

WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

JUNE | 2020

It's shaping up to be
DRY, DRY, DRY
in parts of central Washington

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WHEAT GROWERS**

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President's Perspective



Survey unveils growers' concerns

By Ryan Poe

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers recently did a second survey of our members in regard to COVID-19. We needed to get a feel from our membership of their concerns in order to relay any issues to our national organization, the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG). NAWG was then able to take those concerns to Congress. We had such a fantastic response that it inspired NAWG to do their own survey. The quantity of feedback spoke volumes as to the level of growers' concerns as we had more feedback than we normally get for a farm bill survey!

Growers provided a lot of helpful comments. Under the question about what assistance they needed most right now, comments ranged all the way from needing more cost share programs to increased market access. A number of growers noted it would be helpful to receive ARC/PLC payments now, something that WAWG has recommended to NAWG.

In response to the questions that asked if growers were seeing transportation issues, 14 percent answered yes. As the transportation chair for WAWG, this is definitely one of the areas I have questions about, especially as we get closer to harvest. It's hard for me to imagine where our state will be at that time, and what impacts the pandemic and social distancing could have on getting our crop to our country elevators. I am confident, however, that there are people in the industry thinking about these challenges already and will have the solutions we need when the time comes.

Looking through the general concerns part of the survey, I realized I'm not the only one worried about our overseas markets. It kind of feels like being kicked when you're already down. We have been facing a lot of unknowns over the past few years, like tariffs and trade negotiations, and just when we felt like we were making headway, this pandemic comes around, bringing a lot more uncertainty to the situation. Fortunately for us, wheat is a crop that can be stored. It is tough watching what other commodities are going through, with huge quantities of potatoes being donated, and the dairy industry dumping excess milk.

Besides the general sense of uncertainty, growers are concerned about wheat prices and weather. Access to labor has been another point I've heard talked about, especially the ability to find part-time help for harvest.

We are very fortunate to have Michelle Hennings as our executive director. She does a great job keeping a pulse on what is going on within our state as well as nationally. She's written a column in this month's issue talking about what WAWG and NAWG have been up to for the past few months. See page 4. I urge anyone who has concerns, problems or questions to reach out to either the WAWG staff or the WAWG officers as we are here to try and help.

Speaking of weather, we have seen a few rain showers in my area, which have definitely been needed. At our last board meeting, there were reports that much of Eastern Washington is dry, especially down in Benton and Klickitat counties. See page 18 for more on that situation. As I am writing this, the upcoming week is filled with chances of rain, but we'll see if any of them can deliver. ■

Cover photo: Parts of central Washington are experiencing extremely dry conditions. Growers are worried that without moisture, fields, like this one in Benton County, may be forfeit. See story on page 18. Photo by Nicole Berg. All photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

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Advocacy continues despite stay-at-home orders

WOW! What an interesting couple of months it has been. Our office may be closed, and you won't have seen us at any meetings lately, but the leaders and staff of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) are still working very hard on behalf of Eastern Washington wheat growers. Like many of you, we are working from home and have switched to conference calls and Zoom meetings in order to get business done. I enjoy spending time with my family and working from home, but it has been a challenge to homeschool the kids and not get interrupted while working. I have a sign I put on my office door that says, "KEEP OUT—MOM IS ZOOMING."

One upside of having my kids home with no extracurricular activities is the opportunity they've had to spend more time helping out on the farm. We appreciate the extra hands, and they get to learn valuable life skills under the watchful eye of my husband.

I do miss the face-to-face interactions with colleagues and farmers, however. It makes me feel somewhat removed having these meetings switched to conference calls and Zoom, so I wanted to reach out and give you an update on what WAWG has been working on during the pandemic.

We have been in regular contact with our state and federal legislators, keeping them informed of issues impacting agriculture, monitoring legislation and keeping our grower members informed. Our members are spread out across a wide area, so we are using online surveys to check in with them. It's no surprise that impacts of the pandemic on rural communities; access to labor, equipment and inputs; retaining markets; and the continued low cost of wheat are the top grower concerns. Thank you to those who have filled out the surveys; I've noticed they've become a common theme among organizations.

We recently coordinated with the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to hold a webinar to update growers on NRCS programs and deadlines, and we check in regularly with the other U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies. COVID-19 has caused unique challenges in the planning of grower programs,



Michelle Hennings,
Executive Director
*Washington Association
of Wheat Growers*

including this month's Wheat College and the 2020 Tri-State Grain Growers Convention, which is scheduled for early December.

We are also working with our national organization, the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG), to dig into the various federal relief packages to determine how wheat growers can benefit from them. While some growers were fortunate to get aid through the Paycheck Protection Program, we are also hearing from many that they've run into obstacles that range from applications being denied based on a farm's business structure; unclear deadlines and qualification rules; and, of course, lack of funding. Even the institutions that are responsible for handing out the funding are having to deal with confusing federal rules and a backlog of applications.

We've also learned that some banks are tightening their loan requirements, adding another item to worry about to growers' lists.

We have also just learned that white wheat will not be included in the \$16 billion Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) because the class didn't show at least a 5 percent drop in price during the dates selected by USDA. You can read more about that issue on page 12.

Another issue we are hearing from D.C. is that depressed wheat prices existed before the pandemic and therefore can't be blamed on COVID-19, making the wheat industry overall less qualified for pandemic relief. I look around at my neighbors, many of whom are struggling, and I don't believe that is true. Just as a rising tide lifts all boats, a lack of water leaves everything stuck in the mud. We are working with NAWG to refute this claim and make it clear to our elected officials that everybody, regardless of the crop they are growing, has been negatively impacted in ways that will be felt for months, if not years.

We want to thank NAWG for their advocacy on behalf of the Washington wheat growers. The following are some of the other projects NAWG has been working on at the federal level during the pandemic:

- They joined with other national organizations to ask Congress and the administration to consider the

impacts of stay-at-home restrictions on the agricultural supply chain and workforce and worked with USDA and the U.S. Department of Labor to ensure that farmers would be considered essential workers.

- NAWG joined more than 50 food and agricultural organizations in sending a letter to the Department of Transportation requesting additional emergency relief that includes all segments of the farm-to-fork supply chain to address disruptions.
- In April, NAWG signed onto a letter sent to all governors suggesting actions states could take to aid the continued movement of food and agricultural inputs. Specifically, these efforts sought expanded emergency declarations and waivers related to trucker hour-of-service requirements to make sure producers had access to critical inputs going into the planting season.
- NAWG worked alongside other national organizations in calling on Congress to provide funding through the Commodity Credit Corporation to USDA in order to provide funds to producers. NAWG also joined several organizations in sending a letter to Ag Secretary Sonny Perdue outlining the severe impacts the pandemic is causing throughout production agriculture

with recommendations on how to help the industry recover.

- NAWG wrote a letter to USDA demonstrating how wheat farmers should be eligible for CFAP that included \$16 billion in direct payments for farmers and ranchers.
- NAWG has coordinated with U.S. Wheat Associates on its messaging to the administration on how it must work to ensure that commercial warehouses can store and efficiently transport wheat in top condition to meet overseas demand. NAWG has been very vocal about why farmers and food distribution industries are essential. As a result, export grain systems and Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS) inspections have continued operating with little or no interruption.

I hope all of you are as well as you can be, and we can get back to our normal soon. Your WAWG leaders will continue working to ensure that the Washington wheat industry weathers this crisis.

If you have any suggestions or need to discuss an issue, please call our office at (509) 659-0610 or email me at michelle@wawg.org. ■



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 ☐ Grower \$125
 ☐ Partnership \$500 (up to 5 partners)
 ☐ Landlord \$125
 ☐ Convention \$600
 ☐ Industry Associate \$150
 ☐ Lifetime \$2,500

Name

Farm or Business

Address

City

State Zip

Phone Fax

Email

County Affiliation (if none, write state)

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☐ Producer
 ☐ Landlord
 ☐ Individual
 ☐ Industry Rep.
 ☐ Business Owner
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LEVELS OF MEMBERSHIP

| | Greensheet Newsletter | Wheat Life Magazine | National Wheat Grower Newsletter | Annual Harvest Prints | WAWG Convention Free Registration | One Vote per Member |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------|
| Producer/Landowners (Voting Membership) | | | | | | |
| Grower or Landlord \$125 | X | X | X | | | X |
| 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:

- ✓ Preserving the Snake River dams.
- ✓ Maintaining a safe and sound transportation system that includes rail, river and roads.
- ✓ Establishing favorable trade agreements.
- ✓ Fighting mandatory carbon emission regulations.
- ✓ Fighting unreasonable notification and reporting requirements for pesticide applications.

If these issues are important to your operation, become a member today and help us educate our legislators and advocate for agriculture. We are making sure the wheat industry's voice is heard.

More member benefits:

- Greensheet ALERTS • WAWG updates
- Voice to WAWG through opinion surveys
- National Wheat Grower updates
- State and national legislative updates



**Washington Association
of Wheat Growers**

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May state board meeting ‘zooms’ onto finances

The first Washington Association of Wheat Growers’ (WAWG) state board meeting after the spring planting break went as well as could be expected last month, given the board was adhering to social distancing and meeting online. More than two dozen leaders, staff, growers and industry stakeholders joined a Zoom meeting to hear industry updates and go over the association’s proposed yearly budget.

“It was a short meeting, but it went well with very few problems,” said Michelle Hennings, WAWG’s executive director. “We were able to check in with the different counties, hear about COVID-19 impacts and review our proposed budget for 2020/21. We are all concerned about the long-term impacts of the pandemic.”

Beside membership dues, WAWG gets a large portion of its funding from the Washington Grain Commission (WGC). In acknowledgment of the WGC’s need to trim its own budget thanks to lower grower assessments, WAWG’s proposed budget is approximately 5 percent below last year’s budget. Hennings presented the budget at the WGC’s May board meeting where it was accepted.

In county updates, most counties reported that both winter and spring wheat looked good, although more rain was needed. Walla Walla and Whitman counties both reported slight frost damage from the cold spells earlier this spring, but said most of the wheat has recovered. Benton, Klickitat and Franklin counties all reported drought conditions that are beginning to negatively impact the wheat crop.

In state legislation, WAWG lobbyist Diana Carlen said COVID-19 is the big focus in Olympia right now. Legislators are likely to be called into a special session this

summer to deal with budget impacts from the pandemic. In the regular session, legislators put \$3 billion in reserves in preparation for the pandemic, but that amount is likely to fall short of what is actually needed. The next state revenue forecast is in June. While the legislature is in session, lawmakers will be unable to campaign, so any special session is likely to be short, Carlen said, adding she thinks legislators will need firm agreements from each caucus on what actions they will be considering before the special session is called.

Carlen said **I-976**, the \$30 car tab initiative, has been accepted for review by the Washington State Supreme Court on an expedited basis, so there’s likely to be a decision before the 2021 Legislative Session.

In national legislation, Benton County grower Nicole Berg, who is also the vice president of the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG), said the national organization has been working with Congress on another COVID-19 relief package. NAWG is also working with U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) in regard to wheat price and industry and market impacts and reporting that information back to the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Representatives from several USDA agencies joined the online meeting. Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director Jon Wyss told the board that while local FSA offices have been closed to the public, employees are rotating schedules so that no more than two employees at a time are in the office; everybody else is working virtually.

“We are trying to do the best we can with everybody and making this work so that you don’t see a lack of service,” he said, adding that this is probably going to continue for a while. He also told growers to expect some changes when the county offices do open, such as plexi-glass barriers at the front counters.

FSA is currently working on crop acreage reporting, which is due by July 15. Coverage selections for 2020 Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage still need to be made by June 30. Wyss said there is no indication that those deadlines will change.

Ben Thiel, director of the Risk Management Agency’s (RMA) Spokane Regional Office, also joined the meeting. Like FSA, RMA employees are working from home. Thiel told growers that the recent request to move the spring

Office closed until further notice

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers’ office in Ritzville is currently closed until further notice. However, the staff is working remotely and will continue to conduct business as usual on weekdays 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Phone calls and emails will be answered during these hours as normal. Grower communications and work on behalf of the wheat industry will continue and in-person meetings will resume as soon as possible. ■



“The most important thing we’ve learned is to be proactive.”

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final planting date for Whitman County looks like it will be approved. The quality loss option that was part of the 2018 Farm Bill is on track to be implemented for 2021, and the agency is doing reviews of wheat insurance rates and T-yields. Due to COVID-19 and social distancing, RMA has allowed for more flexibilities to conduct business, including for growers that need to replant a spring crop. Those growers will be able to self-certify up to 100 acres of replant without having a crop insurance loss adjuster visit. The previous self-certification limit was 50 acres.

The next board meeting is scheduled for June 9. ■

Growers concerned over general uncertainty, prices

In May, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) did a second survey on COVID-19 and what impacts growers are seeing. The majority of respondents, 86 percent, said they haven't seen any transportation impacts due to the virus. Only 18.5 percent of respondents said they had applied for the Payroll Protection Program, and of those who applied, 76 percent were approved.

One of the questions on the second survey asked growers what kind of assistance, besides increasing the price of wheat, would be most beneficial to them. Answers included increased market access; reduced government intervention and regulations; Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage payments now; reduced cost of inputs; and better cooperation from the weather.

Most growers haven't seen more than minor inconveniences in their interactions with suppliers and dealers. The same was mostly true for their interactions with U.S. Department of Agriculture offices.

Some of the concerns growers have moving forward are a general uncertainty over the long-term impacts of COVID-19; wheat prices; weather impacts; economic recovery; loss of markets; finding labor, especially at harvest time; and government over-reach. ■

WSU cancels 2020 plot tours

Due to social distancing guidelines, Washington State University (WSU) Cereal Variety Testing Program has canceled their 2020 plot tours. According to the WSU small grains website, virtual tours will be recorded at Lind, the Wilke Farm/Reardan, Dayton and Pullman.

The annual Lind Field Day has also been canceled. This is only the second field day cancellation in 105 years; the other cancellation was in 1980 following the Mount St. Helens eruption. Video presentations of some of the latest field research findings (including wheat breeding and variety testing) will be made available by WSU within the next month or so. In addition, the WSU 2020 Dryland Research Abstract booklet will be produced in digital format. These videos and articles will be posted on several sites, including smallgrains.wsu.edu. ■

Nonmember survey goes out

If they haven't already, nonmembers of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) will be receiving a survey asking them why they haven't joined the association.

"Membership is what funds and guides the advocacy actions of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers," said Anthony Smith, chair of the association's membership committee. "While we appreciate those growers who renew their memberships every year, we'd like to hear from those who aren't members to understand why they haven't chosen to be a part of supporting the wheat industry. As a grower-led, volunteer organization, WAWG is only as strong as those who choose to participate in it."

Just because a grower gets *Wheat Life* in the mail, that doesn't mean they are WAWG members. Anybody who pays an assessment on their wheat at the first point of purchase automatically receives a copy of the magazine.

"Sometimes, growers don't realize they aren't WAWG members," Smith said. "Our hope is that this survey reminds them to pay their membership dues in addition to helping us identify how to better advocate for the wheat industry and encouraging growers to get involved." ■

Winter wheat production in Northwest down from 2019

From the National Agricultural Statistics Service

Based on May 1, 2020, conditions, production of winter wheat in Washington was forecast at 118 million

bushels, down 1 percent from 2019. Yield was expected to average 72 bushels per acre, up 2 bushels from the previous year. Growers planted an estimated 1.7 million acres in the fall of 2019, down 50,000 acres from the previous year. Harvested acres were forecast at 1.64 million acres, down 60,000 acres from 2019.

In Idaho, production was forecast at 58.7 million bushels, down 1 percent from 2019. Yield was expected to average 85 bushels per acre, down 2 bushels from last year. Growers planted an estimated 730,000 acres in the fall of 2019, unchanged from the previous year. Harvested acres were forecast at 690,000 acres, up 10,000 acres from a year ago.

In Oregon, production was forecast at 45.3 million bushels, down 9 percent from 2019. Yield was expected to average 62.0 bushels per acre, down 6 bushels from last year. Growers planted an estimated 740,000 acres in the fall of 2019, unchanged from the previous year. Growers expected to harvest 730,000 acres, unchanged from the previous year.

Nationally, production was expected to be 1.25 billion bushels, down 4 percent from 2019. Yield was forecast at 51.7 bushels per acre, down 1.9 bushels from last year. Growers planted an estimated 30.8 million acres in the fall of 2019, down 384,000 acres from the previous year. Harvested acres were forecast at 24.3 million acres, down 52,000 acres from 2019.

U.S. white winter wheat production is forecast at 224 million bushels, down 3 percent from last year. Of this total, 16.2 million bushels are hard white and 207 million bushels are soft white. U.S. hard red winter, at 733 million bushels, is down 12 percent from 2019. Soft red winter, at 298 million bushels, is up 24 percent from 2019. ■



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| Dwarf Essex Rapeseed | 3,678 (20) | 3,413 (28) | — |
| Ericka | 3,716 (18) | 2,865 (30) | 3,829 (25) |
| Rubisco Seeds' Hybrids | | | |
| Mercedes | 4,427 (1) | 4,933 (1) | 5,145 (1) |
| Plurax CL | 4,397 (2) | 4,708 (2) | 4,959 (2) |
| Phoenix CL | — | 4,636 (4) | 4,900 (4) |
| PNWVT Mean | 3,910 | 3,956 | 4,470 |
| LSD (p=0.05) | 285 | 326 | 287 |
| C.V. (%) | 15.0 | 14.7 | 12.4 |

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White wheat not eligible for latest round of CARES aid

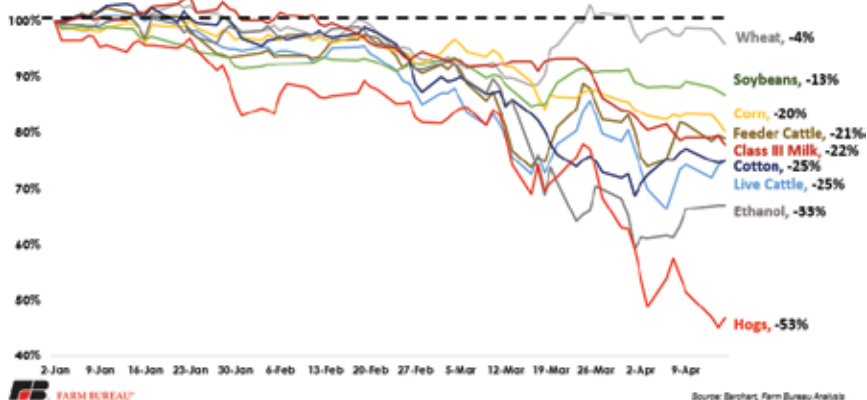
In mid-May, growers in Eastern Washington learned many of them would not be eligible for the latest round of aid from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).

Soft red winter, hard red winter and white wheat have been deemed not eligible for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP), which sets aside \$16 billion for direct payments to farmers and ranchers under authority of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act that was signed on March 27. Under USDA's rules, commodities had to experience a 5 percent or greater price decline during two, five-day periods from mid-January to mid-April. Durum wheat and hard red spring wheat are eligible. The Farm Service Agency will begin taking applications for CFAP on May 26.

About 80 percent of the wheat grown in Eastern Washington is soft white wheat. The other 20 percent is mostly hard red winter and hard red spring.

"We appreciate USDA communicating the importance of U.S. food production for our national security. CFAP will allow critical assistance to farmers leading into harvest seasons across the nation," said Ryan Poe, WAWG president and a farmer from Hartline, Wash. "However, all classes of wheat have experienced price drops during the first quarter of 2020—a critical marketing time for wheat producers. So while cash prices were less than futures prices during the designated time frame, many wheat growers were greatly impacted but do not qualify for

Figure 2. COVID-19 Impact on Agricultural Futures Prices
Percentage Change January 2 to April 15 for Nearby Contract



This chart from the American Farm Bureau Federation shows the price decline in various U.S. commodities from January to April. Unfortunately, while wheat as a whole showed price volatility during this period, it recovered enough at the end of the considered time frame to be above the 5 percent price decline cutoff. This chart appeared in an online article at fb.org/market-intel/update-whats-in-usdas-new-coronavirus-food-assistance-program.

CFAP. Like many other commodities, wheat growers have been battling low prices all year, and COVID-19 has introduced another level of instability into our markets."

Based on information from USDA, the comparison the agency used for soft white was the average price Jan. 13-17 versus the average price April 6-9. The average price during the January time frame was about \$6.23 per bushel, and during the April time frame, the average price was \$6.08 per bushel, a difference of \$0.15, or about 2.4 percent.

Another issue with soft white wheat is that the rule doesn't specify what price series was used by USDA to determine the price drop. The rule only says that cash prices would be used for commodities where there isn't a futures market.

Michelle Hennings, WAWG's executive director, said the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) has been working hard to show USDA the impact COVID-19 has had on all classes of wheat. In April, NAWG sent a letter to Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue urging him to include price volatility during the April to January time frame in order to capture the full market conditions during which wheat farmers were marketing their wheat. The letter included charts demonstrating how the May contract on all three exchanges saw substantial price drops and partial recoveries during that period.

"Each of these futures contracts experienced a more than 10 percent price decline during the designated time period, and farmers marketing 2019 production during this time frame should be eligible for assistance as they were impacted by the price volatility. While wheat futures prices partially rebounded in



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mid-March due to a short-term increase in demand for grocery staples such as flour, bread and other wheat food products, this rebound wasn't necessarily translated into higher prices that farmers received," the letter said.

A chart showing the soft white Portland price from January to April demonstrates the volatility of the soft white market. The market swung more than 8.5 percent from its highest price of \$6.33 on Jan. 28 to its lowest point on March 16 of \$5.79.

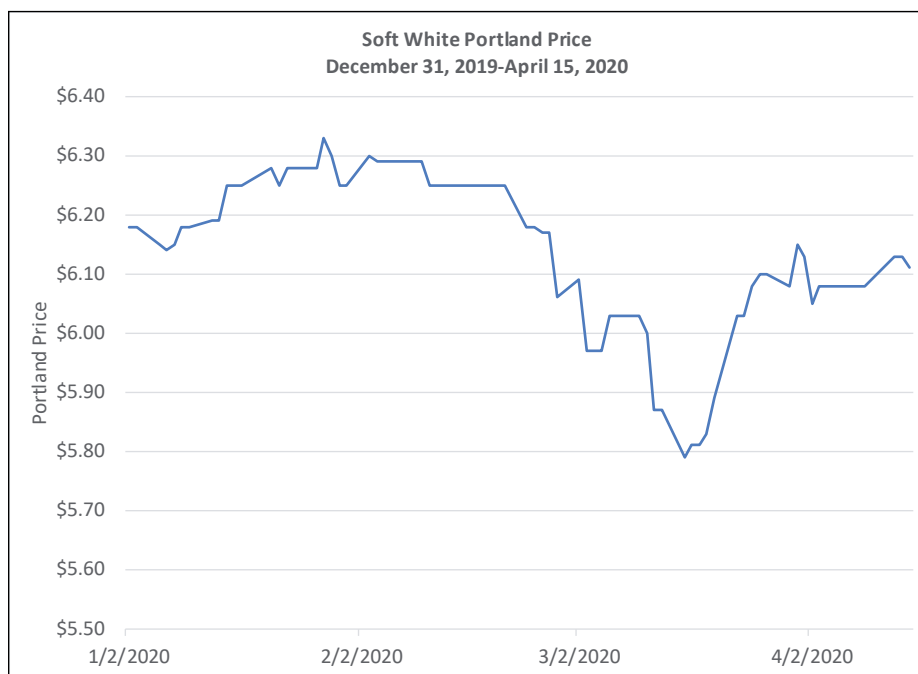
"The information we have is that USDA may reconsider eligibility for other commodities if evidence is provided that supports a 5 percent price decline," Hennings said. "NAWG is continuing to communicate with USDA on the formula the agency used to determine the eligibility of classes of wheat for CFAP and to understand why they didn't use price volatility over that entire time frame as part of the equation. NAWG has done a tremendous job keeping the wheat industry at the forefront of any discussions regarding aid to farmers and ranchers, and we appreciate the time and effort the organization has made to support our industry."

CFAP payments will come from two funding sources: the CARES Act and the Commodity Credit Corporation (CCC). The payment rate for wheat is broken down as such:

- Durum wheat will be paid \$0.19 from the CARES Act and \$0.20 from the CCC; and
- Hard Red Spring will be paid \$0.18 from the CARES Act and \$0.20 from the CCC.

Producers will be paid based on the inventory subject to price risk held as of Jan. 15, 2020. NAWG is working to find more details on how this is defined. A single payment will be made based on 50 percent of a producer's 2019 total production or the 2019 inventory as of Jan. 15, 2020, whichever is smaller, multiplied by the commodity payment rate. Initially, producers will receive 80 percent of their maximum total payment upon approval of their application. The remaining portion of the payment (up to the payment limit) will be paid at a later date as funds remain available.

To be eligible, a person or legal entity must have an average adjusted gross income of less than \$900,000 for tax years 2015, 2016 and 2017. If 75 percent of their AGI comes from farming, ranching or forestry, then the \$900,000 limit doesn't apply. There is also a hard cap on payments of



\$250,000 per person or legal entity—this limitation applies to the total amount of CFAP payments for all eligible commodities. There are also special payment limit rules for participants that are corporations, limited liability companies and limited partnerships (corporate entities).

For all commodities, USDA compared the average price from Jan. 13-17 with the average price from April 6-9. For hard red spring, they used the May contract on the Minneapolis Grain Exchange. For durum, that was calculated using 103.4 percent of the hard red spring wheat futures price, which is the multiplicative factor used under CEPP for Montana, North Dakota and South Dakota. NAWG is looking into what price series would've been used for white wheat.

More information can be found at farmers.gov. WAWG and NAWG are still reviewing specific details of the program and are identifying the next steps for engaging USDA. ■

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2020 WASHINGTON WHEAT FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

One of the building blocks of the Washington Wheat Foundation's mission is education of the wheat industry. Scholarships are what fuel that education and outreach.

The Michael and Linda Schrag Agricultural Education Scholarship is for college juniors and seniors who have declared agricultural education as their major and maintained a



minimum 3.0 GPA during their college years. A Reardan High School graduate, **Bailee Perleberg**, is the recipient of this year's \$1,000 Schrag Scholarship. "I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your generosity in funding the Washington Wheat Foundation Michael and Linda Schrag Ag Education Scholarship for academic year 2020/21. I am beyond thankful and honored to be chosen as a recipient of this award for another year. It is with your help and dedication to CAHNRS and our agricultural education program that I can successfully finish school," said Bailee. After graduation, Bailee plans to teach in the Pacific Northwest. In August, she'll be student teaching at Wahkiakum High School in Cathlamet,

Wash. While attending Washington State University (WSU), she has been active in the WSU Agriculture Education Club and works at the WSU Meat Science Lab.

The \$1,500 Washington Wheat Foundation Barbara Pyne-Herron Memorial Scholarships are for college juniors and seniors. Preference for this scholarship is for promising students with a rural and/or agricultural background pursuing a career in agricultural communications, agribusiness economics and management or agribusiness and technology systems and to students with a family member in the farming industry. This year's Wheat Foundation scholarship winners are Daisy Arias and Luke Blumenshein.

Daisy Arias is double majoring in agriculture, specifically in fruit and vegetable management and field crop management, at WSU. She plans to work at Stemilt Growers in Wenatchee, Wash., as a summer intern. Daisy is "hopefully interning with the R&D team, and I see this as a great opportunity to obtain more agriculture knowledge that will help me out at WSU. I am also excited to see what other connections and opportunities this internship will bring to me now and in the future. I am very grateful for this award, and I'm going to take advantage of this opportunity you have given me to further my education."



Upon completion of his agricultural technology and production management degree at WSU, **Luke Blumenshein** plans to return to his hometown of St. John, Wash., to begin his own farming career on the family farm as a fifth-generation farmer. "Continuing my family's tradition of growing grains on the Palouse is very important to me. The education I have received at Washington State University will enable me to become a successful operator of my family farm with the hope of expansion," Luke said. "I would like to express my appreciation for being the recipient of the Barbara Pyne-Herron

Memorial Scholarship for academic year 2020/21. Scholarships have eased the burden of my student debt at Washington State University, and I am grateful for the help."

Congratulations and best wishes, Bailee, Daisy and Luke! ■

Calendar:

June Shoot, **TBD**

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Drought spreads across central Washington

GROWERS, ESPECIALLY IN BENTON, KLIKKITAT COUNTIES, ARE KEEPING A WORRIED EYE ON CROPS

By Trista Crossley

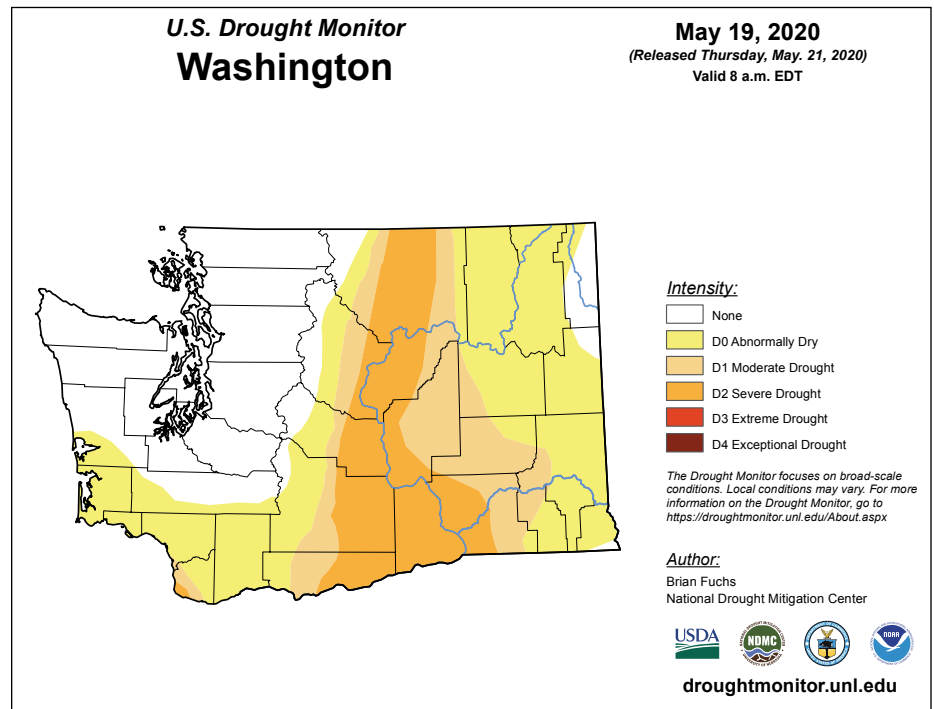
It isn't just COVID-19 that is throwing a wrench into 2020. Growers in the central part of Eastern Washington are also dealing with a lack of moisture that is leaving some of their fields high and dry.

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, much of central Washington is in a moderate drought situation with a swath of that region sitting squarely in a severe drought designation. Data from Washington State University's AgWeatherNet (AWN) backs that up. Growers, especially in Benton and Klickitat counties, are reporting extremely dry conditions that are starting to impact crops.

The AWN McKinley station, in eastern Klickitat County, is showing a total precipitation of 1.25" from January to April, compared to 2.99 inches in that same time frame in 2019 and 2.83 inches in 2018. The AWN East Paterson station near Paterson in the Horse Heaven Hills shows 1.21 inches from January to April, compared to 3.65 inches last year and 2.7 inches the year before.

Dave West, a farmer and crop insurance adjuster from Goldendale, in Klickitat County, said he's heard of some farmers who have already talked to their crop insurance agent about potential crop losses due to drought. West raises mainly hay and anticipates his own hay crop will be about half what it usually is.

"The shallow ground is starting to show some stress," he said. "We haven't had really hot weather yet. If we get some 80 or 90 degree days in May, when (wheat) heads are forming, that could cause some problems. We'll see how much we squeak by. If



the weather stays cool, it will be better."

Here's what growers are seeing.

In the Horse Heaven Hills in Benton County, Nicole Berg said she's got several wheat fields in particular that "look like a train wreck" and may not get tall enough to harvest.

"The further south you go, the shorter the wheat. You also have shallower soil conditions. Between those two things, we are in an extreme drought situation in that area. The wheat is turning blue. There's definitely some fields in Benton County that won't be harvested," she said.

So far, the year hasn't been warmer than usual, although the area has had a few days that hit the mid-80s. They've also had some cooler-than-normal weather. Berg said they did dust in some seed in the fall, and it seems like the later a field was seeded, the better off it is doing now. Berg is also looking ahead to harvest time, which in her area usually kicks off in July. She said she hopes the pandemic and social distancing won't hamper elevators' ability to take growers' wheat.

"This is the prime time to know that crop insurance is there for us as a food safety net," she said. "You have a pandemic, plus a drought situation that equals a bigger crisis. If we didn't have crop insurance, this would be disastrous."

Chad Smith, also in the Horse Heaven Hills, is seeing a mix of good and bad wheat, something he says is normal for the area.

"Some of the wheat looks great, and some is burning up," he said. "There was lots of early wheat put in in August. It was dying real bad, then it got rain. Now

it's cool. We've been getting little showers, hit and miss. I think we'll cut average. Some places will cut maybe a little better. That's typical. We are a little dryer, but somehow the wheat just hangs on."

Smith said the farther south one goes, towards Klickitat County, the worse it gets. On the day *Wheat Life* spoke to him, the forecast called for cooler temperatures.

"We need rain. I think it will be a bad fire season," he said. "All that is saving our butts right now is the cool weather. If it was 90 degrees, I tell you, nobody would be cutting a damn thing."

In Klickitat County, Bickleton-area grower Andy Juris said they are sitting at 18 to 20 percent of normal moisture. Alfalfa has stopped growing and is likely too low to cut. The wheat crop is "all over the place, from stuff that is about to go bad to stuff that is to the point that they aren't going to cut it." He knows of one grower south of him who has already talked to his insurance adjuster.

"His harvest is over," Juris said.

Like many places in Eastern Washington, Klickitat County had a wetter-than-normal August and September last year, but after that, Juris said, the rain just stopped.

"We watched storm after storm go around us up towards Walla Walla and the Palouse. It missed this area," he said. Eastern Klickitat County has also seen a range of temperatures this spring, from days in the 70s to freezing temperatures at night. "You don't want hot temperatures with no water, but on the other hand, if it freezes, it puts the brakes on it, and nothing grows."

Juris said this drought situation is a perfect example of why growers get crop insurance.

"For a lot of us in lower rainfall areas, crop insurance takes a little sting from a bad year, but it doesn't carry you," he said. "If we didn't have that tool in country like this, I don't see agriculture as that sustainable as a whole. People don't think about crop insurance as part of providing a stable food system and letting farmers grow another crop next year, but I'm guessing more people are thinking about the stability of our food system right now than they have in the past."

Mitchell Powers' family also grows wheat near Bickleton. He said it's a pretty bleak outlook for spring wheat. If the area doesn't get rain, he is expecting to harvest about one-third of his average crop. His winter wheat looks a little better, but he's seeing some of his low spots

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A wheat field in Benton County that has been adversely affected by the dry weather. Photo by Nicole Berg.

starting to stress already (as of mid-May).

“At this point, it is dry enough that I don’t know that you could make up the moisture if we do start to get rain,” he said. “There’s no moisture down deep, and that’s going to be a problem when we get into July and the wheat is trying to head out.”

Powers finished planting his spring wheat April 20. He said it was so dry, he had to plant deeper than he’s ever planted before. That has caused some emergence problems. He’s also seeing a lot of wireworm activity “possibly because the seed is down deeper than normal.”

A little north, in Franklin County, Jeff Shawver is also seeing some dryer-than-normal fields around Connell.

“Until about two weeks ago, we only had three inches of rain all year. It really hampered any guys that did spring wheat or had late seeding (last fall) or direct seeded,” he said. “Guys that seeded later or seeded spring wheat, that wheat isn’t very big and is already starting to head out. It’s

struggling to survive. We’ve had a little bit of rain in the last few days, so that’s going to help, but not much.”

Shawver said he thinks most farmers in his area will be able to harvest their crops, but he expects that for his direct seeded wheat, he’ll be looking at an average yield of seven to 10 bushels an acre less. The bigger issue, he said, could happen this fall. Right now, there’s decent submoisture, but without more rain, farmers won’t have moisture to seed into. ■

How are we doing?

Like something you read in *Wheat Life*? Disagree with something you read in *Wheat Life*? Let us know by emailing your comments and suggestions to editor@wawg.org or mail them to 109 East First Avenue, Ritzville, Wash., 99169-2394. Please keep submissions less than 350 words. Submissions may be edited for length. ■



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Wheat College goes online

Due to social distancing measures, this year's event will take place as a webinar

By Trista Crossley

Like many other institutions, the Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization (AMMO) is pivoting to online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year's Wheat College will feature **Peter "Wheat Pete" Johnson**, who is the resident agronomist with Real Agriculture where he posts a weekly podcast, "Wheat Pete's Word." Growers will be able to log into a Zoom meeting on Tuesday, June 16, from 9-10:30 a.m., to hear Johnson speak.



Johnson spent 30 years as the Ontario Cereal Specialist and loves to talk anything agriculture, especially wheat. He operates a small farm near Lucan, Ontario, where he constantly tries out new production ideas and where the "rubber hits the road." He is enthusiastic and passionate about agriculture and loves to be chal-

lenged by growers. He is also a regular on "Agronomy Monday" on Real Ag radio, Sirius Satellite Radio 147.

Traditionally, AMMO's summer Wheat College is known for its mix of classroom and hands-on presentations.

"We are doing some last-minute changes based on meeting requirements, but we are still looking to provide a worthwhile education opportunity to our interested members," said Lori Williams, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) outreach coordinator. "Despite having to move Wheat College online, growers will still have the opportunity to engage with Peter and ask questions."

Johnson's presentation will focus on managing wheat for high yields. He explained that in dryer climates, growers generally focus solely on water availability as the limiting yield factor without exploring other things they might do to increase their yields. He said he gets frustrated when growers apply their inputs all up front.

"That doesn't work to me," he said. "So what we are going to do is we will start from the basics and ask where does wheat yield potential come from? We will look at four different components to wheat yield, so if we are super dry, how do we manage around those four components to give ourselves management opportunities, limiting input costs if we don't get rainfall and maximizing yield if we do get rainfall. Rather than throwing everything at it right out of the gate, let's find other options."

The four yield components Johnson will discuss are the number of heads per square meter; the size of the head; the number of grains per floret; and the

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weight of the grain.

"That is one difference in wheat that makes a huge impact and gives growers a massive opportunity to manage wheat that you don't get in almost any other crop," Johnson said, referring to the fact that growers can vary the number of kernels per floret. "I get excited about wheat.

Wheat is incredibly responsive to management."

Because Johnson lives in Ontario, Canada, he has been talking to several Eastern Washington wheat growers to get a better understanding of the region's growing conditions. He admits that he isn't an "absolute expert" in growing wheat in Washington state, but explains that he understands how the grain works, and he has worked with growers in Australia.

"It doesn't matter if the wheat is in a dry climate with 10 inches of rainfall or wheat in southwest Ontario where total rainfall over the whole year is 35 inches. Wheat is still wheat. You still need those four factors to give you yield. That doesn't change," he said.

Growers interested in participating in Wheat College need to email Williams at lori@wawg.org to register no later than June 15. Williams will email them back with a meeting link. While WAWG membership is appreciated, growers don't need to be members in order to participate in the online webinar. At the conclusion of the event, a Blackstone Grill will be given away to one lucky participant. Additional items, sponsored by Corteva Agriscience and WAWG, will also be given away. ■

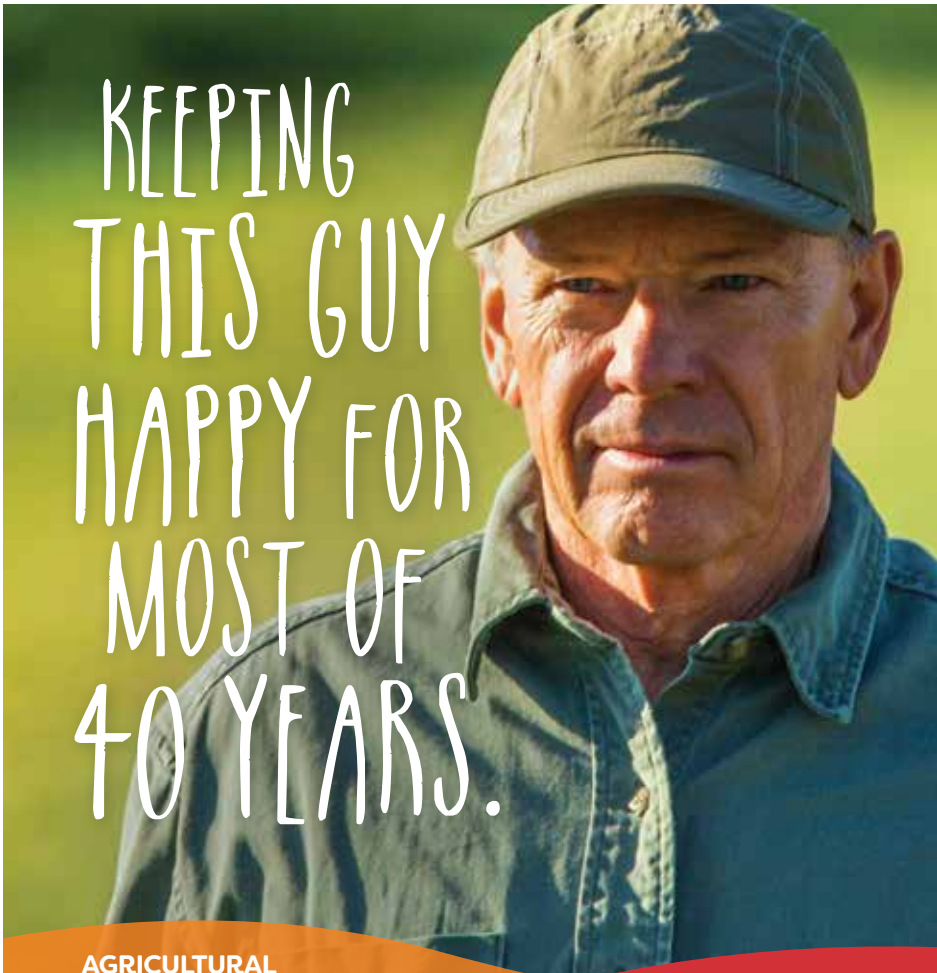
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Register for this event by emailing lori@wawg.org and the webinar link will be provided. This is a free webinar, brought to you by the Washington Association of Wheat Growers. Your membership is appreciated but not required to participate. Registered participants will be entered into a drawing for a Blackstone Grill.

Registration deadline: June 15, 2020
For questions or more information, please call:

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Featured speaker: Peter Johnson aka Wheat Pete

Peter, @WheatPete, is the resident agronomist with Real Agriculture, where he posts a weekly podcast "Wheat Pete's Word." He is a regular on "Agronomy Monday" on Real Ag radio, Sirius Satellite Radio 147. Peter spent 30 years as the Ontario Cereal Specialist, and loves to talk anything agriculture, especially wheat! Peter operates a small farm near Lucan, Ontario, where he constantly tries out new production ideas, and where the "rubber hits the road!" He is enthusiastic and passionate about agriculture, and loves to be challenged by growers. He will discuss opportunities to maximize yields in the PNW.



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Long-time ad sales manager retires

KEVIN GAFFNEY HAS SPENT 30 YEARS CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUCCESS OF *WHEAT LIFE*

By Trista Crossley

You may not immediately recognize his name, but he's one of the main reasons *Wheat Life* is as successful as it is.

In May, after almost 30 years of involvement with the magazine and the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), **Kevin Gaffney**, our ad sales manager, is hanging up his hat.

It's an understatement to say we will miss him.

"Kevin has been a well-rounded and hardworking employee for WAWG," said Michelle Hennings, WAWG's executive director. "He has a great personality and a natural ability to connect with others. His working relationships with *Wheat Life*'s advertisers, growers and fellow staff members has helped make it possible for the magazine to thrive in a time when other print publications have struggled. We are sorry to lose him, but wish him the best in his well-deserved retirement!"

Ryan Poe, WAWG president and a farmer from Hartline, Wash, echoed Hennings' remarks.

"Kevin has been a vital part of the WAWG staff for as long as I have been involved with the organization," Poe said. "He plays a key role in securing funding through advertising, which in turn helps us carry out the mission of WAWG. He is an all-around great guy who has a deep passion for the wheat industry and will surely be missed."

Gaffney grew up just north of Sprague, Wash., on his family's wheat farm and seemingly knows, played sports with or against, or is related to just about everybody in Lincoln County. After high school, he attended Seattle University for a year before transferring to Washington State University where he majored in communications. He briefly considered a career in music or radio before turning to advertising after his professors pointed out there was more money to be made in that field.

"I didn't go to college planning to go in advertising, but it worked out well," Gaffney said. "I enjoy meeting people and developing relationships. Throughout my career, especially with *Wheat Life*, I've tried to develop long-term relationships with clients based on trust and superior customer service. I think *Wheat Life* has allowed me to do that. It's a quality publication, and I've always believed I work for not just *Wheat Life* but for my clients. If they are successful, that will help make *Wheat Life* successful."

Gaffney's first advertising job was at the *Colfax Gazette* (now called the *Whitman County Gazette*) in Colfax, Wash.



He eventually landed at the *Capital Press* in 1994 before joining the *Wheat Life* team in 2002. But Gaffney's involvement with WAWG actually dates back to 1992 when he started contributing freelance articles to *Wheat Life* under then-editor David Anderson. Gaffney explained that any article he wrote for *Wheat Life* couldn't have his name attached to it as long as he was working for the *Capital Press*. These days, besides selling the ads that keep the magazine going—and help make it possible for WAWG to advocate for farmers—Gaffney's byline appears in many issues as our Profiles writer.

"I've always been better working with words than numbers," Gaffney said. "I think a lot of us gravitate to where we belong. To his credit, David was a very demanding editor, and he certainly helped me develop into a much better writer. David was responsible for transforming *Wheat Life* from a tabloid-format newspaper to the quality magazine that it is today."

In his time as a print media salesperson in Eastern Washington, Gaffney has seen some big changes, specifically the consolidation and merging of businesses, not to mention farms.

"In my youth, if you had a section of land (about 640 acres), that wasn't a bad size. Now, a small dryland farm would be 3,000 or 4,000 acres. One farmer now is farming what somewhere between five to eight farmers farmed before," he explained. "Rural communities are struggling with fewer farmers and fewer businesses. It makes it tough for advertising—fewer clients to sell advertising to. There used to be an equipment dealer in nearly every farm town. It's just an economy of scale. It's not necessarily all bad, but there have been some side effects that have been unfortunate for rural communities."

While print media itself has struggled in the internet age, *Wheat Life* is still going strong. Gaffney believes it's because the magazine is a trade publication that targets a niche audience. *Wheat Life* is one of the primary ways WAWG informs members and educates legislators and the public about Washington state's wheat industry.

"I think most of the general public is woefully uninformed about where and how their food is produced," he said. "I think there is a real apathy, and we take it for granted that store shelves will have goods on them."

Besides being involved in the wheat industry through his job, the Gaffney family has homestead farm roots that began in 1880. Just months ago, however, that changed when the farm was sold. With no future farmers coming in the next couple of generations, the bittersweet decision was made to end the 140-year stewardship of caring for the land. Gaffney said the move was made easier because the farm will still be operated by the same trusted family who has been caring for the Gaffney's land for the past 20 years.

Gaffney may be stepping away from selling ads, but

he'll still be a presence in *Wheat Life*—he plans to continue contributing articles as a freelancer. He's also looking to spend more time on two things he loves:

- His wife, Debbie, who he met in high school, although they didn't date back then. They reconnected in the 1990s at a reunion in Sprague. Gaffney also has a daughter from a previous marriage who lives in Tempe, Ariz.
- Playing guitar in a classic rock and roll band with several friends from his high school days.

"It's been an honor for me to work for *Wheat Life* and WAWG," he said. "I can't imagine working with a more professional staff. Michelle has shown unwavering trust and confidence in me. Chauna (Carlson, WAWG's administrative assistant) and Lori (Williams, WAWG's outreach coordinator) have been fantastic to work with. And I want to take this opportunity to compliment my editor, Trista, for the outstanding job she continues to do month after month, year after year, producing what many consider to be one of the top wheat industry magazines in the U.S." ■

Editor's note: Although Wheat Life is partially funded through the support of the Washington Grain Commission, the bulk of its funding comes from ad sales. So without Kevin, there wouldn't be much of a Wheat Life. I've worked closely with him for the past 10 years, and every issue we've worked together on has been a satisfying collaboration (despite those instances, usually late at night, when I was cursing his good name for selling a full page ad long after deadline that I had to find a spot for). Thank you, Kevin, for making me laugh when you tell me you know so and so from high school basketball or for finding that obvious typo in the headline that I've missed five times already. It's been a pleasure working with you, and you will be missed.



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CART(full) OF CHANGES COMING SOON

NRCS uses webinar format to update Eastern Washington growers | By Trista Crossley

In the year and a half since the 2018 Farm Bill passed, the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has had their hands full implementing changes called for in the legislation. That transition is in the final stages, and last month, Washington growers got a chance to see what the agency has been working on.

“There are quite a few changes to each and every program, a lot of final tweaks,” said NRCS Washington State Conservationist Roylene Comes at Night. “We have new tools. The field offices have a new conservation planning system called Conservation Desktop. It’s a new system that is more computer friendly, more user friendly, more connected. The farm bill asked us to streamline in many ways. One way you will see is we are starting to transition towards one application, one conservation plan, one contract. We aren’t there yet, but we are going that way this year. That’s the biggest thing you will hear us talk about—this year is a transition year.”

The presentation, co-hosted by the Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization, was originally scheduled as a series of workshops, but thanks to COVID-19, was instead presented as an online webinar with growers calling in to listen. For those growers who missed the webinar, they can view the recording at <https://youtu.be/ppCJYl-3Kak>.

One of the biggest changes for NRCS is how applications are ranked and funded. The agency is transitioning to a new tool, the Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART), that should streamline the process. Keith Griswold, assistant state conservationist for programs, explained that previous to CART, field staff had to answer the same set of questions for every fund pool a farmer applied to, and each fund pool had its own application. With CART, field staff answers one set of questions, and the program determines which fund pools the applicant is

eligible for based on priority research concerns. Growers will have one contract, regardless of how many programs, practices or fund pools are involved. Griswold estimated that CART will eliminate 30,000 duplicate applications nationwide. It will also ensure that the same practice isn’t funded multiple times from different fund pools.

“There will be a point in time where you won’t even know where the funds are coming from,” Comes at Night added. “We will worry about that. You don’t have to. You could get multiple practices out of multiple fund pools.”

Another change growers will see is that instead of an entire conservation plan being funded, only individual practices might get funding. Comes at Night said that change gives NRCS more flexibility to target practices that will have the most effect in any situation or circumstance.

CHANGES TO CSP AND EQIP

Two popular NRCS programs, the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) and the Environmental

A new kind of CART

The Conservation Assessment Ranking Tool (CART) at a glance:

- CART will create a plan assessment of multiple conservation practices, which may be eligible under multiple ranking pools, then merged into ONE contract;
- CART will assure a practice is not funded twice on the same land unit by separate funding sources;
- CART eliminates more than 30,000 duplicate applications nationwide; and
- CART eliminates repeat questions to improve efficiency. ■

Quality Incentive Program (EQIP), both had major changes under the 2018 Farm Bill.

CSP helps producers maintain and improve existing conservation systems and adopt additional conservation activities to address priority resource concerns. It is primarily for working lands and is the largest conservation program in the U.S. with 70 million acres of ag and forest land enrolled. Participants earn payments based on conservation performance—the higher the performance, the higher the payment. Some of the changes to CSP include:

- Eligible participants who choose not to renew their initial CSP contract cannot compete for a new contract for two years following expiration of their initial contract.
- Public land associated with other CSP-eligible land that is under the effective control of the applicant and is a working component of the producer's ag operation is eligible for enrollment in CSP. In Washington state, that means a producer's Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) land is now eligible for CSP. Comes at Night said NRCS is coordinating with DNR to figure out how the sign-up process will work.
- For farmstead and associated ag land, as long as the applicant meets or exceeds two resource concerns at the time of contract offer, they don't need to schedule an additional activity on these land uses.
- For CSP renewal applications, an applicant must, by the end of the renewal contract period, agree to meet or exceed the stewardship threshold of at least two additional priority resource concerns on the ag operation or implement new or improve existing conservation activities to achieve higher levels of conservation performance for a minimum of two priority resource concerns met or exceeded in the initial contract.
- The \$40,000 annual payment limitation was removed, however, a person or legal entity may not receive, directly or indirectly, payments that in the aggregate exceed \$200,000 for all CSP contracts originally obligated during fiscal years 2019 through 2023.

Unfortunately, the application period for CSP renewal funding this fiscal year has already passed. The deadline was May 29.

EQIP is a voluntary program that provides funding and professional expertise for measures that protect natural resources while ensuring sustainable production on farms, ranches and working forest land. Payments are made to participants after conservation practices and activities identified in an EQIP plan of operations are implemented as prescribed by NRCS standards and specifications.

Washington's top 10

Under the 2018 Farm Bill, each state is allowed to identify up to 10 practices that are eligible for a 90 percent payment rate. These practices are chosen by NRCS in consultation with the State Technical Advisory Committee and may change from year to year. For Washington state, the practices chosen for this year are:

- 396 Aquatic Organism Passage;
- 645 Upland Wildlife Habitat Management;
- 391 Riparian Forest Buffer;
- 666 Forest Stand Improvement;
- 612 Tree/Shrub Establishment;
- 313 Waste Storage Facility;
- 386 Field Border;
- 340 Cover Crop;
- 329 Residue and Tillage Management, No-Till; and
- 327 Conservation Cover. ■

Changes to EQIP include:

- Entities such as state irrigation districts, groundwater management districts or similar entities that have responsibility related to water delivery or management can apply for EQIP funds for eligible lands.
- EQIP can be used to implement practices that help protect or improve source water for community water systems.
- Veterans who have been discharged in the most recent 10-year period are now eligible for increased payment rates (90 percent vs. 75 percent) and advance payments of up to 50 percent of the practice payment.
- Aggregate payments cannot exceed \$450,000, and the payment limitation is not cumulative with prior farm bills.

Under the 2018 Farm Bill, all NRCS programs require Farm Service Agency (FSA) eligibility requirements to be met, including an AD1026; farm and tract eligibility; and adjusted gross income. Because of condensed application time frames, Washington state NRCS is requiring producers to have that eligibility at the time of application.

Comes at Night also addressed staffing issues at the state office, which was put on a priority hiring list earlier this year and assigned a new human resources specialist. Work has been done on all current vacancies with more than a dozen of them filled. Another dozen are in the selection process, and the rest are being advertised.

"We've got great movement," Comes at Night said. ■

Endowing long-term security

INDUSTRY STAKEHOLDERS HOPE TO RAISE MONEY FOR WILKE FARM FUND

By Trista Crossley

Eastern Washington wheat farmers are justifiably proud of the research being done at Washington State University (WSU), much of it funded through grower assessments. Now, a group of farmers are hoping the industry steps up to help fund an endowment for another WSU research effort, the Wilke Research and Extension Farm in Davenport, Wash.

The 320-acre farm was bequeathed to WSU in the 1980s by Beulah Wilson Wilke with the stipulation that it be used for research. The farm is funded mostly through crop sales and Extension grants.

“Because of that, it kind of operates on a shoestring budget. The idea is to create an endowment to create funds to help alleviate the financial constraints that the farm

has,” explained Howard Nelson. “There’s about 2 million acres of cropland in this intermediate rainfall zone, and this is the only research facility in the area. It’s very important, in my opinion, that we keep this research active and available.”

Nelson, who recently retired from HighLine Grain Growers, is joined in the fundraising effort by Eastern Washington growers Hal Johnson and Jim Baye. Their long-term goal is \$1 million, but they are hoping to raise \$100,000 in the next year. Nelson said they are initially approaching industry businesses, but would welcome any donations growers and landlords are willing to give. All three farmers are part of the Wilke Farm advisory committee.

“This farm is more for cropping systems,” Nelson said. ►



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"The idea is to do research on the farm and push the edges to the point where you may have a failure. The idea is you have that failure on the research farm before it gets to the farmer. Farmers are really not able to do that because they can't afford to take a loss. They have to cover their cash expense."

Aaron Esser, WSU Extension agronomist for Lincoln and Adams counties, is the Wilke Farm manager. He also oversees the research that goes on at the farm. He has to worry about the same bills any other Eastern Washington farmer does: seed, fertilizer, equipment maintenance and labor. Because the farm doesn't charge researchers for their plots, that subtracts from the acres that could potentially generate a revenue.

At present, approximately 25 acres of land are devoted to small plot research, including projects on fertility in winter canola, wireworms and weed studies. Esser said it is somewhat of a constant battle to make ends meet on the farm.

"A lot of what I want an endowment for is long-term security to make sure that growers in the intermediate rainfall zone have a voice

in research," Esser said. "When you get endowment money behind it, it carries weight. I'm trying to think not just about tomorrow, but next year and the 20 years after that."

Nelson had hoped to raise some money at the annual Wilke Field Day, which was scheduled for June 16, but thanks to COVID-19 and social distancing measures, has been canceled. Esser said he is working with WSU to put together a virtual field day so growers will still have access to the farm's research information. He is also summarizing all the farm's research projects and will make printed copies available at local Extension offices and online, most likely at smallgrains.wsu.edu.

Growers who are interested in donating to the endowment should contact Linda Bailey, Washington State University Development, College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences, at lmabaily@wsu.edu or by phone at (509) 220-0739. ■

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Educating students about the wheat industry one week at a time

Kara Kaelber, founder of Wheat Week

By Kevin Gaffney

Wheat Week has been an effective tool for educating fourth and fifth graders in Washington state about agriculture and, more specifically, the wheat industry, for 13 years. The mastermind behind this unique in-the-classroom instructional program is **Kara Kaelber**.

Born in southern Idaho, Kaelber spent her middle and high school years in Connecticut, where her mother had taken a job with Weight Watchers, a division of the H.J. Heinz Company. Kaelber began her college studies at the University of Florida. After her mother landed a job with Welch's in Kennewick, Wash., Kaelber eagerly returned to the Pacific Northwest and attended Washington State University (WSU).

"I didn't go back to Connecticut for 19 years," said Kaelber. "I finally had to go back to see the fall colors again. The east coast just wasn't the place for me. I prefer living in the western U.S."

When Kaelber first arrived at WSU, she wanted to be a journalist. As many students do, she changed majors a couple times and ended up with a degree in humanities. Life circumstances entered into the picture with a new baby arriving not long after her graduation. Kaelber decided to obtain a teaching certificate so she would be able to spend each summer with her son.

Kaelber was a substitute teacher before becoming a classroom teacher in the Prosser School District in 2002. Always looking forward, she earned her master's degree in education with an emphasis on administration at the same time that the Franklin Conservation District was hiring an educator for a program called Water on Wheels.

"This program was mostly about teaching students about nitrates in groundwater," explained Kaelber. "Can you think of a more abstract concept to teach for kindergarten through 12th graders? I reevaluated and modified the program to fit the science standards in place at the time to make it appropriate for the classroom. It was critical that teachers would want it as part of their science curriculum."

The funding for that program lasted about 18 months, long enough for it to gain a popular following from several school districts. The lessons on groundwater and soils were especially popular. By this time, the No Child Left



Behind Act was being implemented, and science testing at the fifth grade level was being instituted. School districts were eager to add more science instruction to gear up for the testing program.

"The Franklin Conservation District was very supportive of my efforts. A board member, Chris Herron, suggested that I approach the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) about funding for my instructional program. I will admit, I was skeptical at first. But I decided to give it a try. I took some of our most popular lessons from the prior program, added other ones and renamed it Wheat Week.

"I presented it to the WGC in January 2007, and to my surprise, we were awarded full funding," recalled Kaelber.

"Then it hit me that I had to really get organized and design the entire program. It was like a dream come true that I then had to make into reality."

The program was established and started in several schools in the fall of 2007. She had two educators working for her that first year, one based in Clarkston and the other in Ritzville. They taught a total of 17 Wheat Weeks the first year, reaching about 1,300 students.

Wheat Week consists of five daily, one-hour sessions in the classroom. The first day includes planting wheat seeds, which by day five, have sprouted up and grown two or three inches tall. The lessons are presented in a structured format. On day five, the students get to thresh wheat and chew the kernels to give them a hands-on perspective of the wheat-growing process. Part of their homework is to bring in labels of food products from home that contain wheat.

"That is an eye-opener for the students and the teachers," said Kaelber. "Even in Eastern Washington, there is a surprising lack of knowledge about agriculture. We also have the students fill out thank-you postcards that are sent to area wheat farmers. We believe it's important for the students to provide that positive feedback to the growers as part of our program.

"I can't express enough gratitude to Glen Squires and the WGC for their continued financial support for our Wheat Week program. It simply would not be possible without them."

Kaelber currently has 15 instructors that present Wheat

Week. They are spread around the state, with eight near the I-5 corridor in western Washington and seven spread around central and Eastern Washington. The program reached more than 20,000 students in Washington last year.

The program includes PowerPoint presentations each day. The students each receive a “kernel journal” to write notes in, and there are oral presentations. Some teachers choose to test the students on the program; others do not.

The program is designed to fit the ever-changing science standards. Kaelber has had to redesign the program three times to keep it up to date. Kaelber requests feedback from the participating teachers and has about a 60 percent return. This helps her keep a high level of satisfaction among the teachers. They have a waiting list each year of schools wanting to participate in the program.

The students even perform some wheat DNA extraction and study the history of genetic wheat research done by Norman Borlaug and WSU scientist Orville Vogel. Their “green revolution” development of higher yielding, semidwarf wheat varieties and how they have helped save hundreds of millions of people from starvation worldwide really hits home with both the teachers and the students.

Kaelber’s favorite part of the program is when the students and the teachers fully understand and appreciate how important wheat and agriculture are to the state’s economy, the food supply in the U.S. and to feeding people all over the world.

The COVID-19 outbreak brought the program to a screeching halt this spring. Kaelber and her educators are now on hold, working on how best to move forward.

“We don’t know if most schools will open this fall,” said Kaelber. “If they do open, we aren’t sure we will be able to come into the classrooms. We are currently working on ideas and methods for making our presentations totally video-based. We may be able to offer live streaming lessons. At this point, we really don’t know how the program will be continued.”

Wheat Week takes up about 60 percent of Kaelber’s time at the Franklin Conservation District. She also has a Salmon In The Classroom program that teaches about the salmon resource and a Drain Ranger program that focuses on storm water runoff prevention. All three programs touch on the importance of the dams in the Columbia-Snake River System.

As if that isn’t enough, for the past couple of years, Kaelber has taken on an additional part-time position as program manager of the AgForestry Leadership Program. Now in it’s 43rd year, the program has been instrumental in helping to develop hundreds of leaders for agriculture, forestry and other natural resource-based industries. Kaelber and her Class 41 participants arrived back from

Vietnam and Cambodia on Jan. 24, shortly before the COVID-19 situation exploded onto the scene.

The uncertainty of how Wheat Week will progress this fall has not dampened Kaelber’s enthusiasm for the program in any way.

“We will find a way to make this program work, one way or the other,” said Kaelber. “I have full confidence in our instructors to find effective ways to continue to educate the students about the science of agriculture in Washington state.” ■



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A spring horseback ride near Hartline, Wash.
Photo by Marlene Poe.



CHAIRMAN

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

By Gary Bailey



The U.S. has been through many challenges during its 244-year history, but what historians will no doubt refer to as the Pandemic of 2020 has been particularly distressing to our people and our economy, not to mention our national spirit.

There is no way to downplay the significance of the impact and the ripples that social distancing and work-from-home mandates have had on so many sectors of our economy, from shale oil fields and airlines to restaurants and gyms. But while the pandemic has revealed crucial, but frayed connections we have long taken for granted, it has also demonstrated the resiliency of our agricultural supply chain, particularly our transportation infrastructure.

These are circumstances we haven't encountered before, and I thought Zippy Duval, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation, summed up the situation well when it came to food security. "There will be enough food produced on the farm," he said, "but there's a lot of things that happen to the food before it gets to the consumer, whether it be in processing or transportation."

When it comes to essential occupations during the pandemic, medical workers are at the top of my list—I am in awe of their selfless actions—but others also deserve praise. The transportation system is very important to agriculture, and I can't say enough about the personnel who move our commodities and food around the U.S. and the world.

It is rare that the men and women who drive the nation's fleet of 18-wheelers hauling the goods necessary for the survival of our population receive recognition. But imagine, for a moment, if the pandemic took them off the road. What would happen if our rail or barge system no longer functioned due to COVID-19? We are known as the most reliable supplier of wheat in the world, and that status would be at risk.

One of Washington Gov. Jay Inslee's first acts in response to the pandemic was an emergency declaration "that motor carriers and drivers of commercial motor vehicles collecting or delivering essential food" are exempt from driver hours of service rules. In other words, these men and women were considered so valuable, their federally limited work hours were waived.

Meanwhile, the Department of Homeland Security gave dams across the U.S. special status due to their role in producing electricity; providing municipal and industrial water supplies; irrigation for farms; flood control; and navigation. The announcement conferring "essen-

tial" status particularly mentioned that dams "generate about 60 percent of electricity in the Pacific Northwest."

For Eastern Washington wheat farmers, all of the roles dams fulfill are important, but none more so than navigation, which has continued on the Columbia-Snake River System throughout the pandemic. I am grateful to the employees of our two wheat barging companies, Shaver and Tidewater. They are part of the essential link-age that has continued to move our grain.

An organization that is introduced in this *Wheat Life* issue on page 44 is the Columbia River Steamship Operators' Association (CRSOA) based in Portland. It represents ship owners, tow companies, terminal operators and ports, among others.

It makes sense CRSOA would take a turn in the spotlight during a pandemic. As governors of the three Western states recently wrote, "As home to one in six Americans and gateway to the rest of the world, the West Coast has an outsized stake in controlling and ultimately defeating COVID-19."

The Columbia River is the nation's No. 1 wheat export gateway. Along with other grains, it is the third largest grain export gateway in the world. Again, I ask you to imagine what if the individuals CRSOA represents were unable to work?

At our export terminals, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Washington State Department of Agriculture grain inspectors continue to work. COVID-19 protocols have been put in place while inspecting commodities for export continues. Transportation and inspection services are closely linked, and without one or the other, exports of our wheat would grind to a halt.

Recently, Vince Peterson, president of U.S. Wheat Associates, was asked by some of our overseas customers about the pandemic's effect on the availability of wheat. "We are quite humbled and yet proud to be able to tell (customers) 'Yes, there is plenty of wheat available.'" But he continued that an even more important element of the U.S. supply chain is that America honors its global obligations and "has declared the entire U.S. food industry, from farm to table and to export, to be essential services."

During my time as chairman, I have talked to farmers and our allied industry partners about the value of the grain chain featured in this column. Although this pandemic has taught us many lessons about our weaknesses, it has also revealed our strengths. I am pleased that the country's transportation infrastructure has proven so resilient in the face of such a puzzling challenge. ■

REVIEW

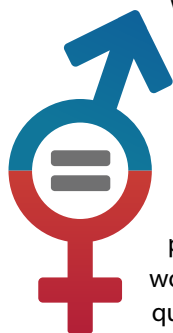
WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Not long-winded. Far-sighted

In his comments on the Columbia River System Operations draft environmental impact statement, Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires began by pointing out that breaching the lower Snake River dams “would not allow for operations of the river system as mandated.” That alone should be enough to quash the debate. And it was the cornerstone of the report’s conclusion that the four dams should not be removed. But the 3,000-page study didn’t stop, and neither did Squires, who, with addendum, submitted a 15-page treatise on the wheat industry’s position regarding river operations. “Washington wheat and barley farmers pay all handling and transportation costs to move their crops to domestic and export locations. The river system is crucial as an essential corridor to move grain and has also served as a competitive buffer against rising rail rates,” Squires wrote, adding that “removal of river navigation (a competitive alternative) and then the assumption that rail rates would not rise disproportionately goes against years of observation of freight rates as a whole when competition is removed, including Pacific Northwest wheat freight rates. The cost of rail freight will increase for all grain throughout the Pacific Northwest, even for the grain or other commodities that do not currently move by barge. Not only will rates go up, but other costs, such as the cost of additional trucks a farmer or entity has to purchase to accommodate turnaround times at harvest, for example, must be accounted for.” Squires ended on a positive note, envisioning the region on the 100th anniversary of the dams’ completion in 2074. “The dams will still be in place, salmon will be more abundant, and we will marvel at the efforts of all involved. We don’t need to turn the clock back to achieve success,” he said. ■

Gender gap narrows

Women are closing the agriculture gender gap according to a survey that was part of the 2019 Women in Food & Agriculture Summit. The survey indicated that 97 percent of women are confident in their ability to positively impact the future of the industry, while 65 percent of the women surveyed felt their gender was well represented. That compares to 76 percent of men who felt women were well represented. However, when asked if women were respected in their organizations, only 32 percent of women agreed, versus 59 percent of men. Asian respondents were particularly likely to report women were well represented in leadership at 83 percent. On the question of harassment, fewer than 9 percent of men said they had witnessed such behavior, while 27 percent of women had witnessed or experienced harassment. ■



Regulatory wheels grind slowly

In 2013, a team of Kenyan officials traveled to Eastern Washington to evaluate whether to drop the country’s quarantine against importing wheat from the Northwest due to flag smut, a disease which the introduction of the seed treatment Vitavax largely took care of when it was introduced in 1968. The team of three Kenyans met with Washington State University (WSU) officials, and based on what they heard and observed, they said they would go home to recommend establishing wheat trade with the region. And then nothing happened for eight years. In late January 2020, however, the U.S.

Department of Agriculture announced that all U.S. states and



regions, including the Northwest, can ship wheat to the East African country. Kenya’s wheat market is valued at more

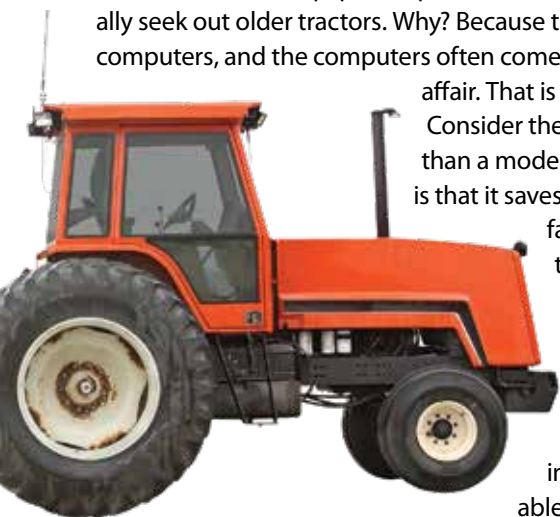
than \$500 million annually. The U.S. currently supplies about 5 percent of the market. The U.S. is in talks to secure a free trade deal with Kenya. Tim Murray, Extension plant pathologist at WSU, helped organize and lead the Kenyan team in 2013. He is pleased the quarantine of Northwest wheat is in the rearview mirror, but he never suspected it would take so long. “Regulatory issues like flag smut lend themselves to bureaucracy in lots of countries because we’re dealing with laws and regulations that are sometimes interpreted narrowly and used as trade barriers,” he said. On the other hand, flag smut can be devastating when it’s bad, and that reputation is well known among regulatory officials in other countries, too. Even the U.S. is not immune. There was an outbreak of the disease in Kansas in 2015 that was attributed to a relatively low percentage of seed receiving fungicide treatment. But while the disease continues to make headlines from time to time, it is not a major problem, especially not in the Northwest, which treats 90 percent of its planted seed with today’s modern seed treatments. ■

Older tractors in demand

When it comes to equipment purchases, most farmers perceive newer as better, but there is a subset of individuals who actually seek out older tractors. Why? Because they don't have computers riding shotgun. Today's new equipment all comes with computers, and the computers often come with digital rights management software that can make even simple repairs a costly affair. That is why older model workhorse tractors are selling for tens of thousands of dollars.

Consider the price tag for a 1979 John Deere tractor model—\$61,000. While that's much cheaper than a modern tractor, which can run \$150,000, what many farmers like about the old technology is that it saves them money in the long run. Every tractor manufacturer has prohibitions about

farmers accessing their computers, but there is an effort afoot called "right to repair" that argues owners should have the right to repair their own equipment, whether it be a tractor or an iPhone. Elizabeth Warren had a plank in her failed presidential bid calling for a national law that empowers farmers to repair their equipment without going to an authorized agent. Various state legislatures across the U.S. are being targeted to pass right-to-repair legislation. Computers have made farm equipment more efficient, and altering software is not a good idea. On the other hand, according to Deere's regulatory filings, parts and service are three to six times more profitable than sales of original equipment. ■



Commissioner elections

Have you sold grain that was grown in one of the following districts: wheat districts 1 and 4, and barley district 7? If so, nomination letters for upcoming commissioner elections will be mailed out at the end of September. Will you get your letter? Ask your grain dealer/handler how they are reporting your county of production to the Washington Grain Commission. Not sure which district your county of production is in? Go to wagrains.org and click on "About WGC" and then "WGC Commissioners." Email us at wgc@wagrains.org or call the office at (509) 456-2481 with any questions. ■

Getting in hot water

The world's oceans are heating up according to a new study that found 2019 ocean heat content was the hottest on record, with 2018 in second place and 2017 in third. Published in the journal *Advances in Atmospheric Sciences*, the study is bookended by news that earth's surface temperatures in 2019 were the second hottest on record. It's estimated that since the middle of the last century, oceans have absorbed 93 percent of the excess heat caused by greenhouse gases from human activities, shielding the land from the worst effects. Although surface temperatures have been tracked for more than a century, ocean records are spottier. A network of 3,000 ocean buoys was established in 2007. Before that, temperatures were taken from the sides of ships. Rising temperatures impact ocean life, which would include Columbia-Snake River salmon that spend the majority of their lives in the Pacific. ■

The right microbiome makes a difference

There is still much to learn about the gut microbiome, but we do know that a lot about our body's functions depends on these microorganisms that exist in our intestines. New research is showing that the amount of "good" bacteria versus "bad" can impact everything from obesity, diabetes, liver disease, cancer, heart health, neurodegenerative disease—even mood. A recent study of 612 people age 65 to 79 across five countries, published in the journal, *Gut*, suggests that the Mediterranean diet may help curb the advance of physical frailty and cognitive decline in older age. The diet is rich in whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts, legumes, olive oil and fish. The study found after a year on the diet, there was an increase in bacteria linked to signs of reduced frailty, such as walking speed and hand grip and improved memory; a reduced production of harmful inflammatory chemicals; and a reduction in bacteria associated with bowel cancer, insulin resistance, fatty liver and cell damage. To learn more about the microbiome, listen to episode 154 of the Wheat All About Podcast, entitled "Gut Check. How Bread Boosts the Microbiome." ■

Help is there

Nearly 500 farmers took their lives across nine Midwestern states from 2014 to 2018. Years of low prices, poor weather and record debt have led to many of the suicides. For someone suffering from stress and depression, financial problems may be the last straw. A national suicide hotline has listeners ready to talk. Call (800) 273-8255. There is also a text service. Dial 741741 and text "hello." It's free and confidential. ■

Born to teach and share his love for baking

Name:

Gerardo
"Gerry" S.
Mendoza

Title: Baking
Consultant

Office: USW
South Asian
Regional
Office, Manila

**Providing
Service to:**

Republic of the Philippines and Korea

Regional Profile: Southeast Asia, and particularly the Philippines, have become one of the most important export markets in the world for U.S. wheat. The Philippines is the second largest market for all classes of U.S. wheat and has been the largest importer of both soft white (SW) and hard red spring (HRS) wheat since 2013. A robust population and income growth are driving increased demand for wheat-based foods. The growing middle class has an increased ability to pay for high quality products, while end-product manufacturers and consumer preferences give U.S. wheat classes a strong advantage. U.S. wheat farmers have invested for nearly six decades in training Filipino millers and end-product manufacturers, helping the wheat foods industry achieve world class sophistication and expertise. Given the quality and diversity of U.S. wheat supplies, USW's focus on increased technical service and assistance is paying dividends as the region's demand for wheat continues to grow.



Editor's Note: This is the fourth in a series of posts profiling U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) technical experts in flour milling and wheat foods production. USW Vice President of Technical Services Mark Fowler says technical support to overseas customers is an essential part of export market development for U.S. wheat. "Technical support adds differential value to the reliable supply of U.S. wheat," Fowler says. "Our customers must constantly improve their products in an increasingly competitive environment. We can help them compete by demonstrating the advantages of using the right U.S. wheat class or blend of classes to produce the wide variety of wheat-based foods the world's consumers demand."

By Amanda J. Spoo

Director of Communications, U.S. Wheat Associates

There is one thing that everyone who crosses paths with Gerry Mendoza agrees on: he is just a really positive, nice guy.

"One of Gerry's greatest assets is a positive attitude and sincere willingness to do whatever it takes to carry a project to completion," said Joe Sowers, U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) regional vice president for the Philippines and Korea, of his Filipino colleague.

While his attitude may come naturally, Mendoza's interest in baking first started in high school when his family got an oven with a gas range.

"I started messing around with the equipment by baking simple cakes (batter type) that were manually mixed," said Mendoza. "Eventually, I moved on to kneading dough to make pizza and apple strudel."

Mendoza was born into a large family in Baliuag, Bulacan, an agricultural town 50 kilometers north of Manila, known for growing rice, corn and other vegetables. The town is also famous for its baked product "Pandesal," a traditional Filipino breakfast bread typically consumed after rice. Once at Adamson University in Manila, he received a bachelor's degree in industrial engineering.

"My decision to take up industrial engineering was highly influenced by my peers rather than a first choice," said Mendoza. "I became quite interested in the food processing industry to the point that my final engineering feasibility study was about a chicken processing plant."

Upon finishing school in 1982, Mendoza started out in real estate housing development and then as a medical sales representative for a pharmaceutical company, which he says is where he gained his sales and account servicing skills. For a short time, during economic

unrest in the Philippines under martial law, Mendoza spent a few years with a small craft bakery that produced traditional Filipino breads and cakes. A few years later, Mendoza returned to the bakery industry and never looked back.

For the next 25 years, Mendoza used his baking, engineering and sales background in the bakery industry selling and promoting baking ingredients, supplies and equipment used to produce bakery goods. During his tenures with Bakels Philippines Inc. and AB Mauri Philippines, he identified new markets and helped expand product portfolios, as well as developing and executing technical services that included product development programs, baking seminars, product demonstrations, recipe application development and technical sales training.

Ultimately, one could say it was his combined interest in playing badminton and baking that led Mendoza to USW. Sowers first met him in 2012, when he (Gerry) was running a World Bread Day badminton tournament fundraiser for the Philippine Society of Baking.

“His enthusiastic personality, strong character and high esteem within the baking community and other industry partners led us to invite Gerry to join USW in 2016, and ever since, he has been an absolute pleasure to work with,” said Sowers. “He came to USW with more than 30 years of experience in baking and allied industries, a background that gives him a profound ability to provide relevant advice and actionable solutions to Philippine mills and end-product manufacturers.”

As a USW bakery consultant, Mendoza’s primary responsibility is providing technical assistance and training to commercial bakeries.

“I saw this (USW) as an opportunity for me to share my baking knowledge and skills that I have nurtured



Jerry Mendoza (center) is just where he likes to be, surrounded by Filipino students and teaching them the finer points of dough elasticity and gluten formation at one of many technical trainings he attends each year.

and developed for most of my professional life,” said Mendoza. “Ultimately, I saw it as an opportunity to continue my passion for baking.”

That passion and Mendoza’s wealth of knowledge is what resonates with customers.

“It has always been great working with ‘Sir Gerry,’ as part of our common goal of sharing baking knowledge,” said a bakery owner in the Philippines. “By sharing his expertise with our fellow bakers in the Philippines, we are now more equipped to face the different challenges of a more globalized and competitive baking industry.”

“He guided us through our SRC (solvent retention capacity) project,” said a milling quality control manager. “From the first time we did the streaming, he joined us, collecting flour samples from each stream in the mill. It’s a very tiring process, but he was there with us until we finished collecting almost 50 samples.”

After spending many years as a regular resource speaker at the Asian Baking Institute and Philippine Foremost Milling Corporation’s Basic Commercial Baking Course conducting lectures on different ingredients such as yeast, bread improvers and chemical leaveners, as well as continuing to regularly conduct baking science short courses for the Philippine Society of Baking—where he serves as an officer and instructor—Mendoza has developed his natural affinity for teaching and mentoring.

“He teaches and discusses baking in a manner that even a newcomer can easily grasp. He answers all questions (precisely), showing patience and even baking his signature ‘Madeleine’ bread for us,” said a chief operating officer for a large mill in the Philippines. “When we were organizing a baking seminar together, I found Gerry’s coordination and attention to detail excellent.” ▶



In the Philippines, noodle consumption is a big part of the diet. Here, Gerry Mendoza (in yellow) helps students understand the critical nature of the sheeting process from which noodles are fabricated.



It's nice to win a trophy at a baking contest sponsored by AB Mauri, a yeast and bakery ingredient company, but for Gerry Mendoza (third from left), the satisfaction is helping the next generation of Philippine bakers to be successful.

"Working with Mr. Mendoza is really inspiring because of his approach to teaching from years of experience," said another milling executive. "With his extraordinary way of being organized and systematic, his guidance and encouragement helps deliver excellent results for companies."

Every customer who shared their experience working with Mendoza—the badminton player who also enjoys bike riding, karaoke and cooking and baking at home—noted his kindness and love for working with bakers.

"He is very approachable, and you can easily feel his sincerity and general concern with whatever you are discussing," said a chief operating officer for a large mill in the Philippines. "He displays passion in educating people with what he has mastered in his career."

Mendoza enjoys being able to provide technical assistance and services to the thriving Philippine baking industry.

"My direct contact with millers, bakery owners, operators and bakers through technical training and baking workshops gives me the opportunity to highlight the value of using flour made from U.S. wheat," he said.

Another manager said, "Gerry is very easy to work with. He is very approachable, not hesitant to share his knowledge and very quick when asked for data. He always assures us that he is always available and will always accommodate our inquiries and requests. He has never failed us, and he knows how to deal pleasantly and effortlessly with everyone he meets."

Sowers added, "Gerry has a natural affinity for presenting information in a classroom setting or running a baking workshop in an interesting and engaging fashion. He is very creative in designing training activities and enthusiastically carries them out. I think that is why so many customers here want Gerry to put on workshops—and, of course, because he is such a nice guy." ■

Hybrid website serves different audiences

A redesigned website greets visitors who click on wagrains.org, the virtual address of the Washington Grain Commission (WGC).

The website not only serves as a direct conduit to customers around the world who want to learn more about the wheat and barley grown in Eastern Washington, it's also a site farmers can mine to discover the work of the organization and its research, marketing and educational priorities.

The new look was designed by Zipline Interactive, a Spokane-based website design agency, in collaboration with a WGC team including CEO Glen Squires, Director of Communications and Producer Relations Scott Yates and Program Director Joe Bippert. Squires said the website was intended as a hybrid, catering to farmers, landlords, customers and the general public.

"It's important farmers and landlords are informed of the activities of the grain commission because it's their assessments which support the organization. But overseas customers and a domestic audience in the U.S. also use the website as a resource," he said.

Farmers and landlords who want to know more about the crop that is their livelihood can peruse the site to discover Washington's wheat ranking in the nation, what happens to the crop after it leaves the farm, the end products that various classes produce, and why growing quality cultivars is so important to maintaining market share.

The website is loosely organized around the themes of our grains, our publications, our farmers and our history and is illustrated with photographs that are both descriptive of the region's farming practices and the beauty of the surrounding scenery. A click on "Our Publications" goes directly to bulletins and brochures issued by the WGC or which are important to the region's farmers, including documents on managing herbicide resistant weeds, the Preferred Wheat Variety Brochure, the annual wheat varieties acreage report and Washington wheat facts.

Customers, meanwhile, can discover more



about the region that grows their specialty soft white wheat including how the land was formed, the growing season, microclimates, our two-pronged transportation system and an emphasis on quality. The public is introduced to the six classes of U.S. wheat, resources on the history of wheat and the economic contribution of the wheat industry to the state.

Barley is also well represented on the website, especially the triple threat it represents as a grain that can feed livestock and people as well as help make beer. You can also learn how barley straw can be used to clear algae from ponds. Both wheat and barley are recognized as GMO free.

The WGC's podcast, Wheat All About It!, came in for an upgrade on the new website with past episodes easier than ever to access on a scrolling menu. With more than three years of episodes in the archive, a bonus episode will be offered from the website on a monthly basis. Visitors coming to the podcast portion of the website through their smartphones can click on podcast apps icons that will allow them to subscribe to Wheat All About It! and never miss an episode.

Be sure to click on "About WGC" in the dropdown menu at the top of the page. It is full of information about the organization including photographs of commissioners and staff. Clicking on "Our Mission" opens an array of tabs including budget information, as well as the organization's research, market development and educational mandates. You can also find the WGC's mission and vision statement there. ■

Going the extra mile for transportation

MARITIME ORGANIZATION IS CRUCIAL TO MOVING WHEAT OVERSEAS

As one of the last links in the grain chain, the Columbia River Steamship Operators' Association is a little-known, but crucial connection for moving Eastern Washington wheat to export locations around the world. Kate Mickelson, executive director of the association, writes about how her organization is responding to the pandemic with changes large and small.

By Kate Mickelson

With the West Coast of the U.S. home to one in six Americans and gateway to the world, the Columbia River Steamship Operators' Association (CRSOA) has an outsized stake in controlling and ultimately defeating COVID-19.

Commerce and the import and export of goods is extremely important to not only the states of Washington and Oregon, but our global economy. CRSOA holds paramount the health and safety of our maritime community and river system overall and understands the threat COVID-19 poses for our global supply chain.

We are observing temporary guidelines and special practices enacted and recommended by our International, federal, state and local maritime partners.

Our members are protecting our maritime community as we perform the duties and responsibilities required for each vessel that calls upon our ports to ensure the critical flow of maritime commerce continues with minimal interruption.

Examples of our diligence in safety include our early coordination efforts and conversations with the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG); the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP); Oregon Health Authority; Washington State Department of Health; and Multnomah County Health beginning in January 2020 and hosting our first in-person meetings on Feb. 4, 2020. We continue to monitor the situation closely to ensure that our members have access to critical health and safety information as well as guidance to enable our members to make informed decisions and develop prevention and response strategies as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves.

The CRSOA and the maritime industry have been a resource to authorities. We have provided input and comment regarding a wide array of topics. We are proud that authorities deemed our industry to be clas-



PHOTO COURTESY OF BLUE WATER SHIPPING COMPANY.

sified as essential personnel. We are also grateful that our industry was included within the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency's Essential Critical Infrastructure Workforce as well as Washington state's Essential Critical Infrastructure Workers.

A large portion of the work in the maritime industry mandates that our members board the vessel. Steamship operators/vessel agents need to access port facilities and board vessels for entry formalities with CBP and inspections with National Cargo Bureau (NCB) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture for cargo calculations with NCB, which determine vessel stability and safety, as well as interface with the vessel and the elevator. The towing community provides ships with assistance to and from the berth; into and out of anchorages and stern buoys; pilot transportation; the movement of goods and commerce; and any emergency situations as deemed necessary.

Pilots are regulated by Oregon state for the Columbia/Willamette river system, Coos Bay and Yaquina Bay to ensure safe navigation. Other needs include port security; terminal and grain elevator boarding after the vessel is alongside; crew transport and launch operations; ship stores; medical providers; etc.

Here is a brief look at what our members are doing every day to maintain the critical flow of maritime commerce:

- **Steamship agents.** The CRSOA board has adopted the Association of Ship Brokers and Agents Guidelines for COVID-19, which outlines recommendations regarding mitigating the threat of transmission of the virus. As noted, "Agents are the compliance and logistic conduit for up-to-date and accurate information passing between the vessel, USCG, CBP, the terminal, the port community and its local stakeholders. In general, boarding the vessel, particularly on arrival, has and will continue to be an essential and necessary best practice among certified U.S. agents."

Agencies are following safe distancing practices and appropriate PPE use. Some agencies are rotating staff to work remotely to reduce in-office transfer of infection. Invoicing and payments have become more electronic to avoid possible infection transmission through the mail system.

- **Pilotage.** Our members continue to prioritize the health and safety of our pilots by taking the precautions recommended by our state licensed pilot organizations. Pilots exercise enhanced social distancing by avoiding living spaces occupied by crew, whether on or off duty.

- **Seafarers.** Our members are following the International Chamber of Shipping's COVID-19 Guidance for Ship Operators for the Protection of the Health of Seafarers.

- **Launch companies.** Our launch company members each have individual plans and practices, including addressing cleanliness and sanitation, and increasing communication with boarding parties about the importance of observing physical distancing and minimizing exposure at every opportunity. Vessels are sanitized not only every morning and evening, but also between each boarding party and/or passenger transfer.

Depending on the vessel type, companies determine how many passengers will be in the cabin space or if two launches will be required. Additionally, when safety and/or weather permits, some companies may allow passengers to ride on aft decks to increase physical distancing. Some launch vessels have a separate wheelhouse area from passenger spaces. Further, launch operators are keeping windows open to increase ventilation and airflow through cabin spaces.

- **Tug and towing companies.** Our tug and towboat members have contingency plans and are following industry best practices or better for vessel boarding, activities while on board the vessel and at the office and management level. Some actions include altered vessel crew schedules to minimize crew shifts, onboard tugs to minimize their exposures and shore personnel working telework schedules.

Crew members undergo screening prior to boarding vessels, and unnecessary personnel and visitors are unauthorized or must undergo advanced screening. Our tug and towboat members have partnered with a 24-hour physician's services for crew members to access if needed.

Our members require safe physical distancing, some even limiting use of company vehicles to single occupancy. Our members have implemented enhanced surface and workspace sanitizing, including galley and shared spaces, as well as any high-touch surfaces and high-traffic areas.

- **Ports and terminals.** Our deep draft ports continue to maintain service levels to customers and tenants, and port terminals remain fully operational.

All of this is intended to ensure that commerce can continue to flow through our West Coast ports as the challenge of COVID-19 continues. ■

WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Mythical USDA reports continue



By Mike Krueger

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting rules, regulations, closures, stoppages, shortages, endless Zoom meetings, etc., have left me a bit jaded. The May series of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) reports didn't improve my overall mood.

The May WASDE (World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates) is the first one in which the USDA gives us their thoughts on what the 2020/21 marketing year supply/demand numbers "might" look like for wheat, corn and soybeans. It is a starting point for markets to make ongoing assessments of acres, yields, production, demand and, most importantly, ending stocks. It is ending stocks that, when all is said and done, are the "tale of the tape" in terms of price direction.

The May report's numbers are the USDA's "reasonable" projection. Yields can't be based on anything else because spring wheat, corn and soybean crops have barely emerged, and the entire growing season lies ahead. In the old days, most analysts and analytical groups would use some kind of multiyear yield average in these initial supply and demand assessments. But that pattern started to change several years ago.

Now yield estimates have become "best case scenario" and often project record yields. So it was with the May 2020/21 yield estimates. The U.S. corn yield was pegged at a record 178.5 bushels per acre. That yield, combined with March planting intentions of 97 million planted acres of corn, gives us a record 16 billion bushel corn estimate. The projected soybean yield estimate wasn't a record, but it was close at 49.8 bushels per acre.

The wheat yield estimates were similarly big. Consider that in Washington state, for instance, winter wheat yield is projected to be two bushels per acre higher than last year despite some drought conditions with occasional very hot temperatures.

The USDA estimated Canada's wheat yield will set a new record in 2020. That could happen, but the crop hasn't been planted yet. Australia's wheat crop is expected to rise to 24 mmt (million metric tons) from last season's drought-reduced 15 mmt crop. Australia is just starting to plant their wheat crop also. Argentina's wheat

crop is also projected to be big at 21 mmt.

It isn't just the production numbers that cause some head scratching. The demand estimates for the 2020/21 corn marketing year seem equally perplexing. Corn ending supplies are forecast to expand from just more than 2 billion bushels this marketing year to 3.3 billion bushels at the end of August 2021. That number would (and maybe will) be close to 4 billion bushels had the USDA not increased the corn export projection by 375 million bushels (9.4 mmt).

Granted, corn exports this year have been dismal, but the only reason to expect them to rebound this much is to believe China will be a major buyer of U.S. corn. The USDA also raised Brazil's corn production to 106 mmt (101 last year) despite ongoing dryness in southern Brazil where most of the second (Safrinha) corn crop is produced.

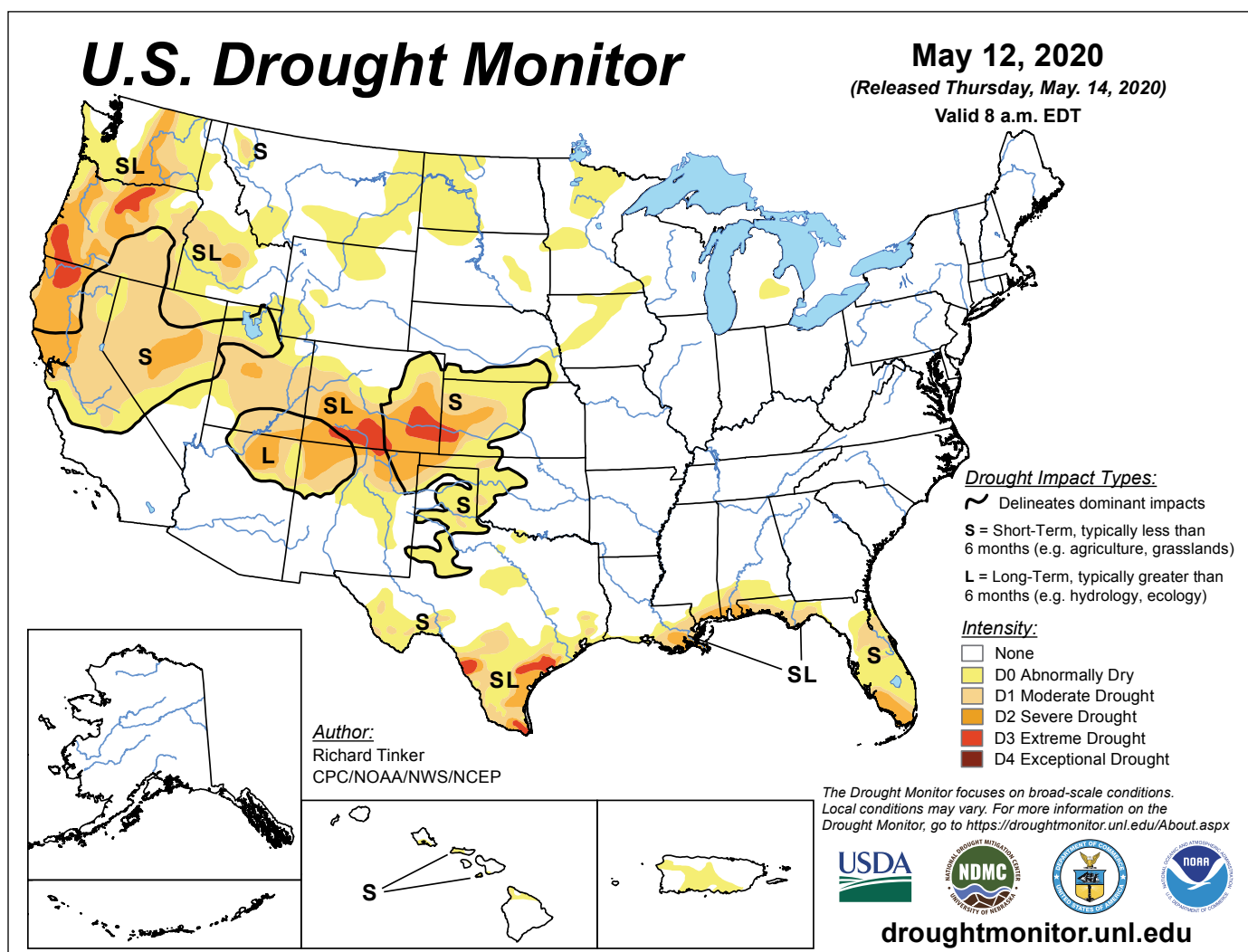
The USDA also increased the ethanol production forecast for the coming marketing year despite the fact a big percentage of U.S. ethanol plants remain closed, and ethanol margins are still negative. Gas is cheap. No one in the U.S. is going anywhere. Again, hoped-for ethanol exports to China are about the only reason ethanol production will increase.

Here's a point of perspective. A total of 62 million bushels of corn were used in ethanol production in a recent weekly ethanol production report. We need to use about 102 million bushels per week to meet the current 2019/20 marketing year goal, and this goal was cut in the April WASDE.

There are some things that can reduce the corn production estimate. First, that U.S. farmers won't plant 97 million acres of corn despite the very fast start to the planting season. The reduction could be as much as 3 to 5 million acres, with most of that change coming in the western Corn Belt and northern Plains.

North Dakota alone could plant 1.5 million acres less than expected. Planting across the northern Plains has been slowed by cold and wet weather. Meanwhile, the option to Prevent Plant corn acres shows a better return per acre than any other cropping choice. It will take a 4 to 5 million acre reduction in corn acres, plus something less than a record yield to save the corn market.

Why so much time devoted to corn in a wheat article?



The two are intertwined in many ways. They also reduced the wheat feed usage estimate, primarily because of the huge corn production estimate. Corn will be too cheap and will replace wheat in feed rations. This isn't a big number in the U.S. (35 million bushels), but the ripple effect will be felt worldwide.

The USDA reduced the 2020/21 U.S. wheat export forecast by 20 million bushels from the current marketing year forecast. Their estimates for a record yield in Canada and bigger wheat crops in Argentina and Australia, coupled with the strong dollar, make it hard to expect increased U.S. wheat exports. They obviously incorporated an optimistic China view on corn, but they don't share that optimism with regard to wheat sales to China.

The U.S. winter wheat production estimate is too big. It has also been very dry and warm across the western half of the southern Plains, similar to the Pacific Northwest. The Kansas Crop Tour (virtual this year) is expected by some to come in 20 to 30 million bushels below the

USDA's May estimate. It's also doubtful we see as much spring wheat planted as expected because of the cold and wet late April and early May. North Dakota, the largest spring wheat producing state, only had 27 percent of the spring wheat planted at mid-May. The five-year average for this time is 56 percent.

The USDA doesn't publish corn or soybean yield estimates again until the second week of August. Acreage estimates will be revised in their June 30 report.

The most significant factor, other than acreage and yields, will be the extent to which China complies with the Phase One agreement on trade. That will decide the level of U.S. wheat, corn and soybean exports. That is also completely wrapped up in the politics of COVID-19. ■

Mike Krueger is president and founder of The Money Farm, a grain advisory service located in Fargo, N.D. A licensed commodity broker, Krueger is a past director of the Minneapolis Grain Exchange and a senior analyst for World Perspectives, a Washington, D.C., agricultural consulting group.

AG'S STORY TOLD

Sue Tebow turns to social media to spread the word on farmers and ranchers

By Trista Crossley

Moses Lake resident Sue Tebow has taken the phrase “sharing is caring” to a new social media level.

“I had been thinking about doing something for a long time to share the ag life with people. I have a lot of friends that aren’t ag related and didn’t understand what goes on in agriculture. I put it off and put it off until one day, I just thought why not and what if? It turned out to be a really good idea,” Tebow said.

Tebow’s idea was to create a Facebook page where she could share stories from farmers and ranchers. The idea—a daily post from a farmer or rancher, no names and a single photo—may have been simple, but it was effective. Four years later, her page, agri.CULTURE, has more than 25,000 followers from around the world and has more than 900 posts. In 2017, Tebow was awarded the Charles Easton Award by the Agriculture Council of America for her work as an advocate for accurate communications

between rural and urban audiences. She has also been inducted into the Grant County Agriculture Hall of Fame and given the Excellence in Agriculture Service Award.

Not too shabby for someone who grew up in an urban area and didn’t know anything about agriculture until she married a rancher in the 1990s. Tebow and her husband raise cattle and grow alfalfa.

“I was always one of those people that would get behind a slow piece of equipment and be upset because I was late. When I married my husband and moved out here, I thought, ‘isn’t this so cool to be in the country? So peaceful?’” she said, laughing. “I would say, having a farm is like having a two-year-old. You have to get a babysitter to go anywhere, and you have to watch it all the time. It was an eye opener.”

When she first started thinking about a way to share agriculture’s story, Tebow knew she didn’t want to do a blog that was focused on percentages and numbers. She



Sue Tebow takes pictures while Robert and Jessie Shannon of Ellensburg feed their cows. The cows are fed with a horse-drawn wagon all winter long. Photo by Roseanna Sales.



Sue Tebow visits with Carden Martinez and her friend's fair steer in Moses Lake, Wash. Carden shows pigs and hopes to show steers one day. Photo by Kerri Dowers.

knew that there were real people with interesting stories behind the scenes growing the nation's food and fibers, a fact that is easy to forget when an urban shopper's only exposure to agriculture is at the store. She felt she had a unique perspective on what the public needed to know about agriculture, thanks to her own background.

"I just thought, who better to tell stories than farmers and ranchers themselves?" she said. "They tell their own story, and the idea behind that is it doesn't matter what their name is. The story is the important part. It's very simple, and I think that's why it works so well. It's a chicken-soup-for-the-soul kind of thing."

In the beginning, Tebow mostly featured family and friends on her page. Then she reached out to other farmers and ranchers and continued to grow. She hasn't had anybody turn her down and says the hardest part is getting to everybody she wants to talk to. She's featured rural



Sue Tebow (right) shows Marci Dowers the photo of her with her piglets in Moses Lake, Wash. Marci's family farrows pigs for 4-H and FFA kids. Photo by Kerri Dowers.

bankers, farm kids, even potato harvest at a nearby Hutterite Colony. She's even found people to feature while in Las Vegas or while receiving the Easton award back east. On that trip to Washington, D.C., she had an extra day to explore and ended up at the place where police horses were being shod.

"That blew me away, watching these guys shoe these massive horses," she said. "One of them played baseball for the Twins. He blew his shoulder out and is now shoeing horses. People are so unique. There are amazing stories out there, and amazing people doing amazing things."

There is no advertising on agri.CULTURE. Last year, Tebow started another page to help cover her travel expenses. On that Patreon page, subscribers can read about the stories behind the scenes, see more photos and get updates on previously featured people.

Tebow says that if farmers and ranchers don't tell their story, the public has no way of knowing what's going on in agriculture.

"I think this could one of the first times in human history that farmers and ranchers have to explain and defend everything they do," she said. "People don't understand if it wasn't for those farmers and ranchers, there wouldn't be any food to eat. To me, I'm like 'hey there's a huge disconnect, not a little one.' I just came up with what can I do to advocate for agriculture in a different way than what's being said?"

To find Tebow's page, search for agri.CULTURE on Facebook and agri.culture.people on Instagram. The Patreon page can be found at patreon.com/agriculturepeople, and Tebow also has a website at agriculturepeople.com. ■



(Above) Sue Tebow gets up close and personal with one of Ron Updegrave's falcons in Moses Lake, Wash. Photo by Ron Updegrave. (Left) Tebow goes for a ride around the field with Charles Edwards as he cuts wheat in Prosser, Wash. Photo by René Groom.

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Five marketing tips for landlords

By Trista Crossley

The upside of being a landlord means you don't have to do the physical work of raising a wheat crop. The downside for those who lease their land under a crop share agreement means they are left with a share of the crop they have to sell in order to make a profit. For landlords with no agricultural experience, the idea of selling that crop can be extremely intimidating and confusing.

Kevin Duling is co-founder and manager of KD Investors, a consulting firm that works with clients throughout the U.S., Canada and Australia to sell their wheat. He has five basic tips to help landlords build up confidence in marketing their grain, beginning with the

most important suggestion—don't sell all your grain in one go.

"It's the number one thing I hear them (landlords) want to do. They always want to do all or nothing in one sale. The best thing you can do is spread your sales out, which will spread out your risk," he said. "Sell some, and then move on."

Duling's other four tips are:

- Talk to your tenant about how the crop is coming along, and if there are good prices prior to harvest, don't be afraid to take advantage of that in what is known as forward contracting. Forward contracting is an agreement between a seller and a buyer for the delivery of a certain quality and quantity of grain at a specified time and for a specified price. "If the producer says things are looking good, it wouldn't hurt to sell 10 percent as a forward contract," Duling explained. Obviously, if the crop is under stress, from drought or pests, this probably isn't a good choice for a landlord to do.
- Ask the producer what he or she is doing to market their own share of the grain.
- Find a way to stay informed. Duling pointed out that there are numerous marketing letters that landlords can subscribe to that would help them stay abreast of what's happening in the market and what forces are impacting grain prices. A good place to start is with a regional co-op or elevator group and see if they offer a newsletter.
- Talk to the commercial elevator you sell to and see if they have any pools you could enter some bushels in. In this scenario, producers pool grain, and then the elevator markets it with tools that might not be available to an individual with only small amounts of grain to sell or tools that might be more complex than a landlord is willing to try, such as hedging and options. As Duling said, this allows landlords with no marketing experience the opportunity to take advantage of more sophisticated tools.

"I think if landlords did these things, they would be doing as good as they can," Duling said. "Nobody can see everything, so we are all at the mercy of weather and currencies and politics."

More information on KD Investors can be found at kdinvestors.com. ■



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You can also mail or fax the form to the address below.

Another option is to fill out the pdf form at wawg.org/grower-education/2020-wawg-recipe-book/, and then save and email it to chauna@wawg.org

For more information, please contact Chauna at the WAWG office, (877) 740-2666 or chauna@wawg.org.

Submissions need to be received no later than Aug. 31, 2020.

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THE BOTTOM LINE

Purchasing farmland—Is there ever a good time?

By Todd King, CPA
Leffel Otis & Warwick, P.S.

The last few months have taught us that we are living in unprecedented times. Six months ago, we could not have imagined all of these changes and the decisions we are making. For various reasons, some farm landowners are contemplating the sale of their land. They may have a family member who has been financially affected by the coronavirus. They may realize that if they leave the farm to the heirs, it will be splintered into very small ownership interests. Or, there is also the concern that leaving the farm to the children will be a burden to them as they do not understand the farming business. For whatever reasons, the potential availability of neighboring farms up for sale can present an opportunity for the farmer wishing to expand.

Land—a good investment?

Traveling across the state, presenting to farmers, I often discuss the

| | Loan Amount | Interest Rate | Payments | Payment Amount Per Year |
|------------------------------|-------------|---------------|----------|-------------------------|
| Loan #1 | \$1,000,000 | 8% | 20 | \$101,852 |
| Loan #2 | \$1,000,000 | 4% | 20 | \$73,582 |
| Difference | | | | \$28,270 |
| Years of loan | | | | x20 |
| Difference over life of loan | | | | \$565,400 |

purchase of farmland. As a conservative CPA, the audience is usually cautioned about excess debt load and the potential implications of this. The other common point is that land will rarely, if ever “pay for itself.” While many factors impact this broad statement, I do believe it to be true. The farmer will usually need to subsidize the purchase of land with income from another source. Most often, this comes from income derived from land that is already owned.

So, if farmland will not pay for itself, does that mean it is not a good investment? No. Let me illustrate with a simple analogy. Stocks such as Microsoft, Apple and Google have been viewed as suitable investments. Investors purchasing these stocks do not expect the dividend to pay for the stock. It is the dividend, along with the appreciation in the value of the stock, which makes it a good investment.

Likewise, in looking at farmland, it is the annual net income from the land, along with the appreciation, that makes the investment appealing. One must keep in mind that “appreciation in value” of land will not make mortgage payments unless you sell the land. The takeaway is that the farmland may be a good investment, but don’t plan on it paying for itself without being subsidized from other sources. The key is making sure that the demand for a subsidy does not exceed the availability of different sources. In simple terms, most farm operations can only afford so much debt.

High-priced land

Twenty-five years ago, I built a new house. At that time, it seemed like a lot of money, and I could not imagine that I would ever view it as a good investment. Today, that same house would likely cost four times what it did back in 1995, and I am feeling much better about my investment. Likewise, the cost of farm ground will often look overpriced at the time of purchase. The key is to be able to survive the lean years while paying for it, so you can later look back and see it as an inexpensive and very worthwhile purchase.

Interest rates

Interest rates on long-term money are currently quite low. Most people do not understand the significant impact that interest rates may have on long term purchases. The chart above contrasts the difference between an 8 percent loan

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and a 4 percent loan, given a \$1,000,000 loan and a 20-year amortization.

The bottom line in comparing a 4 percent interest rate with an 8 percent rate is that over the life of the loan, total payments will be \$565,400 less with a 4 percent rate! Today's interest rates go a long way in making farmland affordable, and these rates will not likely last. Entering into a long-term land purchase should be done with a long-term fixed interest rate. Anyone who was around to see what happened in the early '80s realizes that variable interest rates can be detrimental.

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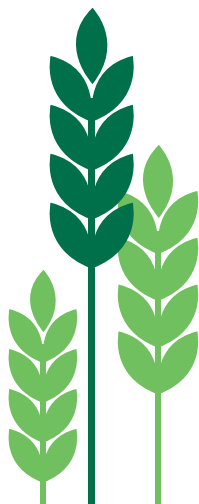
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Conclusion

For various reasons, we are seeing some farmland shake loose and sell. As expected, most of it appears overpriced. Today's interest rates assist in making the purchase work, but in almost all cases, it will need to be subsidized from other sources. For those looking to continue their operation into the next generation, the purchase of land can almost be a necessity. The key is to avoid buying too much, too fast. Farm operations can only take on so much debt. Finding a comfortable balance between taking on new land while managing the debt load will ensure your operation is around for the next generation. ■

Todd King, CPA, is the president of Leffel, Otis & Warwick, P.S., and works out of the firm's Odessa office. He can be reached at (509) 982-2922 or by email at tking@lefflotiswarwick.com. Todd has advised clients on business and tax issues since coming to the firm in 1984. For more information, please visit lefflotiswarwick.com.

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No filter needed! Seeding spring wheat at Beechinor Farms in Walla Walla. Photo by Jason Beechinor.



Ron Kile harvests on his family's centennial farm property near Thornton. Photo by Kevin Kile.



Harvest goes on even when disaster rages across Lake Roosevelt on the Colville Reservation. This was taken in 2019 with S.P. Jensen harvesting. Photo by Daleen Jensen.



Owen (9, left) and Sam (11) Wolf wave from a combine driven by their father, Rick Wolf, during Harvest 2019 at Four Aces Partnership in Pomeroy. Photo by Jessica Wolf.



Blondie holds down the fort at the Fox family farm, halfway between Connell and Othello. Photo by Ross Fox.

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