VHEAT LIFE

Happy Thanksgiving

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

NOVEMBER 2024

IN THIS ISSUE:

Columbia River Treaty update Seasons of Farming: Winter Searchable database helps get farmers out of a pesticide pickle Assessing the 2024 soft white wheat crop **Fingerprinting soil Community brings in harvest in Grant County**

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President's Perspective



It's been a year!

By Anthony Smith President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Sitting down to write my last President's Perspective, I suddenly realized how fast this year has gone by.

When I took the role as president last November, I was a little overwhelmed to be in such an important leadership position for the wheat industry. There were many challenges we faced in 2024, but the Washington Association

of Wheat Growers (WAWG) team was there, working tirelessly and taking valuable time away from the farm to fight and lobby for the good of wheat. We fought to pass a farm bill, traveling multiple times to Washington, D.C., to meet with Congress. We never stopped fighting to protect the lower Snake River dams. We organized tours, participated on panels, and wrote letters. We worked with other stakeholders in the ag industry to spread our message that the dams are critical infrastructure.

We took direction from our resolutions, written and approved by our members, to serve you, the growers. You are the reason we are here, fighting for our industry.

Standing as president of WAWG has deepened my commitment to agriculture. The feeling of being a leader in this industry has really inspired me. One of the highlights of this past year was the Lind Field Day where I gave a WAWG update. I had never been to the field day before, and it was jam-packed with farmers, industry folks, and, of course, Washington State University researchers and personnel. I was a bit nervous to speak in front of the large crowd, but I quickly realized there was nothing to be nervous about because we were all in the same small grains industry!

I want to thank my dad for telling me to run for county president nine years ago. That's where my journey began. I want to thank the officers I've served with; Michelle Hennings, our executive director; and all of the board members for making my year as president successful. I also want to thank the Washington Grain Commission team for working closely with WAWG to keep our industry strong. There are so many WAWG members I want to thank that I can't name them all. Just know that WAWG is only successful if we all get involved. Finally, I want to thank all my Horse Heaven farmer friends and neighbors. You know who you are!

One last reminder before I turn over the presidential reins — it's not too late to register for the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention, which will be Nov. 19-21 in Coeur d'Alene. You can register online at wawg.org/convention/registration/ or call the WAWG office at (609) 659-0610.

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WAWG's current top priorities are:

- Preserving the lower Snake River dams.
- Fighting mandatory climate/carbon regulations.
- Lobbying the state Legislature for a seasonal overtime exemption.
- Maintaining a strong, reliable safety net by preserving crop insurance and making sure farm commodity programs work.
- Maintaining a safe, sound transportation system that includes rail, river and roads.

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WAWG at WORK

ADVOCATING FOR THE WHEAT FARMERS OF EASTERN WASHINGTON

Growers report dry conditions at October board meeting

At October's Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) state board meeting, board members reported winter wheat seeding is nearly complete in most counties, but conditions are dry, despite spotty rains in some areas. The cost of inputs continues to rise, while wheat prices remain low.

Several representatives of federal and state agencies attended the meeting to give updates. Jon Wyss, Farm Service Agency state executive director, said his staff is working hard to catch up on a backlog of cost share payments. The state agency is holding a Conservation Reserve Program training session on Dec. 2-4 that producers can attend either in person or online. More information will be made available on the FSA website, which can be found at fsa.usda.gov/state-offices/Washington.

Jessica Ogola, the commodities accountant for the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), introduced herself and encouraged growers to



SERVICE RECOGNIZED. Washington Association of Wheat Growers Executive Director Michelle Hennings (center) was awarded a Distinguished Service Award from Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) for her commitment to and advocacy for the lower Snake River dams. Presenting her the award were Neil Maunu (left), PNWA executive director, and Tom Kammerzell, PNWA president.

join DNR board meetings to share any issues they might have. Meeting information is at dnr.wa.gov/about/ boards-and-councils/board-natural-resources.

In Washington Grain Commission news, CEO Casey Chumrau shared the most recent production numbers from the National Agricultural Statistics Services' Small Grain Survey. There has been a 30% increase in winter wheat production with 122.5 million bushels (90% is soft white wheat). Washington ranks fourth in the nation in wheat production. A team from the Japan Biscuit Association recently toured Washington. This is the first time in 30 years that the organization has sent a team to the Pacific Northwest. Chumrau said that they were focused on grain safety and enjoyed meeting with producers.

In state legislative news, wheat industry lobbyist Mark Streuli reported that Wheat PAC checks have been sent to a number of ag-friendly campaigns. One of the campaigns that is being closely watched by the ag industry is the race for Commissioner of Public Lands. Streuli and fellow ag lobbyist Diana Carlen have met with both candidates.

WAWG's annual Olympia Days trip has been scheduled for Jan. 19-21. Growers who are interested in taking part should call the WAWG office at (509) 659-0610 for more information.

In national legislative news, there is still no farm bill. Funding runs out at the end of the year, and if Congress doesn't pass a new farm bill by then, crop support will fall back to policies that were set in the 1930s and 40s. WAWG leaders will be attending a National Association of Wheat Growers meeting in Arizona Nov. 11-14.

Communication and lobbying efforts continue on the lower Snake River dams. Leslie Druffel, outreach director for The McGregor Company, told the board that the Inland Ports and Navigation Group, a subset of Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA) focused on dam litigation, is working with a "well-respected scientist" to collect real data on delayed mortality in fish.

Michelle Hennings, WAWG executive director, was recently given a distinguished service award from PNWA for her commitment and advocacy of the Columbia-Snake River System, including the lower Snake River dams. Hennings also spent several days in Washington, D.C., in September with Northwest RiverPartners to talk to mem-



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bers of Congress about the importance of hydropower and the dams.

There will be no board meeting in November. Instead members are encouraged to attend Washington's all-committee meeting at the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention on Wednesday, Nov. 20, beginning at 9:30 a.m. During the meeting, attendees will hear state and national legislative updates, U.S. Department of Agriculture agency updates, and review WAWG's resolutions.

Whitman County growers meet

At their meeting in October, Whitman County growers were reminded of new pesticide label information from Henry Wetzel, Washington State University (WSU) pesticide recertification safety educator.

Pesticides that have endangered species use restrictions will include instructions on the label directing growers to the Bulletin Live! Two website (epa.gov/endangeredspecies/bulletins-live-two-view-bulletins). Growers will need to enter location, date of application, and the pesticide's registration number to see if there are restrictions on use. Growers are encouraged to print the information for their records. Growers who don't follow the additional restrictions can be fined.

Two representatives of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) attended the meeting: Jon Wyss, state executive director, and Jonelle Olson, Whitman County executive director. Olson said the county office will be fully staffed before the end of the year, but asked producers to be patient as some of the staff still need training. She also encouraged producers to certify their fall plantings



FARM BILL FLY-IN. In late September, Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, joined other stakeholders on a Northwest RiverPartners farm bill fly-in to Washington, D.C. The group discussed the important role the lower Snake River dams play in the region's transportation system, energy production, irrigation, and in rural economies. From left are Clark Mather, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners; Kelly Schwint, Grant County Public Utility District; Dave Garegnani, IBEW Local 77; Chris Sidmore, Flathead Food Bank in Kalispell, Mont. ; Hennings; and Kyle Roadman, Emerald People's Utility District in Eugene, Ore.

as soon as possible. Dec. 15 is the deadline. Certification can be done online, but producers should still make an appointment for staff to review it. When asked about potential Agriculture Risk Coverage (ARC) & Price Loss Coverage (PLC) payments, Wyss said there will be none this year in Whitman County.

KayDee Gilkey, Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) outreach coordinator, reminded growers to apply for their part of the \$30 million in reimbursements the state is offering for carbon fees paid on fuel purchases in 2023. Growers can apply at dol.wa.gov/agriculture-support-program.

Andrea Cox, WAWG conservation coordinator, introduced herself and asked growers to contact her if they had any questions or suggestions she can pass along to the state Natural Resources Conservation Service team.

Drew Lyons, holder of the Endowed Chair Small Grains Extension and Research, Weed Science at WSU Extension, reminded growers about WSU's Wheat Academy Dec. 10-11.

Growers also heard short updates from Washington Grain Commissioners Ben Barstow and Gary Bailey; Tom Kammerzell, a commissioner for the Port of Whitman County; and Art Swannack, Whitman County Commissioner.

Growers wrapped up the meeting with a short discussion on resolutions they'd like to put forward at the upcoming 2024 Tri-State Grain Growers Convention.



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DR. BART FISCHER is a research assistant professor and co-director of the Ag and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M AgriLife. His applied research focuses on solving real-world policy problems for ag producers and on anticipating potential policy changes for Congress to consider.



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Auction and Dinner

The auction and dinner will be held Thursday, Nov. 21, at 6 p.m. Social hour starts at 5:30. Donation forms for auction items can be found at wawg.org.



POLICY MATTERS

Data shows salmon, steelhead numbers increasing

Last month, Northwest RiverPartners shared data from the University of Washington's Columbia River Data Access in Real Time website (cbr.washington.edu/dart) showing more salmon and steelhead in the Columbia and Snake rivers since the first federal dam went into operation in the 1930s.

In 2024, a record 755,000+ adult sockeye passed Bonneville Dam, a record in the 86 years that the dam has provided affordable, reliable, carbon-free hydropower and river transportation for the people of our region (see Chart 1).

The same trend holds true for adult salmon and steelhead returns at Lower Granite Dam on the Snake River. In 1975, when the dam was completed, about 46,000 fish were counted. In 2023, that number was over 200,000, an increase of more than 300% (see Chart 2).

NAWG farm bill advocacy continues

There is no time to waste when getting a farm bill passed this year. While Congress is out until after the election, they must continue to hear from growers about the need to get a robust farm bill passed when









Numbers and charts courtesy of Northwest RiverPartners.

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they return for the "lame duck" session. The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) encourages all producers to check out NAWG's new 2024 Farm Bill advocacy campaign urging Congress to work to pass a long-term bipartisan farm bill this year. More information at wheatworld.org/campaign/2024farm-bill-advocacy-campaign/

DOE launches regional PNW energy study

In September, the U.S. Department of Energy's Grid Deployment Office (GDO) announced the launch of the Pacific Northwest Regional Energy Planning Project (PREPP), a broad engagement-based planning process that will produce regional analyses of infrastructure investments that will be required to meet the goals and requirements of regional participants, including resource adequacy, decarbonization, ecosystem priorities, and system resilience and reliability. Funded by GDO and the Washington State Department of Commerce, the 18-month study will explore how utilities in Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington can plan infrastructure investments to address complex dynamics facing the region, such as high load growth, electrification, planning for extreme weather events, and meeting decarbonization targets.

PREPP will combine best-in-class datasets and projections on weather trends, extreme weather events, and new electricity demands to produce a set of future scenarios that can meet growing regional demand, provide reliable electric service, and align with regional energy policies. The study will provide potential infrastructure solutions to address the needs and challenges identified without prescribing any specific actions. It will examine at least one scenario looking at what infrastructure and resources could be needed to replace the power and services provided by the four lower Snake River dams should Congress authorize removal, consistent with DOE's commitments per the Dec. 14, 2023, Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Government, the four Treaty Tribes of the Lower Columbia River, and the states of Oregon and Washington.

PREPP does not replace or duplicate current planning processes or any utility's integrated resource plan or resource acquisition plan but can help quantify and evaluate the impacts of various infrastructure options available to the region. PREPP's process will rely on a steering committee representing regional, community, Tribal, utility, and state perspectives, as well as a technical committee that will comprise planning and resource acquisition subject matter experts to guide the technical decisions in the study.



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Journey of Washington wheat: From harvest to global markets

Washington state is renowned for its picturesque landscapes, rich history, and diverse agricultural bounty. Among its many agricultural achievements, wheat stands out as a significant crop, which was first cultivated in Washington in the 1820s! Wheat has become the backbone of much of Eastern Washington's economy and consistently remains one of the state's top five crops. But what happens to Washington wheat once it leaves the fields? It can hit the market in a variety of ways, ranging from the local farmers market to global markets in Asia and beyond. But before we discuss wheat's ending journey, let's reflect back.

A glance back in time

The story of wheat in Washington dates back two centuries. Early settlers and pioneers recognized the fertile lands of Eastern Washington as ideal for wheat cultivation. Over time, advancements in farming techniques and technology have enhanced the region's ability to produce some of the most high-quality wheat in the world. Today, Washington's 4,000+ wheat farms grow millions of bushels of six types of wheat annually, contributing significantly to the state's agricultural bounty and economy.

From fields to ports

Once harvested, Washington wheat embarks on a meticulous process of cleaning, sorting, and storing. This ensures that the wheat maintains its quality and is ready for export around the world. Washington's strategic location, with access to major transportation routes and sea ports, plays a crucial role in efficiently transporting wheat to global markets. In fact, the Pacific Northwest is important to the whole nation. About 54% of all U.S. wheat exports ship through seven ports in Washington and Oregon!

Asian markets: A key destination

A significant portion of Washington wheat is destined for international markets, with countries along the Pacific Rim being some of its primary consumers. Let's take a closer look at how Washington wheat makes its way to these nations and why it is in such high demand:

- JAPAN is one of the largest importers of Washington wheat. The country's affinity for high-quality wheat for making udon noodles, bread, and other wheat-based products makes Washington wheat a preferred choice. The consistency and superior quality of Washington wheat align well with Japan's stringent food standards and culinary traditions.
- **SOUTH KOREA** is another prominent destination for Washington wheat. The country's bustling food industry relies heavily on nutritious wheat for a variety of products, from bread and pastries to noodles and snacks. Washington's soft white wheat, known for its excellent milling and baking qualities, is particularly popular in South Korea.
- The **PHILIPPINES** imports a substantial amount of wheat from Washington. The country's growing population and increasing demand for wheat-based products such as pasta, noodles, and bakery items, drive this demand. Washington wheat's versatility and quality make it an attractive option for Filipino food manufacturers.

The economic impact

The export of Washington wheat to Asian markets and beyond not only benefits the local economy but also strengthens international trade relations and helps feed our growing world. Trade agreements are vital to Washington wheat farmers, as they export roughly 90% of their crop. The revenue generated from wheat exports supports local farmers, creates jobs, and contributes to the overall economic health of the state. Moreover, it fosters goodwill and mutual dependence between Washington and its trading partners.

A bright, prosperous future

It is no secret Washington wheat has a rich history and a promising future. From its humble beginnings in the early 1800s to its current status as a leading agricultural product, wheat continues to play a vital role in Washington, the U.S., and the world.

Remember the Foundation in your charitable giving. Go to wawheat.org to find out more about supporting your industry.

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Treaty agreement reached

MODERNIZED COLUMBIA RIVER TREATY WILL UPDATE STORAGE COORDINATION, POWER SHARING

By Trista Crossley Editor, Wheat Life

After six years and 15 rounds of negotiation, the U.S. and Canada announced in July that they had reached an agreement in principle on modernizing the Columbia River Treaty. In August, the U.S. Department of State provided details on key elements of the modernized treaty during a public information session.

According to Jennifer Savage, director of the U.S. State Department's Office of Canadian Affairs, modernizing the treaty will:

- Provide preplanned flood risk management beyond Sept.
 16 (when the original treaty expired).
- Update the way hydropower and fish flow augmentation are coordinated, which will contribute to more stable and predictable operations on the system.
- Rebalance the Canadian entitlement.
- Provide consideration for tribal input on operations and adaptive management decisions.
- Meet ecosystem needs such as providing flows for salmon migration.

"Modernization is beneficial for the region, how we fuel the economy, support the environment, and gain Canada's commitment to provide space to store floodwaters to protect U.S. life and property from floods," Savage said. If a deal hadn't been reached, U.S. reservoirs potentially would have been operated more conservatively at lower levels for longer periods of time leading to more unpredictability and



a larger impact on other resources. Under the terms of the new agreement, in most years, U.S. reservoirs in the Columbia Basin will operate similarly to how they are operated today.

Savage said that in modernizing the treaty, Canada prioritized obtaining more autonomy over the treaty dams in Canada, and the U.S. made power coordination more flexible.

The Columbia River's drainage basin is roughly the size of Texas and includes parts of Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana, Utah, Wyoming, and British Columbia. Canada makes up 15% of the basin but provides 35% of the flow on average.

The Columbia River Treaty was originally entered into force in 1964 with two objectives: hydropower and flood risk management. The U.S. paid Canada up front for assured flood space in Canadian treaty dams for 60 years. Through the treaty, the U.S. had the right to call on Canada to help manage flood risk by using 15.5 million acre feet of storage behind Keenleyside (also known as Arrow), Duncan, and Mica dams. In return for those flood benefits, the U.S. is required

to deliver a certain amount of power to Canada, called the Canadian Entitlement.

Flood control

In the modernized treaty, Canada will provide the U.S. with 3.6 million acre feet of preplanned flood risk management storage at Arrow Lakes. The U.S. and Canada are working to identify arrangements to implement the preplanned flood risk management for the upcoming flood season (spring of 2025).

Preplanned flood risk management annual payments from the U.S. to Canada will be \$37.6 million through 2044, indexed annually using the consumer price index. The U.S. will also provide an additional \$16.6 million annually once the agreement is modernized in recognition that the U.S. will receive additional benefits from the preplanned flood risk management. That payment will be made through 2044 and will be indexed annually using the consumer price index.

Peter Dickerson from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers explained that once the agreed upon elements are implemented, U.S. reservoirs will maintain current levels of flexibility in a minimum of 70% of years including the 60% driest years, a roughly seasonal water supply forecast of 90 million acre feet through the April to August time period or less.

Power and the Canadian Entitlement

According to Hub Adams from Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), power operations will continue largely the same with a modernized treaty, however, the Canadian Entitlement will decrease substantially. Beginning Aug. 1, the Canadian Entitlement has been decreased 37%. By 2033, it will decrease by 50%, at which point BPA will be retaining about 600 megawatts of capacity in the Pacific Northwest and

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In addition, BPA will transfer rights — and associated costs — to existing transmission capacity to an entity designated by Canada. Adams said this will not impact other BPA customers.

Ecosystem

In order to elevate the voice and role of Tribes and Indigenous people in treaty operations, both the U.S. and Canada will establish a tribal and indigenous-led body referred to as the Joint Ecosystem and Indigenous and Tribal Cultural Values Body (JEB). JEB will provide recommendation on how treaty operations can better support ecosystem needs as well as tribal and indigenous cultural values. One of the things JEB is expected to do is feasibility studies on how to re-introduce salmon into blocked areas of the upper Columbia.

In addition, Canada will provide 1 million acre feet of water flows in all years and an additional 0.5 million acre feet in dry years to support salmon survival and migration.

Once the amendment text of the treaty is finalized, both countries will go through the process to bring the modernized treaty into force. Until that happens, the U.S. and Canada are working on interim measures for treaty coordination, power transmission, and preplanned flood risk management. Savage said in the interim, operations may be less predictable.

The information session can be viewed at state.gov/columbia-river-treaty/. More information about the modernized Columbia River Treaty is at state.gov/summary-of-the-agreement-in-principle-to-modernize-the-columbiariver-treaty-regime.



Gifts of grain

Hospital foundation program uses farmers' crops to help provide medical services

By Trista Crossley Editor, Wheat Life

With the holiday season right around the corner, growers across the Palouse have an opportunity to make a life-changing gift.

"Pullman Regional Hospital's Gifts of Grain program is a great way for landlords and farmers to give back," explained Wayne Druffel, farmer and president of the board of directors for the Pullman Regional Hospital Foundation. "Your gifts can be used to create better pathways for patients, their caretakers, and our healthcare teams."

The Pullman Regional Hospital Foundation was established in 1945 to support the hospital by increasing awareness of the hospital's services, needs, and facilitating philanthropic efforts to advance health care in the community. Linda Infranco, executive director of the Foundation, said the Gifts of Grain program is a unique and meaningful way to support the hospital and create value for the community. A gift of grain or other commodity also has a tax advantage because it can lower a grower's income.

"The more farmers and people in the industry who take advantage of this program, the bigger benefit it will have on quality healthcare in our community," she said. "We want to make people aware that this is an opportunity that exists that might not impact their pocketbook directly. It's another generous way of supporting Pullman Regional." To donate to the program, growers need to contact their local elevator or co-op and transfer grain to the Foundation's account. Infranco said most of the elevators and co-ops in the region have a Foundation account already set up. Growers can then contact the Foundation and designate where they want the proceeds from the grain to go. Typically, the funds are applied to the hospital's highest need or annual priorities, which include the regional high school athletic training program, the family medicine residency program, and the Patient Care Expansion plan.

"It's time to grow, and the Patient Care Expansion is focused on improving the patient experience and creating more access around quality healthcare," she said.

Once the grain or commodity has been transferred to the Foundation's account, it is sold, usually that same day. The farmer is credited with that day's median commodity price, and a check, minus processing fees, is sent to the Foundation.

The Gifts of Grain program was established in 2014 and has raised more than \$90,000 (more than 24,000 bushels have been donated).

More information about the Gifts of Grain program is at the Foundation's website, pullmanregional.org/howto-help/foundation/foundation-programs-to-support/ foundation-gifts-of-grain.



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Getting out of a pesticide pickle

Updated database provides farmers with Washington, Oregon label information

By Trista Crossley

Editor, Wheat Life

For farmers in a pickle about pesticide labels, there's online help available through Washington State University's (WSU) Pesticide Information Center OnLine (PICOL).

While PICOL has been around for more than 40 years, it has just recently been rebuilt and upgraded and is the only database in the country that can be searched for specific crops or pests. The database contains approximately 19,000

entries for pesticides in Washington and Oregon. Besides WSU, the database is supported by Oregon State University and the Washington and Oregon state departments of agriculture.

"We have (the database) on a new server, new system," said Kristi Boone, PICOL manager. "We have made it more user friendly by making the filters easier to understand and explore. We are also allowing the results to come in multiple formats. In the card format, users can just view information, or they can use the table format to download data into an Excel document so they can manipulate it as they need."

Besides the extensive filtering capabilities, the PICOL home page also includes quick links to special local need labels, restricted use pesticides, and organic

pesticides. To start a search, users enter information in the search bar, use one of the quick links, or simply hit enter from the home page. Results can be viewed as a card or table (the export option is accessible from the table view). Clicking on an entry brings up the pesticide information, including a link to view the Oregon and/or Washington label. Boone said feedback on the updated database has been very positive.

"It's really beneficial in finding particular crops that farmers are trying to cross reference for certain fields," Boone added. "Say a farmer is spraying for wheat and there's a canola crop nearby. They can put wheat and canola in as a crop and know that if it drifts into the next field, it wouldn't harm the canola. Just the cross-referencing aspect has been really good. You can also pull this up on your phone. If farmers are out in the field and maybe the label is kind of worn off on the bottle, they have the means to be able to search on-site and find the label."

When information is being added to the database, it is

updated every 10 minutes. Boone explained that when they get a local special need label from the state, the goal is to get it processed and in the database within 24 hours.

PICOL is also designed to work with the Environmental Protection Agency's new bulletin system. If a pesticide has a related pesticide use limitation area, it will be marked in the search results. Boone said they are working on getting a pop up to alert the user and hope to have an easily accessible link to EPA's Bulletins Live! Two website soon.



Future upgrades to PICOL include adding a mode of action on each label and finding ways to decrease the amount of time it takes to enter label information.

PICOL isn't just for farmers. The database also contains information pertinent to homeowners. Products are marked for commercial vs. home use. Homeowners who are looking for organic pesticide options can take advantage of the organic quick search.

"We have all sorts of products (in the database). Any product that is approved as a pesticide in Washington or Oregon, we have in the system. That could be your Lysol hand wipes to flea/tick collars to agricultural pesticides," Boone said. She shared that a certain online retailer uses PICOL to determine which products they can or can't sell on their site (commercial products are prohibited).

To access PICOL, go to picol.cahnrs.wsu.edu. The website includes a help section and frequently asked questions. To share feedback with staff, send an email to PICOL.info@wsu.edu.





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Questions, suggestions welcome

Meetings with NRCS state team, growers keeping WAWG conservation coordinator busy

By Andrea Cox

Conservation Coordinator, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Oct. 15 marked my six-month anniversary with the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) team. Thank you to those growers that have reached out to me recently with recommendations of practices that I pass on to our state Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) team. There have been some fantastic recommendations, and I sincerely appreciate the time and energy that goes into these submissions.

A couple of months ago, I was fortunate enough to receive an invitation to tag along for a field tour near Hay

with Warren Horton. The time and effort that he has put into implementing conservation-friendly practices to help reduce soil erosion on his acreage is incredible. Some of those practices he receives cost share from NRCS for, while others are not yet "approved practices," but are headed up the NRCS pipeline for consideration.

In addition, one of our Benton County growers reached out to me with the recommendation for cost share for hand pulling of rye. One of our Spokane County growers has recommended that tiling be considered for cost share. I'm truly encouraged by the responses and support that I've received from our growers since my last article in *Wheat Life* asking for recommendations for practices. If you've got ideas, please don't hesitate to reach out. Our growers are truly some of the most innovative in the country.

The past couple of months have also involved a lot of traveling for me and introductions to our local and state NRCS staff. In October, I was fortunate enough to attend the Washington state NRCS Quality Leadership Team in Ellensburg. I'm a huge proponent of face-to-face introductions, and this group had a lot of clarifying questions about my role. I continue to attend conservation district meetings as my schedule allows, to stay educated on other conservation-based opportunities for growers. In addition, I'll be making my way around to our county meetings to continue meeting our growers.



It's important to note that batching dates for fiscal year 2025 were announced a few months ago. All applications received by the dates listed below will be evaluated for funding under each program. All applicants will need to complete participant eligibility requirements: Farm Operating Plan for Entity/individual (FSA form 902); FY25 AGI; HEL/Wetland Determination (form 1026); and all farms/tracts current with FSA). Eligibility deadlines for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) are tentatively set for Jan. 17, 2025. Remaining fiscal year 2025 batching dates are:

- CSP Classic: Jan. 17, 2025
- ACEP-Agricultural Land Easements: First round batching was Oct. 4, 2024, and second round batching is Dec. 20, 2024
- ACEP-Wetland Reserve Easements First round batching was Oct. 4, 2024, and second round batching is Dec. 20, 2024

All unfunded fiscal year 2024 applications were rolled over to EQIP sign-up 1 for fiscal year 2025. NRCS staff will be meeting with these producers this fall into early winter to refresh their plans and prepare for ranking in February. In addition, NRCS staff will be meeting with growers to complete documentation for practices and certification and reviewing ongoing plans with producers that are interested in pursuing a new EQIP or CSP contract. Please don't hesitate to reach out and let me know if you have questions.

I am so thankful to have had the opportunity to meet and reconnect with many of our growers within the past six months. I look forward to meeting more faces at our upcoming Tri-State Grain Growers Convention and having more discussions and answering questions that are still floating around about my role. Please don't hesitate to introduce yourself to me and share any ideas or questions about my role that you may have. You can also reach me at andrea@wawg.org.



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Leadership skills prove valuable beyond WAWG board tenure

Dan Blankenship, WAWG Past President 1991-92

By Kevin Gaffney Special to Wheat Life

Raised on a farm homesteaded by his grandfather, **Dan Blankenship** had a typical wheat farm upbringing. His parents, Dwayne and Beulah Blankenship, had a large family with one daughter and five sons. The fifth of six children, Blankenship worked on the farm as a youth and was also "loaned out" to neighbors in the Washtucna area.

Following graduation from Washtucna High School in 1974, Blankenship attended Washington State University (WSU) and earned his degree in agronomy in 1979. He enjoyed farm work, but serious allergy problems

stifled his enthusiasm for a career in wheat farming.

"When I began my studies at WSU, I took classes that pertained to the science and research side of agriculture," said Blankenship. "Those classes really hit home with me, and I developed a much greater appreciation for the smell of freshly worked soil. I felt great satisfaction watching the progress of newly seeded fields. I discovered a whole new set of aesthetics regarding what we do as dryland wheat farmers."

Blankenship was directly involved with operation of the family farm until 2017, when he retired from the day-today farming management. Part of their family farm is now being operated by his brother, Brett, and the remainder of the acreage is being leased to a neighbor.

It was perhaps inevitable that Blankenship would be heavily involved with the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG). He recalls attending the WAWG convention each year with his father in the 1980s.

"My father believed it was important to learn from your neighbors and to be involved and engaged with your industry associations," noted Blankenship. "I served as committee chairs and as Adams County president before going through the leadership chairs at the state level with WAWG.

"I actually didn't feel completely qualified when I was asked to go through the WAWG chairs. I had not been on the WAWG board for very long at the time. It was a surprise to me when the call to serve came. The decision to serve was aided by the support of my colleagues, who were themselves surprised that I had not noticed that I



had been groomed and trained for the leadership positions."

Blankenship had several excellent mentors in preparing for WAWG leadership. David Harlow, Jim Walesby, Gayle Gering, and Chris Laney were all past presidents that helped him to develop leadership skills and qualities. Other WAWG leaders who supported Blankenship or served on his executive committee were Andy Rustemeyer, Judy Olson, Phil Isaac, Mark Schoesler, Chris Herron, and Tom Harding.

One of the major issues WAWG was fighting then has unfortunately returned — the campaign to remove the Snake River dams.

"The Snake River dams issue has obviously been around for decades," said Blankenship. "This is a critical issue because those dams have become such an integral component of the economic and social fabric of our region. This most recent attempt to remove the dams has been the most blatantly secretive process I've ever seen in government.

"I watched a Zoom committee hearing that Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers held on the process that was being used to cut a backroom deal with the tribes and the environmental community, aided by Washington Governor Jay Inslee. It was interesting to listen to the federal government folks talk about how they were forced to keep the negotiations secret because of the arbitration/mediation process rules. Of course, they themselves had written those rules," explained Blankenship. "Even if money could be provided to 'mitigate' the removal of the dams, there would be huge problems ahead, especially the energy replacement situation. The proposed solutions are inadequate and will be regretted from the moment the dams disappear, if that indeed ever happens."

Other important issues during his WAWG tenure were fighting the inheritance tax and trying to determine the proper balance of support for the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) and exactly how to advocate for fair treatment for WAWG members who were, in essence, becoming nonwheat growers.

One of the biggest accomplishments for Blankenship as WAWG president might have been helping to build leadership skills for WAWG members and leaders during a special, two-day retreat. "We tried to give everyone leadership tools they could use in their personal lives and in their businesses," said Blankenship. "We were striving to make our members and their spouses not just better WAWG board members and committee members, but more skillful cooperative board members, church trustees, and business owners. I still occasionally hear from people who attended that retreat about how they adopted skills learned at that time into their business and personal lives. I am proud of what we did for those folks who were willing to take valuable time away from their farms and families to better serve their neighbors and communities."

Blankenship believes two strengths of WAWG are that is has always been a member-driven organization and that the leadership regularly changes, bringing in fresh ideas and attitudes.

Blankenship recalls that the wheat growers had a good working relationship with the congressional delegation



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during his term, including Sid Morrison and Tom Foley, who were both knowledgeable and favorable to their ag constituents. Federal agencies sometimes presented more of a problem for growers.

"Ignorance of the scale of modern agriculture was and continues to be a problem for the ag industry," said Blankenship. "A large group of growers was meeting with the person at the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) who was responsible for the rulemaking related to 'leaking underground petroleum storage tanks.' As we began to explain how this rule would have horrible impacts on farmers and all privately owned small-town gas stations, she interrupted us to gleefully explain how she had fixed our problem by exempting all tanks under 600 gallons. I asked our group for a show of hands for all the growers that had any tanks under 5,000 gallons. Not one raised their hand."

The decision to run for county commissioner was not something Blankenship had planned after retiring from the farm. He was approached by people who pointed out some decisions made by the Adams County commissioners that were not particularly friendly to agriculture and other property owners. After some reflection and encouragement from his wife, they decided that the skillset he had developed with WAWG could transfer well to the county commissioner position.

"My 2020 campaign was interesting, as it was during the COVID pandemic," said Blankenship. "I am currently running again and plan to continue to do my very best for Adams County if I am re-elected. However it turns out, I do not plan to run for a third term."

One of the things Blankenship heard about a lot when he was first elected was poor communication between the various departments in the county government. The commissioners have established a quarterly forum where all elected Adams County officials meet with the commissioners to talk about challenges and successes. They also now have monthly reporting sessions where all county department heads meet in person with the commissioners. Blankenship believes this has helped with governmental efficiency at the county level.

"There are difficult challenges facing all counties, one being that the inflation rate on all the services that counties are expected or legally obligated to provide continue to be around 8% or higher. At the same time, our ability to raise property taxes is capped at a 1% increase above the total amount collected in the previous year. The arithmetic of that is becoming inescapable," he explained. "Many counties are facing the issue that their county jails are 50-75 years old, and today's residents of those facilities are getting more challenging to deal with. We have gotten several projects funded to improve our jail, including an evidence storage facility and other infrastructure improvements.



"Another issue facing Adams County has been the need to replace the six bridges that span the East Low Irrigation Canal. They are not long enough to traverse the expanded canal, which is needed to replace deep well irrigation in the region."

Following many meetings with both state and federal officials and agencies, funding for two of the six canal bridges has been obtained, and engineering and design costs for the remaining four bridges have been funded.

"After over 40 years in the private sector, where you identify a problem, define a solution, and then take care of it, working within the government has been a little frustrating," said Blankenship. "In government, reaching a consensus on problems takes time, finding solutions takes additional time. Then there are hoops to jump through for compliance, funding, and procurement. That all takes time and can make for a very slow process."

In addition to serving WAWG and Adams County, Blankenship has been involved with the Lions Club, the Eagles, and helped form the Adams County Noxious Weed Control Board. Blankenship sees a positive future for the Pacific Northwest wheat industry. Farmers are problem solvers by nature and have always found ways to survive through both good and bad times, and he believes they will continue to do so.



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SEASONS OF FARMING

As winter settles in, most farmers' fields go quiet, but that doesn't mean nothing is happening.

In Eastern Washington's Mediterranean climate, winter is when the region receives the majority of its precipitation, either as rain or, preferably, snow. Snow insulates crops from wind and excessively cold temperatures and allows soil microbes to stay active. Under the snow, winter wheat and other fall-planted crops are still alive. Nutrients from fall fertilizer applications, like nitrogen, are using winter precipitation to move through the soil down to where plants' roots can access them. Residue left from the year's crops is slowly breaking down, adding more nutrients back to the soil.

Inside, growers are using the time to catch up on bookkeeping and other paperwork. Many farmers will be finalizing taxes, preparing year-end reports, and working with government agencies to verify and finalize participation in farm service programs. Many growers also use the winter to take family vacations, attend conferences, and participate in grower educational opportunities. For industry commissions and associations, the start of a new year means legislative sessions, so growers who are active in those organizations will be spending time in state capitals or in Washington, D.C.

Work is also happening out in shops, where equipment is being taken apart, thoroughly cleaned, repaired if necessary, and re-assembled.

One of the most important tasks that farmers will undertake is

to review their seeding, fertilizing, and harvest, looking at what worked and what didn't work. When the crop was first planted, either in the previous fall or this spring, farmers had to make decisions on how much fertilizer to apply to maximize their yields without overspending on a very expensive input. Too little fertilizer, and the crop may not reach its yield potential, while too much fertilizer, besides being a waste of money, can actually hurt crops such as soft white wheat. Too much nitrogen increases protein in soft white wheat, which is supposed to be a low-protein crop. Growers will use soil tests to figure out how much nitrogen is already in the soil to help plan their fertilizer applications.

Most farmers don't plant the same crop in the same field year after year. This crop rotation helps with weed management and improves soil health, and some crops, such as legumes, can actually add nitrogen back to the soil, giving the following crop a nutrient boost. Farmers will also be using information they've gathered from researchers, fields days, and summer crop tours to pick varieties to plant or to experiment with a new conservation or tillage practice.

Farmers in Eastern Washington have made huge strides in understanding soil health. They are experimenting with cover crops to help with nitrogen management and building soil organic matter, although cover crops may not be as effective in the dryer areas of the region. Direct seed and no-till cultivation methods have cut down on erosion, especially during winter thaw events.

Winter might look quiet, but dig a little deeper, and you'll find farmers are as busy as ever.



Covering crop rotations

Many factors come into play when considering what to plant where

By Jennifer Ferrero

Crop rotations date back thousands of years. Back then, farmers may not have understood the science behind rotating crops on the same land from season to season, but they used it in practice for crop production. Since then, science and experience have expanded our agricultural knowledge exponentially. Modern-day farms in Washington state still use crop rotations contingent on location, weather, weeds, disease, and water.

Crop rotation has many objectives in mind. It can help nourish the soil, break pest cycles, maintain moisture and use valuable precipitation more efficiently, and reduce weeds' proliferation. Rotations give farmers options to spread production, workload, and market risk and increase farm revenue. Still, there are seasons for fallow fields, that is, fields left unplanted and kept weed free to accumulate soil water for use by the following crop. Also, crop insurance plays a significant role in decisions on what crops to rotate and when.

In general, one should try to alternate between grass and broadleaf crops, fall-planted and spring-planted crops, high and low residue producing crops, and high and low water use crops. Although often difficult to do, it is also beneficial to alternate between annual and perennial crops. The use of a legume crop can help reduce synthetic nitrogen inputs.

Ryan Poe is a fifth-generation wheat farmer outside of Hartline, Wash., who farms with his uncle and cousin. Ty Meyer is a production agricultural manager with the Spokane Conservation District who has worked with largescale producers in Eastern Washington. In this article, we will learn from them about best practices and reasons for crop rotations.

The farmer's perspective on crop rotations

Poe's family has farmed in north central Washington for roughly 150 years. It's fair to say that his family intimately knows the land and understands its flaws and the external forces acting upon it. They specialize in winter wheat, grow winter canola, and raise cattle for beef. They are considered a large-scale dryland farm located about an hour north of Moses Lake and near Grand Coulee Dam.

For him, crop rotations aren't necessarily consistent in his

area. Factors such as wind, cold, and moisture come into play when determining what to rotate. He also said that in the Palouse, they have more options for different crop rotations.

"The higher rainfall zones like the Palouse look much different than mine; they utilize more spring-planted crops because of rainfall," he explained.

Poe also factors in weed control, market demands, and crop insurance coverage. When considering the benefits of crop rotations, he said they look at weed control and how crops like winter peas put nitrogen back into the soil. Over the past six or seven years, they've integrated winter canola with winter wheat and fallow periods. Regarding weed control, crop rotations outside of just winter wheat allow him to go after the winter annual grassy weeds that are more difficult to control in winter wheat.

For a few reasons, the question of when to leave the field fallow can be based on soil health, stewardship, nitrogen, and water conservation.

"For us in our area, the sole reason for fallow is lack of moisture; we are in a 10-to-12-inch annual rainfall zone, and the only reason to use fallow is we need another year's worth of moisture for a crop," he said.

Poe explained that winter-planted crops, like winter wheat, can perform better economically than spring-planted crops. His farm uses a combination of two main farming practices: chem fallow, which is the use of herbicides rather than tillage to control weeds, in a direct seed (no-till) system and tillage in a conventional tillage summer fallow system. One of the hurdles to transitioning to direct seeding on all acres on their farm has been consistently being able to integrate canola into their crop rotation. He added, "We've consistently had better luck getting a stand in the fall in a conventional tillage system. With fallow systems, we are trying to control the weeds to conserve moisture to get a stand for the following year."

Poe mentioned that spraying technology for chemical herbicides and the ability to use camera-based spot sprayers have helped to reduce the use of chemicals. He said they regularly scout the fields for weeds. "All fallow ground is sprayed in the spring to control early weeds and throughout the summer to keep the fallow as clean as possible for the following year's production," he added.

Market-related factors that play into what farmers plant in their crop rotations vary and are often based upon auxiliary services, including crop processing logistics like local canola crushers. Farmers must seek out processors who can help take their crops to market.

The conservation district's perspective on crop rotations

The Spokane Conservation District is funded through Spokane County and Washington state and helps landowners and constituents manage their natural resources. They have water quality, production agriculture, forestry, and education programs that enable the district to provide the right resources and experts to help with natural resource concerns. The district also provides funding through grants. Each conservation district works on local issues impacting landowners in their district.

Ty Meyer has been with the district for 21 years. He brings a depth of knowledge to regional producers and works closely with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service. Regarding regional largescale farmers, he said, "We work closely with them in a good partnership with good funding opportunities." The district is a resource for landowners to come to for support. He said they are here to help keep topsoil on farms, protect land from erosion, and keep pesticides on the fields and out of waterways.

Meyer said that crop rotations add diversity to the system. "My work is mainly looking at things from a soil health angle, addressing soil erosion, soil productivity, and ecosystem functions; it is about diversity in the system, getting something in the system to add biodiversity."

He advises that fallow wheat rotations help mitigate disease and gather moisture for the following crop.

"Our thought process on crop rotations is evolving and looking at more diversity. Cover crops are there to build a symbiotic relationship between different plant species to help the soil ecosystem grow." He added that crops evolve, and so do diseases and insects. "Instead of sitting fallow through the winter months, the folks that figure out how to utilize cover crops will see an advantage in reductions of pesticide use and will build a healthier crop system over time that can fend off different diseases and insects as we build a healthier soil ecosystem."

Knowledge sharing is important, he added, "We are learning together from soil health experts who have successfully grown cover crops around the country. When do we start crop rotations, how do we get cover crops in rotation, and how might they fit into our system?"

Meyer said the big questions are where do farmers put a cover crop in their rotation and when do they terminate it to maximize the benefit while mitigating soil moisture loss for the following crops. He said it can be challenging to figure out. "Our soil was not meant to be bare; that's not what nature intended for soil," he explained. For example, he said that in central Washington, temperatures in bare soil can reach up to 130 degrees in the summer, making it hard for microorganisms to live in. He said cover crops provide shade and feed biology, but knowing how to fit it into the system is hard. For farmers, "We can't harm cash crops with cover crops. Even in Eastern Washington, where there is more rain than in central Washington, we struggle with starting a cover crop after harvest. However, finding ways to use them in our crop rotations will ultimately build healthier soil.

Crop rotations versus fallow fields and other crop cover plantings are based on maintaining and improving soil health. However, decisions about what to plant and when must ultimately incorporate market and crop insurance considerations. Experts say that crop rotations reduce the use of pesticides and herbicides and can improve nitrogen and water replenishment in the soil.

Expert Q&A

While no two farmers follow the same schedule, winter is generally devoted to more "indoor" tasks. **Marci Green** from Green View Farms in Spokane County points out that many bookkeeping tasks, such as paying bills, marketing crops, payroll, monitoring budgets, and cash flow, happen throughout the year. In this Q&A, she focuses on the tasks she does primarily in the late fall through early spring.

What kind of bookkeeping tasks do you generally do at this time of the year?

As soon as harvest wraps up, we need to calculate our yields and report them to our crop insurance agent. More importantly, we communicate with our landlords about how the harvest went, and what yields we had on their farm. We

> also verify our crop inventory, both in home storage and in local elevators. If we have crop insurance claims, we need to notify our agent as soon as we realize we have a loss, but then we need to work with adjusters to report the production. We need to enroll wheat (and other fall-seeded crops) in the federal crop insurance program by Sept. 30, so this is when we make sure we have the desired levels of insurance for the upcoming year.

This is also the time of year we make annual cash rent payments to landlords. Most of our leases are on a crop share basis but we do have a few pieces of ground that we lease on a cash rent basis. The fall is a good time to review our lease terms and, if it is time to renew, communicate with the landlord about our desire to continue farming their ground and any changes we would like to see in the lease terms.

The biggest winter bookkeeping task is tax planning. We work with our tax accountant and plan for year-end. We estimate what our taxable income will be for the year, and what we expect our tax liability to be. We update our depreciation schedules and determine if there are expenses or income that we can, or should, defer to next year. After year end, we work with our tax accountant to file our returns and pay taxes. I also do the bookkeeping for one landlord group which is set up as an LLC. I need to keep track of the due dates for each return and consider what returns need to be prepared and filed first.

This is also the time for annual meetings. Depending how an entity is structured, it may or may not hold an annual meeting. One of our landlord entities invites us, as the farm operator, to their annual meeting, so I need to prepare reports to present at their meeting.

Are there bookkeeping/paperwork tasks that you usually do in the winter?

The main thing that must be done in the winter is anything related to year end, particularly income taxes. Crop insurance, FSA, and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) all have various deadlines for applying, enrolling and reporting. Many of these deadlines come up during the winter months. Winter is also a good time to review and update our estate planning. This is primarily because this is when we, as a family, have time to work on these projects that get pushed aside during the seasons when we are busy with fieldwork.

Winter is the preferred time for repairs and maintenance on equipment and buildings. We often go through each machine and make sure it is in good operating condition and ready for the next year. If we are going to make any equipment purchases or trades and build or remodel buildings or grain bins, this is also a good time to make these changes.

On our farm, we store a lot of our wheat in home storage. As a result, the winter has become wheat-hauling season, when we deliver it to the elevator or directly to a local mill. Road conditions have an impact on the timing of this as well.

Finally, winter is meeting season. The local cooperatives and crop protection retailers have grower meetings which are educational and informative. Of course, we also attend the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention and several of the Agricultural Marketing and Management workshops.

How far ahead do you plan what you'll be planting where?

We always have a general idea of what we'll be planting in each field each year. It is best to get our seed ordered a couple months before we will need it, so we try to firm up our plans, including what varieties we want to plant, ahead of time. This ensures that the seed will be available when we need it. At the same time, if conditions change in the markets and/or the weather, we might change our plans right up until the seed goes into the ground.

What factors do you take into consideration when planning your crop rotations?

Some farmers have set rotations that they rarely vary. We are fortunate that we are able to be very diversified. We grow winter and spring wheat, Kentucky bluegrass seed, malt barley, canola, and legumes such as dry peas, lentils, and chickpeas. We also grow a little alfalfa. In general, a spring crop will follow winter wheat. We consider what crops have been grown in each field in previous years, what chemicals have been used on it and if any residuals will affect the new crop, what weeds are prevalent in a specific field that need to be controlled, and soil health. We also try to minimize our tillage so that impacts our rotation as well.

Winterizing wheat

Farmers plant some wheat in the winter. Why?

Vernalization is the requirement by many plants to experience a period of cold temperatures (34–45° F) for a certain length of time before flowering can be initiated. Sometimes farmers refer to this as winter dormancy.

Snow cover plays a key role in providing insulation against wind chill and other fluctuations in air temperatures throughout the winter. As the snow melts in the spring it provides natural irrigation, which is critical as the plant comes out of dormancy.

 Leaves can become brown or tinged with brown over time.

- 2 The crown of the plant is the most critical part for plant survival.
- 8 Roots uptake moisture and nutrients from the soil.

×	Average hours of daylight in Eastern Washington	OCTOBER 10.8	NOVEMBER 9.3	DECEMBER 8.6	JANUARY 9.0	FEBRUARY 10.3	MARCH 11.9
	Normal average air temperatur (F) in Eastern Washington.	res 39 – 61	31 – 45	25 – 36	25 – 36	28 – 43	33 – 52
		armers apply fertil seeding or in first ant growth stage	izer		Max cold tolerance period	Fa fe cr	armers apply 🔂 💿 ertilizer to support ritical plant growth

Winter wheat in Washington

There are two factors that influence spring growth and flowering in winter wheat. Winter wheat varieties need **vernalization** to make seeds, or kernels, which are what millers grind into flour. Spring wheat varieties do not need this cold period and make kernels in a shorter growing period.

Declining temperatures in the fall triggers vernalization, usually starting in October in the Pacific Northwest (PNW). The ability for plants to survive when exposed to temperatures below freezing is called **cold tolerance**. Cold tolerance is important because the plant must be able survive the winter to flower during the following growing season. While average minimum air temperatures in the region are usually above 20° F, the PNW can experience temperatures down to single digits. The part of the wheat plants that must be protected are the meristems in the **crown**, which are usually one inch below the soil during the winter. The soil and any snow cover provide insulation. Average minimum soil temperatures rarely decrease below 30° F.

The vernalization requirement of winter wheat in the PNW is usually met by **eight weeks** of exposure to 34° F with less than 10–12-hour day length. The day length, or **photoperiod**, is the second factor that influences flowering in winter wheat. The photoperiod is defined by the length of continuous light and dark that a plant is exposed to. Most plants control growth and flowering in relation to photoperiod. Wheat is a long-day photoperiod plant. It regulates flowering in response to lengthening days. So even when the vernalization conditions for flowering have been met, the photoperiod requirement ensures that the plants will not flower until environmental conditions are appropriate.

As spring approaches, plants come out of dormancy. In most of the U.S., once winter wheat enters the vernalization period, growth is very slow. Once growing starts in the spring, new leaves are produced. This spring growth of new leaves is known as **green up** and is the farmer's first sign that harvest is just around the corner!





washington state university Crop and Soil Sciences



Sources: Kimberly Garland-Campbell, research geneticist (plants), U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, and adjunct faculty, Washington State University Department of Crop and Soil Sciences; National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration

Nuts & bolts

Equipment work doesn't stop when it's cold; it just moves indoors

During winter, the fields may be sleeping under the snow, but that doesn't mean farmers are. In shops across Eastern Washington, farm equipment is being cleaned and repaired, all in preparation for another year of hard work.

Rob Wilkins, parts supervisor at Papé Machinery in Tekoa, Wash., believes the work being done right now — getting deep into the bowels of a machine — is even more important than harvest.

"What farmers do in the winter, taking care of their equipment, saves them downtime in harvest," he explained. "What they fix, what they repair, what they do maintenance-wise in the winter usually equates to their equipment running longer. Equipment is still going to fail, because we are in a world where metal runs against metal, but most of the farmers that do maintenance religiously every year and go deep, they tend to run longer and smoother in harvest." more reliant on computers, adding another wrench to the works when it comes to repairs, since specialized training is needed to deal with it. The technicians at Papé get that training online and through classes, much of which also happens in the winter.

"There's pretty extensive training that techs go through to be able to diagnose the problem electronically. The physical parts, replacing bearings and stuff, that's just diving into the book to figure out how to tear it apart and put it back together. Once you've done that two or three times, you don't have to look at the book as much," Wilkins said.

Farmers generally can tell when a piece of equipment is having a problem, but during the busy season, they are generally more focused on fixing the problem just enough to get the job done. So the fact that a machine needs some repair and maintenance isn't a surprise. What can be a surprise is how big the repair ends up being.

"You think something is going to be okay, and you get into it and it's not. You open it up and go 'whoa that's kind of worse than we thought," Wilkins said. "That doesn't happen too often. Farmers can feel, when they are in the combine seat, if stuff isn't running quite right, or if it's out of balance, or the bearings are starting to go out. A lot of times, they can feel that from the cab so they know there's some-

At Papé Machinery, technicians will typically spend two to three weeks disassembling a piece of equipment like a combine or tractor, replacing the parts that need replacing, before reassembling everything and running the equipment to make sure it is back in working order. Big equipment is generally deeply maintained every other year, as most of the hardest wearing parts are on a two-to-three-year wear cycle.

Farm equipment is getting bigger, which means repair crews need bigger service trucks and bigger cranes. But equipment is also becoming more and



thing wrong, they just don't know exactly where the problem is."

Farmers will start heading back out into the fields as soon as Mother Nature allows them to. In Tekoa, in Whitman County, that's usually around the beginning of April, but go west where it's a bit dryer, and farmers in central Washington can often start fieldwork in February. As fieldwork ramps up, so does the work at Papé.

"If they aren't using the equipment, they aren't breaking it. That's the old adage," Wilkins said, laughing. "To break parts, they have to be used in the machinery, so once they get going, stuff tends to break."

By Ben Barstow



CHARRMAN WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

A few years ago, I was in a meeting with a U.S. chef, part of a coalition of politically connected thinkers interested in restructuring the world's food system. The idea was that all food should be produced locally so that little or no carbon fuels would be used to transport food around the world. This chef insisted that Japan did not need our wheat and that Japan was capable of producing all the wheat they needed domestically. I told him at the time that I was pretty sure he was mistaken. Needless to say, he was not convinced, but it convinced me to do a little research on my own. I found that, technically, he was correct; Japan does have enough farmable land that it could grow all the wheat that it imports today. However, self-sufficiency in wheat production would mean sacrificing domestic production of a lot of other crops, such as fruit and vegetables, many of which are better adapted to their local climate and farming practices and are a lot more difficult (i.e. bigger carbon footprint) to ship long distance than wheat.

When it comes to producing calories, some environments don't naturally produce food but do have lots of people living there. In this case, wheat is a real winner — especially Pacific Northwest wheat — as far as calories that can be easily moved to where people are. Further, our wheat never sees the inside of a carbon fuel-burning grain drier and comes from the field at 9.5% moisture (the five-year average moisture of Wheat Marketing Center samples). It is relatively clean; there is no need to run it through a cleaner to remove weeds, stems, or dirt; and it stays fresh for years without refrigeration. However, that is a bit off the subject that I wanted to cover here in this, my second-to-last chairman's column.

What I really wanted to talk about is the WGC's final trade team this year, a group from the Japan Biscuit Association. In the U.S., we have one association that represents commercial producers of baked goods of all kinds (the American Bakers Association), but in Japan, where they take their cookies seriously, there is a special association just for commercial cookie producers. What we call cookies, products with high sugar content and fairly high fat, are called biscuits in Japan, and the proud commercial bakers of such products are part of the Japan Biscuit Association.

The director of the Japan Biscuit Association, four of its members representing a large share of the biscuits made in Japan, and Mr. Kazunori (Rick) Nakano, country director for U.S. Wheat Associates based in Japan, paid us a visit this September. I was able to join them for lunch the day they toured the Washington State University wheat breeding facilities and the Pullman U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service Western Wheat Quality Lab.

According to the members of this trade team, they face a domestic "local is better" movement much like we see in this country. There is a perception (I said perception, not reality) that Japanese domestic wheat is better, or safer, than imported wheat. A big part of their mission in coming here was to reassure themselves that our wheat — the Western White that they like to use so much — is safe, clean, and healthy.

I couldn't resist. I had to tell them that virtually all the wheat we grow has Japanese wheat in its parentage, and in effect, when they buy wheat from us, it is like buying their own wheat back. Spring wheat breeder, Dr. Michael Pumphrey, was there and backed me up when I explained that the dwarfing genes in our wheats came originally from the Japanese variety Norin 10. At that point, Rick Nakano, who was interpreting for everyone, confirmed with me twice, "Did you say Norin 10?" He explained to me that when he was growing up on his parent's wheat farm in Japan, they were planting Norin 60, a Japanese variety also developed from the same ancestor as our wheats.

The team left reassured to the point that they are willing to promote the safety of our wheat to their customers, even in the face of their domestic "local is better" movement. To me, that is kind of a big thing. They are talking about staking part of their company's reputation on the safety, reliability, and quality of what you and I grow, handle, and put on a boat for them.

After the visit, Mr. Jun Shimada, senior managing director of Japan Biscuit Association, sent us a very nice email stating that the Japan Biscuit Association members will always use our Western White wheat as their main ingredient. Many of their members use Western White exclusively.

Now, all we have to do is train the rest of the world how to make biscuits like the Japanese do. I think I know how. We'll keep telling everyone, "It's simple! Use Western White!"



Quality assessment, 2024 crop overview

The Pacific Northwest (PNW) is renowned for its high quality soft white wheat (SWW), a crucial component of the region's agricultural exports. With Washington exporting approximately 80% of its SWW crop annually to countries in Asia and beyond, maintaining consistent quality is paramount. The Wheat Marketing Center (WMC) in Portland, Ore., plays a vital role in assessing and promoting the PNW wheat crop.

SWW is prized for its low protein content and mild flavor, making it ideal for pastries, cakes, cookies, and flatbreads. Its weak gluten and light color are key attributes that set it apart in the global market. These unique characteristics directly impact its marketability, influencing both pricing and consumer satisfaction.

WMC employs a rigorous crop quality assessment process that begins in July with the collection of wheat samples from across the PNW. This comprehensive sampling ensures a representative overview of the crop from various growing regions. Upon arrival at the WMC, samples undergo extensive physical testing to evaluate crucial characteristics such as kernel size, test weight, moisture content, protein levels, and hardness.

The evaluation process continues with comprehensive analyses of both the wheat and the resulting flour. These tests examine protein content, starch characteristics, and other indicators of baking performance. The milling process itself is carefully monitored, with particular attention paid to flour extraction rates, ash content, and particle size distribution.

Perhaps the most critical phase of the evaluation is the baking and end-use testing. Using standardized formulas and procedures, the WMC simulates real-world applications for the wheat, producing an array of products including cookies, cakes, and steam breads. This handson approach allows for the assessment of crucial characteristics such as dough handling, water absorption, color, texture, and overall product quality.

The 2024 crop year has proven successful for PNW SWW and club wheat growers. Favorable conditions throughout the growing season have contributed to a crop that exceeds both last year's production and the five-year average. Key highlights include:

- Total estimated production of 6.71 million metric tons (mmt), surpassing last year's 5.32 mmt and the five-year average of 6.11 mmt.
- Overall crop grades No. 1.
- Protein contents lower than both last year and the five-year average for SWW and club varieties.
- Average test weights aligning with the five-year average.
- Thousand kernel weights exceeding the five-year average.

The crop benefited from good soil moisture and strong germination across most of the region, with some drier areas to the north. An extended period of cooler temperatures and timely rains supported healthy crop development, while higher temperatures in July accelerated maturity and harvest. Low disease and pest pressure in most areas further contributed to the crop's success.

Farinograph, Alveograph, and Solvent Retention Capacity (SRC) values indicate very weak to medium gluten strength, ideal for typical soft wheat flour products and blends with hard wheat. End-product tests have shown promising results, including good sponge cake volume and texture and good-to-excellent performance in steamed breads and cookies. Overall baking quality is consistent with typical soft wheat performance.

These results underscore the versatility and reliability of the 2024 PNW soft white wheat crop, reaffirming its position as a preferred choice for domestic and international buyers alike. The comprehensive quality evaluation conducted by the WMC provides invaluable data for all stakeholders in the wheat industry. From farmers to millers, traders to international buyers, this information guides critical decisions on pricing, marketing, and purchasing.

As the PNW continues to cement its reputation as a reliable supplier of premium soft white wheat, the work of the WMC remains an indispensable part of the region's agricultural success story.

Stephens sets the bar

PNW cultivars continue to improve through growers' planting choices, research

For 28 years the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service's Western Wheat Quality Laboratory has conducted variety trials to determine the end-use quality of wheat cultivars and experimental lines developed by Pacific Northwest (PNW) wheat breeders. Over 6,000 samples from state variety testing programs in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho were screened from the 2023 crop year. These tests include grain, milling, flour, and baking evaluations, for a total of 25 tests per line. To assist growers in selecting which cultivars to plant, data generated from these tests are used to create the Preferred Wheat Variety Brochure. The brochure can be downloaded from the Washington Grain Commission website at wagrains.org. For a wheat cultivar to make it into the brochure, there needs to be data from 15 paired observations (against a check) over at least three crop years.

Examples of cultivars in the Preferred Wheat Variety Brochure that are encouraged for planting include the soft white winter



cultivars Piranha CL+, LCS Shine, VI Voodoo CL+, Sockeye CL+, Nova AX, and UI Vixen; winter club cultivars Cameo, Castella, and ARS Crescent; hard red winter cultivar Scorpio; and soft white spring cultivars Tekoa, Ryan, Butch CL+, Louise, and Seahawk. Newer cultivars that are not yet in the brochure include the soft white winter cultivars LCS Hydra AX, LCS Scorpion AX, LCS Dagger AX, the hard red winter cultivar LCS Eclipse, and the soft white spring cultivar Bush.

For well over 20 years, the Western Wheat Quality Laboratory has used the soft white winter wheat variety Stephens as an end-use quality check for the Preferred Wheat Variety Brochure. Stephens was developed in 1965 through a cross between the French variety Nord Desprez and Pullman Selection 101 and was released in 1978.

For 38 years (1979-2009) Stephens was the number one wheat variety grown in Oregon and was widely planted throughout the PNW. Because of its longevity and broad adaptability, it is well suited to be a long-standing check in the Preferred Wheat Variety Brochure for wheat grown in Washington, Oregon, and North Idaho.

Progress in improving end-use quality in PNW wheat can be seen in Figure 1 above. This figure shows the percent of commercial wheat lines with better end-use quality than Stephens. This figure shows the percent of wheat cultivars grown that are above Stephens in overall quality attributes during the last 20 years. In 2003, 50% of the commercial wheat cultivars were better than Stephens in overall quality. Now, 20 years later, 80% of the commercial wheat cultivars rate better than Stephens in overall quality. The 30% increase over this period is an indication of the genetic improvement the region has achieved regarding overall quality. This is a clear indication that the dedication, focus, and funding towards wheat quality has been beneficial to the marketability of wheat produced in this region.

2024 soft white wheat crop passes muster

From specialty products such as sponge cakes or Asian noodles to blending with hard red spring wheat for improving bread color, U.S. soft white (SW) wheat flour has the versatility to improve the quality of a wide variety of products. It has a low protein of 8.5% to 10.5% (12% mb), low moisture, and weak gluten. SW includes winter and spring varieties, increasing the protein range and functionality within the class.

As a key part of its commitment to transparency, U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) produces an annual U.S. Crop Quality Report that includes grade, flour, and end-product data for all six U.S. wheat classes. SW was 89% of the wheat production in Washington state in 2024, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service. The following are the highlights from the USW's SW quality report, originally published in its *Wheat Letter* Oct. 9, 2024.

New crop soft white production is up; functionality is good

The larger 2024 Pacific Northwest (PNW) SW crop experienced more moisture and moderate temperatures, resulting in typical protein distribution, appropriately weak to medium gluten strength, and acceptable to good functionality. The high protein segment is a blending opportunity for crackers, Asian noodles, steamed breads, flat breads, and pan breads. The club wheat subclass, with very weak gluten strength, is typically used in a Western White blend with SW for cakes and delicate pastries.

Growing Conditions

Ample moisture at seeding helped establish the winter SW crop with moisture and mild temperatures supporting crop growth after dormancy and also supporting spring SW. Those conditions transitioned to a prolonged hot, dry period that stressed spring-seeded crops and accelerated maturity. Yields were average to above average with total 2024 PNW SW production reaching 6.7 million metric tons, 17% more than the 2023 crop.

2024 Highlights

- Average **grade** for SW and club is U.S. No. 1.
- **Test weight** averages for SW trended higher this year with a composite average above 60 pounds per bushel. Club test weight was comparable to last year.
- Wheat protein (12% mb) is lower than last year but within a normal range for SW and club.
- Wheat falling number average is greater than 300 seconds and comparable to 2023 and the five-year average for SW and club.

- Buhler Laboratory Mill straight grade extractions, L* values (whiteness), and flour ash are similar to last year for SW. Club straight grade flour extraction and flour ash are down slightly with an L* value similar to last year. Damaged starch trended higher than last year for both SW and club, due to slightly harder kernels. Commercial mills should see better extractions.
- Wet gluten contents for SW flour are lower this year compared to 2023 and the five-year average. This likely reflects higher yields and mild temperatures.
- Solvent Retention Capacity (SRC) lactic acid values for SW are in a normal range for weak to medium gluten strength. Water SRC values are up slightly compared to last year but are comparable to the fiveyear average for SW. Overall, SW composites have SRC profiles suitable for good cookie and cracker performance. Lactic acid and water SRC values for club are consistent with very weak gluten with low water-holding capacity.
- **Starch pasting properties** as shown by amylograph and RVA viscosities for SW and club indicate the crop is suitable for batter-based products. The overall SW and club averages are similar to last year's and the five-year average.
- SW and club show typical **dough properties** ranging from very weak to medium gluten strength and low water absorption values similar to their respective 2023 and five-year averages.
- **Sponge cake** volumes for SW are similar to 2023 and the five-year average with softer textures than last year (lower hardness). Club sponge cake volume is slightly smaller than last year and the five-year average with softer texture.
- Average SW and club **cookie** diameters and spread ratios are significantly larger than last year. These values should not be compared to the five-year averages as the cookie method changed as of 2023.
- Average SW **pan bread** bake absorptions are in a normal range with specific loaf volumes and scores that trend with protein content and bake absorption. Blends of hard wheat with up to 20% SW should produce acceptable pan breads, especially at the higher end of the SW protein spectrum.
- Chinese southern-type steamed bread specific volumes for SW and club are similar to last year and larger than the five-year average. Product appearance, especially external, was better than last year for both SW and club.

Fingerprinting soil

NEW TOOLS FOR FASTER, CHEAPER SOIL CARBON MEASUREMENTS

By Haly Neely

Assistant Professor, Applied Soil Physics, Washington State University

Soil organic matter, which primarily consists of organic carbon, is a key component of healthy soil. Organic carbon is largely the product of decomposing crop residues and is a highly complex soil property. The amount of organic carbon, as well as the soil texture (i.e., the amount of sand, silt, and clay), drive how productive the soil is, and even small changes can have significant impacts on soil function. Despite its importance as a key soil property, the high cost of traditional analysis methods for carbon has limited our understanding of the impact of management practices on organic carbon.

Enter a new tool. Mid-infrared (MIR) spectral analysis uses emitted and absorbed energy from chemical bonds in soil to construct a fingerprint (spectrum). A MIR spectrometer is able to analyze samples within minutes and does not require any expensive reagents or other materials. The instrument collects a spectrum, which is the reflected energy of the sample along the energy spectrum, which is then translated into absorbance (Figure 1). Each soil sample will have a unique spectrum based on the properties of the sample.



After we collect a spectrum, we can use a soil "library" to predict soil properties for the sample. These libraries are inventories of hundreds or thousands of processed soil samples that also have traditional laboratory data (Figure 2). Statistical models are then used to predict soil



FIGURE 2. Soil samples being processed to be run through a mid-infrared spectrometer. Photo courtesy of Dr. Steve Culman.

properties for an unknown sample using these libraries.

MIR spectroscopy has been reliably used to predict multiple soil properties such as organic carbon, inorganic carbon, clay content, and many others from a single scan and has been shown to be much less expensive than traditional analysis methods. This method has been widely used in the Midwest, which has proven that this technology can work. However, to get the most accurate predictions, soil libraries need to cover the same region as the unknown soil samples.

This new tool will improve our understanding of the interaction of management practices, soil properties, and climate conditions on carbon dynamics. As previously stated, the labor and cost of measuring organic carbon in soils has significantly hindered our comprehension of soil carbon dynamics because we could not afford to analyze enough samples to get a clear picture.

Our current understanding is that, in general, soils with more organic carbon capture and store more rainfall, supply more nutrients to plants, encourage root growth, decrease the potential for soil erosion, and improve overall soil health. We also know that we can increase the amount of carbon in the soil by decreasing soil disturbance and increasing the amount of plant residue being added back to the soil.

However, soil organic carbon is one of the most dynamic components of soil, and it is difficult to predict what impact management practices will have on how much carbon is in the soil. For example, moving from a high-disturbance drill to a low-disturbance drill is likely to increase soil organic car-



Graduate student David Sande samples a field near Pullman, Wash., for soil carbon fractions.

bon, but by how much and how fast that happens is still hard to predict.

Adding further complexity, soil is incredibly variable across a single field (Figure 3, next page). This is especially true in Washington state where few fields are flat, and even those that are, had complex formation factors that don't often happen simultaneously. By being able to analyze thousands of samples quickly and cheaply, we will be able to build better models that are capable of predicting how management, soil properties, and climate interact to either build or decrease organic carbon.

As stated before, we have an incomplete picture of soil carbon storage dynamics at the field scale. Additionally, changes in total soil organic carbon following the implementation of a new management practice can be small and difficult to detect against the background soil carbon levels. However, there are many pools of carbon present in the soil that have different rates of decomposition as well as different functions.

For example, particulate organic matter (POM), consisting of recently decomposed plant inputs, is considered to have a turnover time of years to decades and responds quickly to changes in land management. Mineral-associated organic matter (MAOM) is generally less susceptible to change by management but can be vulnerable to tillage. These pools are incredibly important for understanding soil carbon dynamics, but are very labor intensive and not routinely offered in commercial soil testing labs. In addition to accurate total carbon measurements,



FIGURE 3. Soil cores showing the diversity of soils in a single field.

there has already been research on using MIR for soil carbon fractions.

In addition to its value to long-term sustainability, there are now programs that will pay farmers for the carbon in their soils. Although the science isn't clear on the benefits and there is some controversy to the practice, carbon incentive programs are gaining traction in both the policy arena and the farming community. Many carbon markets already exist, and large federal investments in incentive programs are being initiated (e.g., the \$3.1 billion investment into U.S. Department of Agriculture Climate Smart Commodity programs in 2022). The global voluntary carbon credit market has been estimated to be worth over \$50 billion by 2030 according to a report from McKinsey & Company, and interest continues to grow as more and more companies pledge to achieve carbon-neutral status.

Carbon credit programs can be broken down into two groups: those that pay for implementing soil carbon sequestering practices including Truterra and Agoro Carbon Alliance (i.e., process driven), and those that pay for actual soil carbon stored such as Indigo Ag (i.e., outcome driven). There continues to be many questions and concerns about the carbon credit market space, including how different regions will be treated in these programs. For example, one of the practices that is often eligible for carbon credits is planting cover crops; however, this is not a viable option in some regions in Washington state.

The Pacific Northwest represents a significant potential opportunity for long-term, stable, carbon storage but presents unique challenges including highly complex landscapes and fewer options to build soil organic carbon. Also, because most of the current programs are process driven, farmers who have been using carbon sequestering practices for years are currently not eligible for compensation. Moving from process-driven to outcomedriven programs may open up more opportunities for Washington state farmers to receive revenue from measured soil carbon. Soil scientists are currently working to identify fair and rational soil reference states (i.e., as-good-aswe-can-get scenarios) to provide evidence that a farmer has reached soil carbon sequestration potential; outcome-driven programs could be developed to compensate farmers.

Whether we need organic carbon measurements for assessing management practices, for carbon credit programs, or for research questions, MIR spectroscopy can provide these measurements inexpensively and quickly. It is an exciting time in soil science as we continue to unlock dynamic processes so we can provide better information to stakeholders.

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Recent reports could mean changing trends



By Allison Thompson Owner, The Money Farm

Net short positions have been a consistent theme for wheat futures, and grain futures in general, for the past two years. For wheat, the short position has been primarily based on forecasts

of ample global supplies. Based on production forecasts, that has been true. Over the past six years, global wheat production has steadily increased. That trend, however, seems to be in jeopardy, and the funds have been adjusting accordingly. This will keep money flow important going into the end of 2025.

The Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC), releases the Commitment of Traders (COT) report every Friday afternoon after market close. This report provides a breakdown of each Tuesday's open interest for futures and options on futures markets. While that means the data is already four days old when it is released, it is still real information about market positioning. The report lists positions held by commercial traders; those using futures to hedge their physical assets; noncommercial traders, or money managers (large speculators also called "the Funds"); and nonreportables, or smaller speculators. To put it simply, the report shows who is long or short the market and by how much.

Historically, a net long position indicates more traders are betting on higher prices while a net short position means more are betting futures will decline. The report is a vital piece of information for establishing a trend. The funds are generally trend followers with their only goal being to make money for themselves and their clients. Interestingly, the latest trend appears to be shifting — at least according to the Funds.

Over the past eight consecutive weeks (ending Oct. 11, 2024), the Funds have been net buyers across agricultural commodities including corn, soybeans, and wheat. As a result, they have decreased their short positions while adding longs to the market. In fact, the action has resulted in the large speculators (or Funds) maintaining their longest buying streak in grains since August of 2020. For the week ending Oct. 11, it took the Funds to a net long position across all grain commodities for the first time since early September 2023.

With this being the first "break" in the year-long trend, the move has sparked some positive price action. Corn futures have rallied nearly 50 cents, soybeans over a dollar higher, while wheat exchanges have gained 80 cents to over a dollar from the lows. While the move has been impressive, it is important to also remember that these positions are not the "be all, end all" of market movement. Still, it has an impact on price discovery. In fact, it helps market watchers see what is driving the movement.

During the past year, low futures prices have coincided with the large net short positions of the Funds as they have largely followed the supply trend. Ample supplies and large production expectations equated to lower prices. In that respect, fundamental outlooks pertaining to supply and demand remain important. When combining wheat exchanges (Chicago SRW, Minneapolis HRS, KC KRW and EU milling wheat (MATIF)), the Funds hit a net short position of -174,416 contacts in late July. As of the Oct. 5 report, they have decreased that net short position to only -43,240 contracts. So, are the fundamentals of wheat changing enough for the Funds to continue to decrease that position? Based on the latest U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) supply and demand reports, it's questionable.

While U.S. wheat production was revised lower to 1.971 billion bushels based on the USDA September Small Grains Summary, demand was largely left unchanged. Yes, U.S. ending stocks did decrease, but in the world of wheat, the global balance sheet remains most critical. Unfortunately, those supplies remain ample. Compared to the September report, global ending stocks did increase slightly to 257.72 million metric tons (mmt) compared to 257.22 mmt last month. This was a bit disappointing for the trade given that the USDA revised global production lower. The USDA not only lowered production for major exporters including the U.S., the EU, and Russia, but it also lowered production for some major importers including Brazil, Japan, and North Africa. Yet, global ending stocks increased due to adjustments for higher beginning stocks as well as lower consumption and trade.

Given the menagerie of information, it seems the USDA remains reluctant to print a bullish report for wheat or any other grain. The data continues to compute ample supplies. However, with weather headlines and private analysts moving estimates lower, it may become more difficult for the USDA to kick the can down the road. Remember, global wheat production outlooks will have ramifications to global wheat demand.

Russia's wheat production and exports are a hot topic this year as the country has flooded the global market with cheap supplies. However, some hiccups are rising that may hinder its continuation. Just recently, Russia announced a plan to increase their export tax by 41% starting mid-October. While it sounds drastic, the move will only equate to an increase of several dollars due to a weakening Russian Ruble and a slightly higher price index to calculate the duty. While it was seen as a "nonevent," the measure was taken due to internal supply concerns. On top of that, the country also asked exporters (at a closed door meeting) to not sell wheat below a minimum price. The country is clearly taking steps to reduce its exports, and there are rumors that export quotas could be their next measure.

Backing this is the fact that Russian wheat production forecasts have continued to fall. In fact, in their most recent report, the USDA lowered the country's wheat production to 82 mmt. Remember, the country started the year with predictions of a third, record-breaking crop (+90 mmt). Is final production going to move lower? No one knows, and it still depends on their weather moving forward. Regardless, with Russia facing supply concerns, global supplies are getting tighter. This has been an ongoing trend for the past six years, but the market or trade has really failed to see it as a concern during that time. However, it seems to be coming to an abrupt end.

Remember, it circles back to demand. While the USDA did slightly adjust global consumption lower in the October report, it remains record large. Demand, very rarely, if ever declines. Production, on the other hand, doesn't have a steady growth curve. With demand being record large, it puts even more stress on meeting production estimates. Unfortunately, large exporters experienced production issues this past year which are not easily offset. Still, it is going to keep global weather and production forecasts a major market focus through the end of the year.

Don't get me wrong, there are plenty of "what if scenarios" that could play out in grain futures moving forward. War, geopolitical headlines, and the ever looming black swan can also greatly impact wheat prices with little notice.

Remember, fundamentals are the trend setter. With the Funds being trend followers, they are obviously seeing evidence that makes them want to lighten their short positions. That doesn't mean the trend is changing, but it is surprising to not see their repositioning capturing more of the trades' attention. Why? They are still net short. Until they go long, it is still an upward battle for the bulls. However, the story is going to become increasingly difficult for the market, trade, and Funds to ignore.

Allison Thompson is the owner of The Money Farm, a grain marketing advisory service located in Ada, Minn. She is also still actively involved in her family's grain farm, where her husband and father grow corn, soybeans, and wheat.



Outpouring of help

NEIGHBORS, COMMUNITY COME TOGETHER TO HELP GRANT COUNTY FAMILY BRING IN THE HARVEST

By Trista Crossley Editor, Wheat Life

Farming can be stressful at the best of times, so when Dale Childers, a semiretired, long-time Grant/Lincoln County farmer died in August, the local community sprang into action to help the family finish harvest.

Ben McKay, a good friend of Dakota, Dale's son, organized the harvest bee. At first, it was just Ben and a few friends, but as word spread through the community, more people started volunteering to help. McKay's wife works at the HighLine Grain Growers elevator in Almira, Wash., so she was able to coordinate that end of the effort. "I called Dakota and said we are just fixing to do this in a day. We planned how we wanted the fields cut and in what order," McKay explained. "We are just so lucky to have such good friends and neighbors. We live in such a cool little area up here, and everybody looks out for everybody. Everybody was so willing to do whatever it took. We've all kind of been through it before."

The community harvested approximately 1,200 acres of wheat in one day with close to 30 combines, bank-out wagons, and trucks.

Dakota had farmed with his father since 2011. Dale stopped actively farming several years ago due to worsen-



ing health, but that didn't stop him from giving Dakota "suggestions," although Dakota said Dale was good at letting him do what needed to be done. Dale, Dakota, and Dakota's grandmother all lived within a half a mile of each other.

"Every morning, we'd go have breakfast at grandma's place and talk about what we were going to do that day, planning our day out," Dakota said. "He was a cool, calm, collected guy. We had a lot of fun together."

Dakota said the turnout at the harvest bee reflected how highly the community thought of his father.

"It was shocking to see how everybody came together to help. I can't say how much I appreciate how much everybody did," Dakota said. "Everybody enjoyed my father. Everybody thought he was a best friend, a great guy."

A celebration of life for Dale was held at the Childers' shop in early October.



Dale Childers (right) and his son, Dakota, and grandson, Dustin. Photo by Brook Duclos Photography.







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It's with heavy hearts we mourn the loss of one of our own, Ronald William Kloth. Ron was accepted into the kingdom of heaven on Thursday, Aug. 15, 2024, at the age of 82. Ron could never be slowed down. He worked as our trailer shop mechanic up to the age of 82. He always kept us on our toes, teasing, playing pranks on us, and always keeping us with big smiles on our faces. At the young age of 80, he was still able to tear apart a Cat dozer and change out the drive wheels. Ron spent his life as a truck driver, mechanic, and farm hand. When he was not working, he loved woodworking, fishing, and making models. Our shop is a whole lot quieter and lonelier without him. Ron will forever be our friend and deeply

missed.

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THE **BOTTON LINE**

Do landlords need crop insurance?

By Curtis Evanenko McGregor Risk Management Services

Our discussion topic is a review of a subject matter from January of 2018 — do landlords need crop insurance? I've made this comment previously and will again here: everyone has a different appetite for risk, varying circumstances cause each situation to be different. What risk(s) are present and, most importantly, what capital investments are at risk that need protection? Would a crop failure create an undo financial hardship on the person?

The current farm bill does not have any "coupling" requirements of U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) administered program benefits and removes the "requirement" to have a policy in place. Disaster monies paid for the 2021 and 2022 crop did have a two-year linkage requirement if monies were received and taken.

The crop insurance options are the same for all who have an insurable interest in a crop grown for harvest

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as grain. Landlords that actively participate in and share the input costs to produce a crop have a much greater financial risk at stake than landowners that do not participate.

Multiperil Crop Insurance (MPCI) has two options for wheat coverage: revenue protection and yield protection. I am a very strong advocate for the Revenue protection policy, as it provides excellent financial protection. Revenue protection is more expensive than yield protection and may not be necessary in certain scenarios. Revenue protection provides the insured with a guaranteed dollar amount of protection, which is known at the Sept. 30 sales closing date.

Yield protection provides a bushel guarantee at a price announced by the USDA's Risk Management Agency reflecting the market price. The difference between revenue protection and yield protection is a guaranteed revenue dollar amount vs. a guaranteed number of bushels. If the crop income from the farm does not create a hardship if reduced due to unfavorable weather conditions, yield protection may be sufficient coverage.

Coupling either revenue protection or yield protection with an enterprise unit (EU) option could further reduce the cost of crop insurance protection. Please note, EU is NOT for everyone. I believe it fits very well with most all landlords; however, a complete understanding of the application and limitations must be understood. Specific to wheat, and this is a recent change, EU is now classified by type, meaning fall wheat is a different unit than spring wheat. All like crop in the county, fall wheat and spring wheat, would be two separate units. Additionally, one could mix and match unit structure — EU on the fall wheat, optional units, typically farm location, on the spring wheat.

I highly recommend that the landlord and operator employ similar policy coverages to help avoid any potential gaps in coverage. If not, policy language requirements of the landlord may conflict with the requirements of the tenant policy; the actions required of one party must be consistent for both parties insured.

Additionally, crop hail and grain fire are private product policies that are available to all parties involved. The cost of crop hail is driven by location, prior experience, and history. Rates can vary significantly within a county. The



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MPCI policy does not provide coverage for manmade fire losses, such as combine, vehicle, etc., which is why all need to have some fire coverage in place as well, either with a crop hail policy or a fire only policy.

I believe that all crop insurance agents do their best to design and tailor a risk management strategy to fit the needs of our customers. If you don't believe that is happening with your current agent, seek counsel and opinion from another agent to review your situation and request a recommendation. Remember, crop insurance is a federal program, and the cost and rules are the same for all agents and crop companies; the only difference is the service you receive from each.

Why do you have or not have crop insurance — habit or need? Talk with your business partner and have them develop a risk management strategy that best fits your specific needs.

I wish all a Blessed Thanksgiving!

Curtis Evanenko serves as a risk management advisor with McGregor Risk Management Services. He can be reached at (509) 540-2632 or by email at cevanenko@mcgregorrisk.com.

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A double rainbow in the Horse Heaven Hills. Photo by Frank Berg.







(Above) Moses Boone found this surprise in May when he went to repair his sprayer at Holland Boone Farm in Palouse. Photo by Moses Boone. (Left) Reminiscences of harvest gone by in Ritzville. Photo by Marlena Falk.



A spray plane, fast and low, near Prescott. Photo by Chris Oliver.



The northern lights in Dusty from earlier this spring. Photo by Pete Appel.





Boss, Duane Fletcher (3), is making sure his father, Nathan, is doing things right at the family farm in Dayton. Photo by Christina Fletcher.

Jordan Hughes and son, Langston (2), during the first week of harvest 2024 at Hughes Brother's and Son JV of Almira. Photo by Rachel Hughes.

HAPPENINGS

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

NOVEMBER 2024

6-8 WASHINGTON STATE WEED ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE. Trade

show, workshops, break-out sessions, credits requested. Wenatchee Convention Center, Wenatchee, Wash. Register at weedconference.org

11-12 WASHINGTON STATE CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION ANNUAL

CONFERENCE. Yakima Convention Center, Yakima, Wash. More information at washingtoncrop.com

12-13 FARM AND FOOD SYMPOSIUM.

This event, led by the Spokane Conservation District's BioFarming Program, focuses on regenerative agriculture in the PNW. Presenters include Graeme Sait and Dan Kittredge. CenterPlace Event Center, Spokane Valley, Wash. Register at spokanecd.org/ products/farm-and-food-symposium

18-19 WASHINGTON GRAIN COM-

MISSION BOARD MEETING. 9 a.m. at the Commission office in Spokane. (509) 456-2481.

19-21 2024 TRI-STATE GRAIN

GROWERS CONVENTION. Industry presentations, break-out sessions, exhibitors. Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Register online at wawg.org/convention/registration/

DECEMBER 2024

6-7 HOMETOWN CHRISTMAS. Santa, parade, shopping. Waitsburg, Wash. waitsburgcommercialclub.org/events

10-11 WSU WHEAT ACADEMY. Increase your knowledge of disease diagnostics, insect pest management, herbicide decisions and nutrient management Registration is required. Pullman, Wash. smallgrains.wsu.edu/event/2024-wsu-wheat-academy/

JANUARY 2025

7-8 2025 CROPPING SYSTEMS

CONFERENCE. Three Rivers Convention Center in Kennewick, Wash. Registration and more info at directseed.org

15-16 2025 NORTHWEST HAY EXPO.

Three Rivers Convention Center, Kennewick, Wash. For information visit wa-hay.org/northwest-hay-expo.html

17-26 LAKE CHELAN WINTERFEST. An

event for the whole family! Ice sculptures, fireworks, ice slide, and more! Chelan, Wash. lakechelan.com/winterfest/

18 WINTERFEST. Experience the fun and excitement of winter games in Deer Park! A community celebration with events for the whole family. Deer Park, Wash. facebook.com/DPWAKiwanis/?fref=tag

19-21 OLYMPIA DAYS. WAWG's annual advocacy trip to Olympia needs grower participation from every county. Call the WAWG office at (509) 659-0610.

23 WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION BOARD MEETING. 9 a.m. at the Marriott Residence Inn in Pullman, Wash. (509) 456-2481. ■

Submissions

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