, a bill that would reduce greenhouse gas

As of press time, E3HB 1091 was scheduled for an executive session in the Senate Ways and Means

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Committee. You can read Kiesz's full testimony at wawg.org/wawg-member-testifies-in-low-carbon-fuel-hearing/

SB 5126

Jim Moyer, a grower from Columbia County and a WAWG board member, testified in front of the Senate Ways and Means Committee on SB 5126, a Climate Commitment Act (implementing a cap and trade program). After stressing the fact that wheat farmers are price takers and any increase in fuel costs because of a cap and trade program will have to be absorbed by them, he asked that legislators recognize that farmers can play a part in carbon sequestration.

"Wheat farmers across the state are committed to decreasing our carbon footprint because our livelihood depends upon a healthy environment and so does our future. We would like to work with you on adopting carbon policies that will not put Washington at a competitive disadvantage and recognize agriculture as a valuable climate solution," he said. "However, we believe this proposal needs more work to understand. We welcome the opportunity to discuss and explore the benefits that agriculture and forestry play in carbon sequestration."

As of press time, SB 5126 had been passed to the Senate Rules Committee for a second reading. You can read Moyer's testimony at wawg.org/wawg-member-testifies-on-cap-and-trade-and-capital-gains-tax-hearings/

SB 5096

Moyer also testified in front of the House Finance Committee on SB 5096, a capital gains tax. He told committee members that current language on the bill is very confusing, and farmers aren't sure how agricultural land will be treated under the bill.

"Early versions of this bill had exempted agricultural property and qualified family-owned small businesses from the tax. However, the bill voted on on the Senate floor removed the agricultural land exemption in place of an exemption on the sale or exchange of "all real estate," he said. "However, the definition of real estate excludes individual ownership or beneficial ownership in a pass-through entity that owns real property. It is very common for farmland to be owned in multiple business structures since farmers often buy up portions of the farmland over time, often from family members."

As of press time, SB 5096 had not passed out of the House Finance Committee. You can read Moyer's testimony at wawg.org/wawg-member-testifies-on-cap-and-trade-and-capital-gains-tax-hearings/

SB 5172

Nicole Berg, a farmer from Benton County, a past president of WAWG and vice president of the National

Association of Wheat Growers, testified in a House Labor and Workplace Standards Committee hearing on SB 5172, a bill concerning the retroactivity of overtime in agriculture. Normally, wheat growers sign in as either for or against a bill, but in this case, Berg testified as "other" to reflect the fact that WAWG has serious concerns with the bill, specifically that it did not address overtime flexibility for seasonal and harvest workers.

"Currently, there are only six states that require some form of overtime pay for agriculture workers. Most of those states either do not trigger overtime until after 60 hours worked or have some sort of flexibility for harvest, recognizing the unique nature of agriculture," she said. "Only California phases in overtime down to 40 hours per week without some sort of provision that would account for increased seasonal hours, but it is notable that California has a much longer period for phasing in overtime than what Washington is proposing. California also is losing farms at a much higher rate than our state, and this is not a trend we want to see our state follow."

As of press time, SB 5172 was scheduled for a public hearing in the House Committee on Appropriations. You can read Berg's testimony at wawg.org/wawg-leader-testifies-as-other-in-ag-overtime-hearing/ ■

USDA extends quality loss program application deadline

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is extending the deadline from March 5 to April 9 for agricultural producers to apply for the Quality Loss Adjustment (QLA) Program because of recent winter storms and some clarifications to program rules. This program assists producers who suffered crop quality losses due to qualifying 2018 and 2019 natural disasters.

"Because of recent winter storms and some program updates, we want to provide five additional weeks for producers to apply for the program," said Zach Ducheneaux, administrator of the Farm Service Agency (FSA). "I want to make sure eligible producers have the opportunity to apply and to work with our team members to help with any questions. We recently clarified policy to ensure producers who sold grain to the feed market due to quality issues are adequately compensated."

The QLA program assists producers whose eligible crops suffered quality losses due to qualifying drought, excessive moisture, flooding, hurricanes, snowstorms, tornadoes, typhoons, volcanic activity or wildfires.

Eligible crops include those for which federal crop in-

insurance or Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program coverage is available, except for grazed crops and value loss crops, such as honey, maple sap, aquaculture, floriculture, mushrooms, ginseng root, ornamental nursery, Christmas trees and turfgrass sod. Additionally, crops that were sold or fed to livestock or that are in storage may be eligible.

Assistance is available in counties that received a Presidential Emergency Disaster Declaration or Secretarial Disaster Designation, or, for drought, a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D3 rating (extreme drought) or higher. Producers in counties that did not receive a qualifying declaration or designation may still apply, but they must also provide supporting documentation.

FSA will issue payments once the application period ends. If the total amount of calculated QLA payments exceeds available program funding, payments will be prorated.

FSA began accepting applications on Jan. 6 and has received more than 8,100 applications so far.

To apply, contact your local USDA service center. Additional information is also available at

farmers.gov/quality-loss. Producers can also obtain one-on-one support with applications by calling (877) 508-8364.

While USDA offices are currently closed to visitors because of the pandemic, service center staff continue to work with agricultural producers via phone, email and other digital tools. To conduct business, please contact your local USDA service center. Additionally, more information related to USDA's response and relief for producers can be found at farmers.gov/coronavirus. ■

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POLICY MATTERS

NAWG adopts 2021 policy priorities at annual conference

Last month, the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) concluded its annual conference in Dallas, Texas, setting policy direction for the next year, including addressing several critical issues that are making their way through the 2021 Washington State Legislative Session. Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) leaders took part in the conference, both in person and virtually.

Michelle Hennings, WAWG's executive director, said carbon was a main topic of discussion with much of it centering around how NAWG is going to address the issue. Some of the concerns that were discussed included the impacts of making carbon regulation a component of bank loans and crop insurance coverage; effects on rental rates and eligibility for government programs; and who would be in charge of any carbon program (would it be left to private companies or the government). Farmers also discussed the need for standardization in how carbon sequestration is measured.

"I feel like we came out with a good direction on what farmers can promote in regards to carbon, and what they will and will not support," Hennings said to wheat growers at WAWG's March state board meeting. "A focus on soil health seemed to be the direction farmers were most supportive of when it comes to carbon regulation, and we agreed that we want to see a regionally based approach to any carbon program. This issue has arms and legs and is going to walk, so we



Social distancing at the National Association of Wheat Growers' annual conference last month.

need to be prepared."

WAWG leaders introduced a resolution supporting an agricultural exemption for overtime pay, which was voted on and approved. The resolution states that NAWG "supports the right of the farm employee to be fairly compensated for their productive work. NAWG supports fair compensation to include regional variances and to include all benefits provided in return for that work. To this extent, NAWG opposes any government-mandated agriculture overtime regulations. In the event of state and/or federally mandated overtime pay for farm employees, NAWG is opposed to requiring retroactive back pay or assessment for punitive damages to an employer for past hours already paid."

The NAWG board approved policy priorities to:

- Engage with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Food and Drug Administration to ensure that regulation of new technology is science-based and increases profitability for growers.
- Work collaboratively with industry to protect and secure the use of crop protection products.
- Protect wheat growers' use of EPA-approved crop protection tools and defend against unscientific attacks on that ability.
- Engage in climate discussions in a constructive manner to represent wheat growers' interests. ►

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- Lead wheat research advocacy on Capitol Hill.
- Be a spokesman for wheat growers with members of the agriculture committees and USDA officials.
- Fight against regulatory issues that place undue burden on wheat producers.
- Analyze and advocate for beneficial conservation programs and policies in the next farm bill.
- Engage USDA in improving Farm Service Agency and Natural Resources Conservation Service staffing and program delivery.

In other actions, the board re-elected the same slate of officers to continue in their roles for 2021 due to the impacts of COVID-19 over the past year. With that action, the board has re-elected Dave Milligan (Michigan) as president; Nicole Berg (Washington) as vice president; Brent Cheyne (Oregon) as treasurer; Keeff Felty (Oklahoma) as secretary; and Ben Scholz (Texas) as past president.

“It’s an honor to continue serving as NAWG’s president, especially as we’ve got a lot of important issues and opportunities for wheat farmers with the new Congress and new administration,” said NAWG President Dave Milligan. “Following several important policy wins in 2020, we’ve now set our priorities for the upcoming year with a focus on defending critical farm support programs, maintaining and growing our markets and engaging in climate and sustainability policy in a constructive manner to represent wheat growers’ interests, among other issues.” ■

Under new rules, wheat to get additional CFAP payment

Last month, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is dedicating at least \$6 billion towards new programs and efforts to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions. The new initiative—USDA Pandemic Assistance for Producers—will reach a broader set of producers than in previous COVID-19 aid programs. Existing programs like the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) will fall within the new initiative and, where statutory authority allows, will be refined to better address the needs of producers.

Most importantly, for wheat farmers, this will include a \$20 per acre payment that is based on CFAP 2 applications. Farmers will not need to submit a new application, and payments will begin to be made in April. Additionally, the announcement included a formula correction for row-crop

producer applications to allow producers with a non-Actual Production History insurance policy to use 100 percent of the 2019 Agriculture Risk Coverage-County benchmark yield in the calculation.

USDA will reopen sign-up for CFAP 2 for at least 60 days beginning on April 5, 2021. The USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) has committed at least \$2.5 million to improve outreach for CFAP 2 and will establish partnerships with organizations with strong connections to socially disadvantaged communities to ensure they are informed and aware of the application process.

Future opportunities for USDA Pandemic Assistance will be reviewed for verified need, and during the rule-making process, USDA will look to make eligibility more consistent with the farm bill.

The initiative is broken down into 4 parts:

- Part 1. USDA will dedicate \$6 billion to expand help and assistance for more producers.
- Part 2. USDA is adding \$500 million of new funding to existing programs, which includes \$28 million for National Institute of Food and Agriculture grants.
- Part 3. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, enacted December 2020, requires FSA to make certain payments to producers according to a mandated formula. The \$20 per acre payment falls within this section, and these payments will amount to more than \$4.5 billion and go to more than 560,000 producers.
- Part 4. As noted, USDA will reopen CFAP 2 sign-up to improve access and outreach to underserved producers for at least 60 days beginning on April 5, 2021.

To read USDA’s announcement, go to usda.gov/media/press-releases/2021/03/24/after-identifying-gaps-previous-aid-usda-announces-pandemic. More information can be found at farmers.gov. ■

Industry applauds confirmation of Vilsack as ag secretary

The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) and U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) are pleased with the bipartisan U.S. Senate vote approving the appointment of former Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack to that important post again under the Biden-Harris Administration.

“We welcome Secretary Vilsack’s return to USDA in a year that is projected to see record U.S. agricultural exports,” said USW President Vince Peterson, who currently serves on the USDA Agricultural Policy Advisory Committee for Trade. “We look forward to working with

him again to continue building on the successful export market development partnership between U.S. wheat farmers and USDA."

"NAWG applauds the Senate for its timely consideration and strong bipartisan support for confirming Secretary Vilsack to lead the USDA once again," said NAWG CEO Chandler Goule. "Like many farmers across the country, wheat growers are facing economic challenges, and we are pleased to see the Senate and President work to fill these leadership positions at the USDA with qualified candidates, so we can continue to work on policy that benefits rural America. ■

Tai named as trade rep

U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) and the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) welcome the U.S. Senate's confirmation of **Katherine Tai** as the next U.S. Trade Representative. During the confirmation hearing process, Tai said she understands the values and rules that guide global commerce and the importance of enforcing those terms "vigorously."

Most encouraging is Tai's past work as a chief enforcer

against China's unfair trade practices under the Obama Administration and involvement in final negotiations for the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA).

"Tai's confirmation comes at a crucial time for U.S. wheat trade," said USW President Vince Peterson. "After seeing early, encouraging returns on the Phase One agreement with China, we are looking ahead as the World Trade Organization moves to the compliance phase of the 2019 dispute case won by the U.S. against China's unfair administration of their grain tariff rate quotas. U.S. wheat farmers will also want Tai to hold China to the additional enforcement language in the Phase One agreement."

"We appreciate the bipartisan support from the Senate in confirming Ms. Tai to this important position," said NAWG CEO Chandler Goule. "Fair and clear access to international markets is crucial for U.S. wheat farmers, and we look forward to working with her and her team on taking an aggressive stance on prioritizing agricultural trade efforts." ■



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Walt Feldman and Marie Schmidt and their families were German immigrants. Walt's family moved to the Rosalia, Wash., area in 1902 from Minnesota. Marie's family moved to the Rosalia area in 1902 from Minnesota as well. Both families settled within two miles of each other. They married in 1919 and built their home on the farm, raising wheat and barley (to feed the horses) on 380 acres.

One of their daughters, Ellen, married Clare Solbrack from Iowa, after meeting him during the war (WWII). Their son, Tom, and his wife, Ella, began farming in 1982. Tom suffered a stroke in 2007, and his son, Matt, began farming. Daughter, Sarah, came to work on the farm in 2009. Tom passed away in 2019.

Today, Sarah and Matt are a 4th generation brother-sister team who operate this 2,300 acre farm together. They raise wheat, barley and lentils. Matt always knew he wanted to be

a farmer
and loves

doing it. He currently lives in the home Walt and Marie built. Sarah has a background in communications and running the family farm was not part of the plan, but now she can't imagine it any other way and is incredibly proud to be a farmer.

The biggest change on the farm is how horsepower is applied! The farm has seen power go from horses to crawlers and then to tractors and huge combines. The yields have doubled, too. They used to get 40 bushels of wheat per acre. Normally, they average 82 bushels of wheat per acre each year.




There's much more to this story! To learn more about the Solbrack farm and other centennial grain farms in Washington, visit our website or follow us on social media. ■



Walt and Marie's wedding photo.



Sarah and Matt.

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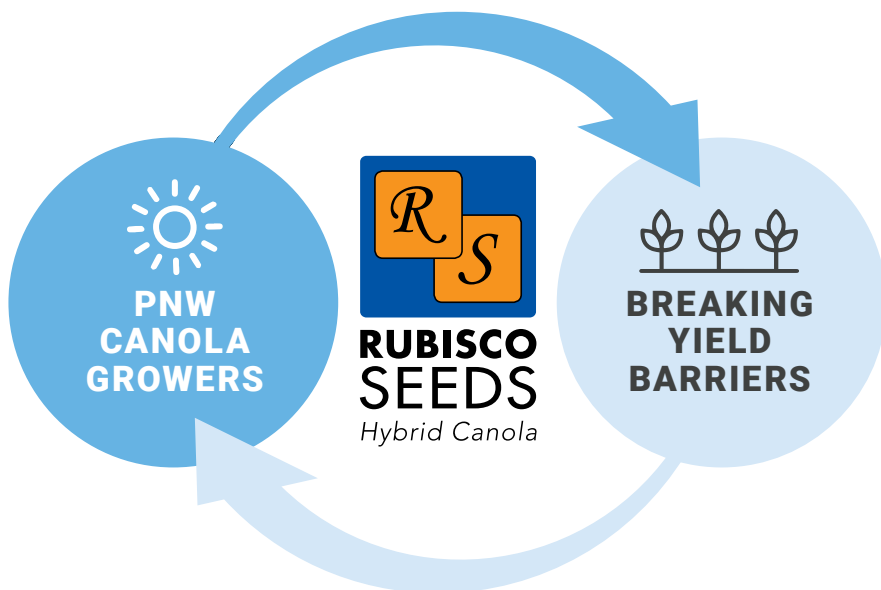


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Kicker	—	—	—	5,145 (1)
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Simpson defends proposal

CONGRESSMAN SAYS PLAN ADDRESSES LOSS OF BARGING FOR GROWERS

By Trista Crossley

Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho) held a conference call last month with Idaho food producers and regional stakeholders to discuss his proposal to breach the four lower Snake River dams.



Simpson's proposal would establish a \$33.5 billion Columbia

Basin Fund to help mitigate the effects of removing the four lower Snake River dams. The money would be used for energy replacement, watershed improvement, nutrient management, economic development, recreation, irrigation infrastructure and to address the loss of barging. The proposal would also put a moratorium on salmon litigation for at least 35 years. According to the proposal, Lower Granite and Little Goose dams would be breached in 2030, while Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams would be breached in 2031.

"I'm sure you are all kind of wondering why the hell I kicked the hornet's nest," he began. "The first thing I'd say is listen, we know the lawsuits won't end. One of the things we are trying to do is we are trying to bring some security and certainty to our agricultural producers, and we are also trying to end what I call the salmon lawsuits, the salmon wars that are going on in the Pacific Northwest."

Besides stopping the lawsuits, Simpson explained his proposal

is also trying to restore Idaho salmon runs, which he said are on the verge of extinction. He pointed out that the latest biological opinion (BiOp), issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) last year, has already been challenged in court. In that BiOp, although the Corps acknowledged removing the dams would benefit salmon, they recommended against breaching, instead, calling for increased spill and other measures.

"Frankly, the challengers are going to win that lawsuit. Primarily, they are going to win it because even the Army Corps, in the latest BiOp, said the best chance of restoring salmon is to remove the dams," he said. "Even the Army Corps is admitting that in their analysis. I don't think a judge is going to look friendly on that. I don't see those lawsuits ending any time soon."

Over the past three years, Simpson said he and his staff have had hundreds of meetings with user groups, organizations and stakeholders to learn about the issues and concerns surrounding the dams and what might be done. He acknowledged that the dams "have a value and that value has to be accounted for." The \$33.5 billion, he said, is what it would take to make stakeholders whole.

The loss of barging capabilities between Lewiston, Idaho, and Pasco, Wash., is a major concern of wheat growers. Simpson said approximately 95 million bushels are currently barged through the four dams. He added that that amount has been going down in recent years, a statement the wheat industry disputes



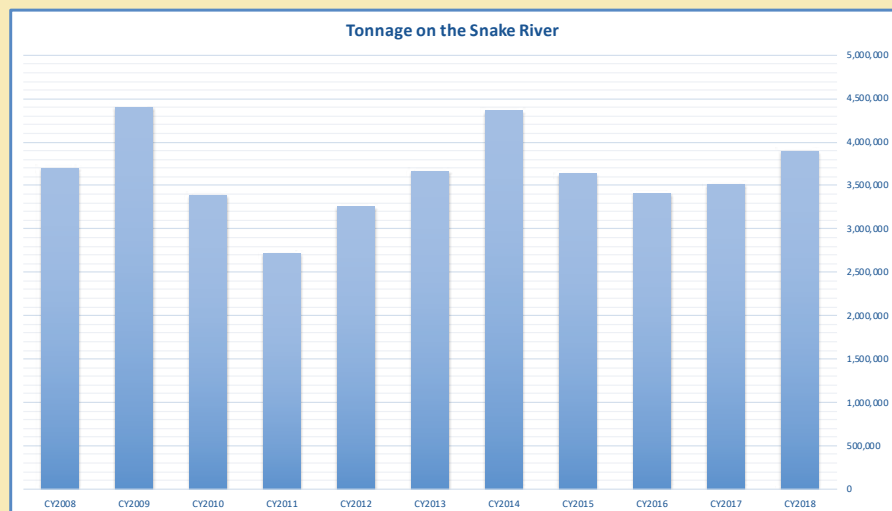
Agency records show tonnage shipped on river is relatively stable

By Trista Crossley

During Rep. Mike Simpson's (R-Idaho) conference call to discuss his proposal for breaching the lower Snake River dams, several times he stated that the number of bushels of wheat that are barged down the Snake River System have been declining. The wheat industry disputes that claim.

According to figures compiled by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Institute for Water Resources (Corps-IWR), an average of 2.41 million tons of wheat per year have been shipped on the Snake River from 2008-2018 (the last year data is available). In 2018, 2.42 million tons of wheat were shipped on the river system, compared to 2.23 million tons in 2015 and 2.38 million tons in 2014.

In 2018, nearly 9.99 percent of all U.S. wheat exports were barged on the Snake River, an increase



SOURCE: U.S. ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

from 2017 (8.38 percent) and 2016 (9.26 percent).

Of course, wheat is not the only product that takes advantage of barging, although it is the biggest product in terms of tonnage. Other commodities that use the river system include wood chips; fuel; fertilizer; iron and steel scrap; and paper and paper products. Total tonnage on the Snake River, according to Corps-IWR, increased from 3.51 million tons in 2017 to 3.89 million tons in 2018 (see chart).

In fact, Kristin Meira, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, said she'd describe overall tonnage, including wheat, as "remarkably stable" for the past 10 years. ■

(see sidebar). His proposal would allocate \$3.6 billion to address the lack of barging capabilities that removing the dams would cause. He said if that money were invested next year in treasury bonds, by 2030, when the first dam is scheduled to be removed, that trust would be worth about \$4.8 billion. Simpson estimated that each year, an annuity of \$181 million could be pulled out of that trust and paid to those producers who would have to find an alternative way to get their grain to the Tri-Cities. Using the 95 million number, that would come out to about \$1.91 per bushel. He further suggested that if \$1.5 billion was spent on transportation infrastructure and the rest invested, grain producers could still get about \$1.13 per bushel for that 95 million bushels.

"They (grain producers) can come out of this...we haven't hung them out to dry. In fact, I think it would be very beneficial to them," Simpson said. "That's the biggest issue we've been trying to address—how do you account for the fact that we ship this grain down the river on barge, and how do you make the alternatives work?"

Stakeholders were able to submit questions to Simpson about the proposal. One of them, from Alex McGregor, chairman of The McGregor Company, asked Simpson about alternatives to shipping inputs upriver when railroad administrators have admitted that they cannot meet timely delivery between Lewiston and Pasco.

Simpson said railroads and trucks will grow to meet that need, especially since he believes the number of bushels of grain going downriver on barges is decreasing.

"To say there's not any alternatives out there is just to throw our hands in the air and say, okay, salmon are dead, and what we are doing now is what we are going to do for the next 50 years minus the fact that a judge is going to intervene at some point in time. What I'm searching for is some solutions. If you have a better idea, tell me," he said.

Simpson was adamant that his plan would not affect "one drop" of Idaho water. He said Idaho sends 487,000 acre feet of water down the Snake River every year to flush salmon over four dams in the state of Washington, and the

one thing it is not doing is saving salmon despite the billions spent on salmon recovery. What it is doing, he added, is keeping the pools behind the dams high so Washington farmers can use that water to irrigate their fields and compete against Southern Idaho farmers.

“The cost of the dams are really born by Idaho, especially Idaho’s Second Congressional District, by flushing water down the river. And what do we get in return for it? We get 8 percent of the power that comes to Idaho from those dams. We get barging, which we can replace and, in fact, get grain down the river at a cheaper cost to the farmer,” he said. “It seems to me that almost all of the cost of these dams comes from Idaho’s Second Congressional District, really, all of Idaho, but particularly the Second Congressional District, and all the benefits go to Washington. That just doesn’t seem to make sense to me.”

You can read more about Simpson’s proposal at simpson.house.gov/salmon/. The congressman has not introduced his proposal as legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives. ■

Answers can be found if stakeholders work together

Editor’s note: During Rep. Simpson’s conference call, Alex McGregor, chairman of The McGregor Company, asked a question about alternatives for replacing Snake River barge transports, both for grain headed downstream for market and crop nutrients shipped up-stream that need to be delivered in a very short window of time so planting isn’t delayed. The congressman’s response didn’t address the question, instead claiming that the number of bushels of grain going down the river are decreasing and asking for better ideas. He also pointed to the fact that salmon are a great source of nutrients that come upriver, get returned to the mountains and then get washed out by the snow. We offered Alex the opportunity to respond to Rep. Simpson’s response.

By Alex McGregor
Chairman, The McGregor Company

Rep. Simpson, we appreciate you sharing your concept of breaching the four lower Snake River dams and the substantial monies you indicated would be necessary to limit the pain it would cause.

You requested alternatives. We suggest it is quite possible to offer hope for salmon while also addressing your feeling that “all the benefits [of the dams] go to Washington.”

A just-released NOAA Fisheries report highlights the biggest challenge for salmon—projected temperature increases in the Pacific Ocean from climate change. While all options are worth consideration, the scientists concluded “management actions that open new quality salmon habitat, improve productivity within the existing habitat or reduce mortality through direct or indirect efforts in the ocean are badly needed.” Farm families have made big strides in helping with habitat, fine tuning best management practices, reducing soil erosion 85 percent and helping improve water quality on river tributaries. We are concerned that when we ship our crops to ocean-going ports, air quality and greenhouse gas emissions will head in the wrong direction with the concept you suggest. Inland barges carry a ton of freight 514 miles per gallon of fuel, trains 202, trucks 59. Both alternatives to barging create far more CO2 and damaging air particulate emissions as well.

Instead of spending tens of billions of dollars to transform an efficient transportation system into some sort of makeshift alternative, replacing hydropower with not-yet developed storage systems for wind or solar or forcing those dependent on reliable irrigation water to make do with something less, instead of all of this, we can work together to do something constructive. Salmon once had fertile spawning grounds along the north Clearwater and along hundreds of miles of the Snake River upstream from Lewiston.

We hope you will consider funding fish passage for dams upstream that today have none. Adding fish ladders to Idaho Power’s Hells Canyon complex of three dams on the Snake would be expensive and challenging, but surely less than disrupting lives and livelihoods across the Inland Northwest. Adding fish passage to several dams in your district would further extend fish habitat so badly needed. As American Rivers has noted, the Hells Canyon dams block 80 percent of access to the historic habitat for Snake River fall chinook. In 2005, the National Marine Fisheries Service estimated



it would take \$100 million to install fish ladders and other passages at Idaho Power's three-dam system. Even adjusted for inflation, \$100 million is a manageable amount compared to \$34 billion. Investing money to remove the upstream fish blockages could bring financial benefits and jobs to your district and recreational fishing opportunities one day, as well. Doing so would help salmon, too. As the scientists put it, "habitat offers hope."

By restoring substantial salmon habitat and investing considerable amounts of money for construction in your district and beyond, more revenue comes to Idaho, and we all benefit from improving prospects for our iconic fish. As farm families with a deep heritage here, we urge you to return those now-blocked waterways to salmon rearing. We appreciate your stated desire to be open to constructive ideas and feedback so we can move forward. On that, we agree. While there are clearly no "silver bullets" to a complex set of challenges, we hope you will work with us to address those challenges while keeping Northwest agriculture, families, businesses and our export economy on firm footing and expanding vital fish habitat in the process. We believe that by working together we can find constructive, not draconian, answers to the challenges we face across this remarkable land. ■



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Who has final say?

ONLY CONGRESS CAN AUTHORIZE BREACHING THE LOWER SNAKE RIVER DAMS

By Trista Crossley

To anyone following the controversy about the lower Snake River dams, it feels like judges hold a significant amount of sway over them. That raises the question, does a judge have the authority to order the dams breached?

The short answer is no, only Congress can do that.

In the Columbia River System Operations Final Environmental Impact Statement released in 2020, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) stated that “significant modifications to completed projects...require authorization by Congress.” Because breaching one or more of the lower Snake River dams would result in major structural or operational changes, that action is considered a significant modification and would require congressional authorization, a lengthy, multistep process, said **Kristin Meira**, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA). PNWA is a nonprofit trade association of ports, businesses, public agencies and individuals who support navigation, energy, trade and economic development throughout the Pacific Northwest. Their members work closely with the Corps and advocate for funding to ensure federal navigation projects can operate safely and reliably.



Even legislation to breach the dams would likely not have an easy or quick passage through Congress. In the case of Rep. Mike Simpson’s (R-Idaho) proposal, Meira pointed out that one of the most challenging aspects of it is that many of the actions it proposes to take are essentially individual major policies or projects, and each of them would require significant study and review.

“Most of them (the policies and projects) would require essentially a two-step process through Congress, meaning authorization through one set of congressional committees, and if that process is successful, then a whole separate process to go through appropriations to actually fund new activities, meaning new policies and new projects,” she explained. “That’s how it works for any modifications that are proposed for Corps of Engineers projects. That’s one of the things that makes the Corps the kind of agency

that typically garners strong support for its projects, the very lengthy and methodical way in which the projects have to be pursued through that two-step process.”

All Corps’ projects are authorized through a bill called the Water Resources Development Act (WRDA). WRDAs have been passed every two years since 2014; the last one was passed in December of 2020. Meira explained that before a project ever makes it into a WRDA, it is extensively studied and publicly reviewed. And even if a project is proposed for a WRDA, there’s no assurances it will actually make it into the bill, get through the House and Senate and get signed by the president.

“I can say there are many, many projects and other proposals that do go through WRDA bills but never garner support in the appropriations process, meaning Congress never decides to fund them,” she said.

And the likelihood that congressional authority to breach the dams might be included in another piece of legislation is slim.

“The idea that new construction or a major modification to an existing (Corps) project could be shuttled through an infrastructure package simply is not how the process in D.C. works,” Meira said. “The Corps of Engineers, they need to always refer back to their authorities, meaning what Congress has given them a permission slip to do. In this case, there is no permission slip. There is no blueprint to do what Congressman Simpson is proposing, so the first step is to actually try to do the blueprint, and that is a years-long process.” ■

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Stakeholders share views on Simpson plan

DAVID DOERINGSFELD Manager, Port of Lewiston *Not in favor*

First of all, we want to be very clear that we appreciate Rep. Simpson's attention to this matter. He has been a friend to the Port of Lewiston for decades. We appreciate his interest in trying to resolve this issue. That being said, we believe the congressman is mistaken by focusing on just four dams out of 250 dams in the Pacific Northwest, and that removing the lower Snake River dams would bring back abundant salmon and steelhead returns.

Right now, the only dates in the congressman's proposal are to begin tearing out dams starting in 2030. The proposal provides no certainty as to when an alternative transportation mode for moving agricultural products would be available. There are very large sums of money being thrown out, however, if you have a plan you can't implement, you really don't have a plan. Our concern is that dams would be coming out in 2030, and farmers would be left holding the bag with no alternative mode of transportation.



ers—producers of wheat, the majority of which is being shipped somewhere else—who could have stranded production because replacement infrastructure hasn't been built. And how likely is replacement infrastructure going to be approved for construction, even if you have all the money in the world to pay for it? What if you can't simply permit increased rail capacity so you can get the wheat to market? There's this NIMBY (not in my backyard) philosophy, people don't want railroads to expand their footprint. Ask those who live in Spokane how they like rail going through their community. Most people don't want more highways or more hardscape in the sensitive Columbia River Valley to accommodate more trucks. At the same time, there's a shortage of truck drivers. Transportation is a three-legged stool—rail, road and river. With one leg gone, that will put tremendous pressure on the others.

What Rep. Simpson's concept begins to do is identify that communities, farmers and others will have significant challenges if the dams were breached. I think his identification of these challenges is the just the tip of the iceberg, however. I think there are so many moving parts that work together well because they've evolved and adjusted together. If you start chopping off one thing or another, you've lost a complicated, complementary system.

WANDA KEEFER Manager, Port of Clarkston *Not in favor*

It doesn't seem fair and equitable to preserve the dams with zero fish passage anywhere from 35 to 50 years and take out those dams with world-class fish passage. That seems contrary to the goal of preserving fish.

Removing the dams would be completely devastating to the Lewis and Clark Valley. I think the valley will be unaffordable and unlivable. There are more than 1,400 employees at Clearwater Paper. If they can't release effluent into the water, they could be shut down or faced with millions or billions in mitigation costs. What does the loss of 1,400 jobs do to the local economy? What does a drop in property values do because the air is so full of dust people can't breathe? This community would be devastated for a very long time.

One thing that isn't clear in Rep. Simpson's plan is the timing on replacement infrastructure. We have farm-



TOM KAMMERZELL Port of Whitman County Commissioner and a wheat grower *Not in favor*

I'm in favor of the concept of doing what we can for fish. However, I think this proposal is dead on arrival because of the holes in it and the lack of information. I'm not against fish, but this is not the answer.



Rep. Simpson says he wants to see salmon back in Idaho, and that's why he's proposing this "innovative approach." But the first big hole to me is that in no place in this plan does he address two things. The first is the fact that not one dam in Idaho has fish passage and the four Snake River dams have state-of-the-art fish passage. People from all over the world come down to Lower Granite Dam to look at what they've done, and how successful it is. Yet, you get to Dworshak and Hells Canyon, the first two dams in Idaho, and there is zero fish passage, and every dam beyond Hells Canyon through Idaho has no fish

passage. That smacks in opposition to his concept of "I want to see fish back in Idaho."

The second part is that there is no mention any place in there of the opposition's position that the water is too warm in the Snake River. However, Idaho's standard for water temperature is 2 degrees C above the maximum in Washington. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) acknowledges that in their own comments regarding water temperature ("TMDL for Temperature in the Columbia and Lower Snake Rivers" report issued on 5/18/20). The EPA notes that the current water quality conditions present a significant challenge when it comes to Washington because the water is already too warm. So, there's a lot of statements in there about what can be done to dams that will affect North Idaho, Washington and Oregon, but he's failed to recognize or even acknowledge that he has problems in his own backyard.

Removing the dams would mean that facilities at the Port of Wilma, Boyer Park and Marina, the Port of Almota and Central Ferry would become stranded assets, because their infrastructure has been built with the concept that the river is going to be there. Removing the dams would be a problem for all of them, and the jobs that come with all of those would go away and would be a hit to our economy.

As a farmer, 100 percent of my crop, both from Idaho and Washington, goes down the river. It's going to impact me by increased (shipping) costs, obviously. Look at the carbon that is going to be expended moving the crop. It's going to be trucked because there's just simply not the rail facilities available.

Eastern Washington has its limits on where you can put rail because of the hills and such. It all funnels down to a bottleneck, down to the Columbia River Gorge, which is already running at what I've heard



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is pretty full. You'd have to add tracks down the Columbia River Gorge to add the ability to move more cargo. The people that are advocating for removing dams would be the first ones to be standing out there saying, "No, you can't add tracks in this scenic Columbia River Gorge next to the Columbia River. That is going to be bad for fish." They would just move their protest signs down the river.

LIZ HAMILTON
Executive Director, Northwest
Sportfishing Industry
Association
In favor



We are in favor of where Rep. Simpson has started this important discussion. In terms of breaching the dams to protect salmon, that's somewhat of a no brainer, but the Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association has never supported solutions that didn't take care of the river-dependent and farming communities. What we love about his proposal is this vision of a prosperous future for the Northwest that includes salmon in it.

In terms of the economic aspects of this, I find it exciting that we are contemplating modernizing a system that, in many places, is more than 50 years old. In the context of COVID, economic development and jobs packages, the alternative energy priorities of the current administration, the level of seniority (in Congress) in the Northwest...I think the congressman summed it up best when he called it "lightning in a bottle." The opportunities are in front of us, and they are within our reach! The brass ring is going by, and as a region, I hope we grab it and help each other get what we need. After all, fishing jobs and farming jobs are both important to rural economies.

I have not missed a court hearing since this all started. The first time I was in the court room was back in 1993 when Judge Marsh said we were "tinkering around the edges of a system that cries out for a major overhaul," and all these years later, with \$17 billion invested, the wild salmon and steelhead back to Idaho are faring no better. In fact, they are worse off than they were then. The urgency is still here. We've all tried to do the best we could for salmon, but unless we breach those four dams, I really fear—and scientists have confirmed—we are not going to save them.

At the same time, if we don't become partners, we won't secure that economic development piece that is truly exciting to the region. I'm assuming one of the key things for wheat growers is to make sure they have affordable and reliable transportation. I realize how close margins are in

farming. They are tight, so the bottom line for wheat growers is something that has to be paid attention to. To create systems that will take care of this community's future success must be a part of the solution.

There's really good data on the benefits of breaching for the fish back to Idaho, especially for the revered B-run steelhead and spring chinook. We'd see a range of variability, depending on ocean conditions, between 300,000 and a million of spring chinook back every year. Currently, the 300,000 fish returns are rarely seen with the dams in place. Robust fisheries will bolster our industry, supporting jobs and infusing needed revenue into rural communities. Additionally, under climate change, it's even more vital that we protect these high-altitude river systems for their cool waters and thousands of miles of high quality spawning and rearing habitat.

I hope people are thinking about what's needed. Instead of fish vs. farmers or fish vs. energy, the question should be, what do you need in this future? If you look at it and the dams are gone, what do you need? Please tell us.

TOBY WYATT
Owner, Reel Time Fishing
In favor



I was born in Clarkston, Wash. I'm a third-generation fishing guide. I spend most of my time fishing for salmon and steelhead. I remember the drawdown of '92. There was a big fight over the dams. Basically, nothing was really done. We just kind of decided we were going to work on it. That was how many years ago? Well, we've spent \$17 billion on recovery, and we've gone nowhere. We still have no recovery.

I went to Washington, D.C., and met with Congressman Simpson. He showed me his plan on the wall. I was also part of the Governor's Salmon Workgroup (Idaho Governor Brad Little), and I spent a couple of years listening to all the experts. In my mind, I don't really see any other way for the fish. I don't really see that they have any other option. People say, we need to net less. We need to reduce the predators. They throw out all these options that kill the fish. If you had everything on a pie chart that is a factor in killing these smolt, the dams would be the single most, biggest threat that we can actually control; other factors, such as cyclical poor ocean conditions, are out of our control. It's proven that the dams and their reservoirs, which are full of predators, have very little current and are at a higher temperature. It's proven that those four dams kill 50 percent of Idaho's smolt. The simple math is, if you

remove those four dams, you are going to save 50 percent of your babies.

The four lower Snake River dams only produce 4 to 6 percent of Bonneville Power's total production. They provide zero flood control. Ice Harbor provides a little bit of irrigation; the rest of them provide none. I know they are subsidized by the federal government. I know that the power they sell, because they have to spend so much on fish recovery, is expensive power, so their customer base is shrinking.

As for the farmers transporting their grain...in Simpson's plan, he's got a great plan laid out to transport their grain. He wants to upgrade the highways and the rail system. I think most people won't take the time to read about the plan. It's such a complex issue, most people just read the headlines and never go deep into it. If I had one thing to say to everybody, I'd say make sure they read deep into it and research everything. To formulate a good opinion on what's really going on out there, they need to read all the science.

CHRIS HAGER
Executive Director, Association
of Northwest Steelheaders
In favor



We support Simpson's proposal. We see it as one of the first opportunities to really transform the interconnected challenges between energy, agriculture and salmon. We know it's not perfect, but we want to be a part of the discussion, and this is a framework that starts that discussion to recover salmon, to restore the lower Snake River, to transition to clean energy and to create jobs within the Northwest. Because of this, we want to be at the table making sure, not only that this framework is handled correctly and goes down the right path, but has everybody's needs in mind so it can be successful.

We really see this as a framework that will translate into jobs, support livelihoods and rural communities and bring everybody together on both sides.

The Association of Northwest Steelheaders is an angling advocacy and conservation nonprofit here in the Pacific Northwest that supports healthy fisheries and healthy abundant habitat for fish, especially ESA-listed species here in Oregon, Washington and Idaho. A big portion of those ESA-listed species are within the Columbia River Basin and are connected straight to the Snake River dams. In the most recent EIS, it said removing those dams has the biggest potential to recover our historic runs. Recovering even a fraction of those historic runs are important to recreational angling, to the region's recreational economy and most importantly, to this region's heritage. ■

Industry pushes back on Simpson plan

By Trista Crossley

The latest salvo in the never-ending story of the lower Snake River dams was fired in February by Rep. Mike Simpson (R-Idaho). He proposed breaching the dams and creating a \$33 billion fund to help the region try to pick up the pieces. Needless to say, the Washington wheat industry is answering back.

“River stakeholders in the three Pacific Northwest states are working together to address the congressman’s proposal and explain the negative impacts breaching the dams would have on river users, communities and businesses,” said Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG). “While we appreciate that the proposal attempts to put a value on the impacts of breaching the dams, we don’t believe it is anywhere near the true cost. We suggest that money may be better spent on environmental projects in the Puget Sound region or to install fish passage capabilities on dams in Idaho that currently have none, instead of tearing down dams that do an excellent job in providing safe fish passage.”

The wheat organizations of Idaho, Oregon and Washington have collaborated on a letter to Simpson offering feedback on his proposal, including clearing up some misconceptions espoused in the plan and in Simpson’s comments since he released it, such as the fact that Washington farmers use water from Idaho to “compete” with Idaho farmers.

“Your conclusion that ‘Washington grain farmers can take that water [used to help move salmon downriver] to irrigate their grain and compete against our [Idaho] farmers’ is incorrect. Grain raised in the Palouse and on the Camas Prairie depends upon timely rains. In the irrigated lowlands of the Columbia Basin, wheat is raised sparingly as a rotational crop. The ‘surge’ of water to hurry along smolt has nothing to do with irrigating the crops that are grown there. Those who participate in the voluntary flow augmentation program are compensated by the Bureau of Reclamation—helping offset operations and maintenance costs, thereby lowering the cost of water to Idaho’s farmers,” the letter states.

“Wheat growers in our four Northwest states do not spend much time competing with each other. Our biggest challenges and opportunities are overseas, around the Pacific Rim and elsewhere, and our competitors are Australia, Canada and other countries. We have worked for generations as tri-state wheat producers to seek new trade opportunities overseas for the classes of grain we raise.”

The letter also points out that Simpson is incorrect to state that downriver barge shipments have declined. In fact, the millions of tons of grain barged downriver have remained stable, year after year, while other shipments have increased dramatically, such as upriver shipments of fertilizer. That shipping capacity (barging) cannot be replaced with cheaper alternatives. Trucks and trains produce more greenhouse gases in transport up and down the river; are more expensive; and are far less reliable.

“In 2017, the Lewis-Clark Grain Terminal in Lewiston shipped more than 20.6 million bushels of wheat and barley to international markets. Without an economic and timely way to move more wheat to foreign buyers, these bushels would instead glut the domestic market and harm the export trade so critical to the Northwest economy.”

Read the full letter at wawg.org/pnw-wheat-industry-offers-congressman-feedback-on-dam-proposal/.

WAWG and the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) are also joining more than 40 river stakeholders on a letter that has been sent to the Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Montana congressional delegations and the governors of all four states. The letter points out that there is no assurance that Idaho fish runs will be restored if the four lower Snake River dams are breached, and the concepts in Simpson’s proposal do not balance the needs of the communities in the Columbia River Basin, are not transparent and do not follow the science.

“We must emphasize that our procedural concerns are eclipsed by substantive ones,” the letter states. “Though certainly well-intentioned, Rep. Simpson’s proposal would set the Northwest on a path toward higher emissions, less energy certainty and a continued narrow focus on four dams with outstanding fish passage... It is a speculative and costly plan that assumes we must choose between productive, fish-friendly federal projects and our Northwest salmon and steelhead runs. We believe this is a false choice and ignores the broad commitment to salmon recovery that must be region-wide and sustained for generations.”

The letter points out that there are multiple causes of fish declines, including warming ocean conditions and changing fish habitat, food sources and predator patterns up and down the West Coast. The Snake River dams are also a critical part of the Pacific Northwest’s energy portfolio, playing an important role in providing reliability, flexibility and dispatchability of power as needed.

Barging, as the letter emphasizes, is one of the safest, lowest-emitting forms of transporting goods throughout the region. Replacing barging with more railroads and

trucks would increase carbon emissions, put more wear on transportation infrastructure and increase the likelihood of road injuries and fatalities.

“Washington state and the nation have a stated goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions, so why would we want to take one of the most environmentally friendly modes of transportation—barging—out of the picture?” asked Hennings. “Additionally, removing the dams’ hydropower capabilities means we’d have to turn to less reliable methods of power generation, such as wind and solar, and to methods that increase carbon emissions, such as coal-fired plants. That just doesn’t make good environmental sense.”

Read the letter at wawg.org/coalition-letter-supporting-dams-goes-out-to-regional-legislators/.

WAWG and the WGC have spent much of the past month meeting with state and federal legislators. The importance of the dams and the shortcomings of Simpson’s proposal are one of the first topics discussed. Wheat growers are making sure lawmakers understand how important the wheat industry is in providing food to the world and its contribution to Washington state’s economy—worth \$845 million in 2018, according to the Washington State Department of Agriculture. And the stability of the

wheat industry relies on growers being able to get their product shipped to ports along the coast—almost 90 percent of Washington wheat is shipped overseas.

“Being a reliable and timely supplier to the market is essential—otherwise buyers can go elsewhere in a world of just-in-time demands,” said Glen Squires, CEO of the WGC. “The navigation system provides the competition and the crucial infrastructure capacity needed to be that reliable supplier in moving grain to the market.” ■

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COVID-19 resources for farmers

PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN FARM BUREAU, HARVUST WILL HELP KEEP FARMERS COMPLIANT

By Trista Crossley

For farm employers who are struggling with COVID-19 restrictions and regulations, the Washington State Farm Bureau (WSFB) is offering a lifeline. They've partnered with a Walla Walla-based software company, Harvust, to offer small agricultural employers free access to HR software to help them and their employees stay legally compliant and safe.

"This is really helping to sort things out and keep organizations compliant," said Suzanne Carson, WSFB business development manager. "There have been lots of financial penalties coming out against well-meaning farms during the pandemic. This is such a tenuous situation, and the Harvust Project is really helping in an employer's time of need."

The WSFB, along with Harvust, will supply all of the tools and training needed to participate. The software will help with:

- Staying on-top of the latest COVID-19 health and safety best practices, information and laws;
- Building relationships with every employee working on the farm with reliable and effective communication;
- Helping employers develop a culture of safety with remote training built specifically for farm employees; and
- Helping employers take control of their hiring process with a completely paperless system that's faster and more accurate.

The collaboration was funded by a Washington State Labor and Industries (L&I) Small Business grant and is being offered free to employers with 50 or fewer employees. Employers with more than 50 employees are welcome to participate, but will be charged a small fee. Free access to the Harvust software will last through June 2021, and at that time, employers who wish to continue using it will be charged a monthly fee based on the number of employees they have.

Harvust is a cloud-based web application and can be used on any device that can access the internet. Employers can send text messages to their employees, notifying them of safety training courses and meetings; links to videos or printed material; or to documents that need to be signed. The software can translate content for workers who aren't fluent in English and even provide audio transla-

tions if necessary. The software is populated with COVID-19 information specific to Washington state and updated as rules and regulations change. It can also be used for other HR functions, such as new employee onboarding.

"Farms and farm workers are a very unique demographic, and they require unique software," explained Harvust co-founder Riley Clubb. "One of those designs that we've discovered that works is sending things to farm employees through their phone and through text, rather than asking them to download an app or go to a website on their own. We are actively pulling them into the website through texts and taking them straight to whatever tasks the HR manager has for them to do."

Clubb and his co-founder, James Hall, both grew up in the Walla Walla area. Clubb's family has grown wine grapes for three generations, while Hall worked for a local irrigation company. Clubb said they both love their



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"We built Harvust because we knew, even prior to COVID-19, that farmers were already drowning in all sorts of rules and regulations and paperwork," Clubb said. "They didn't have the tools they needed to provide a compliant, safe, healthy and effective workplace. COVID-19 really amplified those existing problems, layering on all sorts of rules and regulations."

Harvust was awarded the 2021 American Farm Bureau Entrepreneur of the Year Award earlier this year.

Carson said the WSFB set an objective to sign up 100 to 150 businesses and reach between 500 and 5,000 employees. As of late March, they had reached their goal for employees reached and were roughly halfway to reaching the employer goal. She said the program has been well received.

"We are actively pursuing grants to try to continue this opportunity (beyond June)," Carson said. "We really are excited for this Harvust

team to just take off with what else they have to offer because we do a lot of bootcamps with HR training, and everybody that we are reaching is excited about it. It shows L&I, if they (employers) are ever audited or questioned, that they are making an effort to stay compliant. If these farms are making an effort with an L&I-funded project, it looks good for them."

Carson said interested employers should start by watching a short webinar at wsfb.com/covid called, "Preventing the Spread," that explains the program. There's also a link on that same page that will take employers to a form to fill out and submit. Within a few weeks, employers will receive a packet in the mail with instructions on signing up. You can also contact Becca Chambers by email at becca@harvust.com or by phone at (509) 540-0774 or Lulu Almaguer by email at lalmaguer@wsfb.com or by phone at (360) 357-9975. More information about Harvust is at harvust.com. ■



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AMMO RECAP

Where the US fits in a changing world

By Trista Crossley

Peter Zeihan's message to growers in February was simple—things are changing.

Zeihan was visiting with Eastern Washington farmers as part of the Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization's 2021 winter schedule. More than 90 participants logged onto the Zoom call to hear what the popular geopolitical strategist had to say about politics, global demographics, trade and how the U.S. fits into all of that.

Politics

Zeihan started off with a look at what's changing in U.S. politics. He said the American political system encourages parties to be "big tent parties" made up of factions and alliances, and in the past five years, traditional relationships (think traditional Republican or Democratic alliances) are breaking down.

Then Jan. 6 happened. Zeihan explained that when the capital complex was being stormed and the president refused to deploy the national guard or even regional police to protect his own law enforcement personnel, the Republican party's perception as the party of law and order was threatened.

"That has consequences, because the faction that cares about law and order the most is the business community," he said. "The business community has staff and assets and supply chains and reputations, and they can't function in a country where a political party simply doesn't support law and order issues. The idea that the business of business is business is fading pretty aggressively. One of the things that



we have seen is that it (the business community) is shifting in the general direction of the Democratic alliance."

Zeihan was quick to add that people shouldn't get too excited (or dejected) about this, because it's all still "shaking out." He said the U.S. is five years into what is normally an eight-to-12-year process of evolving and reordering politics.

"Now is the time to act, because it is gelling. This is the time you can find a lever and make it move," he said. "We are going to manage our political system. It'll be loud. It'll be uncomfortable, but we'll get through it."

Globalization

At the end of the cold war, Zeihan said Americans changed the way the world worked by patrolling the global oceans so that "anyone could trade with anyone at any time for whatever reason they wanted." Since then, however, we've been edging away from that, and we've reached a breaking point. He said there are three things that are needed to maintain this system:

- A political culture that is committed to globalization. Zeihan argued that in the U.S., this was gone long before Jan. 6, and America is too preoccupied with what's happening within its own borders to worry about the rest of the world.
- You have to have global interests. Zeihan pointed out that the U.S. economy is the least internationally integrated in the world as a percent of gross domestic product (GDP).
- You need to have boots on the ground to keep everybody on the same side and the bad guys down. The U.S. has been steadily drawing down the numbers of troops it has deployed in other countries.

"Globalization is already over, and what's left is simply running on inertia," he said.

Economics and energy

From 1980 to 2015, the world had a general balance between young demographics, like Mexico, and older demographics, like South Korea. According to Zeihan, it was the greatest period of economic growth in human history in terms of personal incomes, national GDP and the volume and value of trade. Now it's ending as most of the world is aging into export-led systems.

Unlike most countries, however, the U.S. baby boomers had lots of kids, which Zeihan believes will give us another 30 years.

"Global consumption, global production, they are peaking right now, and it will never recover in our lifetimes," he said.

Pivoting to energy, Zeihan said that at the dawn of the coronavirus crisis, the U.S. was net energy independent thanks to shale oil, which is another reason the U.S. is less interested in maintaining the global order. That sector has taken a few hits in the last year, but he said production is only down about 10 percent. Depressed oil prices and

the recent freezing weather that hit the southern part of the U.S. are keeping production low and will likely force smaller oil companies out of business, but he expects to see the sector rebound by next year.

Trade

The Trump Administration went after five trade deals: South Korea, Japan, Canada, Mexico and the U.K. Zeihan acknowledged that Japan is an important market for Eastern Washington wheat growers, but said that Mexico and the U.K. are going to matter more in the longer term.

"Mexico, because it's a young, growing, up-and-coming demographic that is eating more and better food as they age and as they develop," he explained. "And then the U.K.—first world economy, 65 million people. One-third of their food comes from the European Union; that's now in doubt. One-third of their food is only able to be produced economically viably because of EU subsidies, which are now gone. So you are talking a potential two-thirds of the food that 65 million, first-world customers consume needs to be replaced. I can't think of the last time American agriculture got that kind of gift." ►



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Things that will move the needle for ag

Zeihan detailed a number of items that he believes will “move the needle” for U.S. agriculture.

Katherine Tai, the new U.S. Trade Representative, is known for suing other countries, particularly China.

Relations with Europeans will go from bad to worse. Even before the Trump Administration, Zeihan said tensions with the EU were simmering, and a potential trade deal with the U.K. means, by default, the U.S. will be siding against Europe. “They are now an export-led system to every single country, and they can’t function in a nonglobal world, especially if the U.S. is no longer holding up the ceiling,” he explained.

Russia. Zeihan said the country is involved in lots of cyber issues and election meddling. “They’re involved in anything that makes Americans dislike other Americans,” he said. “The big difference between Biden and his predecessors is that this time around, in large part because of the shale revolution, the U.S. doesn’t care at all what happens to energy markets, so team Biden is likely to go after the Russians where it hurts because they aren’t concerned about the blowback at all.”

Iran. According to Zeihan, the Iranians are losing their leverage and influence in the world because they are running out of money and their economy is hurting, thanks to sanctions. At the beginning of the year, Iran hijacked a South Korean tanker to try to interrupt energy markets and hurt countries that are supporting the American sanctions. Zeihan pointed out that neither Trump nor Biden has responded.

“We don’t care. Ten years ago, we would have sent in the marines, but we’ve done nothing, so the Iranians are forced to do one of two things: completely capitulate or up the ante in the hopes that someone cares. Since that someone isn’t going to be the U.S., there’s a very real risk of a major global energy disruption that the U.S. doesn’t care about at all,” he said.

China. Since coming into office, Pres. Biden has continued every single sanction and every single tariff that the Trump Administration put in place against China. The appointment of Tai, who is ethnically Taiwanese, is another poke. Zeihan said the Chinese interpret these actions as a full court press against their interests. Unfortunately for farmers, agriculture is one of the few sectors where the Chinese can poke back. Zeihan anticipates several effects including:

- China has already decided not to purchase American agricultural products unless there is no other purchase option available.

- Specialty crops are going to get hit harder than staples, both because they are for specific markets and because they are more sensitive to changes in consumer status.
- It’s going to get worse before it gets better.
- There will be limits to how bad the effects on American agriculture will get because there’s only so much agriculture production globally.

“I would just underline that we all thought that 2020 was the strangest, most dangerous, craziest year in history. It has nothing on calendar year 2021,” Zeihan concluded. “In many ways, 2020 was just the opening of the deglobalization trend, and we are really going to have a much better idea of what COVID-19 can do this year compared to last year. It’s not going to happen in the U.S., it’s going to happen everywhere else, and that gives the NAFTA countries the opportunity to retune their systems for what is going to be the new reality anyway. So five years from now, we might blame COVID-19 for the end of the world we knew, but honestly, all it did was speed it up and make the transition for us a little bit quicker and a little bit easier. But wow, it’s going to be a wild ride.” ■



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Lt. Col. Frank T. Hager

USAF, Retired

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January 22, 2021

Frank True Hager, age 100, US Air Force Lt. Col. Retired, died on January 22, 2021 in Spokane, WA. He did not die from Covid or Covid-related issues. Frank was born in Tekoa, WA on April 14, 1920. He was the youngest of two sons born to Ralph and Florence Hager. He grew up in Tekoa and was a graduate of Tekoa High School. Upon graduation, he enlisted in the US Army Air Corps, which later became the US Air Force. He received training and became a pilot. He participated in the Berlin Air Lift, flew the China-Burma Hump and later became the base safety officer at Evreux Air Force Base in France. He retired from the Air Force in 1963 as a Lt. Colonel. From 1965 to 1969, Frank had a Ski-Doo snowmobile business. In 1967, he started his own business, Custom Seed Conditioning, Inc. He continued working his business of cleaning seed wheat until he retired.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Elizabeth "Betty" Hager and his brother George Hager. Frank is survived by his son Gary of Spokane, his son Jeff and wife Paula of Spokane and his son Frank and wife Shellbie of Elk WA. He is also survived by two grandsons, Scott and Greg, one great-grandson, one great-granddaughter, numerous nieces, nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews.

To view and sign Frank's online guestbook, please visit www.lauerfuneral.com

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AMMO RECAP

Warmer, dryer summer possible

By Trista Crossley

Farmers should prepare for a slightly wetter-than-normal spring with near average temperatures through May and a warmer, dryer summer.

That's according to Eric Snodgrass, the principal atmospheric scientist for Nutrien Ag Solutions, who presented a long-range weather forecast as part of the Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization's winter schedule in February. Both North American and European models are basing those projections on historical trends that take into consideration current ocean temperatures and existing drought conditions.

"If something subseasonal comes along and knocks all that out, that is 100 percent possible, but no one is going to see it months in advance. That's why we use the latest technology we have," he explained.

Warm ocean temperatures in the northern Pacific and a fading La Niña typically mean that in May and June, heat and drought conditions are more likely to appear in the Midwest, but then retreat west through July and August, bringing hotter, dryer summers to the Pacific Northwest. Snodgrass said one of the things he'll be watching is ocean temperatures along the west coast of the U.S. and Mexico. If the water there stays cool going into summer, the likelihood of this scenario will drop off.

"This pattern often sets us up with what I call the ring of fire," he said, explaining that the heat will stay over the

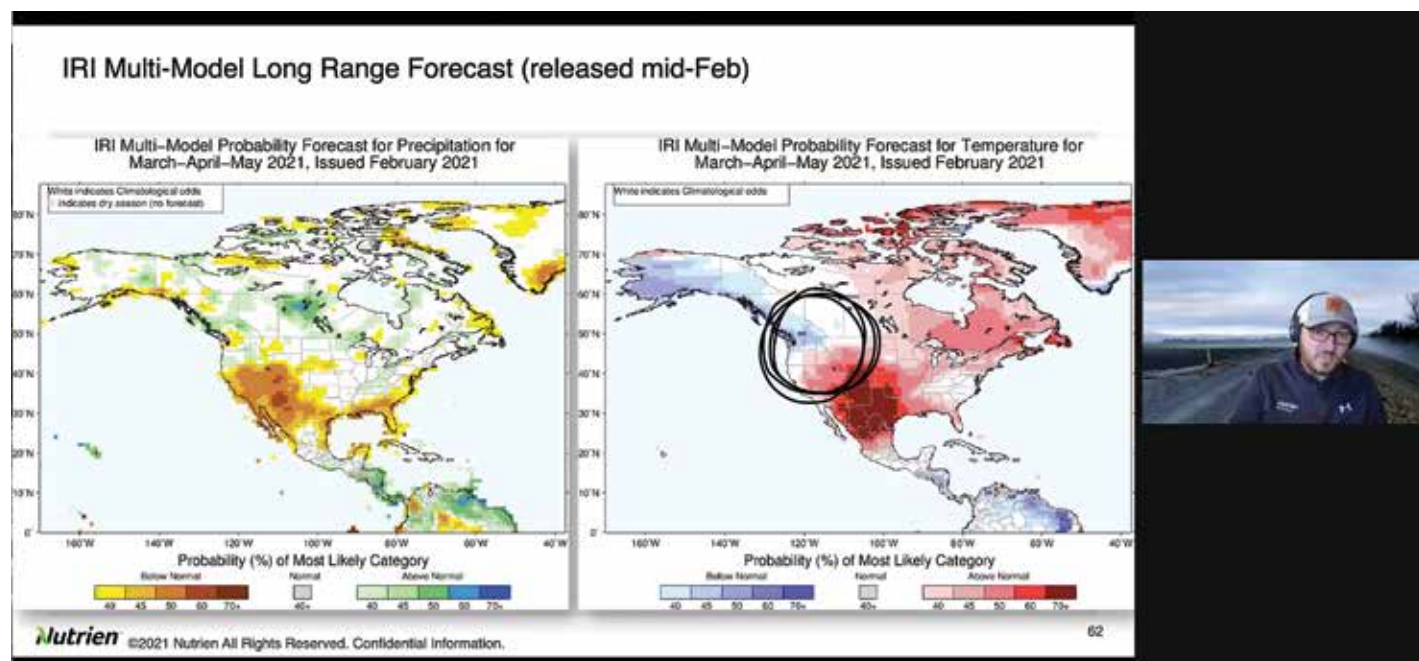
Four Corner states with air circulating around to the west, up through California and into the Pacific Northwest.

"What we can sometimes get in June, July and August is better thunderstorm activity, bringing in those just-in-time rains to finish up a crop and make it absolutely perfect. I want to be watching where the heat sets up. Is the ridge in Montana or is it in Arizona? If it's in Montana, it is much, much too close to us. If it's in Arizona, we are in much, much better shape."

Growers can hear more from Snodgrass by signing up for his daily weather updates at info.nutrien.com/snodgrass_weather. He also produces a weekly video for Northwest Farm Credit Services that specifically looks at the Pacific Northwest. Those videos can be found at northwestfcs.com/en/Resources/weather-insights.

Snodgrass' parting words were to warn growers that long-range forecasts are always speculative.

"There are always events that can come in and knock them out and change them. That's why I wanted to provide you with daily insights," he said. "Because, honestly, we plan most of our operations on a two-week time horizon, and I'm much better forecasting for the next two weeks than I am for the next six months. In fact, everybody is, and that is always going to be the case. That's the beautiful thing about the atmosphere. We will never be able to predict its daily behavior beyond about three weeks." ■



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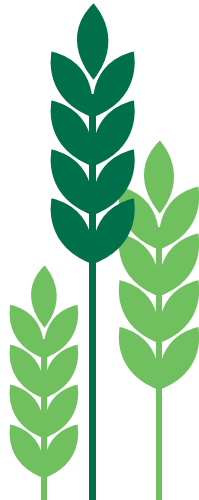
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CHAIRMAN

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

By Mike
Carstensen



My grandpa Henry always said that in order to maintain a civilized discussion, you never wanted to talk about sex, religion or politics. Always one to push boundaries, I'm hoping to address two out of three here. I'll leave the sex for another time.

It's also important for me to point out that when I refer to religion, I'm not talking about anything related to God, but rather strong feelings that are less about facts than they are beliefs. In this case, I'm referring to the belief environmentalists have that salmon numbers will rebound in the lower Snake River, like mana from heaven, if only four dams are breached.

Talking about politics can still get me in trouble, but given Idaho Congressman Mike Simpson's recent proposal, politics can't be avoided when it comes to addressing the future of Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams. For those who don't follow the issue as closely as wheat farmers, in early February, Rep. Simpson released a \$33 billion proposal that would breach the four dams in return for paying off a multitude of those who depend on the dams.

Congressman Simpson wants to replace the renewable, carbon-free hydropower of the lower Snake River dams with a menu of alternatives, some of which haven't been proven, like small module nuclear reactors and storage batteries. Given our Japanese friends' experience at Fukushima in 2011 when a nuclear reactor melted down, I'm not a fan of even small, fission-powered devices. As for batteries to store renewable energy, the idea has merit—in 50 years when the technology catches up.

Aside from being illogical from an environmental perspective and hurting industry and communities, removing four Snake River dams flies in the face of reality for salmon. First, only four of the 13 salmon runs listed as endangered even swim past the lower Snake River dams, which they do with a more than 95 percent survival rate. Second, even rivers without dams, like the Fraser River in Canada, have seen a decline in salmon numbers. Why? How about changing ocean conditions where the salmon actually spend the vast majority of their lives?

Meanwhile, eliminating the dams removes navigation, the most environmentally friendly, safest and most reliable mode of transporting wheat to market. It also removes clean, renewable hydropower and increases carbon emissions. Needless to say, Eastern Washington wheat farmers oppose Simpson's proposal as not only wrongheaded for our industry, but for salmon, the environment and power generation, let alone Lewiston.

Keep in mind, many in the PNW agree a commitment of real dollars for salmon recovery and increased utilization of carbon-free renewable energy to combat climate change is required. However, funding for salmon recovery and hydropower enhancement shouldn't be tied to an extreme measure like dam breaching.

Not to mention, navigation on the Columbia-Snake River System covers three states and seven congressional districts, and any overhaul of the system will require the participation of leaders from the entire area. Congressman Simpson's proposal fails on this point while also failing to address the adverse impacts on human safety, CO2 emissions, trade and the broader economic and community impacts.

I'm not as close-minded about the dams as some environmentalists might believe. Each of us has a small slice of the issue, and in that slice, we feel it allows us to see the whole picture. It doesn't, but that doesn't mean that what we or others believe is wrong. The environmentalists' slice of the issue is an important piece that should be shared with others.

We are all blind men feeling different parts of the elephant and coming up with our own notion of reality. The man who touches the trunk thinks of a thick snake; the one who touches the ear is reminded of a fan; the leg elicits the image of a tree; the one at the tail, a rope; the tusk a spear. Each argues about what the elephant looks like thinking they know the whole picture.

Ultimately, we must build consensus through reason, and the only way to do that is through education. Certainly, the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) tries to educate all sides on the issues. But the real problem is the elephant in the room. It is never solving the issue to see only one part of the elephant.

Environmental groups raise money on memberships and donations. If there are no issues, there are no memberships and no donations. As a result, there are issues facing us as an industry that are like a perpetual motion machine. Perhaps there is no solution, not in our lifetimes anyway, but there is continued effort.

Rest assured your WGC will tirelessly and consistently deal with these issues. Our sister organization, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, is also in a continuous state of lobbying and educating. Both groups are committed to enhancing the long-term profitability and competitiveness of each one of us. My only hope is that together, one day, we can get past the emotion and let reason rule the day. ■

REVIEW

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Baked goods rise in China

What is all that wheat being exported into China being made into? Rising incomes, combined with westernized diets, has seen retail sales of baked foods in the country rise to \$34 billion in 2020. In the U.S., that figure is \$67 billion. Although China's per capita consumption of baked goods is 15.8 pounds per year compared to 49.6 pounds in Japan and 88.6 pounds in the U.S., the potential for growth is obvious. Young women are driving much of the increase with 65 percent of Chinese consumers of baked goods female and more than 80 percent age 40 or younger. At \$13 billion annually, pastries, which frequently are made using soft white wheat, comprise 40 percent of China's bakery sales. The same for cakes, which rake in \$4 billion annually and comprise 41 percent of overall retail baked food sales. China's middle class has grown to 700 million in 2020 from 80 million in 2002, with 14 cities with a population of more than 7 million people. It's expected China's bakery sector will grow to \$53 billion by 2025. As of late February, sales data shows 880,200 metric tons of Pacific Northwest White wheat has been sent to China, a record. ■



Blackmail by any other name

A tangled web has been spun by lawyers around glyphosate over the last five years, ensnaring Monsanto's new owner, Bayer, in a host of cancer-related litigation and billion-dollar payments, despite the fact the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) says the herbicide is not a carcinogen. The latest chapter has Bayer agreeing to spend another \$2 billion to cover any future claims and "provide further closure to the Roundup litigation." That's on top of the \$10 billion the company agreed to pay last June to settle thousands of outstanding lawsuits alleging the chemical causes cancer. Under ordinary circumstances, you'd expect a \$12 billion payout might include removing such a high risk product from shelves. But in fact, perhaps owing to the EPA's seal of approval, there will be no changes to the availability of glyphosate-based products. Bayer's headaches, however, aren't over. Mexico wants to ban the chemical by 2024 and reduce the levels of pesticide residues in food. Mexico imports \$3 billion worth of U.S. corn, most of it bred for Roundup (glyphosate) resistance. Bayer said restrictions "would cause major disruptions" for Mexican farmers and impact food security in the country. ■

Piling on

Farmers and grain traders have been beating the drum about poor U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports for years. Now, the American Farm Bureau Federation has joined the chorus. In January, the federation said confidence is fading in the USDA's most market-sensitive crop reports. It said the government should modernize its technology while improving transparency. Among other things, Farm Bureau President Zippy Duvall said large changes in USDA supply estimates over the last two years caused market volatility and "left farmers questioning the agency's ability to respond quickly to rapidly changing conditions on the ground." The Farm Bureau said the USDA should explain its methodology more clearly and highlight major revisions to previous estimates. It also wants the government to improve its technology to keep pace with markets that are dominated by high speed computers and algorithms. ■

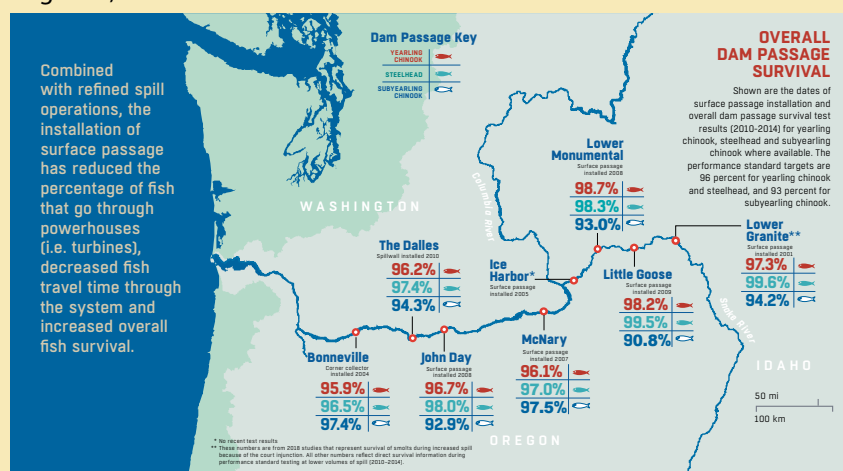
Reporting on erosion

According to a paper in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, nearly 100 million acres in the Corn Belt of the Midwest have completely lost their carbon-rich topsoil. The University of Massachusetts research claims the U.S. Department of Agriculture has significantly underestimated the true magnitude of farmland erosion. By using a new method of satellite imagery to map agricultural fields in the Midwest, the U-Mass researchers found many fields have no remaining A-horizon soil. The researchers estimated that erosion of the A-horizon, which is rich in organic matter and crucial for plant growth, has reduced corn and soybean yields by about 6 percent, leading to nearly a \$3 billion annual economic loss. ■



Objection!

Congressman Mike Simpson's \$33 million scheme to breach the four lower Snake River dams as part of an unproven and unorthodox effort to rehabilitate salmon numbers conveniently left out any element that showed current efforts toward that goal are already yielding dividends. Exhibit A is the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers' dam passage survival rating. Since chinook salmon were listed as threatened in 1992, the Corps and Bonneville Power Administration have completed many projects enhancing survivability of salmon within the Columbia-Snake River System. One of the most effective has been the installation of surface bypass passage through the dams that reduces the number of fish that go through turbines, at the same time, decreasing travel time to the ocean. All fish mortality has been significantly decreased. The map below shows the survival for yearling chinook, steelhead and subyearling chinook in the 2010-2014 time period. In a letter sent to the governors of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana, as well as their congressional delegations, the Washington Grain Commission, along with a myriad of other organizations across the region and beyond, strongly supported the four lower Snake River dams. In addition to low emission transportation made possible by barging, the dams supply clean hydroelectric energy, irrigation, recreation and flood control. ■



Bush closed; Obama opened; Trump closed...Biden opened?

In a letter to the Biden Administration, members of the U.S. Agricultural Coalition for Cuba want to see "a turn to policies of engagement that will serve our national interests and benefit U.S. agriculture" by reversing the current course and strengthening ties with Cuba. Twenty-three farm groups, state agriculture departments and companies, including U.S. Wheat Associates, the National Association of Wheat Growers and the National Potato Council, signed onto the letter. Cuba imports \$2 billion worth of ag commodities annually, but the U.S. only gets 10 percent of that business despite its 100 mile distance from the island. "American agriculture supports a Cuba policy based on our broad national interests, enabling citizens and businesses across our country to engage freely," the farm groups said. ■

Dietary guidelines' slippery slope

Although the "Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2020-25" are positive for grain-based foods, it's clear the earth is slowly moving under the wheat sector's feet. Yes, the recommendation maintains that the average healthy adult consume six, one ounce servings of grain foods daily, with at least half of those servings from whole grains, but looking back at previous recommendations, there is an obvious disparagement of enriched grains, which the dietary guidelines describe as "refined." This is particularly important for soft white wheat, which is often considered a dessert wheat where fine-textured products are a requirement. Guess which year each of the following four statements were included in dietary guidelines, from 2020, 2015, 2010 and 2005:

1. Daily intake of at least three ounce equivalents of whole grains per day is recommended by substituting whole grains for refined grains.
2. Grains are generally consumed in forms with higher amounts of sodium (e.g., breads, tortillas, crackers) and added sugars (e.g., grain-based desserts, many ready-to-eat breakfast cereals) rather than the nutrient-dense forms.
3. Healthy eating patterns include whole grains and limit the intake of refined grains and products made with refined grains.
4. Unlike solid fats and added sugars, enriched, refined grain products have a positive role in providing some vitamins and minerals. However, when consumed beyond recommended levels, they commonly provide excess calories. ■

Answers: 1. 2005, 2. 2020, 3. 2015, 4. 2010.

Specialists search for answers

By Scott A. Yates

The wheat industry is full of specialists, and it takes a host of them to put wheat products on the table.

Farmers are the first specialists, but so are fertilizer and chemical company reps, let alone combine and tractor mechanics. Elevator operators and grain merchandisers are also specialists. Ditto railroad and barge company staff. Export elevators are specialists, and so are large vessel owners and their crews. Overseas millers are definitely specialists, as well as the bakers who buy their flour. It's easy to list a dozen more grain chain specialties without even touching on the division of labor that scientists used to carve up wheat research.

I was thinking of all the experts that gather around the wheat industry and the small compact kernel at the center of it during the third Falling Number Summit, which was held in conjunction with the annual Pacific Northwest Wheat Quality Council meeting at the end of January. Of course, owing to the pandemic, the meetings were all virtual.

Specialties are not static. Just ask Camille Steber. Not so long ago, she was doing basic research on the hormone pathways controlling seed dormancy and germination in *Arabidopsis*, a plant related to cabbage and mustard, as well as wheat. Today, she has become the go-to scientist investigating the impact of late maturity alpha-amylase (LMA), which causes low falling numbers as a result of a cold shock to wheat plants during the soft dough stage in the spring. For the record, low falling numbers is a discountable phenomenon that cost farmers more than a hundred million dollars in 2016 when it was widespread across Eastern Washington.

When Steber was first approached to help growers find varieties with more stable falling numbers in 2013, she thought it would be something that occurred once in a proverbial blue moon. At least, that's how it looked when assessing past occurrences. A slide Steber showed during her 2021 presentation listed falling number issues by date: 1994, 1998 and 2006. But then, beginning in 2010, the problem began to reveal itself more frequently. It showed up in 2011, then 2013, 2014, 2016, 2018 and 2019.

Although preharvest sprouting's connection to low falling numbers is well documented and understood (moisture triggers the seed to start germinating in the head, resulting in a cascade of events within the seed which deteriorates quality), LMA is more of a mystery. It could be that a genetic defect has been introduced in germplasm, but it is likely that changing weather and genetics are both responsible.

The good news is that there are varieties that consistently have better falling numbers, which means farmers can choose less risky varieties and wheat breeders can improve resistance to low falling numbers.

Some scientists believe that LMA's impact, regardless of the falling number score, is not as detrimental to quality as preharvest sprout (PHS). Alecia Kiszonas, assistant research professor at the Western Wheat Quality Lab, has been investigating the difference between the impacts of PHS and LMA on grain quality. She said more work needs to be



Camille Steber, molecular geneticist with USDA-ARS



Alecia Kiszonas, assistant research professor at the Western Wheat Quality Lab



Ashley Cannon, research molecular biologist with USDA-ARS



Two phenomena cause low falling numbers. Preharvest sprout occurs when rain falls on mature crops before they can be harvested. To duplicate that condition and determine whether specific varieties are more resistant, researchers have developed a spike wetting test that applies water to mature wheat in the Washington State University greenhouse.

done, but for now, the slides used during her presentation made it clear that LMA doesn't impact end-use products as much as PHS, at least not in terms of making decent-looking cakes.

But appearance, as in volume, is only one determining factor when end users evaluate products, said Andrew Ross, a professor in the Department of Crop and Soil Science at Oregon State University.

"There are still issues related to other quality traits that could be unacceptable to customers. A blind spot with cereal chemists is that volume is the only thing" they consider, he said. Mouth feel, which is not a testing parameter used in the U.S., is nevertheless, a very important consideration overseas.

Even if it could be determined that LMA wasn't as detrimental as PHS in end-use products, Kiszonas is not optimistic that contract specification could be developed to differentiate between the two. Or, as she put it, "Scientific knowledge and practicality need to be balanced."

Although 2020 was a horrible year for other reasons, it wasn't particularly bad in terms of falling numbers, which is good for farmers, but less good for scientists who need the phenomenon to occur, both for the research opportunities it presents and the potential funding it generates. Problems that don't happen don't get money.

Recently, however, investigating low falling numbers has become something of a small industry with graduate students, post docs and their mentors involved in an array of research projects. Work continues looking for non-destructive methods to evaluate falling numbers. Zhiwu Zhang, an expert in statistical genomics at Washington State University (WSU), is pressing on with hyperspectral photography and facial recognition technology to look at the outside of individual grains to determine what's happening inside.

Amber Hauvermale, an assistant research professor at WSU, has made progress developing an ELISA test, something like the strips used to check the level of chemicals in hot tubs, only in this case, able to determine the severity of falling numbers. The work has been successful enough that an industry collaborator has signed on to develop the product. An effective ELISA test would allow elevator companies to segregate high and low falling numbers wheat when it is delivered from the field.

Thanks in part to the Washington Grain Commission, the Agricultural Research Service (ARS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture has also added a new player to the team. Ashley Cannon is a wheat molecular biologist with a broad skill set of new tools. Appearing at the Falling Number Summit for the first time since she was

hired, Cannon revealed that she has identified 1,888 wheat proteins, 88 of which are LMA specific. Part of the group developing the ELISA test, she believes the new information and the ability to differentiate between LMA and PHS (the falling numbers test does not) will aid in the identification of additional proteins that can be added to the test.

Although it is early days, Cannon is also hopeful her research will one day permit breeders to select for LMA resistance earlier in the variety development process. Among other things, she is also interested in creating a risk-based model based on varieties, temperature and the grain development stage.

ARS Research Geneticist Deven See is also investigating the genetic origins of LMA. His goal is to identify regions in the wheat genome, called Quantitative Trait Loci, that are associated with LMA. The process involves creating a population of wheat plants that segregate



Low falling numbers is episodic, especially low falling numbers caused by late maturity alpha-amylase. In maps developed by Camille Steber's lab, it's easy to see that 2019 was a worse year for the phenomenon than 2020. As for 2021, that won't be known for several months.

for LMA, in the process, uncovering which genes are turned on and which are off and then identifying the molecular markers that breeders can use to breed tolerance to the trait.

Generalists look at specialists working on a single problem and flinch, but history was built on specialists working in teams to solve problems. Steber believes the falling numbers team has already made good progress by identifying existing varieties with more stable falling numbers, understanding the impact on end-product quality and providing tools to breeders to avoid it. Carefully looking at a single thing is usually what leads to progress. ■

Machines versus mouth: The final frontier

There are things about making a cake or cookie you can measure, and then there are things that you can't measure. Or rather, you can't by mechanical means.

Western societies are into measurements that are repeatable and consistent, and machines like the TA.XT Texture Analysis device does just that. Asian societies also use mechanical means, but they refine those assessments by chewing the resulting product and commenting on mouth feel. Listening to Asian and domestic collaborators describe the performance of new soft white wheat varieties at the Pacific Northwest Wheat Quality Council meeting in late January was like watching hands that reach, but don't quite touch.

As Bon Lee of the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland said, "In the U.S., they don't actually taste sponge cake to get mouth feel. They only use the numbers."

The numbers are based on texture science, which is actually a branch of physics that deals with the deformation and flow of matter, referred to as rheology. Chewing a product is the gold standard, but it's hard to get data from the experience since everybody's mouth sensa-

tion may be a little different. Nevertheless, a frequent criticism of varieties from Asian collaborators like **Atsuko Yamashita** of the Japan Flour Millers Association who spoke at the meeting about a particular entry was, "The mouth feel texture was bad."

And what causes that? It may be a result of protein quality or perhaps protein quantity or starch quality/quantity. Or something else. Bottom line, researchers haven't yet put together how everything is interrelated when it comes to mouth feel.

Manufacturers of equipment like the TA.XT have researched human chewing factors, that is, what goes on when a person chews a wheat-based product, attempting to capture mechanically the gumminess, hardness, stickiness, springiness and cohesiveness of whatever is being consumed. They do this through a whole series of probes



that provide consistent measurements.

Or as Doug Engle, cultivar variety manager at the Western Wheat Quality Lab (WWQL) said, “Mouth feel is the gold standard that they are trying to calibrate the machines to measure.”

Even if mouth feel is the gold standard, however, it would be impossible to use human beings to evaluate wheat varieties over the long haul. First, you’d need a trained panel to create a scientifically verifiable study, an expensive and time-consuming proposition, and there are only so many samples a person can eat in a day. Meanwhile, despite overseas collaborators’ insistence on mouth feel, Engle said there isn’t a great deal of variation between their evaluations and that of domestic quality personnel.

“There is some variation in how people view individual varieties, but there isn’t a huge disagreement when you look at the mean scores, although you do have some outliers. And half of our overseas cooperators’ scores have something to do with cake quality,” he said.

Actually, that is another difference in how quality is evaluated. At the WWQL, cookies generally serve as the proxy for cake quality at the early generation stages of breeding work. Only advanced breeding lines are baked for cake quality to verify this important trait, whereas overseas collaborators all bake sponge cakes as a primary part of their evaluations.

Why the difference? Cookies are easier, and given the thousands of varieties a year that are evaluated at the lab, a 20-minute cookie bake versus an hour-long cake bake adds up. Even then, Engle said, the lab bakes almost a thousand sponge cakes a year.

For now, mouth feel and mechanical measurement appears to be close enough when it comes to most quality evaluations, but bridging the divide will continue to be a goal. ■

Finding ‘just right’ dough strength requires rating changes

If you make bread at home, you know that the creation of a single loaf can take two hours or more to complete from start to finish. But if you’re a commercial bakery working a continuous line, 50 loaves a minute is more the standard.

That sort of production requires wheat flour that will perform under demanding conditions. And it’s part of the reason why the Pacific Northwest Wheat Quality Council (PNWWQC) adjusted the way they rank hard wheat varieties for quality at a virtual meeting held in late January. The 2021 Preferred Wheat Variety Brochure is the first to incorporate the new standard.

Like Goldilocks in the Three Bears story looking for the “just right” porridge, milling and baking industries, working in cooperation with the PNWWQC, have established the just-right dough strength. It is represented by a mixing time of three to five and a half minutes on a national pin mixer (mixing time refers to how long it takes to mix a dough to peak strength).

In the past, that has meant varieties with weaker dough strength flour as well as those with stronger dough strength have been penalized. That would make sense if single varieties were milled, but all wheat that is exported—and even that which is not—is blended along its route to the miller, and as flour, on to the baker.

Doug Engle, cultivar variety manager at the Western Wheat Quality Lab in Pullman, said the goal of the change was to provide a truer representation of the value of hard red winter and hard red spring varieties when evaluated for quality. The initial rationale of penalizing stronger dough strength varieties was to drive everything toward the middle, as in neither too hot nor too cold. You might think stronger is better, but dough strength that is too strong can actually lead to production scheduling issues, reduced loaf volume and dough handling problems.

What was overlooked in the process, however, is that millers are experts at blending. It turns out, they actually like strong types, at least to a point, because they help blend up the weak ones to come out with the “just right” dough strength. If a large part of the crop were to be outside of the target mixing strength, it would cause problems, but a few strong ones are a good thing.

The change not to penalize too strong dough strength varieties did not result in wholesale movements among the hard wheat varieties included in the Preferred Variety Brochure, but there was a bit of jockeying for position. For example, the variety SY Touchstone moved up, and LCS Evina moved down.

Significant movement of varieties on the rankings, however, only occurred with lines on the fringes of optimum mixing strength. Most varieties rankings were unchanged by the new scoring system. ■

Eyes in the sky

BIG CHANGES FOR WHEAT BREEDING AS NEW TECHNOLOGIES DEVELOP

By Arron Carter

Little did I know the changes that were going to take place in the next decade when I was hired in 2009 to run the winter wheat breeding and genetics program at Washington State University (WSU).

I have seen many private companies get into the wheat breeding business, along with a large increase in the number of varieties commercially available to growers. Advances in genetics have improved genotyping of breeding lines, opening the door to utilizing new tools to make selections. Increased availability of low cost and light-weight cameras and sensors have allowed plant breeders to look at traits not previously visible to the naked eye. All of these advances and more have altered how plant breeding is conducted, and in many cases, have made us more efficient in the selection process.

This summer will be my 12th field season at WSU, and I can assure you, I am not breeding and making selections like my predecessors, let alone when I first started. There are times I feel like I'm looking more toward the sky than I am looking down at the wheat. Why? The use of drones and sensors (known as phenomics) have become a new tool used in many plant breeding programs.

In some cases, data can be collected faster and with more accuracy using phenomics than I can alone, like when rating thousands of plots for percent of emergence from deep planting. Other times, sensors can give me information about plant health, water use efficiency and photosynthetic ability that cannot be seen by the eye. This additional trait information is allowing all breeders to select lines that are better adapted to the variable weather patterns found in the state.



Arron Carter (left) and students out in the field with their UAV system. Photo by Robert Hubner, Washington State University.

Another tool currently used in breeding programs is known as genomic selection. When I started breeding, we could use one or two DNA markers to track a gene of interest. Now, we can use tens of thousands of markers to track thousands of genes that are beneficial to successful varieties. That means, instead of looking for genes one at a time, I can simultaneously select for many useful genes.

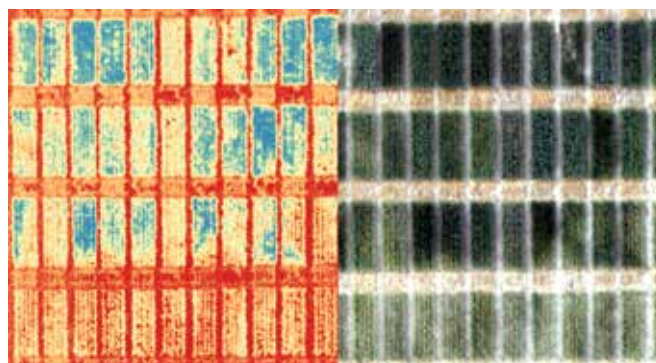
This technology is very beneficial for complex traits where many genes affect the outcome. Consider end-use quality. Typically, we use very expensive laboratory tests to evaluate the quality performance of wheat varieties. With genomic selection, I can use genetic information to make selections early in the breeding program while I am still evaluating thousands of lines. This allows me and my team to predict the best lines and advance them in the program. At later stages, when there are fewer lines, we can then use the laboratory tests to confirm the genetic predictions. This saves an untold amount of time, money and effort during the screening process.

While phenomics and genomic selection are two new methods used by many programs to make selections, some additional tools are on the horizon that may further alter how I breed wheat. One of these is gene-editing technology.

Gene editing is a very specific process in which researchers can alter the sequence of a gene, many times making a specific gene nonfunctional. For example, there is a gene called the PPO gene that causes products to turn brown when exposed to oxygen (like what happens when you cut open an apple). In wheat, it causes final products, especially noodles, to become discolored and undesirable. Altering the PPO gene, which has already been done in apples, can prevent this from occurring.

There are many other examples of how this technology might be used in wheat breeding. Researchers have considered altering genes to prevent fungal pathogen infection or to prevent toxins from being produced. Some researchers are investigating how to create wheat that can be eaten by people with celiac disease. For Eastern Washington farmers, perhaps the most interesting work being done is looking at altering the alpha-amylase enzyme pathway as a way to prevent low falling numbers.

None of this gene-editing technology is currently being used within the WSU breeding programs, but we are closely watching the research that is being conducted. Although the technology is different from GMO crops created through genetic engineering, gene editing will still require our customers' approval before varieties can be commercialized.



A drone photo of research plots showing both a typical RGB image (right) as well as an NDVI image, which is a spectral image of plant health. Photo by Andrew Herr, Washington State University.

Another technology that was tried decades ago, abandoned, and recently reinvigorated, is the development of hybrid wheat. In a typical wheat breeding program, two lines are crossed together to make an F1 plant. This plant is then self-pollinated for 7 or more generations until all genes are in a stable (homozygous) form. This process allows the variety to “breed true” from year to year, permitting seed to be harvested and planted the next year, with no variation showing up in the field.

Hybrid wheat is basically the propagation of the F1 plant after making the cross. In many crops, these F1 hybrids bring along increased yield potential and more resilience to abiotic (environmental) stress. The downside is that these hybrids will segregate if grown a second year, so seed must be purchased annually. This requires significant investment in seed production as the plant must be cross-pollinated in large quantities under field conditions, something that is difficult to do in wheat, a traditionally self-pollinated crop.

Many private companies have invested in developing hybrid wheat. The big, still-unanswered question is will the gains in yield potential offset the difficulty in developing these hybrids every year for commercial production? Depending on this outcome, the next 10 years of wheat breeding may again see significant changes!

When I started this position in 2009, I never thought I would be using the tools and technology that I am today. Plant breeding has turned into so much more than walking fields and looking at breeding lines. I truly believe the incorporation of phenomics and genomics has improved our breeding efficiency and effectiveness.

With the support and in direct collaboration with the Washington Grain Commission, I'm excited by what we can accomplish with the new techniques already in our hands, not to mention the breeding tools that are sure to be discovered in the next 10 years! ■

WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

How transportation influences wheat prices



By T. Randall Fortenbery

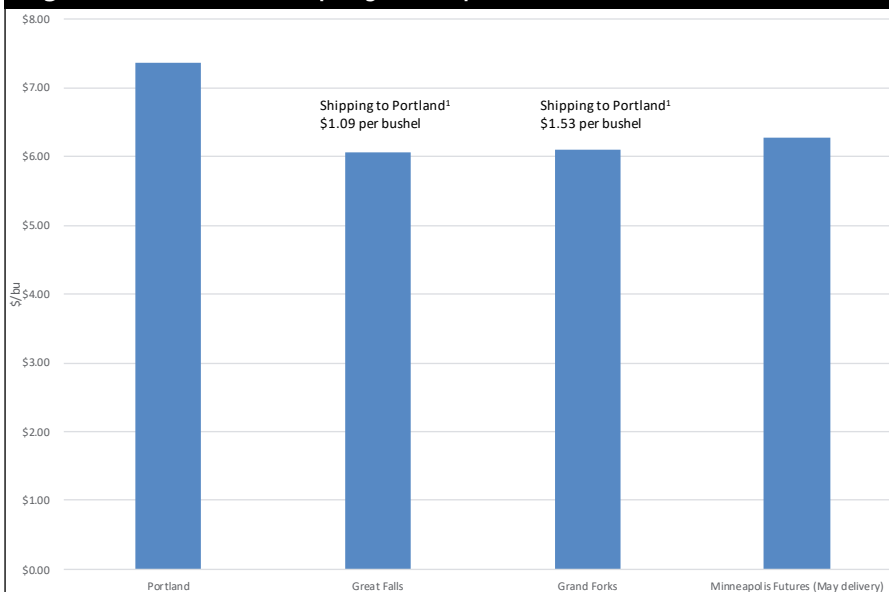
An important factor influencing local wheat prices is the cost of transportation. As

we look across different markets, local basis levels (the difference between the local cash price and the price for the appropriate nearby futures contract) differ partially by the cost of getting wheat to the final consumer.

Consider spring wheat shipped from Portland to Asia as an example. In general, Washington producers can expect a higher spring wheat price compared to producers from Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota because it costs less to get their wheat to Portland compared to producers from the other states. Further, the Portland price will generally be higher than the futures price for spring wheat because the spring wheat futures contract calls for delivery in either Minneapolis or Duluth, Minn.

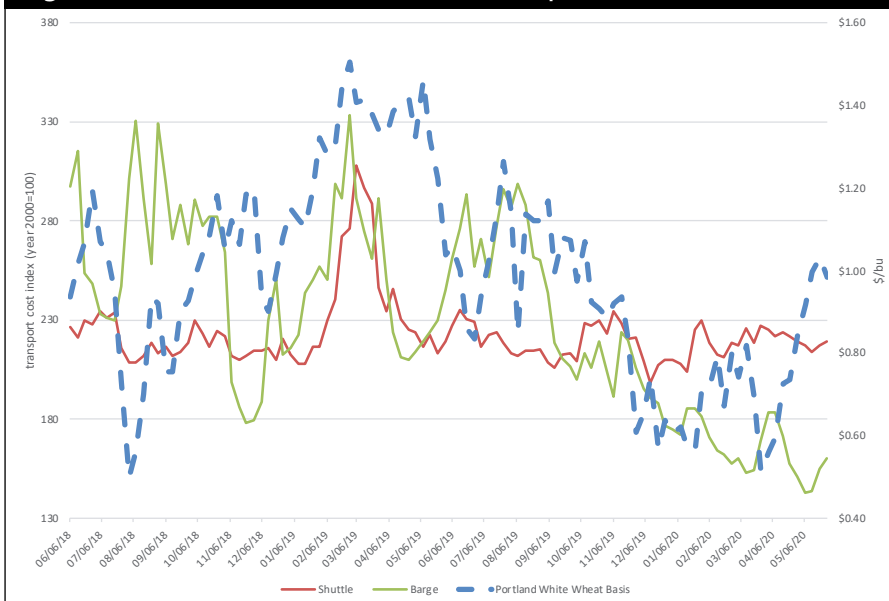
The Duluth market on Lake Superior is an export market, but if we went to sell spring wheat to most Asian markets, we need to divert it from delivery in Duluth to delivery in Portland. For Washington producers of spring wheat, that is easy—since it costs more for local buyers in Washington wheat to ship to Duluth than to Portland, Portland exporters would not have to be as aggressive in offering prices compared to a Duluth elevator to encourage delivery from Washington. However, on average, almost half of all U.S. spring wheat is produced in

Figure 1: Dark Northern Spring wheat prices



¹These are costs via shuttle train estimated by USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service for the week of March 10, 2021.

Figure 2: Portland white wheat basis vs. transport costs



eastern North Dakota, and it is cheaper for merchants there to ship to Duluth as opposed to Portland.

If we add South Dakota spring wheat production, then the Dakotas together account for just under 60 percent of all U.S. spring wheat. Thus, for the Portland exporters to access the primary suppliers of U.S. spring wheat to fill

their vessels, they need to encourage Midwest producers to ship west to Portland, not east to Duluth, and this requires a price premium over the Duluth price to cover the additional transportation costs.

This, in turn, benefits Washington spring wheat producers because they will also receive the price being offered to Midwest producers. Since transport to Portland is cheaper for Washington wheat merchants than for the Midwest merchants, local elevators in Washington can offer a higher price for wheat destined for Portland than elevators in North and South Dakota. This results in Washington producers generally having a stronger basis (their local cash price is higher compared to Portland and the spring wheat futures prices traded in Minneapolis) compared to producers in North and South Dakota.

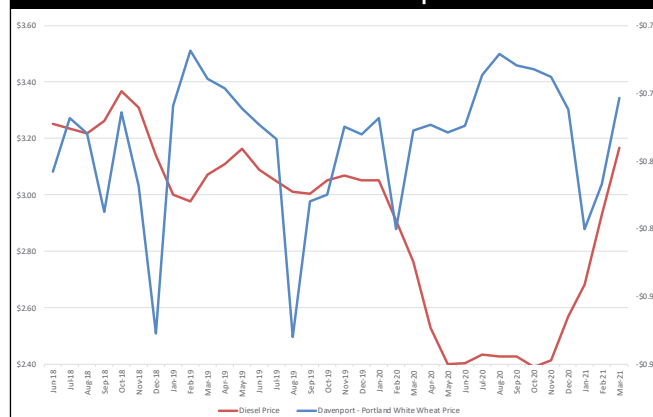
Figure 1 illustrates this for prices bid on March 19, 2021. The Portland price for Dark Northern Spring was \$7.37 per bushel (14 percent protein). The price offered to a farmer in Colfax, Wash., would have been less than that to account for transportation from Colfax to Portland. Markets further east, however, would face significantly lower wheat prices than Colfax farmers to account for increased transport costs from those markets to the Portland export facilities. Notice that the Midwest prices are also discounted compared to the Minneapolis futures price (quoted for delivery in Minneapolis) to account for the transportation costs from Grand Forks and Great Falls to Minneapolis.

Local white wheat prices are also impacted by transport costs. Figure 2 shows the Portland white wheat basis (the Portland white wheat cash price minus the nearby futures price for soft red winter wheat) compared to the cost of both barge and shuttle train transportation over the last two marketing years.

The transport costs in Figure 2 are index values showing changes in transportation rates. Each point shows the percentage increase in transport costs relative to the base cost in the year 2000 (the index in 2000 equals 100). A higher index value means transport costs are rising compared to earlier periods, and a declining value means transport costs are falling. Notice that basis levels generally get stronger (cash prices in Portland are rising compared to the Chicago futures prices) as transport costs go up, and basis tends to weaken as transport costs decline.

This does not mean Portland prices themselves are rising as transport costs go up, only that they are increasing relative to Chicago futures prices. Portland is essentially competing with exporters in Duluth, the Gulf and the East Coast to source grain for export. As transportation costs change, the grain price spreads between all these locations will also change, and grain will tend to flow to the market that comes closest to rewarding transporta-

Figure 3: Davenport-Portland white wheat price difference vs. U.S. diesel price



tion from local markets to the export facilities.

When comparing local Washington wheat prices to Portland prices (the price, say, in Davenport, Wash., compared to Portland), the relationship tends to be negatively impacted by transport costs. For a given price in Portland, local buyers will adjust what they are willing to pay based on the cost of delivering locally sourced grain to Portland. The greater that cost, the lower the local price will generally be compared to the Portland price.

A major driver of transportation costs for many Washington wheat producers are diesel prices, regardless of whether their wheat moves out of the local market by truck, train or barge. Figure 3 shows the monthly average differential between the white wheat price in Davenport, Wash., and the Portland price compared to the national monthly average U.S. diesel price. Notice that prices in Davenport tend to fall relative to Portland prices as diesel prices rise and rise relative to Portland when diesel prices fall. The particularly strong local prices this last fall relative to Portland were associated with the lowest diesel prices experienced in the last three years. As diesel prices began rising in December, the price in Davenport fell relative to the price in Portland.

As of late March, 2021, the futures market for distillate fuels (the contract is for ultra-low sulfur heating oil, but prices are highly correlated with diesel prices) suggests fuel prices will continue to rise slightly through the first couple of quarters of the next marketing year. If this is realized then we can expect Portland to continue to see a strong wheat price relative to other export markets, with local Washington markets continuing to experience the current price discounts relative to Portland. ■

Randy Fortenbery holds the Thomas B. Mick Endowed Chair in Grain Economics at Washington State University. He received his Ph.D. in Agricultural Economics from the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign.

Promoting direct seeding in the Pacific Northwest

Ty Meyer, production ag manager, Spokane Conservation District

By Kevin Gaffney

Born and raised in the wheat country near Colton, Wash., in the heart of the Palouse, Ty Meyer grew up on a wheat and cattle farm operated by his father and uncle.

After graduating from Colton High School, Meyer earned a bachelor's degree in agribusiness from Washington State University in 1993.

"My first employment was with Northwest Farm Credit Services as a farm appraiser," said Meyer. "I worked out of the Yakima office for two years."

Meyer returned home to accept the position of assistant manager of Johnson Union Warehouse, which is now part of the Pacific Northwest Farmers Cooperative. By that time, Meyer and his longtime hometown sweetheart, Kay, were married, and they moved to the west side of Washington when Meyer landed a job with AT&T Wireless during the tech boom of the late 1990s. Meyer's management duties included taking IT professionals around the country to train field office staff.

Meyer continued to work for AT&T after the family moved back to Spokane until the company was acquired by Cingular Wireless and required that all employees had to work from the Seattle offices. That was 2003, the year Meyer decided to join the team at the Spokane Conservation District (SCD).

"It was a good opportunity for me," said Meyer. "It has been a pretty seamless fit, working with direct seed farmers, given my farm background."

Meyer administers the SCD direct seed loan program, which provides funds to assist farmers in the transi-



Spokane Conservation District (SCD) staff at a field day demonstrating a newly installed, Edge of Field water quality monitoring station. The SCD installed the unit in a direct seed field in Spokane County. From left are Walt Edelen, manager of the SCD Water Resources Department; Seth Flanders, Commodity Buffer Program coordinator for the SCD; and Ty Meyer, discussing the positive impacts of no-till farming in the reduction of soil erosion. Photo courtesy of Ty Meyer and the Spokane Conservation District.

tion to direct seeding. A quality direct seed drill unit can easily cost \$250,000 or more. This is one reason why many farmers watch their direct seeding neighbors for several years before making the financial commitment.

Meyer works with farmers all over Eastern Washington and has an agreement in place to work with direct seeders in North Idaho.

"The program is targeted for direct seed farmers to offer funds that may not be available from commercial lenders or other sources. It is a dedicated pool of funds that has grown over the years. We are working with farmers in just about every county east of the Columbia River."

The SCD has multiple funding sources, including from local land use fees. They leverage those funds to obtain grant funds and other revenues for promoting and establishing conservation practices.

"The soil is a precious resource, and it is amazing what conservation practices can accomplish on the farms," noted Meyer. "Farmers in the Inland Northwest have already made incredible progress in reducing tillage, which has resulted in better conservation of the soil resource."

"Many farmers are baling their straw, which enables reduced tillage. Precision agriculture has helped all the farmers, especially the direct seeders. The pay-back for the upfront costs for adopting precision ag technology is usually one or two years. It's really become more of a question of how can you afford not to implement these tools."

Meyer explained that the growth in the size of most farm operations, with the

accompanying increase in the size of the machinery, has made the transition to reduced tillage and direct seeding more workable.

"Most farmers already have high-powered tractors with 450 to 600 horsepower. They already use semitrucks for hauling grain from their fields. These trucks are also capable of pulling large bulk liquid product tanks. With this equipment already in place, the transition to direct seeding is not as onerous or expensive as it was just a decade or so ago."

One of the complaints about direct seeding over the years has been that it worked better in higher rainfall regions. Meyer said he has direct seed farmers successfully operating in low rainfall areas of Douglas and Adams counties.

"Direct seeding is always evolving," said Meyer. "We continue to strive to grow the best food crops we can while having as minimal an impact as possible on the precious soil resource. It seems to me, it is more important to find the right unique system for each individual farm than strictly looking at how much annual moisture is received. The rainfall matters, of course, but I really believe direct seeding can be successful on farms with as little as six to eight inches of annual moisture.

"Other goals we are striving for on direct seed farms include establishing higher organic matter levels. Cover crops can also be a critical factor in success. This might be legumes to put nitrogen back into the soil or adding other crops to enhance overall soil health. Cover crop practices are still in their infancy in our region. We are committed to helping our growers find more holistic approaches to building soil health."

While the SCD is not directly involved in ag politics, they want to help the farmers in any way they can.

"As everyone knows, there is a strong push in the legislature concerning carbon reduction, taxation of carbon emissions, etc. Our focus is mostly on helping the farmers implement practices to reduce, if not reverse, climate change.

"Regardless of whether the farmers believe in climate change or not, it is a critical issue to agriculture at this time. So ag needs to aggressively and accurately tell its story. This isn't an easy task, explaining modern agricultural practices to legislators and to an urban population several generations removed from the farm.

"While the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) and the Farm Bureau are working with politi-



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cians in Washington, D.C., and Olympia, we are focused on working directly with farmers on potential solutions to these issues.

"Ag needs to educate legislators and other citizens about how much progress agriculture has already made over the past decades in reducing erosion, improving soil health and carbon sequestration. Farmers need to receive recognition and credit for everything they have already accomplished, and they need to be provided with funding to help continue this important conservation work."

The SCD does much more than just promote direct seeding. They are actively involved in Forestry, Livestock & Land Management, FireWise Assessment, Watershed Planning, Water Resources, Soil Health and other educational programs.

The SCD just completed a \$7.5 million regional conservation project with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) in Spokane County. They also have a very popular annual tree and shrub sale each spring.

Meyer has served on the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association board for six years. He also serves on the NRCS State Technical Advisory Committee.

Meyer and his wife, Kay, live in Colton with their two children. Their son, Jackson, is attending WSU, and their daughter, Maggie, attends Colton High School.

The SCD will soon be moving to their new, 50-acre conservation campus and new building in the Spokane Valley at 4422 E. Eighth Avenue. For more information, you can find SCD online at spokanecd.org. ■

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Farming with family can be complicated

By Trista Crossley

Family can be complicated. Farming with family can be even more complicated, when you factor in all the uncertainties farmers have to face.

Linda Johnson's family farm sits on the breaks of the Tucannon River about 12 miles outside Dayton, Wash. The farm was first settled around 1890 by Grant Low, Johnson's great-grandfather, and his wife, Ora Monnett. Despite coming out west as an orphan, Low was successful enough that by the time he died, he had amassed a sizeable amount of farmland. The farm was divided between Low's three daughters and one son. Johnson's father and his cousin, Mike Thompson, took over farming their mothers' land until 1975, when Johnson died suddenly in the middle of harvest.

"In true Columbia County spirit, Roy Eslick headed up a farming bee and cut our crop all in one day. It



Linda Johnson's 15-year-old brother, Don Thompson, drove the family's John Deere 95 H during the harvest bee in 1975. Photo courtesy of Linda Johnson.

was actually reported on Paul Harvey," Johnson remembered.

Johnson's aunt, Jean Nelson, and her family took over the farming operation when Johnson's father died. A similar arrangement has continued to the present time. Johnson leases out her portion of the land she inherited through her father to Nelson's son and son-in-law who farm both families' acreage. Johnson operates under a crop-share agreement and grows mostly dryland wheat, with a little barley thrown in. Back when she was a child, Johnson remembers growing green peas for the Green Giant plant that used to be in Dayton. While Johnson is



The harvest bee organized by Roy Eslick in 1975 after Linda Johnson's father died in the middle of harvest. Twenty-three combines and 28 trucks helped the family harvest their crop that year. Photo courtesy of Linda Johnson.

aware of the potential pitfalls that can arise when working with family, she said she's got a good relationship with her tenants and that they meet periodically to review the operation of the farm.

"It doesn't concern me too much, because I think we seem to be able to keep a pretty even temperament," she said. "I have seen that (breakdown) happen in families, and it can destroy relationships. You take a risk when you get involved in any kind of venture with family. It wouldn't matter if we bought a gas station together, there's always going to be different ideas."

Johnson is responsible for marketing her share of the crop once it's harvested. She said she keeps an eye on the market daily, reads industry publications and gets daily bulletins from her local grain growers group to help her make decisions.



Grant Low settled the family farm around 1890 in Columbia County. Photo courtesy of Linda Johnson.

"Our theory around here is we buy high and sell low," she said, laughing. "It's up to me to market (my share of the crop) as I see fit. Whatever I make, I make, and whatever bad choices I make, I have to live with them."

For other landlords, whether their tenants are family or not, Johnson's advice is to always keep up on the farm lease, stay in contact with the tenant and try to maintain a good working relationship, even if it means "swallowing a little bit of pride."

None of Johnson's children grew up on the farm, and they don't have the same attachment to it that she does. She isn't sure if they'll hang onto the land or sell it.

"I don't plan on ever parting with it, but they may have a different mindset," she said. "I spent my childhood riding horse out through wheat fields by myself. We'd get up in the morning and wouldn't come home until we were hungry. I've ridden over every piece of that farm on my horse. It means everything to me. It's a connection to my great-aunt and my grandmother and beyond that, to family that I didn't know that started out before us. The ground is a passion for me. I love farming. I always have. It's hard work, but you get in there and get your hands dirty and get it done." ■

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THE BOTTOM LINE

Common crop insurance mistakes

By Curtis Evandenko

McGregor Risk Management Services

This is a multifaceted issue in that there are many different “things” that can contribute to invalidating or reducing crop insurance coverage for the insured. Please know that this list is by no means all inclusive, merely a snapshot of common items that are often encountered during the crop policy year.

Named insured

This is a three-legged stool. It is imperative that the insured person on the Multi-Peril Crop Insurance (MPCI) policy is the same entity that certifies planted acres at the local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office and markets the grain. For example, John Smith, a married individual, is the named insured on the MPCI policy and is also how the planted acres are certified at FSA. However, the grain is marketed under the name Smith Farms. In this scenario, one leg of the stool is missing, and the stool cannot stand. In the event of a loss, the Approved Insurance Provider (AIP) will be unable to pay a potential loss as the named insured (John Smith) does not match the name under which the grain was marketed (Smith Farms).

Substantial beneficial interest

All substantial beneficial interest (SBI) of more than 10 percent must be named on the crop insurance application. For example, the aforementioned spousal policy for John Smith requires both individuals to be listed on the policy, regardless if the farm was inherited by the wife and the policy is in her name. The only exception to this requirement, which is seldom ever met, would be for both individuals to have complete separation of all financial and household expenses documented. In the event that only one spouse is listed on the policy, the AIP considers the insured crop to be 50 percent insured, and the grower is only eligible for a 50 percent payment of any potential crop loss indemnity.

SBIs with less than 10 percent share are not required to be listed, but there's no harm in listing them, especially if

their percent share is increasing. Any changes to the SBIs must be made prior to the applicable sales closing dates. Wheat in the Pacific Northwest has a sales closing date of Sept. 30. In the event of a death occurring after the sales closing date, changes to the SBI can wait until the following crop year. However, timely notice is critical, so notify your agent as soon as possible.

Acreage certification at FSA

Identifying the correct practice of the wheat acreage planted is also required—think continuous crop or summerfallow. This may not seem like a significant item, however, the yield difference and corresponding coverage guarantee associated with the acreage can be.

We can correct incorrectly reported practice types or shares if the error is discovered in a timely manner—timely being the operative word. It must be done prior to a notice of loss. Upon submission of a notice of loss, crop liability cannot be increased. For example, correcting planted acres initially reported as continuous crop to summerfallow acres or correcting shares from .6667 to .7000 would increase liability and may not be approved by the AIP.

While we're on the subject of continuous crop and summerfallow wheat acres, maintaining separate records by practice type is important as is keeping production records by type (spring or winter) and by ownership, such as by landlord. Production history databases are separated by practice, type and landlord. The same crop, practice and type with a different share for the same landlord, .6000 and .6667, does not automatically constitute different units according to the MPCI policy language.

If production is not kept separate by unit but is co-mingled with other units, this could adversely impact a potential loss scenario by prorating and allocating harvested bushels. Additionally, if production is not maintained separately by optional unit, the penalty is significant with collapse of optional units into a single unit.

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Notice of crop damage

MPCI policy language requires notification of crop damage within 72 hours of the insured's discovery of said crop damage. The discovery of crop damage may or may not happen within 72 hours of the weather event; hail or fire damage on an actively growing crop is much easier to discern than potentially damaging cold temperatures while the crop is dormant, such as this year's mid-February cold temperatures with the accompanying wind. The fall wheat crop was dormant during this occurrence, and damage, if any, will not show itself until later in the spring when the wheat crop breaks dormancy. Always document your specific weather conditions or events for future reference. When in doubt, submit a notice of loss to the AIP via your crop agent.

Additional notice requirements include:

- Within 15 days of harvest if a loss is anticipated;
- Within 60 days of the completion of harvest on that unit, not the farm; or
- Within 45 days of the harvest price announcement, if it's a revenue protection policy.

Lastly, a timely notice is required to the AIP before any dirt is moved, as the crop adjuster representing the AIP must approve and release acreage for activity. For example, think reseeding damaged wheat acres whether in the fall or in the spring. Another example would be working stubble ground soon after harvest is complete; if an open notice of loss exists and a payable claim is expected, the in-

sured must first allow the AIP to inspect prior to destroying. This, unfortunately, happens too often. Growers are doing what good farming practices dictate, timely replanting damaged acres to establish the best crop stand, hoping for the best possible crop yield, but jeopardizing policy replant benefits.

The MPCI policy provides a replant payment for replanting expenses incurred if crop damage occurs after the initial fall final plant date. Damage that occurs prior to this date is not covered under the replant policy of the MPCI policy. The replant payment calculation for wheat is four bushels times projected price (\$6.33) times share. All insured parties could receive replant benefits under the MPCI policy even if they do not incur or participate in replanting expenses. Many AIPs offer private replant products that require similar notification.

That was a lot of real estate covered. Frankly, each subtopic could be delved into further, but I think this provides an idea of the possible pitfalls with a few of the bugaboos noted. If you have any specific concerns you'd like to discuss, please don't hesitate to contact me.

I wish all a blessed Easter and a safe spring season! ■

Curtis Evanenko has more than 25 years of crop insurance experience serving the Pacific Northwest from both the wholesale and retail sides of the business. He currently serves as a risk management advisor with McGregor Risk Management Services. He can be reached at (509) 540-2632 or by email at cevanenko@mcgregorrisk.com.



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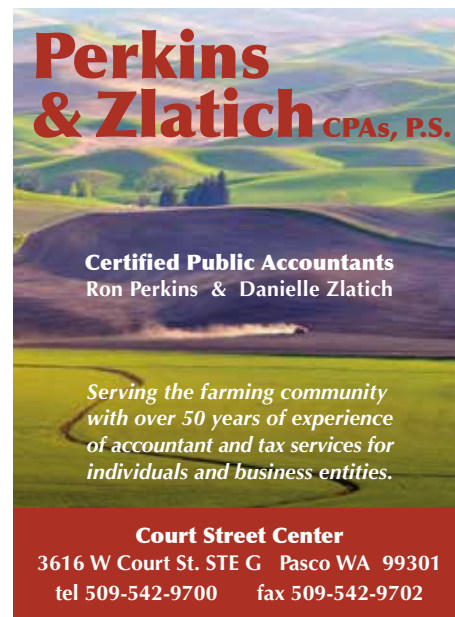
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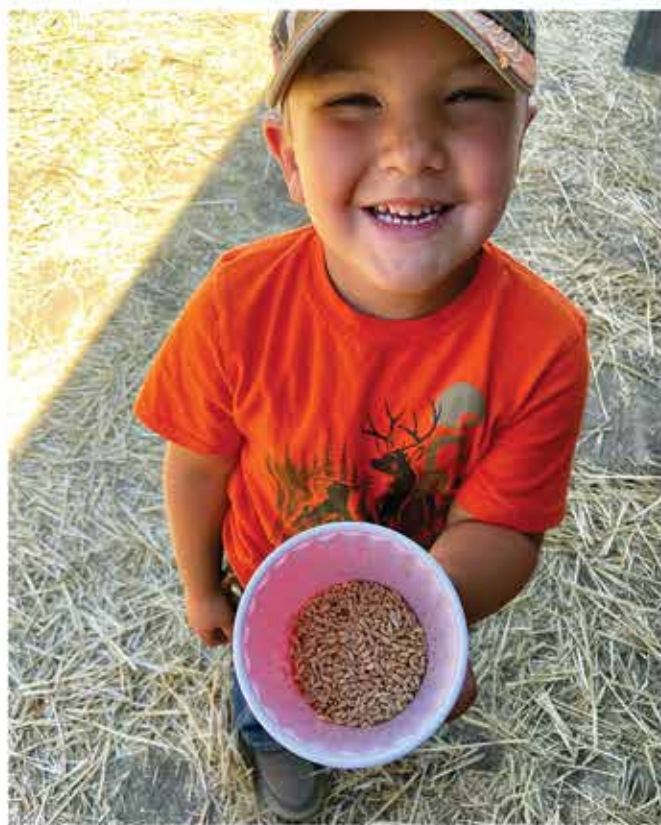
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Caden Bennett (4) during Harvest 2020 in Lacrosse.
Photo by Morgan Brown.



Jaxon (22 months) gives his father, Evan Jones, some combine tips at E&A Jones Farms in Wilbur. Jaxon wants to be a farmer just like daddy! Photo by Ashleigh Jones.



Wheat outside Pomeroy. Photo by Jaril Pietras.



Liberty (2) waiting for a combine ride with her dad, Nathan Mielke. They are the 5th and 6th generations on the farm in the Rocklyn area. Photo by Torri Mielke.

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Filling the drill before planting the 2021 crop in Mansfield. Photo by Nathan Wall.

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