

# WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

NOVEMBER | 2019

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### IN THIS ISSUE:

- Harvest halted by wet weather
- Meet Carol Smith, executive director of the State Conservation Commission
- Trading in on the value of personal visits
- Are insects disappearing?
- There and back again: The life of a wheat seed



# WHEAT LIFE

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**WASHINGTON  
ASSOCIATION OF  
WHEAT GROWERS**

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# President's Perspective



## Looking back over the past year

By Jeffrey Shawver

In a couple of weeks, my time as president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) ends. I've got one or two more trips to make and a few meetings to run, but then it'll be time to turn the gavel over to the incoming president, Ryan Poe.

When I took over the president's position a year ago, I don't think I realized how busy I was farming until I had to step back and count on others, like my father-in-law or my dad, to help while I traveled to Olympia or Washington, D.C., for four or five days at a stretch. I've come to realize how valuable my time is and how important it is to make sure I'm spending that time on the things that matter to me, like my farm, my family and my industry.

I've enjoyed getting to know people from other parts of Eastern Washington that I otherwise wouldn't have met. I've got a new appreciation for the various ways the same crop—wheat—is grown across our region and the different issues each county is dealing with. The same can be said for all the people I've met from different states while traveling on WAWG business. This past year has gifted me with new friends and opened my eyes to the farming community that lies beyond my county. I think farmers should consider going through the WAWG chairs for that experience alone.

Another thing this year has given me is more confidence in my profession and what I do. I was surprised at how many growers reached out to me to talk or to ask questions. Sometimes I had the answers, and sometimes I had to call the WAWG office, but it felt good that I could maybe help a little.

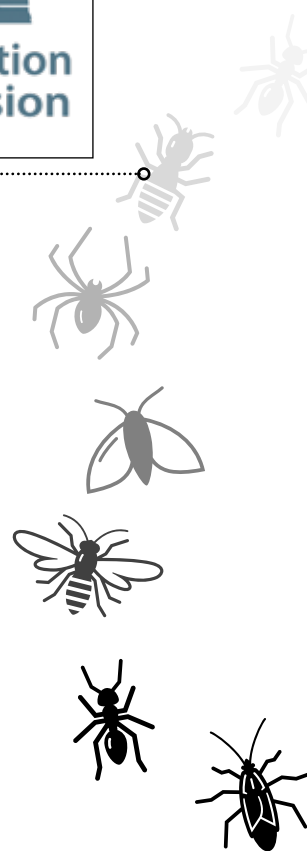
Nobody steps into the president's position knowing exactly what to do, and that was true for me as well. I learned a lot by watching the presidents in front of me, and how they handled things. Each president was a little different. One showed me how to be outgoing and friendly, while another was quiet but thoughtful. Another president could run a meeting like no one else, while another taught me how important it is to be involved in community outreach. I tried to take a little from each former president and use those bits to help me navigate through this past year. I also want to thank the WAWG staff for all their help. They work hard to make sure myself and the other officers know what we are doing. I also need to thank my family for helping me when I had to be away from the farm and understanding why I had to be away from the farm to help it be successful.

I've said it before in this space, but I'm going to say it one last time—as a member-supported organization, WAWG can't succeed unless our growers step up and get involved. Yes, it's a time commitment. Yes, sometimes it requires days spent in suits meeting with legislators you may or may not agree with. Sometimes it leaves you scratching your head, wondering at the willingness of people to believe anything they read, and sometimes it keeps you up at night trying to find answers. But at the end of the day, it all comes down to the fact you are fighting for a profession and life you love and trying to make sure the generations coming behind you have the same opportunities. I hope I've done my part this past year. See you at convention! ■

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# WAWG MEMBERSHIP FORM

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<b>Family \$200</b> (2 family members)	X	X	X			X
<b>Partnership \$500</b> (1-5 family members)	X	X	X	X		X
<b>Convention \$600</b> (2 individuals)	X	X	X		X	X
<b>Lifetime \$2,500</b> (1 individual)	X	X	X	X		X
<b>Non-Voting Membership</b>						
<b>Student \$75</b>	X	X	X			
<b>Industry Associate \$150</b>	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
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- National Wheat Grower updates
- State and national legislative updates



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# Wireworm

## A pest that's more than just a nuisance

Wireworms are pests that have never left. For decades, cereal growers have produced wheat with a growing threat beneath their feet.

Growers in North Dakota, Montana, the Pacific Northwest and Canada have suffered a surge in wireworm populations and subsequent crop damage, according to university researchers. There aren't official surveys, but anecdotal evidence from growers, entomologists and researchers throughout the region points toward a growing population that is only likely to get worse.

Wireworms, the larvae of click beetles, typically live three to five years, a life cycle that exacerbates the problem. First, click beetles move into a field from surrounding permanent habitats — grassy ditches, pastures and undisturbed field borders — and lay eggs. That cycle repeats each year, with additional eggs being laid every year. Meanwhile, the first wireworms are growing and maturing underground. When that generation reaches adulthood, the pests begin laying their own eggs, and then the growth takes off exponentially.

"All of a sudden the population can just explode," says Dr. Bob Vernon, a research scientist who recently retired from Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. "This is starting to happen, and it's a real concern."



Retailers are taking notice as well. More than 80% said wireworms are the biggest problem pest in their area, according to a 2018 Ag Retail survey conducted in Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington.

"Increasing populations are leading to greater damage, from shredded stems to thin stands," says Dr. Ruhiyyih Dyrdaahl-Young, BASF Technical Representative for the northern Great Plains. "A single large wireworm can eat two or more germinating seedlings, and there is no solution after planting. Growers need to be proactive and plan ahead when managing the pest."

Extremely large populations — it's possible to have more than 1 million wireworms per acre, Vernon says — can destroy the majority of an emerging crop that was seeded around 1.5 million seeds per acre.

Growers can face a loss of more than 50% of seedlings, and those that survive may be stunted, further reducing yield in a field already taking a hit.

In the last five years, it has become more common for damage to be severe enough that the surviving crop can't compensate by producing more tillers, forcing growers to replant the field. That's added seed, added time, added labor and added wear on the equipment.

"It can be an added expense growers have to incur," says Dyrdaahl-Young.

Wireworms can cause other management headaches by making herbicide application much more difficult. Ongoing feeding can cause plants to mature at different rates and different heights. Areas that are bare or have patchy growth are also at a higher risk for weeds all season — and even into the next year. A grower may have to choose whether to make additional applications or leave part of a field more susceptible to weeds.

### Lost Control

Why, after such a long period of relatively easy management, are wireworms a problem again?

Wireworms have been on the radar of growers and crop scientists dating back to the early 20th century. But the development of lindane and other organochlorine insecticides pushed the focus on the pest to the back burner.

By 2007, most of the organochlorine insecticides were banned by the U.S. EPA, and the products that took their place — neonicotinoid insecticides — do not cause direct mortality but instead cause intoxication of the wireworm. This intoxication can protect initial stand establishment and seedling development, but the lack of direct mortality allows the larval development and life cycle progression to continue — leading to population growth.

Researchers are starting to see wireworm populations on the rise. Current neonicotinoid insecticides are unable to reduce wireworm populations and these high wireworm infestations are causing more damage to the crop treated with a neonicotinoid insecticide.

"You can plant your cereal crops in those fields with current technology, and wireworms will still take down your crop," Dyrdaahl-Young says. "Luckily, we have Teraxxa™ insecticide seed treatment coming soon with a novel mode of action to control wireworm populations."

To learn more about wireworms, reach out to your local BASF representative.

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# WAWG at WORK

ADVOCATING FOR THE WHEAT FARMERS OF EASTERN WASHINGTON

## Business as usual at October state board meeting

It was business as usual at last month's state board meeting of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG).

Several guests stopped by the meeting to talk to producers, including Chris Mertz, regional director of U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS); Kay Teisl, risk management specialist from the Risk Management Agency's (RMA) regional office in Spokane; and WAWG lobbyist Diana Carlen.

Mertz told the board that NASS was in the process of re-interviewing producers to see if what they had intended to harvest was actually harvested. He said the last time NASS went back to update harvest numbers was in 2014, and it was mostly done in Idaho. He also said that estimated yield numbers for Washington for 2019 were released on Sept. 30. The winter wheat yield fell by six bushels per acre for an average 70 bushels per acre. For spring wheat, the yield was estimated at 47 bushels per acre, down from 54 bushels the year before.

Over at RMA, Teisl said the agency was fielding calls from producers about high moisture garbs and wheat slowing down harvest. RMA is telling growers to be sure to file a notice of loss with their insurance company. She answered questions from the board about how crop insurance would be handling various situations, but was only able to give general answers, explaining that it's on a case-by-case basis as to what can or will happen.

Gary Bailey, chairman of the

Washington Grain Commission, talked about the ongoing investigation by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service into the discovery of GE wheat plants in Eastern Washington in June. No report has yet been issued. Speaking of GE wheat, Bailey said more than a dozen trade teams have swung through Eastern Washington this year, and from them, the commission is hearing that overseas markets are not willing to accept any amount of GE wheat in their tenders. Bailey also touched on trade, saying that although the bilateral trade deal with Japan has been signed by the U.S., Japan still needs to okay it. Providing they sign it, it is scheduled to go into affect Jan. 1, 2020, and will put U.S. wheat on par with Canadian and Australian wheat.

Carlen, WAWG's lobbyist in Olympia, made the drive east to give the board a state legislative update. Looking towards the 2020 Legislative Session, Carlen said there are a couple of things the ag lobby is keeping an eye on. First, the House has a new speaker, Laurie Jenkins (D-Tacoma), who Carlen described as "very progressive." Carbon regulation will still be an issue, with a cap and trade program still very much in play, she said. A capital gains tax is still on the radar, and an initiative that could lower car tabs could end up hurting the state's transportation budget. The 2020 Legislative Session is a short one—60 days—and Carlen said most legislators will want to get done quickly so they can start campaigning for the 2020 elections.

Carbon regulation and a cap and trade program also made an appearance during the national legislative report. Michelle Hennings, WAWG's executive



**THE BEST JOB OF ALL.** Last month, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers took part in a career showcase in Ritzville, Wash. The event was organized by the Adams County Development Council, and there were 33 area businesses interacting with 6-12 graders from Lind, Ritzville, Washtucna, Sprague and Lamont to discuss career options.



director, said as the issue gains traction, both in Washington state and nationally, WAWG needs to consider passing a resolution on supporting (or not supporting) any sort of carbon regulation in order to provide direction to the organization. That issue will be discussed during the WAWG all-committee meeting at the 2019 Tri-State Grain Growers Convention.

Nicole Berg, treasurer of the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG), updated the board on NAWG's strategic plan progress. She talked about the possibility of using a U.S. Department of Agriculture program designed for disaster assistance, the Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+), to help farmers who experienced quality damage to their crops from excessive moisture, especially in the northern and central Plains. NAWG has sent a letter to Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue asking him to include quality losses as a covered damage. Berg also reiterated the need for WAWG to vote on resolutions dealing with carbon regulations.

The next WAWG state board meeting (other than the all-committee meeting at convention) is scheduled for Dec. 10 at 10 a.m. in Ritzville. ■



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Clark Neeley (at far end of table on left), who is taking over the cereal variety testing program, attended last month's meeting of the Whitman County wheat growers to introduce himself and answer growers' questions. Neeley relocated to Eastern Washington from Texas A&M University in College Station.

## Whitman County growers meet variety testing lead

Whitman County growers had an opportunity to meet one of the newest hires at Washington State University Extension, Clark Neeley, who is taking over the cereal variety testing program. Neeley relocated to Eastern Washington from Texas A&M University in College Station, where he was the extension small grains and oilseed specialist. Neeley told producers that he was still getting acquainted with WSU's program.

Fred Hendrickson, the Farm Service Agency (FSA) county executive director for Whitman County, was also in attendance. He spoke to producers about the large numbers of garbs and spring wheat that were still in the field and the problems that could cause with winter wheat seeding.

"I hope to see growers come out as well as possible," he said.

Hendrickson also talked about the Market Facilitation Program (MFP), saying that the office has taken about 75 percent of the county's applications and paid about half of those. Whitman County's payment came in at \$27 per acre. Growers are getting half of that in the first MFP payment, with two more possible payments coming up.

Turning to farm bill programs, Hendrickson said he wasn't sure wheat acres in Whitman County would be getting an Agriculture Risk Coverage-County payment

because yields were really good, but that they were waiting to see the official yield numbers. Finally, he reminded growers that sign-ups for the 2019 and 2020 farm bill programs are now open.

Tom Kammerzell, a Port of Whitman County commissioner, spoke to producers about the Columbia River System Operations draft environmental impact statement scheduled to be released in February. The report, which will have a public comment period, will present a range of alternatives for long-term system operations on the Columbia River System and evaluate the potential environmental and socioeconomic impacts on flood risk management, irrigation, power generation, navigation, fish and wildlife conservation, cultural resources, water quality and recreation.

"When the draft comes out, we need everybody to send a letter about how it will affect them," he told the group, adding that it is important that producers send individual letters, not simply sign onto a group letter.

Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, talked about the resolutions that will be discussed at the upcoming 2019 Tri-State Grain Growers Convention, including the need to have a resolution on carbon, carbon sequestration and carbon markets to help guide the association's legislative actions.

"We need to decide what we want so we can advocate for it," she explained.

Hennings also talked about trade, FSA programs and the quality issues some farmers are encountering due to the fall's cool, wet weather.

Tim Murray, chair of the WSU plant pathology department, rounded out the meeting, talking about filling positions in his department and touching on some of the projects he's working on, including snow mold and soil pH. ■

## Benton County growers hold fall annual meeting

Growers from Benton County gathered at the Horse Heaven Hills community center last month to hear U.S. Department of Agriculture agency updates, as well as updates on state and national legislation.

Claire Tachella from the Natural Resources Conservation Service's Prosser office, urged growers to get their records submitted to her office in order to receive payment programs and discussed upcoming program en-





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Located in the heart of Downtown Spokane, within walking distance of theaters, art galleries, spas, restaurants and outdoor activities is the home of the 2019 Tri-State Grain Growers Convention. The Convention Center and INB Performing Arts Center are connected to the hotel via a skybridge. The Spokane Veteran's Arena, River Front Park, Spokane River and Centennial Trail are all within walking distance.

## **Chad Prather, Emcee**

Chad Prather is known for his way with words. He is a comedian, armchair philosopher, musician, and observational humorist, often recognized from his fast-talking, rapid fire rants from the front seat of his truck. His current "Star Spangled Banter Comedy Tour" is selling out theaters all over America. Chad calls the Fort Worth, Texas, area home. He grew up working with horses and is often recognized by his ever-present cowboy hat.



## **Stephen Censky**

Mr. Censky is the deputy secretary for the U.S. Department of Agriculture. He previously served as CEO of the American Soybean Association and in both the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations at USDA. Mr. Censky received his B.S. in agriculture from South Dakota State University and his postgraduate diploma in agriculture science from the University of Melbourne, Australia. He grew up on a soybean, corn and diversified livestock farm near Jackson, MN.

## **Peter Zeihan, keynote**

Geopolitical strategist Peter Zeihan is a global energy, demographic and security expert. Zeihan's worldview marries the realities of geography and populations to a deep understanding of how global politics impact markets and economic trends. With a keen eye toward what will drive tomorrow's headlines, his irreverent approach transforms topics that are normally dense and heavy into accessible, relevant takeaways for audiences of all types.



## **Jim Morris, keynote**

Jim Morris' journey is a testimony to the power of dreams and their ability to inspire and transform human life. Retired from playing baseball, the high school team he was coaching challenged him about giving up his own goals. Not much later he found himself at a big league tryout. After just three months in the minors, Morris was a major league player for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays. Now a role model to millions, Morris' memoir, *The Rookie*, was made into a major motion picture.

## **National update with Philip Brasher**

Philip Brasher has reported on food and agriculture policy for more than 15 years and currently holds the position of executive editor for *Agri-Pulse*. He will be moderating a panel that includes representatives from U.S. Wheat Associates, the National Association of Wheat Growers, the National Barley Growers Association and the Wheat Foods Council.



## **Breakout session topics to include:**

- Climate forecast
- Crop rotations
- Farm Bill program updates
- Tax law update
- Herbicide resistance
- And many more...

## **Auction and Dinner**

Auction and Dinner is Friday, Nov. 15, at 6 p.m. Social hour starts at 5:30 p.m. Donation forms can be found at [wawg.org](http://wawg.org).





Last month, Benton County growers held a fall meeting at the Horse Heaven Hills community center to hear guest speakers from the Farm Service Agency, the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers and the National Association of Wheat Growers.

rollment deadlines and staffing issues. Victoria Barth, the Farm Service Agency county executive director, also talked about program deadlines including the acreage reporting deadline of Dec. 15 and the Dec. 6 sign-up deadline for the Market Facilitation Program (MFP). She said the county office has signed up fewer growers for the MFP than expected at this point and encouraged growers who haven't signed up to contact her office.

Both Tachella and Barth talked about the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), saying that although there has been no official notice, they are expecting a general sign-up will likely happen later this year. Barth also told growers that due to higher yields, there will likely be no 2018 Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) payments for wheat. There will be a Price Loss Coverage (PLC) wheat payment, however. Barth also talked about changes to the ARC and PLC programs mandated by the 2018 Farm Bill, including the ability to elect a program yearly beginning in 2021, the use of Risk Management Agency (RMA) data in setting program payments and separating wheat yields by practice (irrigated vs. dryland).

Matt Doumit, standing in for Washington Association of Wheat Growers' (WAWG) lobbyist Diana Carlen, gave a state legislative update that included a list of items the ag community is monitoring, including carbon cap and trade legislation; a potential low carbon fuel standard bill and an initiative—I-976—that would lower fees on vehicle registrations. Doumit cautioned growers that if the initiative passes, state and local governments could lose billions of dollars that would normally be used to fund transportation projects.

Michelle Hennings, WAWG executive director, talked about the association's latest advocacy efforts, including taking part in interviews as part of Gov. Inslee's study on the lower Snake River dams. She also talked about a summer tour that took legislators on a tour of the Ice Harbor Dam to educate them on the importance of the dams to the region and let them see the efforts being made to help fish bypass the structure. She told the group that there's enough research and technology available in this day and age that the dams can co-exist with a

healthy environment. She added that the tour was very successful and made a positive impression on the legislators.

Hennings also touched on carbon, telling growers that while WAWG has been successful in helping head off potential regulations, the pressure by the environmental community to pass some sort of carbon legislation is building, and the association needs grower input on how to deal with it. She encouraged growers to attend the upcoming Tri-State Grain Growers Convention to help craft a resolution that guides WAWG's officers and staff in regards to carbon legislation.

WAWG recently met with officials from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to talk about how the department can regain the trust of growers after a situation several years ago that saw several Benton County DNR leases terminated with short notice. Hennings said DNR was very aware that the situation and how it was handled angered many growers. DNR officials asked WAWG to work together with them in finding a solution that would help better protect farmers in situations where leases are terminated early under DNR's "better and higher use" agreement clause.

"In my mind, it is very positive that they reached out to us for a solution," Hennings said.

Finally, Nicole Berg, treasurer of the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) and a Benton County grower, tackled national legislation, especially changes made to ARC/PLC and CRP by the 2018 Farm Bill. She warned growers that they could see some major changes in the next CRP general sign-up with regards to acreage caps and program payments. NAWG is also working on getting wheat quality issues



created by excess moisture eligible for disaster aid funds under the Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus. She said the idea has received some support from members of Congress. NAWG is also working with RMA to include a quality component in crop insurance.

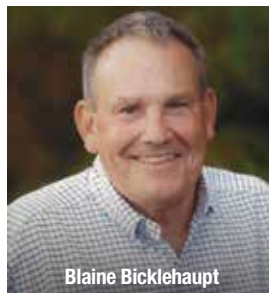
After the meeting, growers enjoyed a lunch provided by Chad and Anthony Smith. ■

## Growers' input needed

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service's (NASS) fall surveys are underway, and they encourage wheat producers to participate in the surveys when they receive them either by mail or telephone. The feedback producers provide can create a foundation for crop yield, production practices and help set up loan rates, disaster payments and crop insurance price elections. There are three NASS surveys a producer can expect to receive: the agricultural survey, which measures acreage, production and stocks; the agricultural resources management survey, which rotates crops each year with this year the survey seeking information on production practices and chemical use for barley, cotton, sorghum and wheat; and lastly, the county agricultural production survey, which is seeking data down to the county level for small grains crops. ■



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## Last call for 2019 convention

The 2019 Tri-State Grain Growers Convention is coming fast, but there's still time for growers to sign up. The convention will take place Nov. 13-16 at the Davenport Grand Hotel in Spokane, Wash. Growers can register online at [wawg.org/convention/registration/](http://wawg.org/convention/registration/).

Once again, Chad Prather will be emceeding. Prather, a comedian, armchair philosopher, musician and observational humorist, is known for his way with words. He has often been called a fast-talking combination of Lewis Grizzard and Jeff Foxworthy, and many will recognize him from his rapid-fire rants from the front seat of his truck. He is known for his comedic family stories told from an adult perspective onstage and is considered one of the country's fastest rising comedians and entertainers.

Jim Morris, Peter Zeihan and Stephen Censky will be the keynote speakers this year. Morris, a former minor league player who had retired and was teaching high school baseball, was challenged by his players to pursue his own goal of making the major leagues. He was soon playing for the Tampa Bay Devil Rays, a journey depicted in the movie, "The Rookie." A schoolteacher by trade, Morris is a loveable storyteller whose miracle story captivates and inspires audiences to never give up on a dream.

Zeihan is a global energy, demographic and security expert. His worldview marries the realities of geography and populations to a deep understanding of how global politics impact markets and economic trends. He routinely helps industry leaders navigate today's complex mix of geopolitical risks and opportunities.

Censky was sworn-in as deputy secretary at the U.S.

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Department of Agriculture (USDA) in 2017 after being unanimously confirmed by the Senate. He previously served for 21 years as CEO of the American Soybean Association. Later, he served in both the Reagan and George H. W. Bush administrations at the USDA, eventually serving as administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service where he was involved in running the nation's export programs.

Educational break-out sessions will cover weather forecasting, market outlook, budgeting, agronomic research, conservation, tax law, ag policy and many other topics.

Both the photo contest and the 15x40 program are returning this year.

The 15x40 program offers a free convention registration to 15 producers under 40 years of age who haven't attended the convention before. This is a first-come, first-served program. Producers will be responsible for their travel and lodging costs, although some counties have indicated a willingness to help with those costs. For more information and to register, call the WAWG office at (509) 659-0610.

We want to give our farmer shutterbugs a chance to show off their skills as part of our photo contest. The grand prize will be a free registration to the 2020 Tri-State Grain Growers Convention, which will be held in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Winning photos may be used in 2020 marketing materials and will be published in *Wheat Life*, *Oregon Wheat* and *Idaho Grain* magazines. Entries will be displayed throughout the 2019 convention area. Contest is open to convention registrants only, and photos must have been taken within the last 12 months. Submissions must be received by noon, Thursday, Nov. 14, 2019, at the convention registration desk. All entries must be matted in an 8x10 format (no glass). On the back, please write photographer's name, contact and caption information. Contact Lori Williams at lori@wawg.org or by phone at (509) 659-0610 for more information. ■



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\*Source: Collegeboard.org; *Trends in College Pricing 2018*

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# POLICY MATTERS

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## Taskforce team begins interviews for state's dam study

Back in September, Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), took part in a stakeholder interview held by a consulting team hired by the Washington State Governor's Office to talk about the potential impacts of breaching the lower Snake River dams.

The Washington State Legislature earmarked \$750,000 in the 2019-21 operating budget to have the governor's office "...contract with a neutral third party to establish a process for local, state, tribal and federal leaders and stakeholders to address issues associated with the possible breaching or removal of the lower Snake River dams in order to recover the Chinook salmon populations that serve as a vital food source for Southern Resident orcas."

According to the governor's website, the consulting team will provide neutral facilitation and evaluation services while:

- Gathering and summarizing previous analysis related to lower Snake River dam retention and removal or breaching;
- Engage with stakeholders, tribes, states, federal agencies, legislators and congressional delegation to gain their perspectives;
- Produce a draft and final report summarizing all the gathered information; and
- Gather public input following completion of the draft report through hosting open public workshops.

A draft report is expected in December 2019 with the final report submitted to the governor and legislature in February 2020.

The governor's office has said the report will not recommend whether or not the dams should be breached or removed, nor will it develop new or prioritize potential mitigation options.

"The interview went very well, and I was able to communicate how important the lower Snake River dams are to our industry," Hennings said. "We are completely opposed to any action regarding the dams that would negatively impact our ability to move grain to the ports in Portland and Vancouver. We are confident that dams and salmon can co-exist, and we believe breaching the Snake River dams will not have a noticeable impact on the

Puget Sound orcas. In addition, we believe this process is redundant and an example of not using taxpayer dollar efficiently as the study duplicates similar efforts currently underway by the federal government."

Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission, was also interviewed as part of the consulting team's process.

Here are some of the talking points WAWG staff prepared for Hennings' interview.

- The dams are essential to navigation and transportation of wheat and other cargo from Eastern Washington, eastern Oregon and Idaho. The Columbia-Snake River System is the largest gateway for wheat in the U.S. Nearly 90 percent of the wheat grown in Washington is exported, so having a direct line from the Inland Empire to the seaports on the lower Columbia River (and our global markets) is very important.
- Barging is a cheaper, more efficient and cleaner way to move wheat to the Columbia River seaports. A typical four-barge tow that travels down the Snake River hauls as much wheat as 1.4 unit trains and as much as 530 semitrucks. Barges also use far less fuel per ton of cargo moved than either trains or trucks.
- Keeping barging available also provides important competition to the rail and trucking industries. If growers didn't have the option to use barging, rail rates and trucking rates would likely go up since they would no longer have to compete with barging.
- Railroads might also favor higher value commodities like crude oil, so growers may have a harder time moving grain reliably on a limited amount of track. Growers also operate on much tighter margins than other commodities, so we are less able to absorb price increases.
- The loss of reliable, clean power production and increased transportation emissions will be taking our response to lessening greenhouse gases in the wrong direction. Unless we plan on replacing dams with nuclear power plants (with their own environmental issues), the only reason we can even realistically contemplate making Washington's power produc-





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- A host of issues impact salmon runs, including large human developments along the Snake and Columbia rivers (like Tri-Cities, Portland and Vancouver); pollution; ocean conditions; and lack of access to already existing upland habitat because of culverts. Ultimately, we don't know that simply removing the lower Snake River dams will improve salmon runs all that much. In addition, there are large dams both upriver and downriver of the lower Snake River dams, so there's no guarantee that simply removing the those dams will greatly improve fish runs.
- We think the place to start regarding salmon recovery is to focus on the low-hanging fruit that can be implemented now and doesn't harm our long-term infrastructure. Plus, we already know that they will have an immediate impact on fish. Those efforts include replacing fish-impassible culverts with passable culverts or bridges so fish can get to the habitat that already exists; continue salmon habitat restoration efforts in urban and suburban areas; increase and improve hatchery production of chinook and other salmon species; improve stormwater and wastewater treatment infrastructure; and continue to upgrade the fish passage infrastructure on the dams, like better fish ladders and "fish friendly" turbine upgrades. ■

## Columbia River Treaty negotiations continue

Columbia River Treaty negotiations between the U.S. and Canada are ongoing, with the latest round taking place in September in British Columbia. According to a press release from the government of B.C., delegations from tribes of both nations presented on ecosystem work collaboration. Other issues discussed were flood-risk management and hydropower. The U.S. team is led by chief negotiator, Jill Smail, of the U.S. Department of State.

Negotiations are closed to the public, and any information released by the U.S. State Department tends to be general in nature, explained Kristin Meira, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA). One thing that is certain, however, is that no agreement between the U.S. and Canada has been reached yet.

"PNWA and other groups are vocal in our support for a timely conclusion to the negotiations, especially as we continue the march toward 2024 and the expiration of the current assured storage for flood risk reduction," Meira

said in an email. "Northwest navigation, shipping and grower interests are strongly supportive of a new flood control agreement that a) preserves the current approach to high and low flows, and b) provides certainty for the coming decades of operations on the river for the mutual benefit of U.S. and Canadian interests."

PNWA is a stakeholder group that works to make sure the region's waterways are efficient, reliable and environmentally sustainable while supporting navigation, energy, trade and economic development interests throughout the Pacific Northwest.

The ninth round of Columbia River Treaty talks is scheduled for Nov. 19-20 in the U.S. ■

## Schrier introduces USDA funding bill for research

House Agriculture Committee member **Rep. Kim Schrier (D-Wash.)** joined with two of her colleagues, Rep. Jimmy Pannetta (D-Calif.) and Rep. Cheri Bustos (D-Ill), to introduce a bill that would authorize an annual 5 percent funding increase at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA).



In a press release, the group said the bill, The America Grows Act, restores the U.S. public's commitment to funding agricultural research. In recent years, publicly funded research has declined as privately funded research has grown. The press release also points out that among high-income countries, the U.S. share of publicly funded research has declined from 35 percent in 1960 to less than 25 percent in 2013.

"We have seen outstanding work come out of our research institutions, including Washington State University. With agriculture as one of the main drivers of our state's economy, research and research funding are increasingly vital for farmers and growers to keep up with the changing economy and climate. The investment made by the America Grows Act will allow for consistent funding crucial for the future of agriculture in our state and country," Schrier said.

The bill would fund research specifically at the Agriculture Research Service, USDA's chief in-house scientific research agency; the National Institute for Food and Agriculture, which funds external research through a nationwide network of land-grant colleges and universi-



ties, agricultural experiment stations, schools of forestry, schools of veterinary medicine and cooperative extension experts; the National Agricultural Statistics Service, which collects and reports statistics on U.S. agriculture; and the Economic Research Service, which provides economic and policy analysis on farming, ranching, food, conservation practices, farm management, commodity markets and rural economic development.

## NAWG joins farm group on USDA WHIP+ letter

On Oct. 16, 2019, NAWG, along with other farm groups, sent a letter to USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue asking that the agency make available the fullest appropriate disaster assistance under the recently-enacted Wildfires and Hurricanes Indemnity Program Plus (WHIP+) as well as under other applicable USDA programs. Additionally, the group urged the USDA to provide flexibility in the crop insurance program to assist growers who face severe quality problems and who might not be able to harvest their crop because of abnormal weather conditions. ■



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## NATIONAL WHEAT OUTREACH PLAN READY FOR ACTION

From the National Wheat Foundation website

Farmer-leaders of the National Wheat Foundation and the National Association of Wheat Growers have developed a National Wheat Action Plan to serve as a catalyst to increase public and private wheat research and improve wheat productivity and farmer profitability. Facing decreased profitability in comparison to competing crops, lack of significant productivity gains, increased global competition and negative consumer sentiment regarding the healthfulness of wheat-based products, the leaders recognize that current efforts are insufficient to generate the turnaround the U.S. wheat industry needs.

The action plan will launch a process to attract interest, support and investment of private capital to stimulate increased expenditure on private and public wheat research and technology transfer and to expedite adoption by wheat farmers. This vehicle will evolve to become a substantial annual revenue source to be used primarily for wheat research and technology transfer.

The priority areas are:

- Unify the industry around common goals and strengthen industry relationships;
- Educate, demonstrate and motivate farmers to realize the value of optimizing management practices to maximize both productivity and profitability; and
- Design, develop and deploy increased risk management tools for U.S. wheat growers to improve their opportunity for profit.

## HERE'S TO YOUR HEALTH!

A record-breaking crowd attended the Inland NW Craft Beer Festival on Sept. 20-21, held at Avista Stadium in Spokane, Wash. Roughly 400 people came by our booth. We distributed more than 250 information cards; more than 300 "WaWheat" stickers; 300 "No Barley, No Beer" stickers; two dozen wheat hats; and signed up more than 70 followers on our Facebook page. We had more than 750 entries into our custom cornhole set drawing (some people qualified to enter more than once). We had a handful of volunteers help at the booth including Mary Palmer Sullivan, Sandi Swannack, Ben Barstow, Bob Brueggeman, Anthony and Tessa Wicks and Ryan Rowe. John Schuler and Kara Rowe were staff at the booth. Thanks to the Washington Association of Wheat Growers for letting us use their spinner wheel. The cornhole set attracted a lot of visitors. Thanks to the Washington Grain Commission for ordering shirts and bringing stickers. Each person walked away with grain facts and material. ■



### Calendar:

- Tri-State Grain Growers Convention **Nov. 13-16, 2019**, in Spokane, Wash.

### Reminders:

- The National Wheat Foundation is now accepting applications for the Jerry Minore Scholarship, honoring students pursuing a career in agriculture. The scholarship is available to both high school and college students for the 2019-2020 academic year with an application deadline of **Dec. 01, 2019**. For more information, visit [wheatfoundation.org/education-and-scholarships/](http://wheatfoundation.org/education-and-scholarships/).
- Remember the Foundation in your charitable giving. Go to [wawheat.org](http://wawheat.org) to find out more about ways that you can support your industry.

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FALL'S WET, COOL WEATHER THREATENED TO LEAVE CROPS

# UNHARVESTED

By Trista Crossley

In “normal” years, by mid-October, most of Eastern Washington’s wheat has been harvested, and growers are wrapping up winter wheat seeding. Unfortunately, this year is anything but normal.

As October rolled around, there were reports of thousands of acres of spring wheat and chickpeas (also called garbanzo beans or garbs) still to be harvested across Eastern Washington, especially in the Palouse region. The culprit is moisture. Thanks to a cooler summer and regular rain showers that began in August and extended through October—not to mention an early October snow storm that set snowfall records at the Spokane, Wash.,

airport—the opportunities for wheat, especially spring wheat, and garbanzo beans (garbs) to reach the required level of dryness to be harvested were scattered and unpredictable.

At the beginning of October, Clint Myers, a grower from south Spokane County, was sitting on nearly 500 acres of spring wheat that was still too wet to harvest.

“We just haven’t had a real hot summer. August was pretty cool. There was a stretch of about 10 days where it was kind of hot, barely into the 90s. Then it cooled down, and September was unseasonably cool the whole month. With those cool temperatures, it’s hard for crops to mature and ripen. We go about every three or four days and catch





a shower that slows it down,” he said. “The tough deal now is that local co-ops and elevators are trying to work with growers. They’ve raised the (acceptable) moisture levels from 12.5 percent up to 14 percent, but there’s still wheat out there wetter than that.”

Even for growers who were able to get their wheat harvested, the cool, wet weather raised the likelihood of quality issues.

“We are fortunate enough that we have home storage with aeration,” Myers said. “We can put the wetter wheat in storage, turn on the fans and dry it down. It still might have sprout and falling numbers issues, but at least we can get it dried to a level the elevator will take. Unfortunately, many growers don’t have any home storage. They have wheat or garbs that need to be cut, but even if they can cut it, there’s no one to take it.”

A similar situation exists with garbs—with an added complication. For many farmers, especially in the Palouse, winter wheat typically follows garbs in their rotations. But how do you plant your winter wheat if your garbs are still on the ground?

## Beans not so dry

At the beginning of October, Todd Scholz, vice president

of research and member services for the USA Dry Pea and Lentil Council and a grower from Colfax, Wash., said 50 to 60 percent of the garb crop—approximately 60,000 acres—was still not cut in the Palouse, which encompasses Northern Idaho as well as Eastern Washington. Once again, moisture was the biggest problem, with most elevators only accepting garbs that were between 13 and 14 percent moisture. Scholz said he had talked to the Washington State Department of Agriculture’s inspection service, which reported they were seeing samples with moisture percentages in the high 20s.

“One of the problems of growers is we are used to having a dry crop and generally don’t store it ourselves,” Scholz said. “There’s no farm storage for pulses. Processors are responsible for making sure the crop doesn’t spoil or explode or whatever else it might do. Our situation is pretty dire, pretty worrisome. The other thing is we need to plant winter wheat in the ground right now. Of course, moisture may be delaying our planting too, but having a crop (already) on the field makes it even more complicated.”

Fortunately, when *Wheat Life* checked in with Scholz several weeks later, the situation was greatly improved. Scholz reported that thanks to dryer weather and actions taken by local processors to set up drying facilities, it appeared that approximately 90 percent of the garbs in



A spring wheat crop in Spokane County that remained unharvested as of mid-October. A few days of dry weather in the middle of the month gave many Spokane and Whitman County producers the opportunity to harvest the rest of their wheat. But for some fields, like this one, it may have been too little too late.



the Palouse were going to get harvested, albeit much later than normal.

"Generally they are coming in at a good quality, considering," he explained. "And yields are average or better."

One bright spot in the situation is that other areas that grow garbs, such as Canada and Montana, are also running into weather-delayed harvest and quality issues. Scholz said he's heard that some processors are advising growers to harvest their crop if they can because a supply shortage may make the crop more valuable than it would be if destroyed, especially if the garbs are high quality.

"Hopefully, those opportunities will arise, but farmers are going to lose that opportunity if they don't harvest them," he said.

Gary Bailey, a grower near St. John, Wash., and chairman of the Washington Grain Commission, was one of those growers who, as of early October, had a garb crop preventing him from planting the last of his winter wheat.

"We have 155 acres of garbs that have never, on a moisture basis, gotten dry enough to cut. We are a week away from the final insurance day, and it doesn't look like they are even going to be close by then. So what we are doing right now is we are trying to figure out what our insurance policy provides for us. How we can move on to get this crop cleared to plant our fall wheat?" he said.

### A question of crop insurance

That date Bailey is referring to is the end of insurance period, which for garbs, was Oct. 15. For spring wheat, it was Oct. 31. After those dates, if a grower hasn't filed a claim with their insurance company, they have no insurance coverage, said Gretchen Strasser, president of Haight Crop Insurance in Spokane.

In general, producers have two options when it comes to dealing with crops that are likely to be poor quality. They can harvest the crop and hope to find an elevator or co-op that will take it, or they can destroy the crop. The first step, Strasser said, is to contact the insurance company and have the crop appraised by a loss adjustor. Sometimes, if a grower thinks they can get the crop harvested, the insurance company will allow for an extension of time to harvest it. On the other hand, if harvesting the crop is not an option, a producer can accept the insurance loss and destroy the crop in some way, usually by plowing it under or seeding another crop into it.

Bailey said he had filed a claim with his insurance company and was waiting for the loss adjustor to appraise his garbs. He said he was likely to destroy them rather than try to harvest them.

"It doesn't make any sense to harvest them just to dump

them in a pile," Bailey explained. "We can get rid of the crop cheaper than harvesting it. If the beans are out of condition, which I suspect they are, they aren't worth anything. So why spend the time to harvest them when you can't get rid of them?"

As is normal for crop insurance, Bailey couldn't make any decisions until after the visit by the loss adjustor. He hoped that visit happens sooner rather than later so he could move forward with getting his seeding done.

Unfortunately, destroying the crop rather than harvesting it sets up more potential problems for farmers to deal with. With both wheat and garbs, producers will have to deal with the plant mass left on the field as well as any volunteer plants. Most farmers will likely turn to chemical or mechanical methods to do that, which could incur additional input costs.

"Let's say the adjuster says this is what your insurance is going to look like and you can do whatever you want with this crop. We move on, and we get that done, and it could settle in and rain and rain and rain. My point is, the longer you wait, the less (winter wheat) crop you are going to have," he explained. "We are fortunate that this is a pretty small portion of our operation. I really feel sorry for some



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of those guys closer to Pullman that that's their winter wheat ground, and they can't get those garbs off."

Besides the end of insurance date, there's another date winter wheat growers need to keep in mind in this situation—the final planting date by which winter wheat must be planted if a grower has elected the winter coverage endorsement. That date varies by county, but in Whitman County it is Nov. 15, while in Spokane County, it was Oct. 31.

"You can still plant after that date, and it (the crop) would still be insurable, it's just not covered under the winter coverage endorsement," explained Ben Thiel, director of the Risk Management Agency's (RMA) regional office in Spokane.

If a farmer planted winter wheat and lost the crop, without the winter coverage endorsement, in order to maintain insurance, the farmer would have to replant (most likely spring wheat). Crop insurance would provide a payment to help with replanting costs. If a producer has the winter coverage endorsement and they lose the winter crop, they are eligible for either a replanting payment or an indemnity. As Thiel put it, the winter cover endorsement "... gives you the ability to get an indemnity payment for the loss of a winter crop before the spring final planting date."

Thiel said RMA is hearing from growers and insurance companies that adverse weather is severely affecting this year's crops, "...resulting in farmers being unable to mechanically harvest their crop or that harvested production has been or potentially would be rejected by the buyer or elevator because of moisture levels."

Thiel said he understands the concerns expressed by growers about wanting to get their winter wheat planted on the garb acreage, adding that if a producer believes they have an insurable cause of loss, they should file a notice of loss and talk to a loss adjuster about what options there may be with the current crop.

"As far as the next insurable crop, the small grains policy for wheat doesn't require that they should have planted winter wheat. We don't dictate or know what

## Updates

**Clint Myers** was finally able to get his wheat harvested a few weeks after speaking to *Wheat Life* as did many other farmers in his area, thanks to a few days of dryer weather. He said moisture levels are still a little high, and both the wheat and garbs likely have quality issues. "It's been a real community effort in my area with a lot of neighbors helping neighbors to get done no matter what."

**Gary Bailey**, the farmer that had 155 acres of garbs that he had filed a loss claim on, was eventually able to get it appraised. A sample taken to the Washington State Department of Agriculture grading office confirmed the moisture content of the garbs was too high. In addition, the crop was unmarketable due to quality issues. Bailey was able to destroy the crop and get his winter wheat planted. He said he is still working with his insurance company to fully understand the coverage he'll receive.

farmers' intentions are with winter wheat. Since either winter or spring type is insurable, if they are unable to plant winter wheat, they can still plant spring wheat," he said.

Loss adjusters are sent out by the insurance companies. Thiel said the loss adjusters will visit a field to inspect the crop and work with the producer to identify available options, such as intentions to harvest or not; perform an appraisal; and take samples (if applicable) for grading. If a producer needs to destroy the crop and can't wait for the appraisal, they can contact their insurance company and discuss arrangements to leave representative sample areas that the loss adjuster can appraise. The appraised potential production is what is used as a yield on a producer's actual production history in cases where the crop would go unharvested. If a producer destroys the crop without an appraisal or leaves no sample areas, the associated acres would have a yield of zero for the actual production history. Thiel advised producers to consult with their insurance companies before taking any action to destroy the crop to help avoid negative outcomes.

"RMA is listening to farmers about harvest and crop condition concerns," Thiel said. "We are attempting to

do more field visits to obtain first-hand observations of harvest challenges and crop damage. I appreciate meeting with insured producers on their property and letting them show me and explain in their own terms the challenges they face. RMA is communicating with grower organizations to understand the magnitude of the issue and the areas impacted and in turn, keeping leadership within RMA abreast of the situation. RMA is also working with the insurance companies to address their questions to help facilitate consistency of the loss adjustment process."

Thiel also said the RMA regional office has been contacting agricultural commodity buyers to help insurance companies identify possible alternative places for farmers to take their harvested crops.

Myers, the south Spokane County producer who was still waiting to harvest the last of his spring wheat, said all the old timers talk about 1977 or 1978 as the last time the



year was so wet that a large number of crops were left unharvested.

"We were dying for some rain last year. There was a two-month stretch where there was no rain recorded in September and October. This year is the exact opposite," Myers said. "We are going to get our wheat cut and get it dried down to a percentage that we'll be able to sell. The value is to be determined. We are not going to make any money, but hopefully we'll break even." ■

*Editor's note: As of press time, there was no estimate of how many acres of wheat was still left unharvested across Eastern Washington.*



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# Taking the reins

A FAMILIAR FACE VOTED IN AS EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR AT THE STATE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Earlier this year, members of the Washington State Conservation Commission (SCC) welcomed back a former employee as the new executive director.

**Carol Smith** had spent 15 years at the SCC—from 1998 to 2014—managing the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program and other science-related issues. She left the SCC to take a position at the Washington State Department of Ecology heading up their environmental assessment program. She has also worked for the state's department of fish and wildlife, the Morehouse School of Medicine and a chemistry lab in California.

Smith grew up in on the west side of the state and holds various biological science degrees.

The SCC is the coordinating agency for Washington state's 45 conservation districts, which provide voluntary, incentive-based conservation programs to landowners. The SCC also helps the conservation districts work with other partners and is responsible for distributing state funds to the conservation districts. Smith replaced Mark Clark who retired as executive director in January.

In an effort to get to know Smith a little better, *Wheat Life* emailed a list of questions to her. Here are her answers.

## You had previously worked for the SCC. What brought you back?

There are two main reasons. Nothing is more rewarding than seeing the tangible results of a best management practice—to see a ribbon of forest along a river that wasn't there 20 years ago or seeing conservation tillage in the Palouse, knowing the value of the soils that are saved for future agriculture. Even being a small part of the great effort it takes to put that work on the ground is a legacy worth striving for.

The second reason is the sense of family that exists in the conservation district work. People involved in conservation district work truly know and understand the value of relationships and trust. Their very success depends upon trusting relationships with landowners to put voluntary practices into place. Those high values placed upon relationships and trust spill over into our day-to-day work



and life and create a sense of family that just doesn't exist in many other work environments.

## What are some of the biggest challenges facing the SCC and the state's conservation districts?

The environmental problems that we are facing now are increasingly complex, especially with an increased human population that continues to place pressure on our resources and agricultural land. For example, water supply is one of the toughest challenges now and into the future. There is increasing demand on water supplies that are changing in timing and quantity, such as the declining groundwater levels in the Columbia Basin and the Palouse. Water quality problems increase with human population growth and land development and remains a huge challenge. Legal action adds to the complexity of our work as happened recently with the Hirst Decision. Adequate funding continues to limit our ability to engage as much as we should and to work with landowners on solutions to these problems.

Because of the complexity, no single entity or agency can solve these problems alone. We all have expertise to bring to the table to develop workable solutions, and we all need to be active partners in developing solutions.

## What are some of your short-term goals for the SCC?

The items that we are prioritizing at this time are to:

- Improve our relationship with sister agencies and others so that we are recognized as an engaged, collaborative partner in solving environmental problems.
- Work for increased funding for conservation district work with a priority on technical assistance.
- Lay the groundwork for a state-funded riparian restoration program that leverages the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP), fills the gaps that CREP doesn't address and provides increased flexibility for landowners.
- Support funding and work on soil health.
- Continue to support existing programs that are impor-



tant to conservation districts: Regional Conservation Partnership Program, CREP, Shellfish, Natural Resource Investments, Farmland Preservation, Voluntary Stewardship Program, Livestock Technical Assistance and irrigation efficiencies.

### What are some of your long-term goals for the SCC?

Long-term goals are to:

- Fully implement a state-funded riparian restoration program targeting high priority streams that supplements CREP as well as funds those who aren't a good fit for CREP. This would be a voluntary, incentive program that is flexible and suitable for smaller parcels, as well as provide additional incentives to increase participation in CREP.
- Demonstrate actual improvement in water quality or salmon habitat in the targeted riparian approach through monitoring with partners.
- Have a funded soil health program across the state that provides conservation districts with additional technical assistance to work with landowners on participation in soil health best management practices.

- Continue to work to right-size the funding for existing programs.
- Have all conservation districts in the State of Washington adequately funded.
- Increase training and certification of district planners for our key programs. This demonstrates our commitment to high quality expertise.
- Ultimately, we, the conservation district family, want to be recognized more broadly as the go-to source of expertise in working with landowners to develop solutions to environmental issues.

### Soil health is in the spotlight right now, but in the last legislative session, the Soil Health Initiative failed to get full funding. What are your thoughts on that, and where does that project go from here?

The Washington Department of Agriculture is working with partners, including us, to put forth a soils health decision package and potential legislation again in the next session. We will be partners to actively support this work.

There seemed to be two hurdles last year. One was a



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lack of agreement with stakeholders. We are working on that hurdle right now. We are developing the required gap analysis requested of us when the legislation failed. In that process, we are working closely with stakeholders and our partner, the Washington Department of Agriculture, to not only complete the gap analysis, but more importantly, have those necessary conversations to help us all come to a more common understanding of this issue.

The second issue is how to communicate about soil health. Those unfamiliar with agriculture are often not aware of the benefits of soil health. We are also trying to be mindful to match the communication to the audience to make the topic more relatable. For example, knowing that the Governor's Office has a high priority on climate change, we can communicate with them about how certain best management practices, such as composting, cover crops and forested buffers, can sequester carbon in a very significant way. Another great message about the value of soil health comes from the case studies that show that healthy soils can improve farm yields. This message would be useful when talking about funding for soil health with legislators who focus on economic and agricultural viability.

**You deal with many legislators who represent urban areas and maybe don't understand how agriculture works and the need to fund voluntary conservation projects. How do you communicate the idea that a viable agricultural industry can contribute to a healthy environment rather than damaging it?**

There are many examples of how agriculture relates to the urban environment. The obvious one is that we all depend upon agriculture for food for our very survival. But also, our healthiest foods are often those locally grown, and it is important to connect healthy local food to people, including those in urban areas. The Food Policy Forum is working on that very issue, and the Washington Department of Agriculture is our partner in that effort.

With respect to a healthy environment, agriculture that employs best management practices can, depending on the practices, result in clean water, fish and wildlife habitat. Some of these practices also sequester carbon, a pollutant caused by a variety of human actions such as increased carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. And most

*Voluntary conservation means working with, not against, a landowner. No one knows their land better than the landowner, and that knowledge is crucial to designing practices that work well with that parcel of land and their specific farming activity. We need that local knowledge.*

of this pollution isn't caused by agriculture. This means that agricultural best management practices can have a public benefit to reduce pollution, some of which comes from those in the urban, industrial and residential environments.

However, to accomplish those environmental goals, we need adequate funding and strong voluntary, incentive programs to encourage significant participation. Agricultural lands are well suited to help support environmental goals because we strive for healthy soils that can also grow pollinator plants, riparian forests and other practices that support the public at-large. Once land is heavily developed with roads, buildings

and other urban, residential and industrial infrastructure, it is very costly and difficult for land to provide those environmental benefits. And to achieve those benefits, we must have viable agriculture and forestry.

**Along those same lines, how do you communicate with legislators and the public that voluntary conservation can often work as well or better than mandatory regulations?**

Voluntary conservation means working with, not against, a landowner. No one knows their land better than the landowner, and that knowledge is crucial to designing practices that work well with that parcel of land and their specific farming activity. We need that local knowledge.

Also, when a landowner voluntarily puts practices on the ground, they have buy-in. They are much more likely to maintain the practice and ensure its success. They've helped choose and design the practices and want them to work.

For example, when I used to manage the Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program, which restores trees and shrubs along streams as a voluntary incentive program, I would do site visits along with conservation district staff who developed the projects. Often, landowners would take time off from their normal day to walk the buffers with us and would point out things, such as the increased wildlife and birds they now saw due to the buffer, or the cooling effect the trees had in hot summer days. At the end of the visit, they always wanted to know "How is my buffer doing?" Of course, it was doing great. Landowners who care like that are tending to the buffer as though it is part of their farming operation. The public benefits from the improved fish and wildlife habitat and carbon




sequestration, and much of that public benefit is because of caring landowners who go the extra mile to meticulously care for that buffer that we helped install.

It comes down to having a voluntary incentive system that results in engaged private landowners who actively try to improve an environmental condition. That's powerful! Those landowners serve as examples for others, increasing participation and results. Solving problems at the local level with active participation from landowners is a much better approach to dealing with issues on private lands.

The public benefits at a lesser cost with a voluntary incentive approach because often, landowners cost share (pay) for part of the practices they install. They have skin in the game too. And the public gets that local knowledge and greater care and maintenance of the practice as a bonus. ■

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# Wheat remains third in value in state

## AG STATISTICS SERVICE RELEASES 2018 VALUE OF CROPS FOR WASHINGTON STATE

In 2018, most of the top 10 Washington state crops according to production value remained unchanged from the year before. Apples topped the list, followed by milk and then wheat.

According to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), the value of the Evergreen State's 2018 agricultural production totaled \$9.67 billion, down 2 percent from the revised previous year's value of \$9.86 billion.

Apples had a 2018 value of \$2.19 billion, which was down 10 percent from the previous year, and represented 23 percent of the total agricultural value in 2018. In 2017, apple's share of the total was 25 percent.

Milk remained in the second position and had value of production totaling \$1.13 billion dollars in 2018, down 5 percent from 2017. All wheat value of production remained in third position in the rankings with a 2018 value of \$845 million, up 22 percent from the previous year.

Potatoes, valued at \$788 million, were the fourth highest value in the state. This represents a 15 percent increase from the previous year. Cattle and calves rounded out the top five with a value of \$652 million, down 3 percent from the previous year. These five commodities had a combined value of \$5.60 billion, or 58 percent of the 2018 value for all

commodities (excluding government payments). The same five commodities in 2017 had a combined value of \$5.67 billion, also 58 percent of the total value.

Record high values of production were established for all grapes. Value of all grape production in 2018 was \$361 million, up 13 percent from the previous year and slightly higher than the previous record high in 2016. Egg production entered the top 10, with a value of \$241 million in 2018, an increase of 70 percent from the previous year. There were notable commodities outside the top 10 that showed significant increases in value from the previous year. The value of onions increased 10 percent to \$178 million in 2018. Blueberry value increased 21 percent from 2017 to \$139 million in 2018. Barley value of production increased 55 percent to \$21.5 million in 2018. The value of canola, at \$20.3 million, increased 23 percent from the previous year.

Five of the top 10 commodities declined in value from the previous year, including apples; cattle and calves; hops; and sweet cherries. Other notable commodities that declined in value in 2018 were pears, down 15 percent to \$211 million; raspberries, down 38 percent to \$35.9 million; and green peas, down 21 percent to \$22.8 million. ■

Commodity	Rank		Value of production			% change 2018/2017
	2018	2017	2016	2017	2018	
Apples	1	1	\$2.35 billion	\$2.43 billion	\$2.19 billion	-10.1
Milk <sup>1</sup>	2	2	\$1.1 billion	\$1.19 billion	\$1.13 billion	-4.8
Wheat, all	3	3	\$657 million	\$691 million	\$845 million	22.2
Potatoes	4	4	\$813 million	\$687 million	\$788 million	14.8
Cattle and calves	5	5	\$704 million	\$672 million	\$652 million	-2.9
Hay, all	6	6	\$479 million	\$516 million	\$519 million	.7
Hops	7	8	\$382 million	\$459 million	\$428 million	-6.8
Cherries, sweet	8	7	\$491 million	\$475 million	\$426 million	-10.1
Grapes, all	9	9	\$360 million	\$319 million	\$361 million	13.2
Eggs	10	12	\$117 million	\$141 million	\$241 million	70.2
Value of crop production			\$7.37 billion	\$7.37 billion	\$7.16 billion	-2.9
Value of livestock production			\$2.43 billion	\$2.48 billion	\$2.51 billion	1.3
Total value of production, all commodities			\$9.8 billion	\$9.86 billion	\$9.67 billion	-1.9

<sup>1</sup>Value at average returns per 100 pounds of milk in combined marketings of milk and cream plus value of milk used for home consumption and milk fed to calves.

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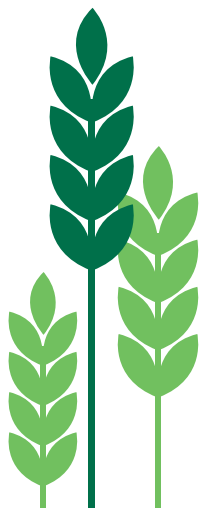
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Kevin Kaelin takes advantage of a rare dry day to get his winter wheat seeded near Mead, Wash., in Spokane County.



# CHAIRMAN

## WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

By Gary Bailey



When I was growing up, wheat and barley went together like bread and butter. In 1985, more than a million acres of barley was planted in Washington state.

Nowadays, barley has become more of a niche crop with just 85,000 acres harvested in 2019. What happened? Economics, driven by higher yielding spring wheat varieties, has played a large role in the reduction of acres. The geographical expansion of corn across the country, not to mention its increased productivity, has also had an impact.

Other factors include the government's decision to reduce dependence on the PL 480 program, which subsidized barley exports, as well as the introduction of Clearfield herbicide-tolerant wheat, which has kept barley out of rotations due to residual herbicides in the soil. Note: The introduction of a Clearfield-tolerant barley—Survivor—now gives producers the option of using barley as part of the Clearfield Production System.

When making planting decisions, however, barley rarely comes out on top in terms of income potential. Although it's a great rotational crop for breaking disease cycles and providing a boost to the subsequent wheat crop, those benefits must be balanced against the bottom line. It's true rotational benefits have a dollar value, and we should be more cognizant of that value, but short-term pain for long-term gain is difficult when each year is a struggle.

Although feed barley dominates acreage grown in Washington, the crop has multiple uses, owing to its ability to be sold for food as well as malt for beer. A diet that includes barley is recognized as heart healthy by reducing cholesterol and blood pressure levels. Unlike oatmeal, however, companies haven't jumped on the barley bandwagon, and there are few food products available—and less marketing of them.

Growing malt barley is more lucrative from a price standpoint, but my personal experience has been that current all-malt varieties, that is, those accepted by the big brewers, don't yield as well as newer varieties. That, along with stringent standards, makes it a high-risk crop to raise under dryland conditions.

As for positive barley news, the Washington Grain Commission's (WGC) Mary Palmer Sullivan was recently honored with a malt type variety developed at Washington State University (WSU) named in her honor. Mary is a fierce advocate of barley at both the local and national level, and the honor is well deserved. "Palmer" was bred specifically for the craft beer market, where

standards are not as exacting as they are for the big boys, and craft brewers also use more barley in their recipes. But to really move the acreage needle, I believe we'll have to interest the big beer players like Anheuser-Busch and MillerCoors, which may be possible given new malt varieties coming through the WSU pipeline.

Great Western Malting in Vancouver, Wash., is the largest malt house in the state, although there are others malting on a smaller scale. The move to "buy local" could play well for barley growers as the other key ingredient in making beer—hops—is a prominent Washington state crop.

As barley breeder Kevin Murphy has taken on new responsibilities at WSU, Robert Brueggeman of North Dakota State University will replace him. Brueggeman received his master's and doctorate degrees at WSU and is excited to return to the area, having grown up here. During his eight-year tenure as barley breeder, Murphy gave us two new food barleys: Meg's Song and Havener; three feed types: Muir, Lyon and Survivor; and the craft malt variety, Palmer.

In 2009, the Washington Wheat Commission merged with the Washington Barley Commission to create the WGC, adding two barley representatives to the board. Ben Barstow of Palouse, along with Kevin Klein of Edwall, are the current barley representatives, and I know each of them are committed to improving the economics of the crop as we proceed into the future.

Barstow, who was featured in episode 130 of the Wheat All About It! podcast, spoke about barley as he planted a feed variety that was destined to be pearled and used in pet food. Check out his conversation with Scott Yates by going to the WGC website at [wagrain.org](http://wagrain.org) and clicking on summaries at the bottom of the page to find the episode entitled, "Ben Barstow's Love Affair With Farming."

Since pioneers came into the country and began planting wheat more than 130 years ago, it has maintained its status as our preferred crop. But over time, disease and weed pressures led to the need for rotational alternatives. For most of our farming history, barley was our only option, but other crops are lately proving their value, such as canola and triticale, and pulse crops, including chickpeas. How barley will stack up in the future is difficult to gauge. But many factors may be poised to impact production including health endorsements from celebrities, tweets by "influencers," even a grassroots campaign extolling "buy local," which is to say it wouldn't take much to put the old timer back on top again. ■

## Trade teams integral to selling PNW wheat

GRAIN COMMISSION STAFF DISCUSSES THE CARE AND FEEDING OF CUSTOMERS

One of the most important activities the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) undertakes over the course of a year is hosting trade teams. More funding may be devoted to other line items in the budget, but the amount of time WGC staff and commissioners devote to planning, hosting and summarizing trade team visits eclipses all other pursuits.

U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) is an important conduit for trade team visits to the Northwest. Most, but not all groups are proposed for visits by USW overseas staff and coordinated through the organization's Washington, D.C., or Portland, Ore., offices. In many cases, USW can use Foreign Market Development or Market Access Program funds appropriated by Congress to help defray the cost of visits from current and potential customers.

Beginning in 2012 when Glen Squires took the reins as CEO at the WGC, trade team visits have become a more important focus of the organization, especially teams from Southeast Asia, per the commission's direction.

"The Pacific Northwest (PNW) has so much to offer. Within a relatively small footprint, our region exposes trade teams to the breadth and depth of wheat industry infrastructure, growing conditions, emphasis on quality and the research that keeps farmers in business and customers prospering," Squires said.

With that in mind, the executive staff of the WGC sat down together recently to talk about the care and feeding of trade teams, and why so much energy is expended on them. Mary Palmer Sullivan, vice president, and Joe Bippert, program director, often tag team trade teams, working together and separately to create itineraries and address educational components.

Nowadays, Squires leads only the highest profile visits or those addressing specific challenges. Scott Yates, director of communications and producer relations, pulls trade team duties when others are unavailable. He also drops in on meetings and dinners, as well as hosts the Nisshin Crop Quality Survey team every August.

Asked how trade teams are organized, Sullivan said every group is different depending on the size of the team, length of stay and the part of the world they live in. That's because different USW overseas offices provide different kinds of information and background about the travelers.

"We try to find out what they want to see, whether it's rail loading or barge loading facilities, research institutions or inspection agencies or just meeting with farmers. Throughout the process, our message emphasizes the quality wheat produced in the region. We don't just tell them, we show them by bringing teams



Harvest doesn't stop—except for trade teams!



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to Washington State University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (ARS)," she said, explaining the Pullman visits serve a dual purpose. "We want teams to understand that farmers' investment in research is paying off."

Squires reiterated Sullivan's point about WSU and the ARS.

"Meeting with staff at the Western Wheat Quality Lab (WWQL) is often on a trade team's list of things they want to do before they even get here. They also want to meet with breeders to better understand the breeding process, and why it's so important. WSU is a critical stop in the PNW," he said.

Although some teams stay in the region for as long as a week, others only come for a day. Bippert said that makes for a different experience, but "there's a lot you can cram into a short amount of time."

In general, Bippert said trade teams come in two flavors.

"Many of the individuals who accompany teams to the PNW are here for first time. For these newcomers, certain aspects of an itinerary are going to be more valuable than others. For some, if we take them to a wheat field, it may be their first experience seeing a head of wheat growing, plus just seeing the vastness of farming operations is an eye-opening experience," he said, adding that trips to the top of Steptoe Butte aren't just about providing a vantage point to take photographs.

"The view demonstrates the scale of what we're working with," he said, adding that more seasoned groups with several visits under their belt may be looking at the specific quality of the crop in a particular year or addressing a particular challenge.

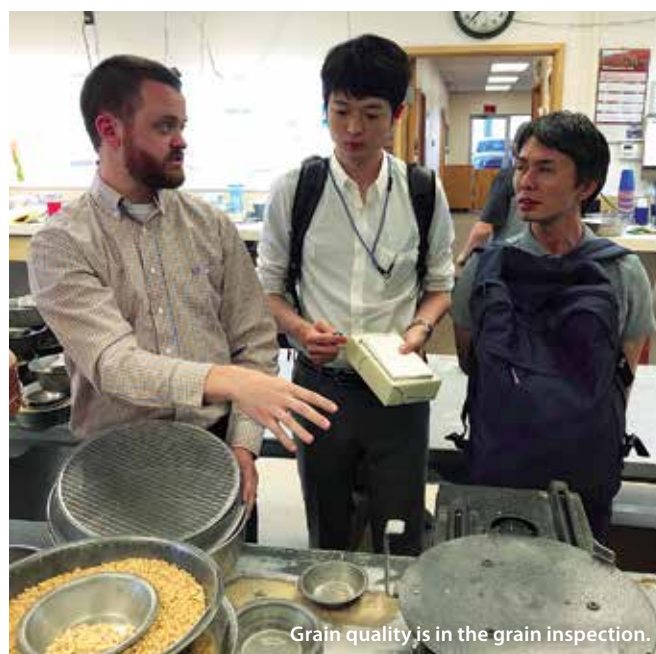
"Regardless of the type of team it is, I look at any visit as part of a relationship-building exercise to create a stronger customer connection," he said.

In terms of introducing teams to the region's transportation infrastructure, Sullivan said having four shuttle train loading facilities located within 60 miles of the Spokane airport has been a boon, particularly HighLine Grain's shuttle train loader, which is just minutes away.

"HighLine is often more convenient,



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but we may also stop at the McCoy shuttle loader on the way to Pullman or Templin Terminal outside Ritzville, depending on how the schedule works. Lately, it's been more convenient to visit HighLine—and it is the newest, latest and greatest, so we like to showcase that,” she said.

Bippert pointed out that scheduling a trade team is not as simple as creating a Washington itinerary because many trade teams are traveling to other states as well. This demands coordination.

“We have limited time with the groups that come through, and we need to coordinate well with other commissions so we aren’t duplicating any activities,” he said. “Pullman is a great place to visit because we can go to a breeding lab and the quality lab, both of which are first class. If needed we can also take them to the river, but Idaho frequently covers barging from Lewiston,” he said.

Although commission staff make trade team arrangements and can provide the best overview of the industry, Squires said it’s gratifying that most trade teams do not feel a visit to the region is complete without meeting and speaking with farmers.

“There are many parts to the grain chain, but because farmers represent the first link, visiting a farm and talking to a farmer is always a highlight. It works both ways. Farmers enjoy meeting their end-use customers too. We



Seeing the wheat is believing the quality.

are lucky at the WGC to have a board that understands and appreciates the importance of a one-on-one interaction,” he said, adding that all of the board’s 10 commissioners have participated with at least one trade team in the last year.

Interspersed between stops on a trade team visit is a lot of time spent in a van. Far from being wasted, however, all of the executives said this traveling time can be very valuable when it comes to learning of a team’s specific concerns. But such open communication also depends on the makeup of the team.

As Sullivan put it, “The discussion is a lot more candid

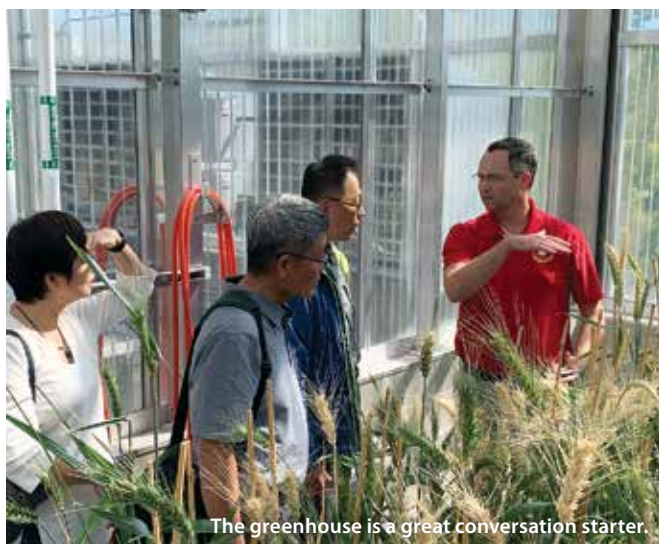


WGC-funded wheat greenhouse brings teams together.



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Onsite education benefits trade teams.

when a team is all from the same company. We can ask pointed questions, and they will answer, something individuals aren't comfortable doing in a setting with their competitors," she said.

Bippert agreed there's a lot of information exchange during the less formal events like dinner.

"I can't think of the number of times decisions have been made in more casual settings. Just like us, customers want to establish a personal relationship so as to better accomplish a business function," he said.

Squires agreed. When conditions are right, communication is two-way.

"It's absolutely an exchange of information," he said, explaining that he often asks about food trends in specific countries. Recently, a team from Southeast Asia volunteered how important soft white flour has become for breeding chicken—a nod to the popularity of the fast food outlet, KFC. But Squires said teams will also reveal challenges they are facing with specific classes. For instance, poor water absorption in the hard red wheats has been a frequent complaint.

Sullivan said she makes a point of asking teams if there is anything outside the tour itinerary that she can do for them. As a result, among other things, she's taken teams to Walmart for batteries, to Spokane Seed for pulse samples, to Trader Joe's to see a trendy grocery store and to Ferdinand's on the WSU campus for ice cream.

"Whatever they want to do, if we have the time to do it, we will," she said.

Although the WGC acts as an intermediary between upcountry elevators and export locations and does not sell wheat itself, does all the attention to trade teams actually result in increased sales? ►



Squires believes it does. "Our efforts either maintain a market or grow a market," he said, citing the example of a recent team from Myanmar.

"The buyer for a mill was currently getting wheat from Canada in containers, and she wanted to know whether she could buy wheat from us in containers. Of course, I provided the connection she needed. Not to mention, about 20 percent of the time teams are in the region, they will request samples, which is the first step to becoming a buyer," he said.

Bippert said sales are rarely a "one and done" experience.

"A shipment of soft white to a Colombian mill was the result of a conversation that began with a trade team visit a couple of years ago. They subsequently sent a technician to the Wheat Marketing Center where a study was conducted using soft white in crackers. We presented the research to executives in Colombia, and now we are sending two containers to continue the process. It is not a one and done, but the trade team visit starts the conversation and the thought process that gets the ball rolling to build the momentum that results in sales," he said. ■



Numbers don't lie at the Western Wheat Quality Lab.



Grain quality has many mothers, including the VTP.



Maps are always helpful.



Meetings, yes, but a lot more, too.



# Are the insects leaving us?

Many studies show sharp drop in insect numbers

By Sanford D. Eigenbrode

"The Little Things That Run the World" (insects, that is) was the intriguing title of an address by the famed biologist E. O. Wilson at the 1987 opening of the invertebrate exhibit at the National Zoological Park in Washington, D.C. Of course, no one group of organisms "runs" the complex ecosystems of earth. Still, insects are hugely important, and without them, life on earth as we know it would cease.

That's because of the services they provide through pollination; decomposition and nutrient cycling; supporting soil health; and serving as essential food for many birds, mammals and freshwater fish throughout the world. So, when you hear a bird call, catch a trout in a favorite stream or eat almost any type of food, you have insects to thank. On top of that, if we take a moment to appreciate them, insects are tiny emissaries that offer a glimpse at the awesome diversity and beauty of nature.

That's why recent reports that insects may be in decline throughout the world is a concern. A 2017 study by European entomologists found that the weight of flying insects in 26 German nature reserves had decreased by 75 percent over just 27 years. That study drew attention to similar reports. A 2014 review in the magazine *Science* showed that invertebrates (mostly insects) had declined by about 45 percent globally in the last 40 years. In Puerto Rico's Luquillo National Forest reserve between January 1977 and January 2013, the number of insects caught in traps had declined many-fold. Another recent review documented declines of populations of certain

butterflies and moths, wild bees, hover flies, ground beetles, ladybird beetles, dung beetles, dragonflies, mayflies and others around the world.

Media coverage of these studies evokes the frightening prospect of an "insect apocalypse," in which the loss of insect diversity leads to collapse of ecosystems—as well as calls for increased efforts to conserve insects everywhere. Calmer voices point out that most of insect biodiversity has yet to be measured and that more study is required to determine whether insect diversity and abundance is declining, which insect groups are affected, and whether the effects are local, regional or global.

Furthermore, why declines are occurring anywhere is not fully understood. Reasons most often cited are habitat loss and degradation; nontarget effects of insecticides; changing climates; light pollution; and the ongoing global movement of species that disrupts ecosystems. Combinations of these and other factors likely produce effects on specific insect species and habitats. Recognizing and addressing these knowledge gaps is essential to understanding the problem and taking appropriate, science-based action to address it.

So, what about the insects here in Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho? First, we might think of the pest species affecting our agriculture, forests, human health and home gardens. Unfortunately, these species do not seem to be in decline. Rather, the region has become home to new pests over the past few decades, like the cereal leaf beetle (*Oulema melanopus*) and the wheat-grass aphid (*Metopolophium festucae cerealium*) in cereals and



Cereal leaf beetle, a pest of wheat, has been in our region since the late 1990s. Photo by Nate Foote.



This aphid, informally named the "cereal grass aphid," *Metopolophium festucae cerealium*, is new to North America and has been abundant in PNW cereal crops since 2011. Photo by Brad Stokes.

the balsam wooly adelgid (*Adelges piceae*) in forests. Long-term monitoring of aphid pests of legumes and cereals with suction traps have detected lots of variation among years, but no consistent multiyear trends in their abundances. On the other hand, there have been declines of some iconic nonpest insect species in our region.

Western populations of monarch butterflies (*Danaus plexippus*) have been declining for 20 years, including an 86 percent decline in 2018. The Western bumblebee (*Bombus occidentalis*), formerly common throughout our region, has become less abundant since the late 1990s, and the Morrison bumble bee (*Bombus morrisoni*) has declined by nearly 90 percent during the same period. Two regional species of tiger beetles, the Bruneau Dunes tiger beetle (*Cicindela waynei*) and the Columbia River tiger beetle (*Cicindela columbica*) have undergone large range contractions. Several dozen bee and butterfly species in our region are listed by the Xerces society as vulnerable or imperiled because of their small populations and declining habitats.

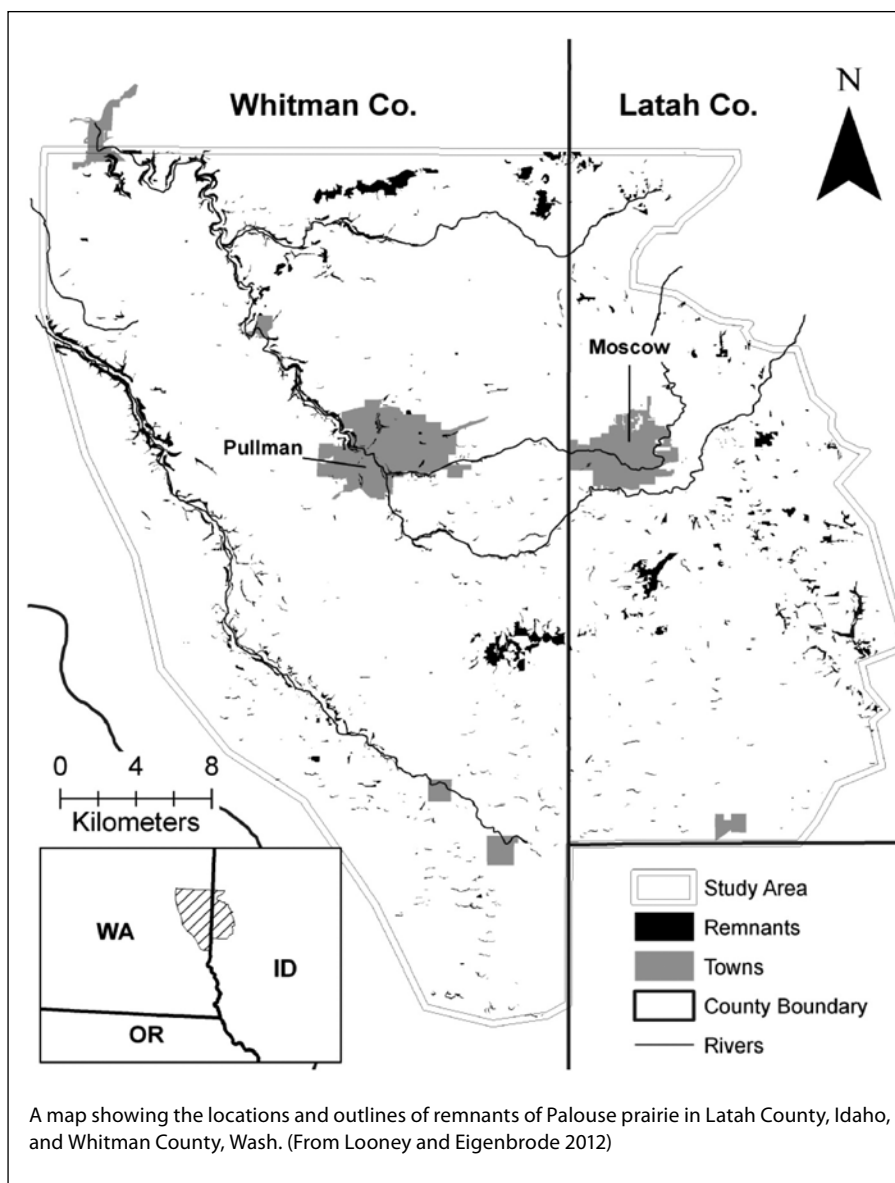
These declines are part of nationwide trends affecting butterflies, native bees, tiger beetles and other taxa. Apart from individual species of concern like these, however, there are no data suggesting a wholesale decline in insect diversity and abundance in the inland Pacific Northwest. One possible explanation is that the loss of native habitat, a major cause of insect declines, has been relatively slight here over the last few decades. Rather, the major loss of habitats occurred here when the region's prairies were converted to agriculture, and when much of our old growth forests were harvested. Those transformations presumably



The Western bumblebee (*Bombus occidentalis*). Photo from bugguide.net. Reprinted with permission by Lynn and Gene Monroe, Granite Ridge Nature Institute.



Monarch butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*). Photo from Wikipedia.



reduced native insect biodiversity, but since there is little information about the original insect communities, that is uncertain. Even today, the difficulty and expense of comprehensively documenting insects and abundance is an





A cover crop in bloom in Asotin County, Wash. Photo by Subodh Adhikari.

impediment that leaves us with insufficient information about any ongoing, wholesale trends in our region.

It does seem certain, however, that we should preserve what remains of our native insects as part of our heritage and for the ecosystem services they provide. The trends in studies from around the world can be our wake-up call to valuing and preserving what we have. Although agriculture predominates in our landscapes, there remain numerous small fragments of less disturbed and native vegetation. Despite the fact that they cover less than 1 percent of the original extent of prairie, researchers at the University of Idaho and Washington State University have found that they support hundreds of insect species, including wild bees, ground-dwelling insects and plant-feeding insects associated with native plants. Work is needed to describe these insect communities more fully and determine whether they are stable or in decline, but preserving or restoring their habitats can prevent declines that would certainly follow if these habitats were to be lost.

In addition to preserving native habitats, diversifying farming systems can help support more diverse insect populations. Multispecies cover crops introduced into cereal-based systems, especially flowering species, support much higher insect diversity than the crops or fallow land. Use of multispecies cover crops is currently very limited in our region, but there is increasing interest among producers, and wider adoption could have a big impact

on insect diversity, perhaps working together with conserved prairie remnants to support diversity at the landscape and regional scales.

On forested land, the recent trend to manage for increased conifer diversity will have the additional benefit of increasing insect diversity. Furthermore, even small meadows embedded within forest stands greatly increase the diversity of butterflies and probably other insects as well. At our homes, insect diversity can be supported by minimizing insecticide use and by incorporating diverse native plant species into our gardens.

Reports of insect declines and uncertainty about their scale and causes highlight perhaps the biggest challenge we face concerning insects—how little we know about them. We only have named about 1 million of the estimated 5 million insect species in the world. New species are continually being discovered, and we just don't know all of the ecological functions of most of these species. Management of our lands in ways that can help protect insect biodiversity will allow us to preserve these functions while we come to better understand them. This is a need in human-dominated landscapes throughout the world, including our beautiful inland Pacific Northwest. ■

*Sanford Eigenbrode is a University of Idaho distinguished professor and entomologist. Listen to Eigenbrode discuss insects in episode 121 of the Washington Grain Commission podcast, *Wheat All About It!* To listen to the podcast, go to [wagrain.org](http://wagrain.org) and click on summaries.*



A view of a parcel of a Palouse prairie remnant in bloom in Latah County, Idaho. Photo by Tim Hatten.

# WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

## Crystal ball cloudy for wheat exports, prices



By T. Randall Fortenbery

On Dec. 1, the 2019/20 wheat marketing year will be half over.

Near the end of the second quarter last year, there was significant uncertainty concerning the impact of trade friction on U.S. wheat exports and prices for the 2018/19 marketing year. In the end, total U.S. wheat exports for the 2018/19 marketing year were quite poor from a historical perspective, but slightly above the previous marketing year's (2017/18) export total.

In October 2019, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) forecast that U.S. wheat exports for the 2019/20 marketing year would again improve on a year-over-year basis, but still remain well below the 1 billion bushels consistently achieved early in the decade.

Figure 1 shows the cumulative U.S. wheat shipments through May 31 each marketing year over the last several years. The graphed data for each year is slightly below the total export volume finally realized for two reasons: 1) the graph only shows wheat, not wheat products, and 2) often a small percentage of the wheat sold in a given marketing year is actually shipped in the new marketing year. The red bar for the 2019/20 marketing year shows what we would expect to ship by May 31, 2020, to achieve USDA's current forecast of 950 million bushels for the 2019/20 marketing year.

If realized, the current expectation would result in the second largest export volume over the last five years or so, but still remain well below levels experienced six to 10 years ago. In general, a 1-billion-bushel total wheat export volume in a given marketing year corresponds to about 26,000 thousand

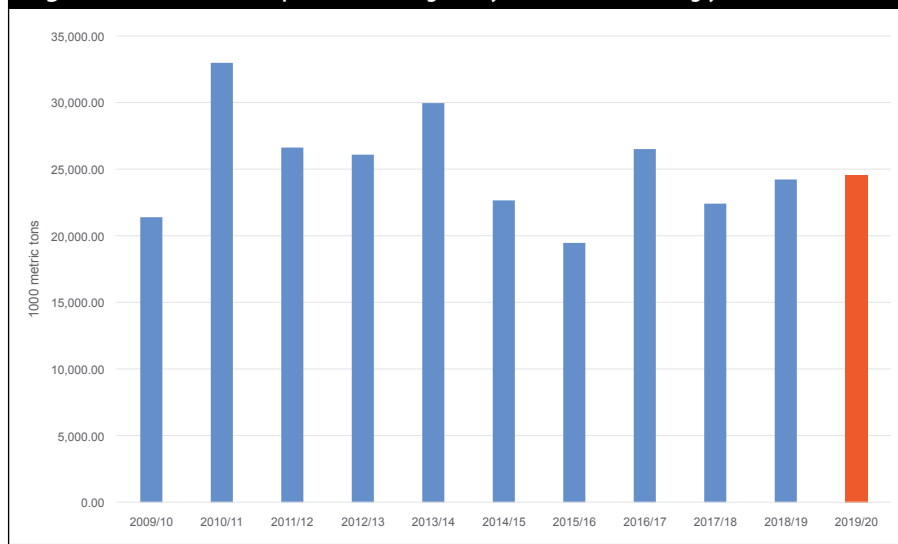
metric tons of unprocessed wheat shipped by May 31 (this does not include wheat products or sales that ship in the next marketing year). You can see from Figure 1 that last occurred in the 2016/17 marketing year (when total U.S. wheat exports were 1.05 billion bushels), but you have to go all the way back to 2013/14 to find the next historic year that occurred.

One challenge facing wheat marketers the last few years has been USDA's overly optimistic forecasts of wheat exports in the first half of the marketing year. As wheat export expectations deteriorated, so did prices. If that is the case again this year, then total exports will not exceed last year's level (since the current export forecast exceeds last year by only about 1 percent). However, through late October 2019, wheat exports were outperforming the previous marketing year and appear to support the belief that this year's export total will exceed last year.

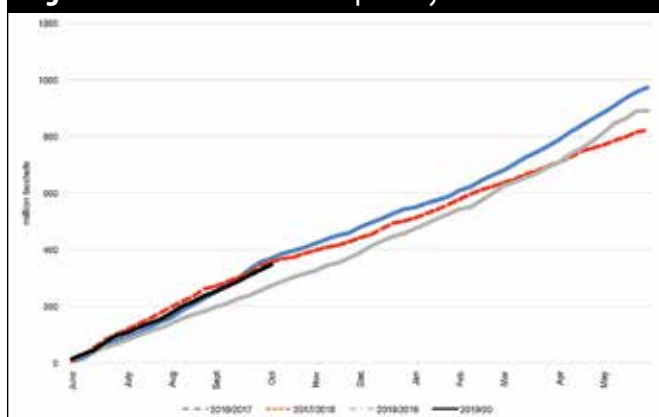
Figure 2 shows cumulative export shipments this year compared to the last few years on a weekly basis, as reported by USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS). Note that we are not only ahead of year-ago shipments through mid-October, but seem to be matching cumulative volumes experienced in the 2016/17 marketing year (the last year with total wheat exports in excess of 1 billion bushels). Also note that the U.S. export pace began to pick up in mid-April last marketing year and has continued through this year.

An important contribution to this

**Figure 1: U.S. wheat shipments through May 31 each marketing year**





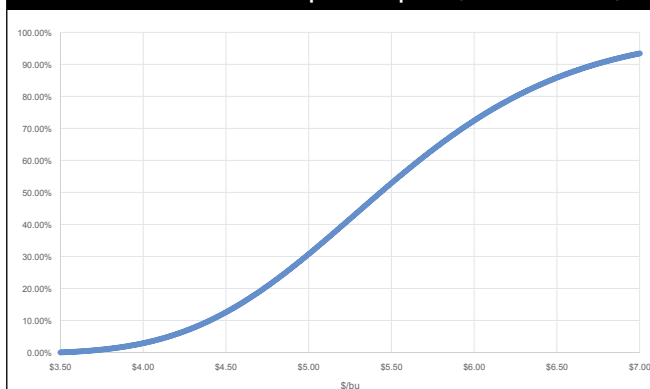
**Figure 2: Cumulative wheat exports by week**

improved trade picture was the resolution of negotiations for the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). While the agreement still needs to be ratified by the U.S. Congress and the Canadian Parliament (Mexico has ratified the agreement), the completion of negotiations resulted in the reduction or elimination of many of the tariffs put in place in 2018. This has helped return trade to levels experienced in earlier years, and wheat has been one of the winners. A year ago, U.S. wheat exports to Mexico were running about 25 percent below exports through fall 2017. By the end of the marketing year, however, we had made that up, and total wheat exports to Mexico on an annual crop year basis were slightly above total annual exports in 2017/18. The year-over-year trade deficit disappeared following the resolution of the USMCA trade terms.

Despite the improved wheat export picture for the current marketing year, USDA is projecting average U.S. farm level wheat prices to fall from \$5.16 per bushel last year to \$4.70 per bushel this year (based on the October WASDE forecast). This is the forecast of the average price received this year for wheat already harvested and the price that determines whether Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program payments for the crop harvested in 2019 will be available.

To get a sense for the price expectations at harvest for the crop planted this fall, we can look at the futures market for the July 2020 contract. We can also examine market-based probabilities that the futures prices will change from current levels as we approach harvest by examining the prices for options associated with the July futures contract. This is similar to the strategy the USDA Risk Management Agency uses to evaluate price risk in crop insurance policies and then determine premium costs for revenue insurance products.

Basically, the more expensive options for July wheat futures become, the greater traders' perceived risk that

**Figure 3: Probability (vertical axis) the price will be equal to or less than the specified price (horizontal axis)**

futures prices will change between now and harvest. Last year, on Oct. 18, 2018, soft red futures prices for July 2019 delivery were about \$5.52 per bushel. The actual price at expiration was in the mid-\$5.30 per bushel range, so just below the October expectation but a pretty accurate forecast.

On Oct. 18 this year, soft red wheat futures (the closest proxy for soft white) for July 2020 delivery were \$5.44 per bushel, so slightly less than the expected harvest price last year but not really much of a discount. Traders seem to be a bit more optimistic about wheat prices going forward than USDA.

Figure 3 provides a picture of market traders' perception of futures market price risk between late October 2019 and next summer's harvest based on the implied volatility from options associated with July 2020 soft red wheat futures contract. Based on Oct. 18 trading, traders believe that the harvest price (July wheat futures price in July 2020) will be below \$6.75 per bushel with a 90 percent probability. On the other hand, they believe there is only a 26 percent chance the harvest futures price will be below \$4.90 per bushel and about a 45 percent chance prices will be below last year's harvest price at contract expiration.

That means while USDA is expecting significantly lower prices for the 2019/20 marketing year compared to last year, traders appear to think harvest prices next summer will be about equal to this year's harvest price. July futures in July 2018 (the start of the 2018/19 marketing year) ended at about \$5 per bushel, well below both the July 2019 closing futures price and the current expectation for the July 2020 ending futures price. ■

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

# THE REST OF THE STORY

There and back again: The life of a wheat seed | By James Wylie

I am only a little wheat seed all cleaned up and ready to do my stuff. I don't really look like much, a long flat shape with a hole at the end where I can stick out my tongue. I'm one of many, and we all look about the same. We spend a lot of time talking about what's to come, and what we will be able to do. Although I don't think I'm much, there are a lot of people who think we are very special.

I grew up on a little farm in Alberta, Canada, and I've been coddled and cleaned and carefully cared for ever since that big harvester came and cut us down and blew us into a pile. It was a special farm away from all the other wheat fields so that we were not contaminated with the likes of them. That's why those buyers were so

pleased with us—that's what made us so special.

Finally, I was put in a sack and placed on a truck which hauled me to a place call Palouse Hills in Eastern Washington. And there I sat all winter long. It was boring because all of us were ready to go to work, but we had to wait for the farmer to think it's the right time. Things started to warm up, and the days got longer, and finally it was our time. All of us were dumped in a big machine, which let us go one at a time in many rows until we were scattered over the entire field. It had rained a couple days before, so we all felt good to get a taste of water. A couple days later, it rained again, and the water drained past us down into the earth. Boy, did that make us hop to, and we jumped out of our shells and grew long roots that raced down after the water. Down, down they went. We were having a grand time, stretching our wings, so to speak.

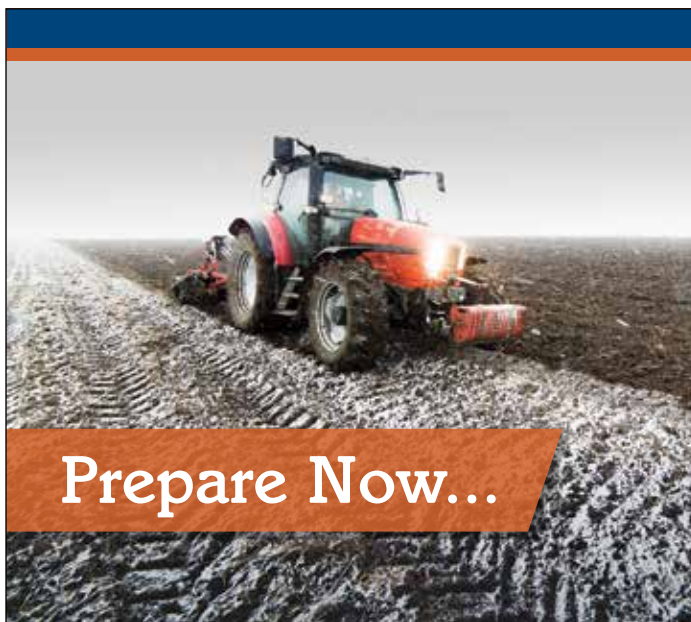
Then we realized those roots were sending back energy, and we thrust forward with a little leaf right on the surface of the land. We grew and grew higher with tough, long stems until we each topped out with a fine group of maybe a hundred new wheat seeds. The wind began to blow, and it became warmer and instead of being green, we started turning brown.

The farmer brought out his big machine and thrashed all of us about until we were little wheat seeds again. We were sold to a miller where we were ground and screened or milled until we became almost like powder. We were sacked and sold to a baker, and he worked with us until we were turned into dough and bread and all kinds of things people love to eat. ■

*Jim Wylie was a retired geologist who owned farms in Whitman and Franklin counties. He lived in Meridian, Idaho, but had a long-time, close attachment with Eastern Washington. He passed away in August.*







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## Landlord journeys from aviation to agriculture

By Trista Crossley

The ties that bind Rawson Mordhorst to central Washington agriculture are complex, almost as complex as the machinery he spent his career working with.

Although Mordhorst grew up in Ephrata, Wash., as did his wife, Margaret, he says he wasn't involved in agriculture "other than driving a wheat truck for my uncle." Instead, Mordhorst went into the U.S. Navy during the Vietnam War, where he flew helicopters. Upon retiring from the military, he settled near Oak Harbor, Wash., and worked as an engineer at Boeing. These days, he is responsible for managing both sides of his family's ag interests, which include dryland wheat crop share agreements and a small cash rent parcel in the Warden area that mainly grows onions.

"I'm pretty much responsible for selling the wheat and making the division of proceeds and keeping track of that and making sure the bank account balance is sufficient to

maintain our share of the things that need to get done, like insurance and fertilizer," Mordhorst said.

Mordhorst's paternal grandfather, who was in the banking business, acquired several parcels of farmland near Ephrata and Sagebrush Flats in Grant County. For many years, that land was farmed by a branch of the Mordhorst family. On his mother's side, the Hirschel family settled in the Wilson Creek area in the early 1900s and began farming. Over the years, various branches of the two families intertwined through marriage, and much of the responsibility for managing the two sets of properties fell to Mordhorst's father then mother and aunt. Eventually, about 10 years ago, Mordhorst took over from his mother. Shares in the various properties that Mordhorst manages are divided between his immediate family and his extended family.

Although he didn't grow up farming, Mordhorst was able to learn from both his mother and his aunt what he



In this 1948-ish picture, Rawson Mordhorst is shown with his grandfather, D. (Detlef) Fred Mordhorst, and his grandmother, Anna Rachel (Rae) Mordhorst, on part of their farm. Photo courtesy of Rawson Mordhorst.



needed to know about managing the family's properties, especially when it comes to marketing his share of the wheat.

"Selling wheat is a gamble," he explained. "Mom used to track the price religiously. Every day, she would record the price of wheat, and she prided herself on selling at the highest point. In recent years, I've been talking to my aunt and learned that my grandfather always sold as soon as it was in the warehouse. I've grown into that too. Any more, the price doesn't seem to go up at the end of the year. At least by getting it sold, we minimize storage and costs like that."

He also relies on his tenants, most of which have been farming for the family for years, to decide when and what to plant.

"They do a good job, and I've been able to rely on that. My dad was careful in selecting people that had excellent reputations for farming. I know there were times when there were other farmers interested in farming the land when it was (available), and dad went out and got information from the local farming community as to who the better farmers were," he said.

Finding the right tenants is the biggest piece of advice Mordhorst would give to other prospective ag landlords. He pointed out that if you are managing crop-shared land for other people, not just yourself, you have a responsibility to have the land farmed to the best of its ability, even if

that means looking outside the family for a tenant.

"You can't just rely on somebody who is a relative who may be a farmer. You have to be selective and find someone who's very capable and good at farming. It's your land," he explained.

Mordhorst says he visits his family's land a couple of times a year, and he and his wife pay attention to news and weather from the east side of the state to help get a sense of how the growing season is progressing. He's also starting to think about what will happen when it's time for the next generation to take over. He's not only talking about who will take over managing the property from him, but who will take over farming it as well. At least one of his tenants has children who aren't interested in continuing to farm.

"They (the tenants) are getting on in years. I don't know what their plans are in carrying on. If they have someone else farm their land, that gets to be a consideration for me," he said.

For his part, one of Mordhorst's daughters, who is based in Seattle, is likely to take over management of the property. He said he tries to include her on any communications he has with his farmers or crop insurance agents.

"You can hire somebody to manage your property, but you'll be giving up some income to do that. With wheat prices as they are, you don't want to give up too much," he said. ■

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# THE BOTTOM LINE

## Interpreting economic change: The global pulse

By Dr. David M. Kohl

I have taught at the Graduate School of Banking at Louisiana State University for more than 30 years, and one course I teach is called “Interpreting Economic Change.” This year’s senior-level course was composed of bankers, farm credit lenders and regulators from 22 states and Mexico. Each year we attempt to integrate emerging trends in the U.S. and abroad into these soon-to-be graduates’ strategic thinking. Here are some of the trends that will shape the pulse of the globe over the next decade with an orientation toward agriculture and rural areas.

### Global agriculture production

Agriculture producers often ask, “When are commodity prices going to return to the robust years experienced during the super cycle?” One only has to examine the increase in corn and soybean yields in major production countries over the past decade, as well as changes that are occurring in other crops and livestock production, to develop an answer.

According to the University of Missouri, corn production has increased 21 percent in the U.S. and 48 percent in China since 2008. However, Brazil and Argentina have increased corn production by 85 percent and 174 percent, respectively. Our Canadian neighbors to the north have increased corn production by 36 percent. However, the consumer perception of GMOs in Europe has contributed to a 9 percent reduction in corn production.

Shifting to soybeans, the U.S. production is up 55 percent in the past decade. Soybean production is up 108 percent in Brazil, 73 percent in Argentina and 125 percent in Canada. The layering of new technology with new land resources coming into production in South America, Africa and other areas of the world will challenge commodity-based profit models globally in the next few years. Further, the effects of climate and weather changes will allow triple cropping to become the norm in South America and double cropping in the Upper Midwest and Canada. Crop production centers could not only shift around the world,

but also provide global grain abundance and further suppress commodity prices.

### Government and social policy

Government and social policy with the law of unintended consequences will be a global force impacting economics both here in the U.S. and abroad. The challenges center on global political uncertainty, new leadership and various agendas with the new leaders. The evolution of the swing from capitalism to socialism and populism with free trade, tax and regulatory issues, often fueled by social media and information, will create extremes in volatility.

Economic cycles have been a part of life for centuries. However, since the end of World War II, the GATT agreements, the jet age and the use of air conditioning shifted economic powers and demographics, not only in the United States, but around the world. The rise of the industrialized Asian rim in the 1970s, China’s market-based reforms in the late 1980s, and the fall of the Berlin Wall each accelerated globalization. Add on NAFTA and the European Union, and the acceleration of many of these economies around the world with free trade was the outcome. Now, the shift toward socialism and populism in rich nations is being demonstrated in the U.S., Brexit referendums and overall threats of tariffs and trade sanctions. This shift in thinking could be a dangerous procedure, similar to the populist movement of the late 1920s. During that era, world trade declined from \$5.3 billion to \$1.8

billion in a matter of five years, which was one of the major factors behind the Great Depression.

### Rise of Asia

Since 1990, the rise of the Asian rim as an economic power has caused a significant shift in global forces. Measured in world output, Western Europe’s share has declined from 31 percent to 22 percent in this decade. China’s growth has been stellar over the period with a rise from 2 percent of the world output to 14 percent. Some of these gains came from the U.S., which has observed a 2 percent decline in output. Trade agreements are vital for trade access to the Asian region, where

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three out of every seven residents have increased buying power.

Chinese infrastructure building fueled increased growth, but growth has since moderated. The Belt and Road Initiative could impact world competition over the next decade. Since 2013, China has invested \$248 billion in 68 countries building infrastructure, and they have earmarked up to \$1 trillion from now until 2025. This initiative is designed to fuel trade into the Asian region and will create direct competition to North America as alternative trade partners for the Asian rim will be in Central and South America, Eastern Europe and Africa.

### Food and fiber trends

The food and fiber industry will be turned upside down over the next decade. An article in *The Economist* magazine entitled "Breakfast in 2030" caught my attention and challenged my paradigm.

"Imagine this: Your morning croissant comes from a 3D printer, your sugar-free ginger cake is soft and sweet, the roast beef on your sandwich is plant-based, and your entire diet is perfectly tailored to your lifestyle. Can you picture it?"

Before you have a bout of indigestion, realize that the \$89 billion beef industry now sells \$1 billion in plant-based meat alternatives. Changes in the food and fiber marketplace are accelerating at warp speed both in the U.S. and abroad. The IPO for Beyond Meat was one of the hottest on Wall Street. The dairy industry has been challenged by substitute products such as almond, soy and oat-based alternatives. Fifty percent of the food establishments in Warsaw are now vegan, and it is one of the fastest-growing trends in Europe and in some locales here in the U.S.

Consumers in rich nations will seek a food experience in niche


markets with four drivers: transparency, customization, personalization and an experience that links the traits to the plate. Areas of the world with a rising middle class may also seek these attributes. However, nations with less economic power, but large populations, will be more commodity based as they attempt to lift themselves out of poverty.

### 2020 to 2030 decade

The next decade is going to be one with plenty of challenges and increased opportunities, given the aforementioned factors. Entrepreneurialism will challenge institutional mindsets and will be the catalyst for change in the upcoming decade that could experience a major global recession. The abilities of these groups of entrepreneurs, regardless of age and ethnicity, will quickly align resources and talents to anticipate the needs of the marketplace. These major market disrupters will unravel the mystery of big data, blockchain technology and robotics to develop systems that are agile and resilient. The convergence of bioengineering and information technology will enrich individuals with an entrepreneurial spirit both inside and outside the organization.

Three skill bases will be needed for success in the future: First, the ability to analyze data; second, to think critically about the data; and third, the differentiator will be the ability to communicate locally, regionally, nationally and globally using verbal and nonverbal formats.

These are just a few of the appetizers discussed with the future leaders of the lending industry. Some of the points may confirm your thoughts, while others may challenge your thinking and paradigm concerning the global pulse of economic changes. There will be opportunities if one accepts the challenges. ■

**Dr. David Kohl** received his Ph.D. degree in agricultural economics from Cornell University. For 25 years, he was professor of agricultural finance and small business management and entrepreneurship at Virginia Tech. He has published four books and more than 2,100 articles on financial and business-related topics. Dr. Kohl is currently president of AgriVisions, LLC, a knowledge-based consulting business providing cutting-edge programs to leading agricultural organizations worldwide. He is also a business coach and part owner of Homestead Creamery, a value-added dairy business in the Blue Ridge Mountains. This content was provided by  **Northwest**  
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# Your wheat life...



Back in June, equipment was ready and "on deck" for wheat harvest at Art Druffel Farms in Colton. Photo by Carson Hammer.



William Wymer (11) checks out the 2019 wheat crop at Kloster Farm in Lincoln County. The land is leased and farmed by John Wagner and his son, Jordan Wagner. Photo by Diana Kloster.



Washington plus wheat equals the best. Photo by Marci Miller.

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location, names of people in the  
picture and ages of children.



Jett Labes (3) and Camryn Hernandez (2) going to ride on the tractor at Knodel Farms in Lind. Photo by Kelsey Labes.





Burkleigh Jorgensen (7 months) and her dad, Conor Jorgensen, after having a ride on the combine with her grandpa, Chris Jorgensen, at Jorgensen Farms near Coulee City. Burkleigh is the seventh generation from Jorgensen Farms to experience harvest. Photo taken by Shelby Jorgensen.



Jentry Mae Aune (10 months) is a 6th generation Aune farmer who's excited to take the wheel from dad Justin Aune during harvest 2019 at J. Aune & Sons Farms in LaCrosse. Photo by Elizabeth Aune.

Justine Clements (19) in her grandfather Bob's wheat at JBS Farms Inc. in Waterville. Photo by Jacque Clements.





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# QUOTE WORTHY

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“The tribe never consented to the construction of the lower Columbia River dams. On behalf of the Yakama Nation and those things that cannot speak for themselves, I call on the United States to reject the doctrine of Christian discovery and immediately remove the Bonneville Dam, Dalles Dam and John Day Dam.”

—JoDe Goudy, chairman of the Yakama Nation, at a news conference in Celilo Village on the Columbia River on Indigenous Peoples Day, Oct. 14. (seattletimes.com)



“I can honestly say that I think every day we are becoming closer...We feel very

good about being on a path to yes.”

—House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) speaking about progress on the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement. (thehill.com)

“In America, the big get bigger and the small go out. I don’t think in America we, for any small business, we have a guaranteed income or guaranteed profitability.”

—U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue at a stop in Wisconsin.



“The question was ‘can 40 and 50 cow dairies survive?’ and the honest answer is, it’s tough, you have to make a decision, and some may and some may not, and that was the reality of the question. When it was phrased in the article it was like I was telling them to get out or get big, and that’s not really the context of it. If you listen to the whole conversation I acknowledged the reality of the economic duress dairymen have been under, and it’s really tough.”

—U.S. Department of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue clarifying his earlier statement about small businesses not surviving. (rvedtv.com)

“The two sides have made substantial progress in many fields, laying an important foundation for the signing of a phased agreement...Stopping the escalation of the trade war benefits China, the U.S and the whole world. It’s what producers and consumers alike are hoping for.”

—Chinese Vice Premier Liu He on the continuing trade war between China and the U.S. (cnbc.com)

“We have worked with growers, producers, commodity groups and governments to promote our agricultural goods. We worked to spur rural economic development, and we cultivated relationships with international trading partners. As family farmers, we remain connected to the farm communities we represent. Now we must build upon these relationships to show Americans and the world that the U.S. is open for business.”

—Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.), James Comer (R-Ky.) and John Rose (R-Tenn.) in an op-ed on the importance of passing the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement.



# HAPPENINGS

*All dates and times are subject to change.  
Please verify event before heading out.*

## NOVEMBER 2019

**4 COLUMBIA COUNTY WHEAT GROWERS MEETING.** Watch the calendar at [wawg.org](http://wawg.org) for more information.

**6 WALLA WALLA WHEAT GROWERS MEETING.** 9:30 a.m. at the Marcus Whitman Hotel in Walla Walla, Wash. Lunch included. RSVP to Jim Kent at (509) 629-2111 or [turbo1@pocketinet.com](mailto:turbo1@pocketinet.com).

**6-8 WASHINGTON STATE WEED ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE.** Trade show, workshops, break-out sessions, credits available. Wenatchee Convention Center, Wenatchee, Wash. Register at [weedconference.org](http://weedconference.org)

**18-19 WSCIA ANNUAL MEETING.** Northern Quest Casino in Airway Heights, Wash. [washingtoncrop.com](http://washingtoncrop.com)

**13-16 2019 TRI-STATE GRAIN GROWERS CONVENTION.** Nationally known speakers, industry presentations,

break-out sessions, vendors. Davenport Grand, Spokane, Wash. Auction. Register online at [wawg.org/convention/registration/](http://wawg.org/convention/registration/)

**29-30 CHRISTMAS AT THE END OF THE ROAD.** An old-fashioned cowboy Christmas! Storytelling, fun run, caroling, pictures with Santa. Winthrop, Wash. [winthropwashington.com/event/christmas-end-road](http://winthropwashington.com/event/christmas-end-road)

**29-DEC. 1 LEAVENWORTH CHRISTKINDLMARKT.** A Bavarian-style Christmas market for the whole family that features traditional Bavarian foods, handmade arts and crafts and family-friendly entertainment. Leavenworth, Wash. [christkindlmarktleavenworth.com](http://christkindlmarktleavenworth.com)

## DECEMBER 2019

**6-8 CHRISTMAS LIGHTING FESTIVAL.** Sleigh rides, carolers, roasted chestnuts. Leavenworth, Wash. [leavenworth.org](http://leavenworth.org)

**7-8 HOMETOWN CHRISTMAS.** Santa, parade, shopping. Waitsburg, Wash. [cityofwaitsburg.com](http://cityofwaitsburg.com)

**10 WAWG BOARD MEETING.** Meeting starts at 10 a.m. at Washington Wheat Foundation Building, Ritzville, Wash. (509) 659-0610, [wawg.org](http://wawg.org)

**10-11 WSU WHEAT ACADEMY.** Increase your knowledge of the science behind wheat management recommendations. Limited to 75 participants, and registration is required. Pullman, Wash. [smallgrains.wsu.edu](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu)

**13-15 CHRISTMAS LIGHTING FESTIVAL.** Sleigh rides, carolers, roasted chestnuts. Leavenworth, Wash. [leavenworth.org](http://leavenworth.org)

**20-22 CHRISTMAS LIGHTING FESTIVAL.** Sleigh rides, carolers, roasted chestnuts. Leavenworth, Wash. [leavenworth.org](http://leavenworth.org) ■

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