WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

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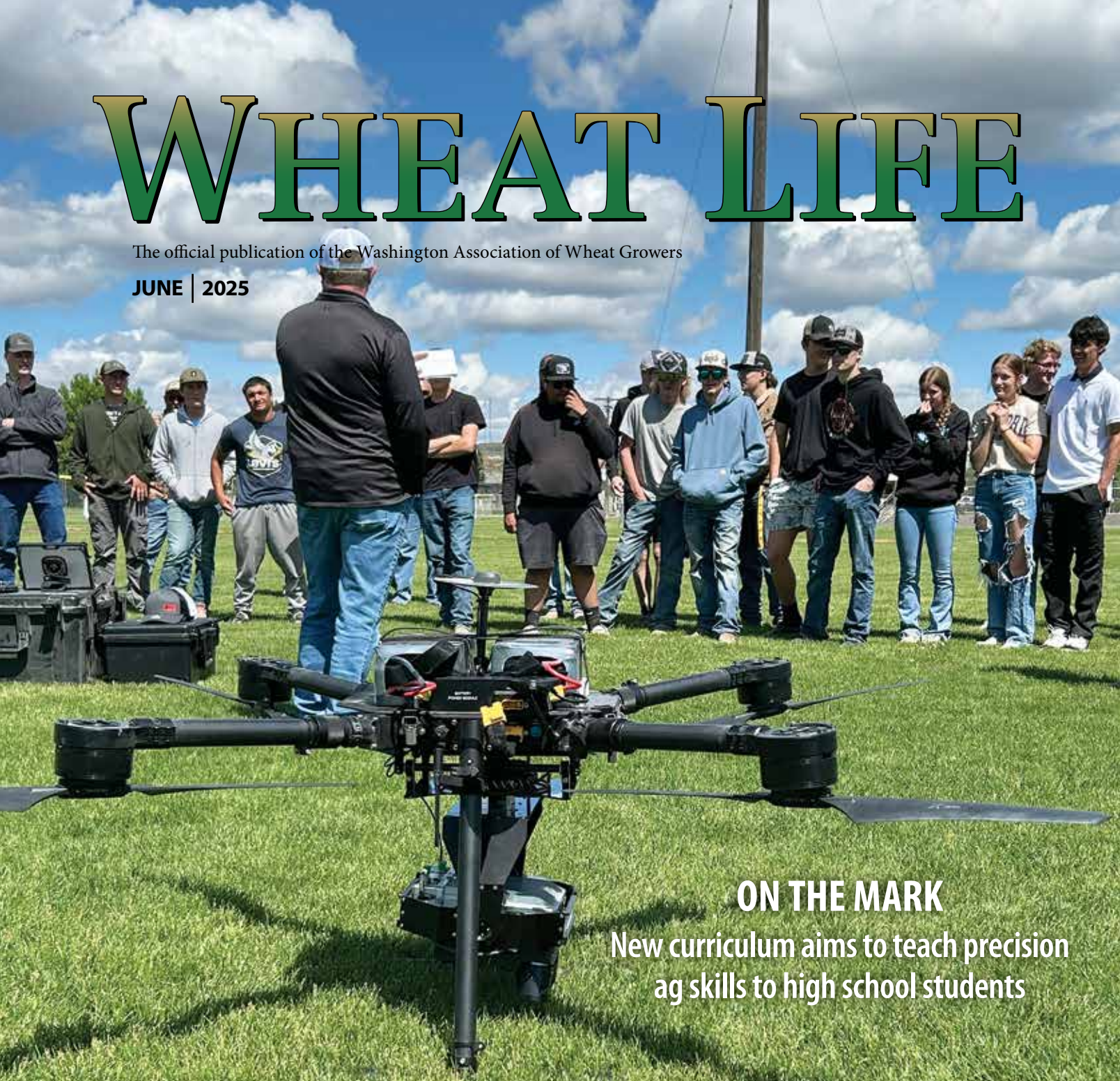

ON THE MARK

New curriculum aims to teach precision ag skills to high school students

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Gene editing vs. GMOs

Forward pricing: A neglected marketing tool

South American market potential

When weather moves soil

Wheat Ambassador Karly Wigan reflects on Olympia Days trip

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WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS

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President's Perspective

From selling the future to farming with it

By Jeff Malone
President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Before I returned to the family farm full time, I had a short but impactful detour that shaped the way I approach agriculture today. Fresh out of college with a degree in business and communications, I landed a job at Odessa Trading Company selling precision ag equipment. At the time, I wasn't exactly sure where my career would take me, but I quickly found that working in precision ag gave me a unique window into the future of farming.

Selling precision ag technology wasn't like selling used cars; it didn't take much convincing once a grower saw the return on investment. The beauty of precision equipment is that it pays for itself, often within the first season. Farmers could see the value almost immediately, whether it was through straighter rows, reduced overlap, lower fuel consumption, or faster field times.

Most farmers would start with GPS steering on a tractor, sprayer, or combine. Just that one step made a noticeable difference. Once they experienced how much time and money they could save, many would expand their systems with section control on sprayers or drills. Suddenly, you were saving on seed and chemicals while improving efficiency. The margins were adding up, and the technology was proving its worth. But the real power of precision ag revealed itself during harvest. That's when you could collect yield data and really see how the crop performed across different parts of the field. With that information, you could write fertilizer prescriptions applying more nutrients to the good areas that consistently yielded well and scaling back in the poorer spots. The result is fields with more uniform crop growth and better yields, as well as more efficient use of inputs.

From the sales side, I watched precision ag move from a "nice to have" to a "must have." And now, as a full-time farmer, I can't imagine doing it any other way. Looking back, I often think how helpful it would have been to have learned about this technology earlier. When I was in high school, there wasn't any formal education around GPS or data-driven farming. Thankfully, times are changing. As you can see on page 22, several local schools will be offering a precision ag curriculum to their high school students. These programs give students hands-on exposure to the technology and concepts that are now central to modern farming.

We need more of this. The next generation of farmers isn't just going to be planting and harvesting. They're going to be managing software, analyzing data, and making decisions that directly affect profitability. With today's labor costs — especially here in Washington where the minimum wage is among the highest in the nation — there's no going back. Precision ag isn't optional anymore. It's essential.

This industry has always been about adapting and innovating. Precision ag is just the next step in that long line of evolution. Whether it's self-steering tractors, real-time mapping, or prescription-based inputs, these tools are making us better farmers. They help us get more out of every acre, every dollar, and every hour.

So, if you're a farmer who's still on the fence about precision ag or maybe someone just dipping your toes into the data, I encourage you to take the next step. Start with steering. Look at section control. Run your yield maps. Write a few fertilizer prescriptions. The technology is there, and, more importantly, the payoff is too.

Precision agriculture isn't just the future. For many of us, it's the present, and it's making all the difference. ■

Cover photo: Students from several area high schools got a taste of what's on offer from a new precision ag curriculum See page 22. All photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

Inside This Issue

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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.**

If these priorities are important to you, your family and your farm operation, join WAWG today and help us fight.

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				LBS PER ACRE					
Control Mean	4086	3743	3399	2683	3128	4711	Private trials		
Rubisco Seeds' Hybrids									
KICKER	--	4972	4701	4383	3505	5841	KICKER	4678	6667
MERCEDES	5145	4419	4359	3756	3881	5393	MERCEDES	4945	6569
AKILAH						5876	AKILAH	5686	5455
PHOENIX CL	4900	4611	4043	3398	3454	5093	DRIFTER	4856	6795

Data courtesy University of Idaho, Control Mean= Athena, Dwarf Essex, Ericka

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WAWG at WORK

ADVOCATING FOR THE WHEAT FARMERS OF EASTERN WASHINGTON

Growers hear from USDA agencies in May

At the May Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) board meeting, growers reported overall good winter wheat stands. Winter wheat was beginning to head out in Franklin and Benton counties, while up north, spring planting was winding up.

All U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agencies were represented at the meeting. Aubrey Hoxie from the Natural Resources Conservation Service said the agency is moving forward with Environmental Quality Incentives Program obligations, but Inflation Reduction Act funding is still up in the air.

Ben Thiel, director of the Risk Management Agency's (RMA) Spokane Regional Office, said his office has been getting some questions about whether or not state depredation payments impact crop insurance claims (they don't). Thiel was pleased to report that beginning this fall, the fall canola sales closing date will be changed to be the same as winter wheat as long as there is no last second reversals and the change is published by the June 30 contract change date. Late last year at a WAWG board meeting, a grower brought up the fact that the fall canola sales closing date was a month earlier than winter wheat, too early for many producers to know if they'd be planting canola or not. Thiel took the idea of moving the sales closing date to insurance companies, canola grower groups, and agency staff, all of whom supported moving the date to better align with winter wheat. Thiel said it was unusual to be able to make such a change so quickly, but the timing and overwhelming support pushed it along.

RECOGNIZING 20 YEARS OF SERVICE. Washington Association of Wheat Growers' (WAWG) executive director, Michelle Hennings, had her 20th anniversary working at WAWG in early May. At the May board meeting, the WAWG executive committee presented her with an appreciation award for her two decades of commitment to the organization. Hennings became executive director in 2014. Before that, she was the WAWG director of finance.

Jon Wyss, who is back for the third time as Farm Service Agency (FSA) state executive director, said a lot is happening within USDA, but there's not much information he could share yet. A Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) sign-up has been announced. The deadline is June 6 for both general and continuous CRP, although the deadline for continuous CRP could be extended through July if the 27-million-acre statutory cap isn't reached. Wyss confirmed that midcontract management is not eligible for cost share payments and warned growers that CRP stands must be established within 12 to 24 months.

Currently, the Washington state FSA is operating without a state committee. Wyss said he will hear problems as they arise. For producers who are appealing an FSA decision, they can have Wyss hear the appeal or wait until a full committee is appointed. Growers who are interested in being on the state committee are encouraged to send an email to Wyss at jon.wyss@usda.gov.

WAWG state lobbyists, Diana Carlen and Mark Strueli, made the trip over the mountains to attend the meeting. At the time, Gov. Bob Ferguson still hadn't signed the budget (he signed it on May 20), which relies on $9 billion in new revenue, mainly through across-the-board tax increases, including an increase in taxes on gas and diesel.

One of WAWG's main priorities this legislative session was to extend the exemption for fuel used to transport agricultural products on public highways. The Legislature

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passed a bill sponsored by Rep. Tom Dent (R-Moses Lake) to extend the exemption until Dec. 31, 2029. The bill also clarified that all propane uses for agriculture are exempt until 2030. Ferguson signed the bill on May 16. See Dent's statement on page 14.

Rhetta Cypert, ag field program manager for the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, attended the meeting and said the department will be taking into account input costs and the general downturn in agriculture when setting prices for ag leases. Overall, dryland leases dropped by approximately 4%. As ag leases renew, the new rates will take affect.

In Washington Grain Commission (WGC) news, they have two buyer conferences coming up in Asia. There are six trade teams scheduled to visit Eastern Washington this year. WGC CEO Casey Chumrau said she'd like to see farmers engage with the trade teams and encouraged them to contact the WGC for more information about the visits.

Chumrau said that so far, wheat has not been targeted due to tariffs. The fees on Chinese-made and registered vessels proposed by the U.S. Office of Trade Representative have mostly been resolved for bulk shipments of wheat, but other ag products weren't so lucky.

The marketing year ends May 31, and Chumrau said sales of soft white wheat are up significantly over last year. Finally, Chumrau introduced Sarah Márquez, the new WGC manager of communications.

In transportation news, WAWG Executive Director Michelle Hennings reported on her recent trip to Washington, D.C., with the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association, to educate staffers on the Columbia-Snake River System. She also met with members of Washington state's federal delegation to discuss farm bill priorities. Hennings said the trip was very insightful and that the lower Snake River dams is a "hot topic" with the current administration. One of the other topics that was discussed was the Columbia River Treaty. The administration has paused negotiations as it reviews the treaty.

HILL VISITS. Last month, Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, was in Washington, D.C., with the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association for their Northwest Transportation briefing and hill visits focusing on Marine Highway 84 and the importance of the region's infrastructure and system as a whole. Hennings also met with members of Washington state's federal delegation, including Rep. Dan Newhouse (right), to discuss farm bill priorities.

Board members reviewed and approved the proposed 2025-26 WAWG budget. The next state board meeting is scheduled for June 3, beginning at 10 a.m. in Ritzville. This will be the last board meeting until after harvest. ■

WSU names new CAHNRS dean

From Washington State University

Raj Khosla, a globally recognized researcher on precision agriculture with extensive leadership expertise, has been named the Cashup Davis Family Endowed Dean of Washington State University's (WSU) College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences (CAHNRS).

As the dean, Khosla will lead CAHNRS in developing a clear vision that enhances the college's teaching,


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research, Extension, and outreach initiatives. His leadership will leverage CAHNRS's interdisciplinary expertise and past achievements to promote academic excellence, foster a dynamic research environment, and elevate its regional, national, and global impact.

"It is an honor to join WSU and have the opportunity to lead CAHNRS," said Khosla. "CAHNRS is one of the largest and most innovative colleges at WSU. I look forward to building partnerships and initiating collaborations throughout the WSU system to develop programs with impact across the state of Washington."

Khosla currently serves as the department head of the Department of Agronomy at Kansas State University. His career spans decades of contributions to precision agriculture, including founding and serving as past president of the International Society of Precision Agriculture. His research focuses on utilizing spatial and temporal variability in agroecosystems to improve management decisions for producers, enhancing production, resource efficiency, and sustainability. ■

How are we doing?

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

WHEAT SPEAK. Last month, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) shared wheat's story at several events. (Above) Spokane County's Laurie Roecks (in green) was one of the volunteers at the Spokane Farm Fair where more than 1,000 elementary students heard about wheat and its importance to the region. (Below) A few weeks later, WAWG joined with the Washington Grain Commission and the Washington Wheat Foundation to share wheat's story at Bloomsday in Spokane. KayDee Gilkey (right), WAWG outreach coordinator, used the wheat trivia wheel to share wheat facts.

Asotin growers award scholarship

The Asotin County wheat growers have awarded a $1,000 scholarship to Cooper Thomas, a senior at Asotin High School. Thomas is the son of Brian and Angie Thomas.

Thomas is the vice president of his senior class. He is active in FFA and plays baseball. In his spare time, he likes to hunt and fish. He is planning a career in ag business and sales. He said his interest in that field was sparked by a summer job at a Moscow, Idaho, seed company owned by a family friend who travels the world selling seed.

"I find that really interesting," Thomas said. "You get to meet new people and sell seeds to help grow the economy. Maybe, eventually, I'd like to manage my own company or a warehouse."

Although he hasn't made a decision yet on where he'll be attending college, the College of Southern Idaho is one of his top choices. He hopes to be able to play baseball there as well.

"I'm really thankful to the Asotin County wheat growers for their decision to choose me for the scholarship," he said. "It really helps to know that there are people out there willing to help students who want to go into agriculture." ■

Asotin County wheat growers' president, Leif Claassen (left) presented Cooper Thomas with a $1,000 scholarship on behalf of the county's growers.

Are you receiving your ALERT?

With their annual membership, Washington Association of Wheat Growers members can receive industry updates through the weekly digital Greensheet ALERT via email. If you are not receiving this ALERT, either we don't have your current email address, or our ALERT is going into your spam folder. Please call our office at (509) 659-0610 to make sure we have your current email address. ■

POLICY MATTERS

Governor signs CCA ag fuel legislation

On May 15, Gov. Bob Ferguson signed House Bill 1912, giving the agricultural community the farm fuel exemptions they were promised when the Climate Commitment Act (CCA) was passed a few years ago.

House Bill 1912, sponsored by Rep. Tom Dent (R-Moses Lake), will make it easier for farmers to use the fuel exemption by establishing a public directory to find sellers who offer exempt fuel.

"This is long overdue. The cap-and-trade program was enacted with the understanding that the agricultural industry would be exempt from the increased costs created by the carbon emissions market. Unfortunately, that is not the case," said Dent. "It was time to step up for our agriculture community. We need them to succeed. They are the ones who are putting food on our table."

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) thanks Rep. Dent for his work on this legislation. Getting this extension was one of WAWG's main priorities this session, and wheat growers advocated for the legislation during their annual Olympia Days visit.

The legislation:

- Requires the Washington State Department of Ecology to keep a website directory of retail fuel sellers of agricultural fuel that are exempt from the CCA compliance obligation.
- Provides financial incentives for retailers to sell tax-exempt fuel and directs Ecology to set up a program to refund cap-and-trade taxes to farmers.
- Clarifies that until 2030, the CCA exemption for fuels applies regardless of whether or not the fuel is used to propel a motor vehicle. The exemption also applies to gasoline, diesel, biodiesel, and propane.
- Extends until 2030 the tax exemption for fuel used for on-road transportation of agricultural products. ■

WAWG joins alliance for crop protection tools

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers has joined the Modern Ag Alliance, a coalition of more than 100 ag organizations that are advocating for U.S. farmers' access to crop protection tools.

The Modern Ag Alliance works with federal and state policymakers to advance legislative solutions that ensure consistency in pesticide labeling and continued innovation in farming. Specifically, the coalition emphasizes the importance of science-based regulation and the need to reinforce that any pesticide registered with the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) — and sold under a label consistent with the EPA's own determinations — is sufficient to satisfy health and safety warning requirements.

On May 22, the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) Commission released a report questioning American farmers' use of crop protection tools despite the clear science behind their safety and benefits. The report raises the possibility that the federal government could take a position to restrict farmers' access to these essential inputs, undermine existing science-based frameworks, and ultimately jeopardize the affordability and security of America's food supply.

"Farmers are already facing a host of challenges — uncertainty about their access to critical crop protection products shouldn't be added to the list," said Elizabeth Burns-Thompson, executive director of the Modern Ag Alliance. "Crop protection tools are not only safe, they are essential to food security, affordability, and the survival of family farms all across this country. Losing access to these critical inputs would be a devastating setback to American agriculture."

Pesticides are rigorously reviewed by the EPA, which boasts one of the most stringent review processes for these products in the world. In the case of glyphosate — one of the most thoroughly studied products of its kind — more than 1,500 studies and 50+ years of review by the EPA and

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If the MAHA Commission's report drives future policy decisions that do end up restricting farmers' access to these critical tools, the consequences for American agriculture would be severe. For example, without glyphosate, crop yields would decline, input costs would surge by 150%, and food inflation would more than double.

"We look forward to working with the Modern Ag Alliance coalition to ensure our wheat growers have continued access to the tools they need in order to grow the world's best grain," said Michelle Hennings, WAWG executive director. "We firmly believe that these chemicals, including glyphosate, are safe and effective when used according to label directions." ■

Industry supports Supreme Court hearing glyphosate case

Groups representing farmers across the U.S. have filed a brief encouraging the Supreme Court to hear a case on labeling for glyphosate and other pesticides. The groups, which represent a broad swath of agriculture and cover more than 300 million acres, argue glyphosate is a "once-in-a-century" herbicide given its effectiveness at controlling an array of damaging weeds with affordability and low toxicity.

"Glyphosate remains one of the safest and most effective tools wheat growers rely on to manage weeds while supporting vital conservation practices," said Pat Clements, president of the National Association of Wheat Growers. "We hope the Supreme Court will take up this case and provide clarity to farmers so they may use the crop protection tools they need to grow healthy, reliable food for communities around the world." ■

Ag Committee advances budget reconciliation markup

On May 14, the House Ag Committee advanced its portion of the reconciliation bill by a vote of 29-25.

"The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) appreciates Chairman Thompson's leadership in advancing these critical investments in the farm safety net, conservation, trade, research, and other programs," said Pat Clements, president of NAWG. "This legislation re-

flects many of the key priorities that America's wheat growers have been advocating for. While the committee bill does not include all of NAWG's farm bill priorities, it does work to protect and enhance the crop insurance program, provide a meaningful increase in the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) program, double funding for the Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development (FMD) program, and invest in agricultural research. Congress must act this year to strengthen the farm programs to provide farmers with a robust safety net and long-term certainty. Farmers need these improvements this year, not next year." ■

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Tradition meets progress in wheat farming practices

Wheat farmers are creatures of habit. Rooted in tradition, our work follows a rhythm shaped by generations — planting winter wheat in the fall, nurturing it through the seasons, and harvesting in the summer sun. This cycle is timeless, yet the tools and techniques we use today are a far cry from those of a century ago.

A hundred years ago, the average farm was just 138 acres. Harvesting wheat meant hitching a team of 20 horses to a harvester, cutting the wheat, bundling the straw, bagging the kernels by hand, and transporting it to market using another team of horses. It was labor-intensive, gritty work.

Today, the average American farm spans over 460 acres — and across Eastern Washington, wheat farms often stretch across thousands. Instead of saddling horses, we fire up combines that harvest, thresh, and separate wheat from chaff in a single pass. The grain is unloaded into a truck, delivered to a grain facility, and within days or weeks, is floating down the river, en route to become pastries, pastas, and baked goods enjoyed around the world.

Despite this modernization, one thing hasn't changed: our role as stewards of the land. Without healthy soil and a sustainable environment, there would be no crops, no food, and no future for farming. Over the past several decades, wheat farmers have dramatically improved land management practices. Conservation tillage, cover cropping, rotational grazing, and precision farming now help retain soil moisture, reduce erosion, and promote biodiversity[1].

At the same time, global population growth has intensified the need for higher yields. In 1925, the world population was 1.6 billion. Today, it's over 8.2 billion, yet we're farming on less land than ever before, due in part to urban expansion. As cities grow, they consume land that once grew our food. In fact, more than 50% of habitable land is now used for agriculture, but that percentage is shrinking due to development and infrastructure growth[2].

To meet this challenge, farmers use crop protection tools — including fertilizers, herbicides, and insecticides — that allow us to grow more food with fewer inputs. For example, insecticides alone help reduce yield losses by up to 40%, which is essential in meeting global food demands without expanding farmland[3].

As wheat farmers in Washington, we honor our heritage while embracing innovation. Technology hasn't changed who we are — it's allowed us to continue farming the way our ancestors did, just with smarter, more efficient tools. We still rise early, monitor the fields, and tend the land with care. Only now, we do it with GPS-guided equipment, real-time data, and practices that help feed a growing population — with less land, fewer inputs, and a deeper respect for the environment.

We may be farming in the 21st century, but our roots remain firmly planted in tradition. ■

Sources:

[1] Washington Wheat Foundation Conservation Video: https://vimeo.com/1011837077/c384624ef8

[2] Our World in Data – Land Use: ourworldindata.org/land-use

[3] CropLife: How Insecticides Are Shaping the Future of Agriculture: croplife.com/crop-inputs/insecticides/how-insecticides-are-shaping-the-future-of-agriculture

Moving research forward faster

GENE EDITING COULD HELP BREEDERS' WORK WITHOUT THE GMO BAGGAGE

By Trista Crossley
Editor, Wheat Life

Technology has moved plant breeding forward by leaps and bounds, but not without some resistance, most notably to genetically modified organisms (GMO)s. Gene editing could provide a viable alternative in breeding programs without all the GMO baggage.

In gene editing, researchers modify the current DNA of a plant to either stop a gene from producing something or to start producing something. GMOs, on the other hand, get to the desired outcome by introducing foreign DNA into the plant. GMOs are tightly regulated, and many countries require labeling of GMO products or ban them altogether. Because gene editing doesn't use foreign DNA, the regulatory burden may be less stringent, with some countries being more willing to accept them. In the U.S., the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) generally only requires regulation for plants with more than two modifications done through gene editing.

While gene editing existed as far back as the 1980s, the development of the CRISPR-Cas9 system in 2009 revolutionized the technology by making gene editing simpler, faster, and more accurate. With CRISPR-Cas9, the CRISPR part of the technology guides researchers to the right part of the gene's DNA, and the Cas9 enzyme cuts one strand of the DNA at that precise spot. The cell then naturally repairs the cut.

Once the gene modification is made, the plant reproduces, giving half of its DNA to the second generation. Researchers then screen the plants, looking for the CRISPR-Cas9 enzyme. Plants with the enzyme are discarded; the other plants contain the naturally repaired DNA.

"If you looked at that from the gene sequence, you would have no idea, because you would just see DNA that a plant made," explained Arron Carter, the Washington State University winter wheat breeder. "Most of the time, we're causing a gene not to work because it's very easy to go in, make a mutation in there, and now that gene doesn't make the enzyme. It's a little more difficult to put something in that will do something that a plant typically doesn't do. It's not that it's impossible. It's just more difficult."

For breeders, the biggest advantage to gene editing is the time it takes to produce plants with the desired trait. Through traditional breeding, Carter might find a desired trait in a hard red spring variety. He would have to cross it with his best soft white winter line and then try

to get the new variety to work as a Washington soft white winter line again.

"If we use gene editing, I could take my best soft white winter line, modify that gene, and now we have whatever variety that we already know is excellent for Washington with that one adjustment," he explained.

However, Carter currently doesn't use gene editing — or GMOs, for that matter — in his breeding program. Not only does gene editing require specialized equipment and training, but the technology is still working through regulatory hurdles and acceptance by most of Washington wheat's export markets. If the technology becomes widely accepted, Carter would most likely send the material to a specialized lab that would make the gene edit for him and send the plant back.

It's not only customer acceptance holding Carter back, but also the regulatory side. The wheat genome is much more complex than corn and soybeans and is still being mapped. It has three copies of every gene, meaning that at a minimum, an edit would have to be made three times. That puts gene editing in wheat over the FDA's regulatory limit of two gene edits.

"In wheat, we are still trying to understand a lot about its genetics. We can only make a gene edit if we know, if we understand how the gene works. The technology is there, but our full understanding of the wheat genome, of what all the genes do, what their sequence is, is not there yet," he said.

Besides the complexity of the genome, wheat is one of the last big crops to be privatized, so the industry hasn't seen the big private investments that other crops have.

Carter said there are traits that would be helpful to have in his breeding program that could easily be done through gene editing. One of those is the polyphenol oxidase gene, often abbreviated to PPO, that causes browning in fruits and vegetables — think of the browning that happens to an apple after it is cut open. In wheat, turning off that gene would help keep noodles from oxidizing and turning gray.

"If we remove that enzyme, you would have nice, bright, beautiful noodles," he said.

Another helpful trait for growers that could be addressed with gene editing is herbicide resistance. Breeders could deactivate the enzyme that an herbicide molecule would typically bind to. The enzyme keeps functioning, but the location where the herbicide binds is now inactive.

"(Those are two traits) that would be pretty easy targets and would be beneficial to our growers and our end markets," Carter said. ■

Students from the Wilbur-Creston, Odessa, and Harrington school districts took part in a field day at Weismil Farms north of Odessa to explore precision agriculture as a potential career path. See more photos from the field day on pages 24-25.

Precisely targeted

SCHOOL DISTRICTS MAP THE SKILLS STUDENTS WILL NEED TO SUCCEED IN AGRICULTURE

By Trista Crossley
Editor, Wheat Life

The Wilbur-Creston and Odessa school districts are putting the finishing touches on a new curriculum that gives students a leg up in today's agricultural industry. Students got a taste of the training on offer at a precision ag field day in May at Weismil Farms north of Odessa.

The idea for the new curriculum came from what Steve Fisk, superintendent of the Odessa School District, thought was a video game. While visiting one of his board member's house, he saw tractor icons moving across a computer monitor. It turned out the icons represented real machines working out in the family's fields. But what fascinated Fisk was the fact the machines and their data were being monitored by a family member who lived in Salt Lake City. After a little research, he learned that although all modern combines come loaded with precision ag software, such as Trimble, StarFire, or John Deer Essentials, more than half of farmers are only using the basics.

"My head just kind of exploded in a really great way. Why aren't our kids learning this? I love the thought of exposing our kids as much as we can to all the new innovations out there in the world," Fisk said. "There's a gap to market for kids who grew up with technology, with this more intuitive understanding of it. I saw an opportunity for kids whose families maybe don't own a farm, but they like the rural lifestyle. If you're in a small community, your job options outside of agriculture that pay family wages are very, very limited."

Fisk began pitching his idea and found a willing partner in Jay Tyus, superintendent of the Wilbur-Creston Cooperative School District. Although the idea may have begun as a way to give students right out of high school some first level equipment technician skills, it quickly flew beyond GPS and autosteer to include drones and field mapping.

"If we were going to really get serious about this, we should get serious about the future, not just now," Tyus explained. "We want our kiddos in this program to also get their 107 pilot license. We want them to be spray certified, and we want them to be able to use high-end cameras to do field mapping. They'll be able to use AI tools to do the prescriptions and could then do spot treatments. So, a student coming out of this program is going to be able to go to work for a local farmer or help their family farm by jumping in the machinery and being an operator. Or they're going to be a pilot that can go out and do the important mapping tools that could then be uploaded into a

spray rig or even into the large drone-deployed sprayers."

Along with learning the technical skills, students will also be immersed in agronomy and plant science. The curriculum will include hands-on experience with drones, setting A-B lines, and using AI tools to design spray programs. The school districts plan to use simulators to train students on guidance programs. Because students have to be 18 to get their 107 pilot license for drones, the program will be targeted mainly to juniors and seniors. The two school districts will share resources and use remote learning. Right now, Fisk and Tyus are figuring out how to build a curriculum within a school year that fits the farming cycle.

"In our vision, you learn about it. You practice on the simulator, and then you go out in the field," Fisk said. "There's a cycle of learning. It's application based, real-world based, and that's really powerful for kids."

Steve Fisk (left), superintendent of the Odessa School District; Carmen Weishaar of Weismil Farms; and Jay Tyus, superintendent of the Wilbur-Creston Cooperative School District are hoping to get students excited about a potential career in agriculture.

The school districts have leveraged partnerships within the ag industry, including regional implement dealers such as RDO Equipment, Papé, and the Odessa Trading Company, to help design the curriculum and provide access to equipment. Funding has come from the state and the Hagan Foundation. Fisk said the idea of students interacting with folks in the industry and building collaborations and friendships is exciting.

Tyus expects the program to grow as the ag industry's needs change.

"By the time we get it (the curriculum) running, some of the components will be obsolete because that's how technology works. So, we're going to be continually upgrading, modernizing, and being relevant for our kids and trying to stay one dream ahead of where they're at," he said.

At the field day at Weismil Farms, students from Harrington, Odessa, and Wilbur-Creston got the opportunity to talk to professionals about internship and employment opportunities in the industry, inspect a combine, use autosteer in a side-by-side, drive a tractor through an obstacle course, and pilot a mini excavator. The students then saw a drone demonstration and a Weed-It demonstration in Odessa.

Carmen Weishaar of Weismil Farms helped organize the field day. She said many high schools don't expose students to the type of technology that today's farmers use or explore the job opportunities that are available in agriculture.

"My goal was to let the kids realize that we're not turning wrenches as much as we are using computers and phones. A lot of this tractor information happens in our office at our desk. We feed information to tractors and combines, and then our operators, in a sense, just go out and hit a button. The data that is shared through the cloud from the tractors and the combines and all the equipment is the data we use at home to do smarter farming," she explained. ■

"My favorite part of the day was getting to drive the tractors, seeing the combines, and the new technology."

— Dustin Strozyk, Wilbur-Creston High School

"I enjoyed learning about the tractor and driving it, and I enjoyed learning about the combine. I liked learning how the electronics inside the tractors and the combines are upgrading from how they were to now."

— Nathaniel Hicks, Odessa High School

"I enjoyed driving the side-by-side and figuring out how to do the autosteer. I enjoyed driving the tractor and learning how it worked."

— Kiera King, Harrington High School

"I think my favorite part of the day was going to the side-by-side and learning how the GPS worked, and how it could be used in precision agriculture. I found it very practical and interesting how we are slowly moving towards a more automated system of agriculture."

— Isaac Ikehara, Harrington High School


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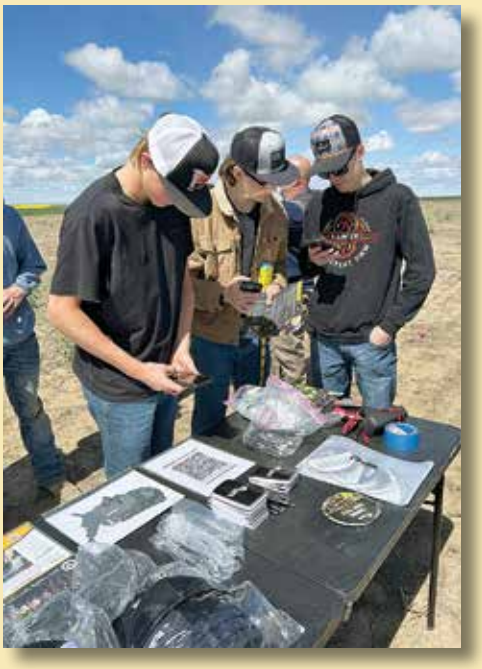



Das Kraut Haus

Forward pricing: A neglected marketing tool

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM LOW PRICES WHEN THE MARKET GOES DOWN

By Howard Nelson
Special to Wheat Life

A question that I've used in the past as an ice breaker for discussion was, "Would you sell wheat if the market price was $10 a bushel?" Growers have actually had the opportunity to do this, and some of you may have accomplished this goal as prices went higher than $10 a bushel in 2007-08 and 2021-22. But as the saying goes, what goes up must also go down. How can we protect ourselves from low prices when the market goes down? Forward pricing!

Let's establish some guidelines for using forward pricing:

- We are only going to use it in a downward-trending market.
- We are only going to use it if we feel we are getting a good price.
- We are only going to price an amount of bushels we are comfortable doing.

Looking at market trends since 1973 (52 years), market prices during the marketing year (May to April) have trended down 28 of those years, or 54% of the time. If we look at the data more closely, those market trends often cross over into the next market year, and we are presently in that situation. We are currently in the third year of a downward trending market. See Chart 1.

Looking at the data since 1973, the market trend has changed from an upward-trending market to a downward-trending market 10 times. Of those 10 years, the downward trending market continued eight times into a second year. Of those eight years, the trend continued into a third year four times, and of those four years, the trend continued into a fourth year two times, and of those two years, the trend continued into a sixth year one time. See Chart 2. ▶

Chart 1: Portland soft white wheat 2022-2025

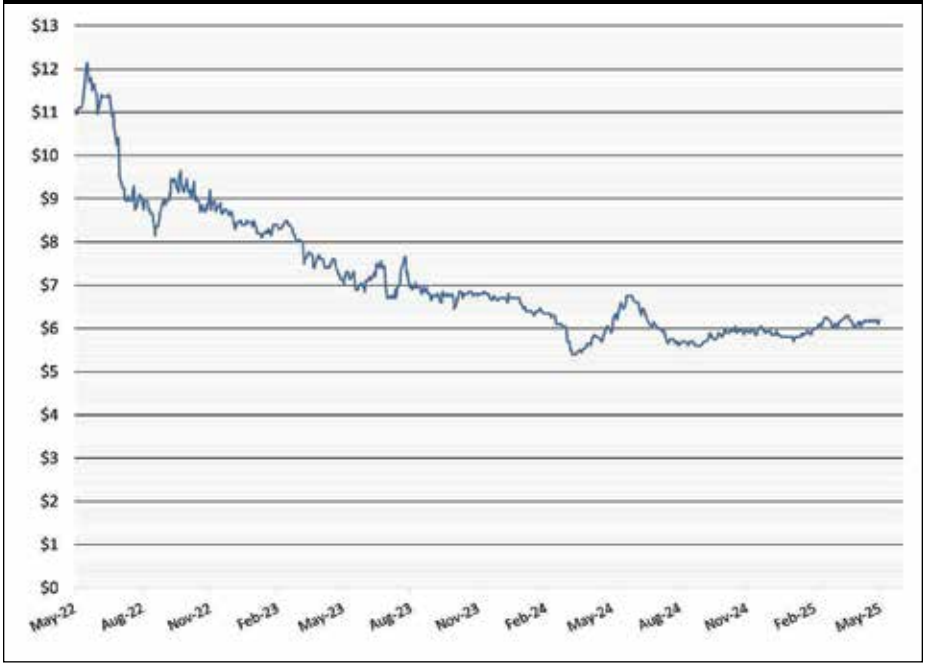
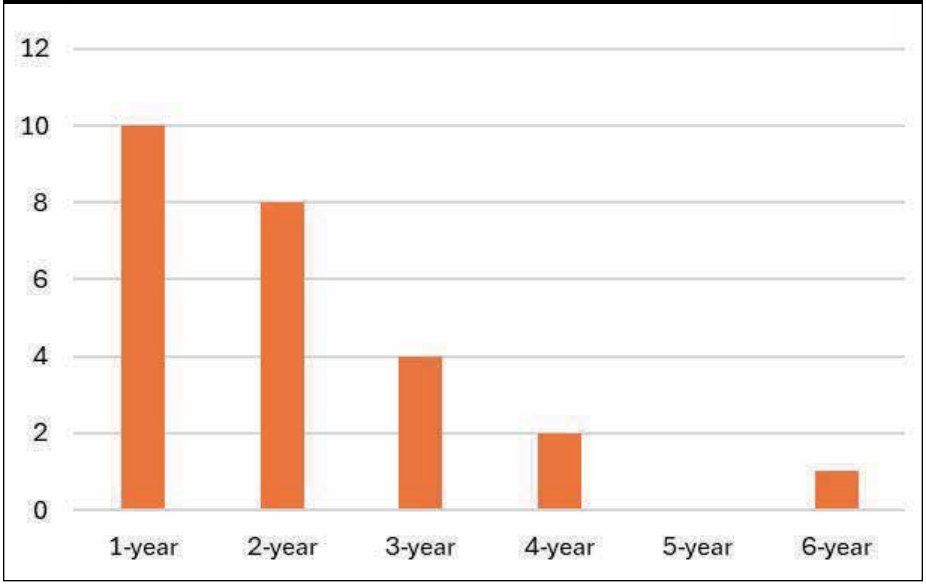


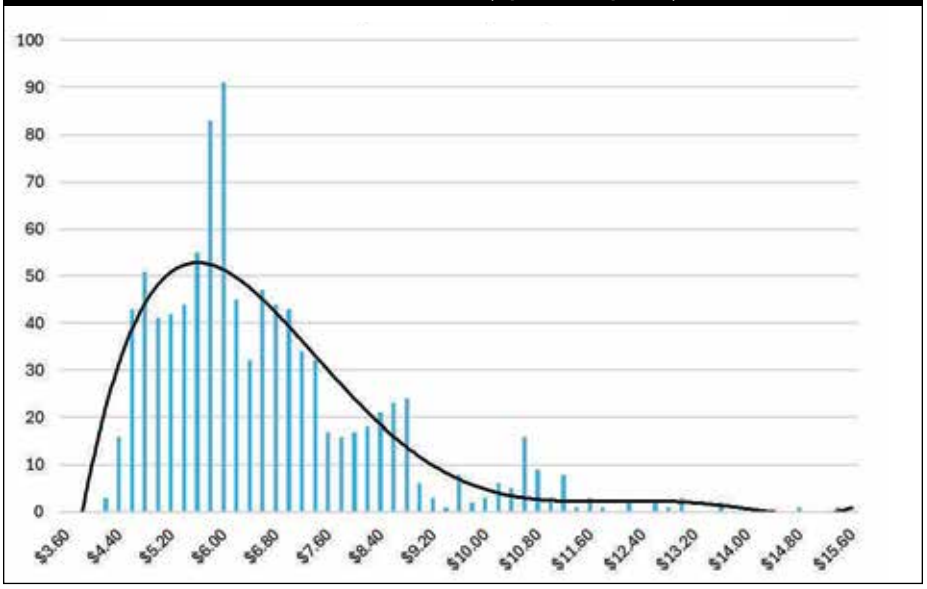
Chart 2: Frequency and duration of multiyear downtrends since 1973



Once we've decided that we are in a downward-trending market, we need to decide if we have a good price. Let's look at the price frequency for Portland soft white wheat since 2006. See Chart 3.

You can see that we have a curve that is not normal but is right skewed. If we use the recommendations for working with data that is not normal, the top price of the frequency range should be $10.30 per bushel. We could establish our good price goal to be a percentage of that top price. This would be your personal choice based on your estimated cost of production and level of risk acceptance. My personal choice is that a good price occurs when prices are above 80% of the top of the range, or $8.24 per bushel.

Chart 3: Portland soft white wheat weekly price frequency, $.22/bu interval



The final thing we need to consider is the quantity we are willing to forward price. This is where things get sticky. We recognize now we have entered into an area where we are projecting our cropping rotation based on current market prices, what our expected yields will be, and what disasters may/could happen on our farm. It also depends on how much time remains until harvest. If it is May and there are three months until harvest, you have more confidence in your estimate of bushels to market than if you are considering pricing next year's crop, 15 months away. ▶

There are three ways to forward price:

- Cash forward contract. This is the most common and easiest method to forward price. You can contract a flexible amount but are required to deliver that amount of wheat to your grain buyer.
- Hedge to arrive contract. This contract is normally based on a CBOT futures contract. Your final sales price hasn't been determined yet because the basis is open. Your final price will be the cash price of soft white wheat plus the profit/loss from the hedge to arrive contract. Your grain buyer will charge you a service fee based on the length of time the contact will be in place. Delivery of the grain to your grain buyer is required.
- Short Hedge CBOT futures. This contract is similar to the hedge to arrive contract in that the final price is not determined yet. The final price will be the cash price of soft white plus the profit/loss from the short hedge. Delivery of grain is not required so you can price a higher amount without fear of under delivery. Margin is required to be deposited into your brokerage account, and if the future market moves higher than your hedge price, more money will need to be deposited to cover your unrealized loss. The margin required could be a cash flow issue unless you have enough working capital or a loan agreement with your banker separate from your operating loan to cover the margin requirement.

Table 1 summarizes the characteristics of the types of forward pricing.

The most common reason that growers do not forward price is the fear they may have a crop issue and will not be able to deliver the quantity contracted. The main thing is to only contract an amount you are comfortable with or a minimum amount that you feel would be produced in a bad production year. In a situation where you have under delivered on your contract but the price has dropped, you technically could buy the shortage from your buyer at the lower price to fill your contract. Your grain buyer may allow you to amend your contract in this situation as they should be able to cover your shortage with wheat they are buying from other growers. The worst situation would be if the price has gone higher. Your grain buyer would require you to cover the loss of the difference between the contracted price and the current price. Table 2 shows the prices that growers experienced in our current three-year downtrend.

Table 1: Characteristics of the types of forward pricing

	Cash Forward Contract	Hedge to Arrive Contract	Short Hedge CBOT Futures Contract
Quantity Priced	Flexible	5,000 bu inc.	5,000 bu inc.
Delivery Guarantee	Yes	Yes	No
Service Fee	No	Yes	No
Margin Requirement	No	No	Yes
Basis	Fixed	Open	Open
Brokerage Account	No	No	Yes

Table 2: Portland cash soft white wheat and CBOT futures prices for select dates in the current three-year downtrend

	2022 Crop			2023 Crop
	Cash	Aug. Cash	CBOT Dec. 22	CBOT Dec. 23
May 18, 2022	$12.15	$11.50	$12.34	$10.97
August 15, 2022	$8.65		$8.18	
August 15, 2023	$6.75			$6.24
Realized Price				
2022	$8.65	$11.50	$12.81	
2023	$6.75			$11.48
Gain/bushel		$2.85	$4.16	$4.73

The Portland soft white wheat market hit a high of $12.15 per bushel on May 18, 2022. At that time, August delivery soft white wheat was $11.50 per bushel. Three months later, on August 15, cash prices had dropped to $8.65 per bushel. If the grower took a cash forward price, he would receive $11.50 per bushel, an additional $2.85 per bushel more than the cash price. If the grower took a hedge to arrive contract, he would have received $12.81 per bushel, an additional $4.16 per bushel more than the cash price. The hedge to arrive contract performed better than the cash sale because the basis changed in favor of the farmer (the basis relationship between soft white wheat and CBOT is complicated and should be covered in a separate discussion). A hedge to arrive or short CBOT futures contract for 2023 production would have netted a price of $11.48 per bushel on August 15, 2023, when the cash price was now $6.75 per bushel. The 2023 crop hedge was nearly equal to the cash forward price of $11.50 per bushel for August 2022 delivery.

Forward pricing is a practice that could extend good prices into additional

years (of good prices). Commodity prices are volatile and tend to have moves that extend for multiple years. Growers should learn to use these forward pricing strategies for downward-trending markets in future years. ■

Howard Nelson is a retired agronomist and commodity broker. He worked for 31 years in the PNW grain industry and retired in 2020 from HighLine Grain Growers. He has a bachelor's degree in agronomy from Washington State University and currently lives in Kennewick, Wash., with his wife, Cheryl. Nelson can be contacted at howardnelson73@gmail.com.

Crop insurance specialist helps farmers manage risk

Tomy Gertsch, Risk Management Agency

By Trista Crossley
Editor, Wheat Life

Looking back, everything in **Tomy Gertsch's** employment history seems like it was in preparation for her current job as a senior risk management specialist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Risk Management Agency's (RMA) Spokane Regional Office.

Gertsch grew up in Hermiston, Ore. While her family's main occupation wasn't farming, she was active in 4-H, and most of her summer jobs were ag related. Her family also raised a small herd of Polled Herefords. Gertsch attended Gonzaga University, first majoring in education before realizing that profession wasn't the right fit. She eventually graduated with a degree in history and minors in general business and economics.

"I went back home to save some money after school. The jobs that were around were in agriculture," she said. "I was a lab tech in an agricultural testing laboratory and then spent a few years as an admin assistant for a commercial loan center for a local bank. Then I came up to the Spokane region when I became an accounting assistant for a grass seed company. In 2016, I got a job with the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) and began a year of training to become a county executive director."

During her first year at the FSA, Gertsch traveled around the state learning all the different programs FSA offered; at the end of that year-long training, she became the county executive director in Klickitat County, based in Goldendale. Klickitat County showcases the extremes of Washington state: one side is lush and green where it straddles the Cascade Mountains, while the eastern side is much drier. With the diverse environment, agriculture in the county includes wheat and other small grain operations, hay operations, and cattle ranches, as well as several wineries.

"It was a great starting county to get a little bit of everything that Washington state can offer. It was a great office to learn at," she said. After a few years, Gertsch became the agricultural program specialist for the state and moved to the state FSA office in Spokane. There, she oversaw the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program, or NAP, as well as some of FSA's commodity loan programs, dairy programs, and several of the ad hoc programs, such as the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program and the Market Facilitation Program.

"There was a lot of different programs that I covered in those years, but my favorite was NAP. NAP was more diverse than some of the other programs because you dealt with a lot of unique crops throughout the state of Washington," she said.

NAP also shares some similarities with crop insurance, so when a position opened up at RMA's Spokane Regional Office, Gertsch decided to apply. In 2022, she became the risk management specialist for dry peas, grass seed, alfalfa seed, hybrid specialty seed, and hybrid vegetable seed. In January of this year, she was promoted to senior risk management specialist. In her new role, she covers more of the perennial crops, including apples and grapes, as well as some seed crops.

The move from FSA to RMA wasn't the only change Gertsch had to adapt to when she switched agencies. In general, RMA tends to have less interaction with individual growers; instead, the agency works primarily with grower groups or approved insurance providers, making sure policies are upheld and are fitting the needs of the industry. RMA is also much smaller than FSA — employees working out of the Spokane Regional Office cover Alaska, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington.

One of the perks of Gertsch's RMA position is that it is never boring. She said agriculture is always changing, and there's always something new to learn. When new crops are introduced or a new processor moves into the region, RMA can usually find a program from another part of the country that can be reworked for the Pacific Northwest. The agency also works with private companies to develop insurance products that are eventually implemented through RMA. One example happened in the dry pea industry. Originally, plans for dry peas mainly protected yield.

"(Growers) wanted a product that was more revenue based, and so they worked with a private developer to create some sort of revenue protection. Over time, for

Washington and Idaho, we have been able to provide multiple plans for them. So those growers now have three different plan options: they can do yield protection, revenue protection by itself, or revenue protection with harvest price exclusion," she explained.

While crop insurance may be a cornerstone of wheat growers' safety net, it isn't as well utilized in the state's specialty crops, although Gertsch said that is changing. Grass seed growers, who have been eligible for crop insurance for years, are beginning to request written agreements.

"In the last few years, our office has worked to expand coverage for Kentucky bluegrass in Idaho, Washington, Oregon. I think we're also making strides for perennial ryegrass as well," she said. "Like a lot of our seed crops, we hear from the grower groups, and that's what triggers us to see what modifications we can make in the policy, or what data we need to research to try to get a new policy that may be beneficial to growers."

In her spare time, Gertsch likes to garden and read sci-fi and fantasy books. She also enjoys exploring eateries and breweries in Eastern Washington and Northern Idaho. Local Spokane establishments provide both great food and tasty beer in atmospheres that are welcoming and pleasing to her inner nerd. She is always happy to hear when brewers utilize local hops and malting barley. She's proud to be part of an agency that is dedicated to keeping growers going when a crop fails and wants growers to know that RMA is always working to make crop insurance work better.

"If you bring up an issue to your grower group, it will make its way to us. And even if you don't hear a response immediately, usually behind the scenes, we are working on how to make modifications," she said. "We're a small agency, but we cover a lot, and we do a lot." ■

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

By Kevin Klein

There's more to WSU's Variety Testing Program than just plot tours

Spring planting season is over, and all the spring crops are up and actively growing. The winter wheat has been sprayed and looking great with good yield potential, especially if we continue receiving rain showers and average mild temperatures for the next couple months! The half inch of rain and cool temperatures we received over Mother's Day weekend across most of our region is promising. Summer fallow has been sprayed with Roundup, and now I have a little time to catch up on some shop and office work that has been accumulating these past two months. It was also time for another round of important Washington Grain Commission (WGC) meetings.

At our commission meeting in May, we approved the budget for the next year. Our three core budget areas are marketing, research, and grower outreach. One of the higher priority programs in research has been the Washington State University (WSU) Variety Testing Program (VTP), which has gone through some struggles in the past couple years. The commission will significantly increase our investment into the program to maintain its viability.

Many folks don't realize there is much more to the VTP than just the plots at the various sites. The program evaluates the variety performance of both winter and spring wheat across Eastern Washington, and, especially important for growers, the data generated by the VTP helps you choose the varieties that are best for your farm so you can maximize your yield. In fact, choosing the right variety to plant is one of the easiest ways you can increase production and decrease the cost of inputs.

The breeders use the VTP to help them evaluate their cultivars to determine if they will release the variety for commercial production. In order to release a variety at WSU, the breeder must show three years of data from the VTP to prove that the cultivar is an improvement in yield and quality. Grain harvested from the VTP is used to generate critical information on a range of other variety characteristics, including end-use quality, falling numbers, market-class grading, winter survival, rust resistance, Hessian fly resistance, aluminum tolerance, and snow mold resistance.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service's Western Wheat Quality Lab uses the VTP samples to evaluate grain quality, milling and baking quality, and assign each variety a score. This scoring is used in the Preferred Variety Brochure that allows farmers to select varieties based on quality. To be included in the brochure, varieties must have three years of data from the VTP and receive a score. While all data from the VTP is valuable to you as growers, it is also essential for our overseas customers as it demonstrates our constant commitment to prioritizing quality and consistently providing them with the best grain possible.

While we tend to think about VTP tours as a way to learn more about what's up and coming relative to varieties, it's easy to forget that is only the beginning of the enormity of useful information those plots generate. So many researchers and programs depend on this information, and that is why the WGC has prioritized this in their research funding.

Thank you to all of our breeders at WSU for stepping up and collaborating together to get the VTP headed in a positive direction again. Arron Carter, winter wheat; Mike Pumphrey, spring wheat; Kim Garland-Campbell, club wheat; and Bob Brueggeman, barley, can be found giving updates at the variety testing plot tours starting the end of May. Please plan to attend a tour in your area to have the chance to speak to these knowledgeable breeders in person. If you can't make the plot tour, you can always visit the locations at your convenience. At each site, there is a sign with a PVC tube on the post that contains a map of each plot and the varieties planted. The sites and schedule can be found on the WSU small grains website at smallgrains.wsu.edu.

Thank you to Drew Lyon for keeping the small grains website up to date with current information and data. Check it out as there is a lot of useful information for growers on the website; simply click on the subject you would like to see.

One of the biggest challenges the WGC faces at the present time is the numerous vacant positions within WSU's College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences (CAHNRS). These positions take an incredibly long time to find replacements and are in jeopardy of not being filled due to budget restraints, largely resulting from a lack of state funding. We are hopeful that the administration within CAHNRS and WSU will fight to refill these positions quickly as they are all very valuable to the agriculture economy in our state.

We hope to see you at the field days this month. It is a great excuse to get off the farm and visit with others in your community. As commissioners, we always welcome your feedback. ■

Industry eyes South American potential

By Jake Liening
Market Development Specialist, Washington Grain Commission

While the majority of Washington's historical top 10 soft white wheat (SW) export markets are located in Asia, South America's Pacific Coast markets have been the target of consistent market development efforts, creating awareness of the value and quality of SW.

Soft white markets in South America

Chile is the largest SW market in South America, driven by growing cookie and cracker demand. The U.S. currently holds an estimated 30% share of Chile's wheat import market across four U.S. wheat classes: SW, soft red winter (SRW), hard red winter (HRW), and hard red spring (HRS). However, with volumes and classes varying based on shifting price dynamics, imports can be limited to certain classes. In the 2024-25 marketing year, as of April 24, Chile has imported 5.25 million bushels (143,000 metric tons (MT)), reflecting a 13% increase over the same period last year. This is also above their five-year average of 3.42 million bushels (93,000 MT), with a drastic change in 2021-22 purchases accounting for zero. The 2021-22 decrease was largely due to SW not being able to make Chile's low protein specifications without charging a premium, which likely compelled Chile into the buying matrix of SRW, Argentinean, and/or Canadian wheat to meet their needs.

Peru, while being one of the few South American countries that purchase almost all classes of U.S. wheat, sporadically purchases SW. As demand for bread, snacks, and other wheat-based products continues to grow, Peruvian flour millers increasingly seek the technical knowledge needed to evaluate and incorporate a wider range of high-quality wheat classes into their sourcing strategies. Although traditional preferences and the landed cost of imported wheat remain key competitive factors, targeted training and product demonstrations are helping to bridge this gap by clearly communicating the performance and value advantages of U.S. wheat, including SW. By the end of April, year-to-date purchases of SW were 404,000 bushels (11,000 MT). In the past 10 years, the country has imported 3.73 million bushels (101,400 MT), with the 10-year average sitting at 373,000 bushels (10,150 MT). Peru buys mainly SRW and HRW but has been targeted as an opportunity market for SW in the coming years with the largest cookie and cracker company purchasing SW the last two years.

Colombia is another opportunity market in South America that is primed for SW. Average wheat production in Colombia has decreased significantly over the last 40 years, which makes Colombia 100% dependent on imports. The country mainly imports U.S. HRW, SRW, and SW for bread and pastry flour, cookies, crackers, pasta, and household baking flour. Colombia's per capita bread consumption remains relatively low at 58 pounds annually, particularly when compared to Chile's 198 pounds. A key factor limiting broader consumption is the traditional formulation of Colombian bread, which often includes high levels of shortening and sugar. This results in a denser, heavier product that many consumers find less digestible and appealing. Consumption patterns show that 94% of Colombians primarily eat bread at breakfast. Other major staples in the national diet include rice, arepas, bananas, manioc, and corn tortillas. The market is largely dominated by artisan bread, which accounts for 91% of total bread sales. In contrast, packaged sandwich bread represents just 9% of the market and is mainly used for sandwich preparation. The central highland region around Bogotá is the primary consumption zone, responsible for approximately 80% of the country's daily bread intake. Colombia has purchased no SW in the current marketing year, but in the last 10 years, the country has imported 5.63 million bushels (153,000 MT), with the 10-year average at 563,000 bushels (15,320 MT).

Hurdles to market growth

In addition to price sensitivity, import logistics play a critical role in shaping demand for SW in South America. U.S. wheat competes with Canadian and Argentinian supplies, while SRW remains the dominant soft wheat class imported throughout the region. A key logistical challenge is that most flour milling companies in South America lack the capacity to receive full vessel shipments, while the expense to ship and unload a partial

In May of 2025, a team of Colombian bakers and a miller visited the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland, Ore., for a Cookie and Cracker Workshop, comparing soft white (and soft red winter) performance vs. Canadian soft red winter and a blend with Canadian spring.

cargo in a port is cost-prohibitive. This constraint often limits South America's ability to access U.S. wheat, despite interest in its quality and functionality. To address this, U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) is actively working to expand market access by supporting opportunities for smaller buyers to pool their purchases into consolidated cargoes — commonly referred to as "grocery boat" vessels — helping regional millers overcome logistical barriers to improve the competitiveness of U.S. wheat in the marketplace.

Success story

Nearly 60% of total U.S. wheat exports to South America are exported in combined/partial cargoes.

To address logistical constraints and promote greater use of U.S. wheat, particularly among buyers unable to import full vessel loads, USW conducted a two-day logistics and combined cargoes workshop in Bogotá in April 2024. The workshop brought together wheat purchasing managers from Chile, Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador, focusing on strategies to improve access to U.S. wheat through multiport shipping and coordinated purchasing pools. The seminars featured presentations on grain logistics, freight markets, transportation strategies, and contracting. Experts from the U.S. grain trade, freight consulting, and USW's regional team based out of Santiago, Chile, led sessions aimed at helping millers understand the advantages and mechanics of importing U.S. wheat via combined cargoes from both the Pacific Northwest (PNW) and Gulf ports.

The results were substantial. As a result of their workshop experience, the Chilean company, Molinos del Norte, whose products are made from 100% imported wheat, reported purchasing 551,000 bushels (15,000 MT) of HRW and 309,000 bushels (8,400 MT) of SW, valued at $7.5 million, to create a blend that displaces Canadian western red spring. It is important to note that Molinos del Norte confirmed that their decision to purchase was directly influenced by insights they gained during the USW seminars, along with the USW technical support they received in 2024. The transaction was executed as part of a multiport purchase, an approach that, according to the company, was adopted based on USW's guidance and has only been utilized within the past five years.

Cunaco, another major Chilean mill, also increased U.S. wheat purchases from 1.64 million bushels (44,500 MT) in 2023 to 2.49 million bushels (67,690 MT) valued at $18 million in 2024, eliminating Canadian wheat from their sourcing. Molicentro, the largest cookie and cracker manufacturer in Peru, purchased 404,200 bushels (11,000 MT) of SW valued at $3 million, and Molinos El Triunfo acquired 100,700 bushels (2,740 MT) of HRW valued at $800,000, also replacing Canadian Prairie spring red.

In total, the workshop led to confirmed U.S. wheat sales of 4.10 million bushels (110,700 MT), worth $31.9 million. With just $44,300 in U.S. Department of Agriculture Market Access Program funding invested, the activity yielded a return of $720 for every $1 spent. The event demonstrated the effectiveness of ongoing, focused market development efforts in driving sales, displacing competitors, and equipping millers to better navigate U.S. wheat sourcing logistics, all of which will help promote SW as a more consistent, long-term option for South American markets. ■

When weather moves soil

FEBRUARY SNOWMELT EVENT LED TO EXTREME RUNOFF, EROSION IN PALOUSE

By Erin Brooks
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By David Huggins
Research Leader, Northwest Sustainable Agroecosystems Research Unit

By Carol McFarland
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Jesse Radolinski
Former Research Soil Scientist, Northwest Sustainable Agroecosystems Research Unit

Abrupt transitions from snow to mud are a common phenomenon for spring on the Palouse. Unfortunately, when high volumes of water run overland, soil often moves with it. The most hazardous situation for soil loss is when warm temperatures that melt snow and thaw the top inch or more of frozen soil are accompanied by rain. Here, water that cannot infiltrate the underlying frozen soil runs over the surface carrying valuable topsoil and agrichemicals with it. This is a selective process as soil organic matter and clay particles are more easily transported down the slope.

Much is lost when water and topsoil move downslope. In addition to reducing soil water recharge, the loss of topsoil results in nutrient loss and reduces the soil's future capacity to store water, thereby limiting crop yield potential. Furthermore, when nutrients and agrichemicals leave the field along with soil, a valuable resource becomes a challenge.

Soil erosion is typically characterized by three categories: water, wind, and displacement (such as results in movement downhill with tillage). In many cases, soil erosion can be reduced using best practices for soil health. Often, Mother Nature is blamed for the amount of soil destruction that can occur when rain, melting snow, and partially thawed ground results in serious soil erosion. Management practices can mitigate or even eliminate soil erosion when adverse conditions arise.

The Revised Universal Soil Loss Equation (RUSLE2) from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) calculates soil erosion with a combination of soil type/vulnerability of loss, land use such as cover management, and topography — including slope length, steepness, and shape.

Approaches to minimize water erosion utilize practices that increase water infiltration and enhance soil water

This Washington State University Extension photo dated Aug. 1, 1931, shows erosion on a 40% slope in a summer fallow field about 12 miles west of Pullman, Wash. According to the original caption, ditches are 5 to 10 inches deep and were caused by intense rain of July 30, 1931. Photographer is unknown.

storage (holding capacity). These practices include:

- Reducing soil disturbance.
- Maintaining soil cover.
- Maintaining living roots.
- Increasing soil organic matter.
- Reducing compaction and improving soil structure to enhance water infiltration and storage.

The benefits of conservation practices accumulate over time and can build the capacity of a farming system to mitigate the impact of extreme weather events. The positive impacts of these practices were also seen across the region, including "divided slopes" where long and/or steep slopes are broken into fields with different cover types, to slow soil moving down the hill.

Research on soil erosion has a long history in the Palouse and was initiated near Pullman, Wash., in the 1930s with the establishment of what is now the Palouse Conservation Field Station (PCFS). The PCFS site was one of 10 original erosion research sites initiated across the U.S. and is still in active operation today.

The Cook Agronomy Farm (CAF), located in Pullman, was founded in 1998 as a collaborative research effort between Washington State University, the University of Idaho, and the USDA-ARS Northwest Sustainable Agroecosystems Research Unit with the goal of conducting long-term, multidisciplinary, field-scale, cropping systems research. In 2012, CAF joined the USDA-ARS Long-Term Agroecosystem Research (LTAR) Network to participate in cross-disciplinary knowledge sharing across the nation, investigating and quantifying long-term impacts of conservation practices in agriculture.

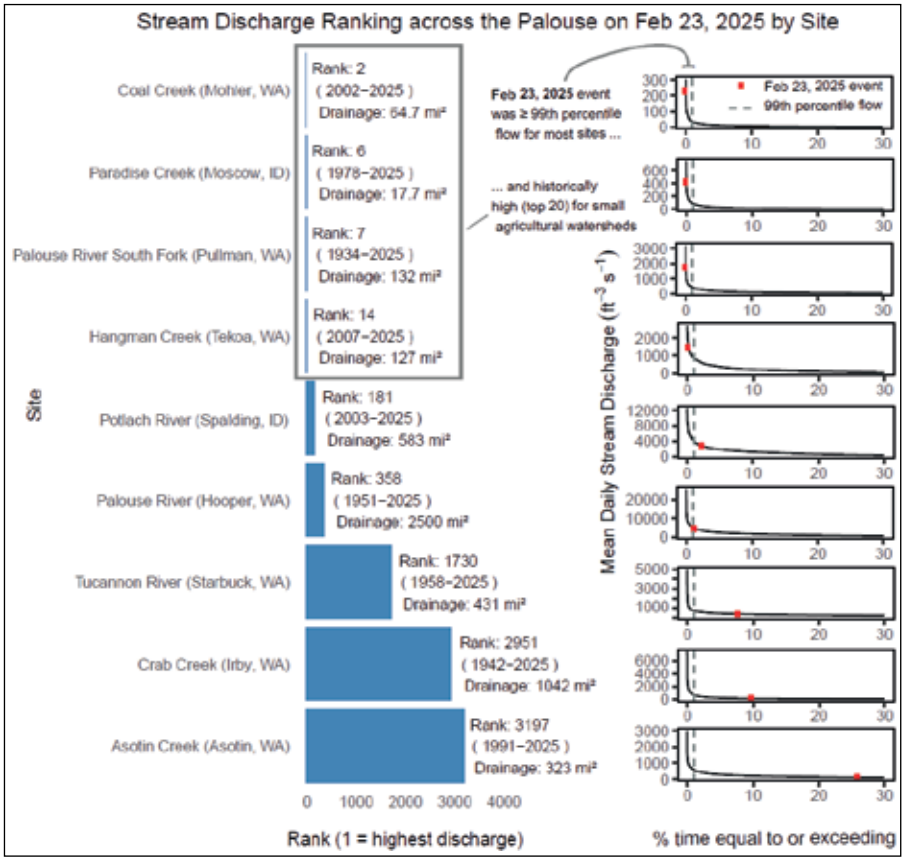

FIGURE 1. (Left) Ranking of the average daily stream discharge on Feb. 23, 2025, according to long-term monitoring records for nine U.S. Geological Society (USGS)-gauged streams across the Palouse (labeled with monitoring record length and drainage basin area), and (right) each site's daily long-term daily discharge records versus the amount of time where discharge was equal to or exceeded that value (e.g., 1% on x-axis means 99th percentile flow or where flow was ≥ that value for 1% of recorded time). Note that the most stream gauge recent records (10/01/2024 to 4/01/2025) are considered provisional data. See the USGS provisional data statement at https://waterdata.usgs.gov/provisional-data-statement/. (Figure credit Jesse Radolinski)

At CAF, two, large-scale field units are managed with two different treatments:

- Reduced tillage and uniform agrichemical input.
- Continuous no-tillage with precision nitrogen application.

Crop rotation is paired each year with winter wheat, spring wheat, spring canola, garbanzo beans, and winter peas commonly grown. To document the impacts of these two management treatments on water, two isolated, 30-acre catchments have been instrumented with paired flumes that monitor both surface runoff and subsurface flow from artificial drain lines within each field. Each flume is also equipped with automated water samplers that collect water samples throughout storm events, which are then analyzed for sediment, nitrate, and dissolved and particulate phosphorus concentration. These instruments provide all the necessary information to record the total losses from each field. With this instrumentation, scientists were recently able to document one of the most severe frozen soil runoff and erosion events that the region has experienced over the last 30 years.

The frozen soil runoff storm event occurred on Feb. 23 and Feb. 24 this winter. This event was set up by cold, dry, conditions in January. There was little to no snow cover to insulate the soil across the region when nighttime

temperatures dropped below 20 F over a two-week period. Overnight temperatures dropped down to -14 F in Moscow, Idaho, on Feb. 12. By mid-February, the soil was frozen down to 6 inches in Moscow. In the weeks prior to the snowmelt event, 7-10 inches of snow accumulated over the frozen soil in the Moscow-Pullman area. Warming temperature starting on Feb. 22 and over 1.5 inches of rainfall lead to one of the largest flood events in the last 30 years in Moscow. The combination of 1.5 inches of rainfall with 1-2 inches of water melted from the snowpack over frozen soil that was largely impermeable to water was the perfect conditions for an extreme runoff and erosion event.

Stream flow records from nine U.S. Geological Survey-monitored streams across the Palouse (see Figure 1 on previous page) show that flow on Feb. 23 was historically high (top 20) for relatively small agricultural watersheds draining less than 132 square miles and was 99th percentile or greater for most of the surveyed streams. For example, Coal Creek in Mohler, Wash., had the second highest discharge on that day since 2002, whereas the Palouse River had the seventh highest record since 1934. Thus, the historically high water flow across the Palouse's agriculturally dominated landscape would have created ideal conditions for a powerful erosion event around Feb. 23.

Preliminary data collected during this event indicates that although similar amounts of runoff were experienced from both watersheds at CAF, the continuous no-till management experienced less soil loss as surface residue cover on the ground held the soil.

More resources on managing soil erosion in Eastern Washington were compiled by the Washington Soil Health Initiative and are available at soilhealth.wsu.edu/erosion/ ■

Flooding on Feb. 23 from surface runoff near the Cook Agronomy Farm. Photo by Erin Brooks.

An H-flume recording surface runoff on February 23, 2025, flow at the Cook Agronomy Farm. One liter water samples are collected from the runoff by automated water samplers. These samples are analyzed from sediment, nitrate, dissolved and particulate phosphorus. Photo by Erin Brooks.

Field under conventional tillage showing rill erosion (greater than 50 tons per acre) as well as gully erosion where surface water concentrates in the field. Photo by David Huggins.

WGC welcomes new communications manager

In May, the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) welcomed **Sarah Márquez** as their new manager of communications. Márquez has over 20 years' experience in strategic communications, marketing, and community education, with extensive experience in health and human services, education, and healthcare.

"Sarah brings a wealth of experience in communications, content design, and project management, and we are thrilled to welcome her to our team," said WGC CEO Casey Chumrau. "We're confident her innovative, educational, and human-centered approach to storytelling will help the WGC excel in our strategic initiatives so we can further elevate the work of Washington's wheat and barley farmers."

Márquez will oversee the development and execution of communication strategies, creating engaging content for growers and customers and analyzing results to ensure maximum impact. Along with ensuring positive media coverage for WGC initiatives, she will write, edit, and produce content for WGC's communication channels, including *Wheat Life*, e-newsletter, social media, website, promotional materials, and annual reports.

A certified project management professional, Márquez earned a bachelor's degree in English with minors in creative writing and Spanish from New Mexico State University. Prior to joining the WGC, Márquez served as the communications and content manager for provider relations at Delta Dental of Washington in Seattle, Wash., where she led innovative communication strategies that enabled the organization to achieve some of its highest performance, comprehension, and satisfaction rates among a high-impact stakeholder group.

Guided by her passion for community work, she is currently a volunteer board member for Best Dental Help, a school-based oral health program that brings essential oral health care to kids in need throughout the Puget Sound region, and looks forward to finding ways to give back to her new home in Eastern Washington — including to the agricultural community.

"I'm honored to join the WGC as another voice dedicated to supporting Washington grain growers and producers," Márquez said. "Thank you for your trust and the invaluable work you do to feed the world." ■

Unlocking yield potential

THE ROLE OF PHOSPHORUS IN AMELIORATING SOIL ACIDITY IN WASHINGTON GRAIN PRODUCTION

By Joao Antonangelo
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By Joaquin Casanova
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By David Huggins
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For Washington's wheat and barley growers, optimizing soil fertility is key to achieving high yields and maintaining long-term soil health. A critical factor influencing yield potential in recently acidified soils in Eastern Washington is the presence of high levels of exchangeable aluminum, which impairs root development and nutrient uptake. Research conducted from 2002 to 2005 provides valuable insights into how phosphorus can mitigate aluminum stress and improve grain production across Washington's dryland cropping systems. However, given the elapsed time, further research is needed to understand the short-term effects of phosphorus applications in reducing aluminum toxicity, which may present a more economically viable alternative to liming.

Acidic soils, becoming more common in the Inland Pacific Northwest, pose a significant challenge for wheat and barley farmers. As soil pH drops below 5.5, aluminum becomes more soluble and can reach toxic levels, restricting root growth and reducing nutrient access. This leads to stunted plants and lower yields.

Past studies have demonstrated that phosphorus plays a crucial role in alleviating aluminum toxicity. By binding with aluminum in the soil, phosphorus reduces its toxicity and allows for better root proliferation, even at low soil pH (see Figure 1 on next page). This protective effect needs to be explored across different soil management systems in Washington, including no-till and conventional tillage systems. ▶

Given the high cost of lime application, phosphorus fertilization could offer a more cost-effective strategy for short-term aluminum toxicity mitigation.

U.S. Department of Agriculture researchers with the Agricultural Research Service in Pullman evaluated phosphorus availability and its impact on the yield of two of Washington most important grain crops — spring barley and spring wheat. This work studied the effect of different treatments (no lime control, surface broadcast lime, surface broadcast sulfur, and annual deep banding of lime). Soil pH in the top 4 inches increased after broadcast lime to around 5.5 but slightly decreased over time to around 5.4 in 2005. For control and deep band, the pH went from around 5 to 4.9. The sulfur treatment had the lowest pH, between 4.8 and 4.6. In the short-term, from 2002–05, their findings show a direct correlation between increased phosphorus availability (Olsen method) and increased crop yields, particularly **when lime was not applied as a soil amendment** (see Figure 2), reinforcing the importance of strategic phosphorus management in fertility programs on acidic soils. The need for updated research is particularly relevant when considering related studies conducted in Oklahoma (2014)[1] and Montana (2018–2019)[2], which also explored the interaction between phosphorus and aluminum in acidic soils. The Montana study showed that phosphorus availability increased yield in some conditions even when soil test phosphorus levels were already very high, while the Oklahoma study showed that phosphorus application can help protect

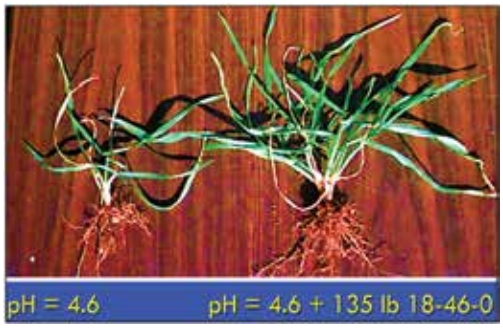

FIGURE 1. Banding phosphate fertilizer with seeds can enhance phosphorus availability, but an additional benefit is that the phosphorus reacts with aluminum to form aluminum-phosphate complexes, reducing aluminum toxicity. This figure was adapted from a presentation given by Dr. Hailin Zhang in 2018 while guest lecturing for the Environmental Soil Chemistry course at Oklahoma State University.

plant roots from aluminum toxicity in acidic soils.

Practical recommendations for Washington growers include:

- Regular soil testing should be the foundation of any fertility plan. Monitoring soil pH and exchangeable aluminum levels can help identify areas requiring intervention.
- Applying phosphorus as a starter fertilizer placed with the seed can enhance root growth and crop performance, particularly in acidic soils with high levels of exchangeable aluminum.

Figure 2 presents scatter plots that track the relationship between phosphorus levels in the soil and yield. The x-axis shows the soil test phosphorus concentration in the soil, while the y-axis represents how well the crops yielded. Different symbols and colors represent different soil treatments:

- Control (no lime) — Blue circles (blue regression line).
- Sulfur broadcast to lower soil pH (one time, 892 pounds per acre) — Red squares (red-dashed regression line).
- Deep-banded lime (200 pounds per acre annually) — Green triangles (green-dashed regression line).
- Broadcast lime (one time, 6,245 pounds per acre) — Purple diamonds (purple-dashed regression line).

Each treatment has its own trend line, and the R^2 value next to the treatment tells us how well phosphorus levels explain yield differences. A higher R^2 means soil test phosphorus has a strong influence on yield, while a lower R^2 means other factors might be at play.

What can we learn from Figure 2?

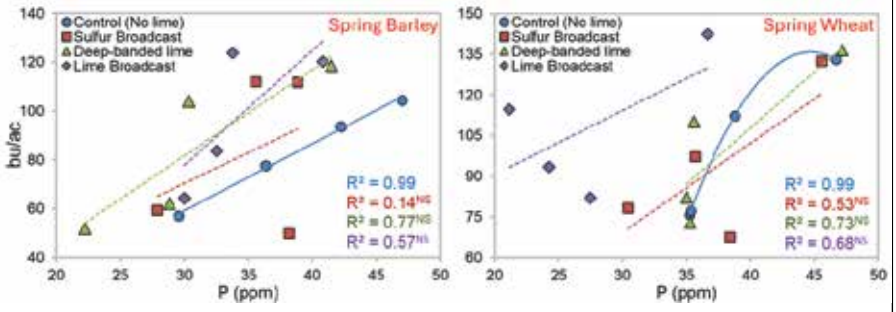

FIGURE 2. Relationship between soil test phosphorus (Olsen) and yield under different soil amendments from 2002 to 2005 in Washington. The highest correlation between phosphorus and yield is observed in unlimed soils ($R^2 = 0.99$). Lime applications weakened the soil test phosphorus-yield relationship, suggesting that other soil factors, such as reduced aluminum toxicity and improved pH (because of lime application), play a more dominant role in crop performance. NS means nonsignificant.

- Phosphorus is most important in unlimed soils. The control (no lime) treatment shows the strongest relationship between phosphorus and grain yield. This means that in acidic soils without lime, adding phosphorus can make a big difference in how much grain is produced.
- Adding lime weakens the link between phosphorus and yield. In plots where lime was applied (either deep-banded or broadcast), the connection between soil test phosphorus and yield is not significant. This suggests that once lime is added, other factors like improved soil pH and reduced aluminum toxicity because of lime play a bigger role than phosphorus in helping crops grow.
- The big picture. If soil is acidic and unlimed, adding phosphorus can dramatically boost yield in the short-term. After liming, other factors become more important, so extra phosphorus may not have the same effect.

For farmers, this means that if your soil is acidic and you're not using lime, phosphorus fertilizer may significantly improve crop yield because it will decrease aluminum toxicity even at lower soil pH.

If you have already applied lime, phosphorus may not be as critical and focusing on overall soil nutrient balance may be more beneficial.

Future research should explore how lime and phosphorus interact to refine soil management strategies. By understanding these interactions, farmers can make smarter, more cost-effective decisions about phosphorus fertilizer and lime applications to maximize grain production. ■

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Market outlook calls for lower wheat prices

By T. Randall Fortenbery
Professor and Thomas B. Mick Endowed Chair, School of Economic Sciences, Washington State University

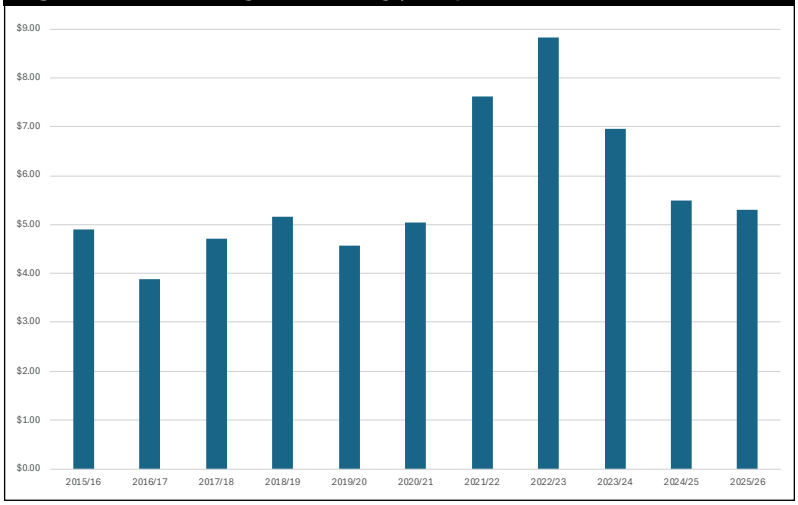
On May 12, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released their first official estimates of the U.S. wheat balance sheet for the 2025-26 marketing year in the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE). Unfortunately, the current outlook for the new marketing year, which runs from June 1, 2025, to May 31, 2026, estimates lower prices in 2025-26 compared to last year. In the 2023-24 marketing year, U.S. wheat prices averaged $6.97 per bushel. They fell to $5.50 per bushel for the 2024-25 marketing year and are currently projected to average only $5.30 per bushel in 2025-26. If realized, this will be the lowest marketing year average price in five years, and the first time the price is below the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) trigger price of $5.50 since the 2020-21 marketing year (see Figure 1).

Lower prices this year come despite USDA's forecast for a 3% reduction in U.S. wheat production. U.S. wheat exports are projected to decrease 20 million bushels, or 2.4% this year compared to last, and that will help contribute to a near 10% increase in wheat ending stocks in May 2026 compared to May 2025 This represents the largest ending stocks level in six years.

In contrast to the USDA, the International Grains Council (IGC) is forecasting a slight reduction in U.S. ending stocks for the 2025-26 marketing year. However, even if IGC is correct, the year-over-year reduction is not enough to imply significantly higher U.S. prices this year compared to last.

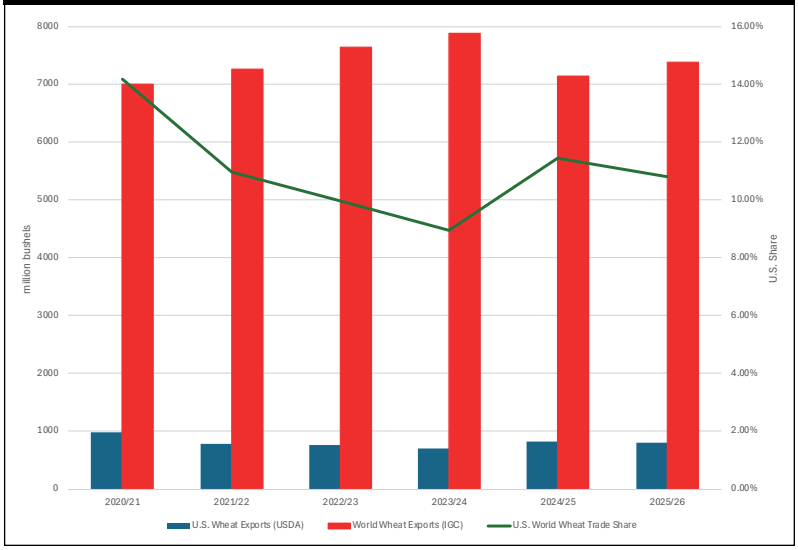
USDA and IGC also differ in their estimates of world wheat ending stocks for the 2025-26 marketing year. USDA's current forecast is for global ending stocks to be essentially unchanged this year compared to last, but up over 2.5% when excluding China (this matters because China owns about half of all world wheat stocks but tends to be a minor trader). IGC, in contrast, is forecasting a reduction in total world wheat ending stocks of almost 3% before subtracting China's ending stocks. In addition, IGC is forecasting an increase in total world wheat trade for 2025-26 of over 3%. Again, this contrasts with USDA's forecast of a decrease in world wheat trade this year.

Figure 1: U.S. average marketing year price for wheat



Source: USDA WASDE

Figure 2: Wheat exports



Source: USDA WASDE, IGC

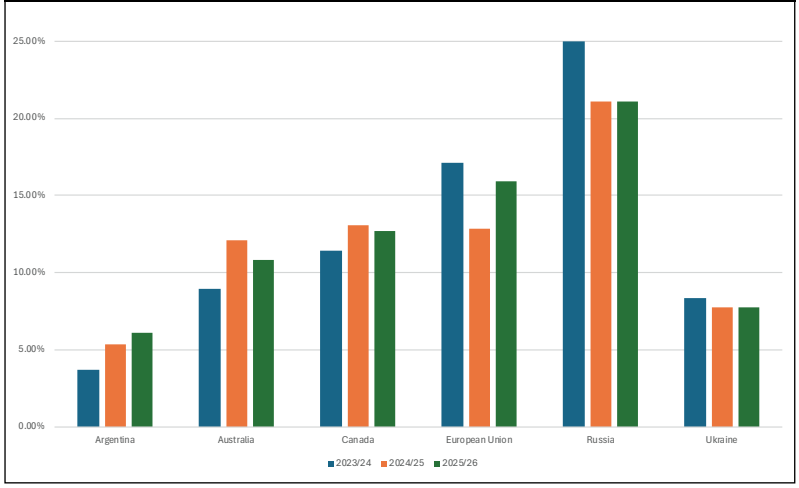
Figure 2 shows USDA's estimates of U.S. wheat trade compared to IGC's estimates of global trade over the last several years. Based on current forecasts for 2025-26, the U.S. will likely lose some market share this year compared to last, with total trade share closer to the 2021-22 marketing year. If we assume USDA has the more accurate world wheat trade forecast for 2025-26 (with overall trade declining relative to last year), then U.S. market share remains unchanged in 2025-26.

Figure 3 shows the expected world trade share of the other major wheat exporters for 2025-26 as forecast by the IGC. Notice the expected trade share for both Argentina and the EU are projected to increase substantially this year compared to last. Argentina is currently projected to increase market world trade share from 5.3% to 6.1%, and the EU is forecast to increase its share from 12.9% to 16%. Russia's world trade share is expected to match last year, and all other major exports are projected to experience year-over-year reductions in world wheat trade share.

USDA will not provide balance sheet estimates of U.S. wheat by class until the June 2025 WASDE release, so we have no current estimates of white wheat demand for the 2025-26 marketing year. However, based on the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service's Prospective Plantings report issued on March 31, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho combined planted 45,000 more winter wheat acres last fall compared to fall 2023, so as long as we have no serious weather issues, we will likely have a larger U.S. white wheat crop this year compared to last (Idaho reduced winter wheat acres this year, but that was more than offset by increases in Washington and Oregon).

Any production increase will at least be partially offset by smaller stocks being brought into the 2025-26 marketing year. USDA currently estimates that U.S. white wheat ending stocks on May 31, 2025, totaled 67 million bushels, a reduction of 21% compared to the previous year. These are the lowest white wheat ending stocks since the 2021-22 marketing year. Thus, if demand remains stable relative to last year and assuming increased production offsets most

Figure 3: World wheat trade share



Source: USDA WASDE

of the decline in ending stocks, the overall wheat balance sheet may remain little changed from 2024-25.

For a significant change in current price expectations for the 2025-25 marketing year, one of two things must happen: either wheat production prospects (domestically or globally) must begin to fall compared to current expectations, or U.S. wheat exports must exceed current expectations (a substantial change/disruption in the current geopolitical environment could also impact wheat prices, but such an event is difficult to anticipate). Based on the USDA crop progress reports issued mid-May, the U.S. winter wheat crop's condition was about equal to last year's. However, there were some concerns related to moisture, especially in some of the hard red winter wheat growing areas, so watching crop conditions going forward will be important in assessing whether domestic production issues can help prices later this summer.

On the demand side, much of the attention will be on U.S. trade prospects with major U.S. wheat buyers, which will be impacted by U.S. tariff policy moving forward. As of this writing, the trade environment is still quite fluid. While the imposition of some tariffs by the U.S. have been delayed, no trade agreements have yet been negotiated with our largest wheat buyers.

In 2024-25, the four largest buyers of U.S. wheat were Mexico, Philippines, South Korea, and Japan (in that order). As of mid-May (with two weeks left in the marketing year), they combined to account for over half of total U.S. wheat exports in 2024-25. In addition, South Korea, Philippines, and Japan accounted for almost 63% of all U.S. white wheat exports last marketing year. Developing a stable trade environment with these buyers as we move into this year's harvest will be critical in ensuring a strong export market for U.S. wheat in 2025-26. ■

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

Highlights from my Olympia Days trip

By Karly Wigan
2024-25 Washington Wheat Ambassador

My experience as a Washington wheat growers ambassador during the Olympia Legislative Days was more than I could have ever hoped. I was able to meet so many new people, from the other wheat growers that were with me to the government officials we met with. My favorite part was being able to talk about my experiences in agriculture to our representatives and senators. Our main goal for the trip was to share how important it is to maintain the viability of the agriculture industry. I was able to tell personal stories about growing up on my family farm, and how I view agriculture. I shared many stories about the challenges we face during the growing season of our crops all the way up to harvest. It was very rewarding to show them that behind every piece of legislation, there are real people affected by every government decision.

It was very interesting getting to speak with both Democrats and Republicans about the same topics. Though we may have had different political opinions, it was encouraging that everyone I talked with understood the importance of agriculture. By getting to talk to many different government officials, I was able to have a deeper understanding about how the legislative body makes and changes bills and policies. Meeting and talking to the Legislature was a big part of my experience, and I am thankful to have some truly memorable moments as well.

One of the biggest highlights I was lucky enough to experience in the Capitol Building was lunch with Sen. Mark Schoesler (R-Ritzville). He was very kind and took us to the Senator's cafeteria for lunch. I did not know the House and the Senate each have their own lunchrooms, but it was very cool. While we had lunch, Sen. Schoesler talked to us about being Washington wheat ambassadors and answered all of our questions about the things we had seen throughout the morning. It was really special to see a senator in such a casual, humanizing setting. It made the experience feel even more personal, as he genuinely took an interest in our perspectives as young people involved in agriculture. The conversation wasn't just about politics; it was about our shared passion for farming, and how we can all work together to ensure that the next generation of farmers is supported.

The second highlight I wanted to share was walking on the floor in the House of Representatives. Rep. Tom Dent (R-Moses Lake) made sure I got everything out of my Capitol Building experience, and I sure did. Rep. Dent was so generous with his time by taking me down to the chamber floor and making sure I understood the full weight of being in that space. He gave me a detailed tour, explaining the ins and outs of how the chamber functions, how laws are passed, and the role that each representative plays.

Learning from the other Washington Association of Wheat Growers members that were a part of the trip was also a highlight of my experience. I think having many different types of members attend Olympia Days is a big benefit to the wheat growers. From older and younger generations, to women and men agriculturalists, we all had a story to share. It was fun being able to bounce ideas off of everyone during the meetings throughout the day. I often talked about the challenges for my brother or myself in returning home to farm while my dad is still farming. My story was then followed up by one of the older generation farmers in the room talking about how it's difficult to find someone to take over their farm. Having multiple different perspectives of the same story worked well in our favor. Regardless of party, the wheat growers could make personal connections to people in the room.

Overall, my time as an ambassador not only gave me the chance to make meaningful connections, but it also empowered me to continue advocating for agriculture and ensuring that the voice of the farmer is heard in the halls of government. I truly believe the future of agriculture is as bright as ever, and the next generation will continue to shine. ■

THE
BOTTOM LINE

Tips for surviving a difficult farm economy

By Kameron Schultz
CPA, Leffel, Otis & Warwick, P.S.

The ag commodity market has never been for the faint of heart, and today's farm economy is testing even the most seasoned farmers. Between rising input costs, low grain prices, and high interest rates, many producers are tightening belts and looking for every possible edge. Surviving — and even thriving — in this kind of environment starts with financial discipline. Here are four core strategies that can help you weather the storm.

Know your margins

If you don't know your break-even cost per acre, now is the time to figure it out. Many farmers make the mistake of focusing solely on yields and gross revenue. While those numbers feel good, they don't tell the whole story. The true indicator of financial success is your net profit, which starts with knowing your cost of production. Having a firm grasp on cost of production allows you to evaluate your operation one field at a time.

During my tenure working on a farm, one thing I learned is every piece of ground is unique, and it's easy to become personally attached. This can make it incredibly hard to walk away from a lease, especially if it's been in your operation for decades. Hanging onto unprofitable acres, at best, will cause your financial success to suffer or could eventually break you. Consider your economies of scale. If dropping an underperforming lease allows you to cut back on labor costs or reduce the amount of equipment you run, your overall profitability could improve, even with fewer acres.

Create an honest budget

Successful farmers don't just track the numbers — they plan for them. That starts with building a budget that's conservative and grounded in reality. Resist the urge to plug in best-case yields or optimistic grain prices just to make things pencil out. Your banker will see right through that, and more importantly, you'll be setting yourself up for financial whiplash and disappointment if the crop falls short.

Instead, base your numbers on average yields over the past five to 10 years, adjusted for current market conditions. Make sure you account for all costs, including fixed expenses, variable inputs, and family living. The number one thing I would keep out of the budget for now, unless it's a necessity, is new equipment. Instead, focus on repairs and maintenance before taking on new debt or spending your available capital on new iron. Some of the most profitable farms on a per-acre basis aren't running the most up-to-date equipment, but continue to invest in their older machines.

Manage debt with precision

In tight times, debt can be a useful tool — or a dangerous liability. The goal should be to borrow the least amount of money for the shortest possible term. Interest expense can quickly erode already narrow margins, so use caution when taking on new obligations.

I would recommend shopping around for financing. While traditional banks are an obvious first stop, some suppliers and equipment dealers offer low or even zero-interest financing during promotional windows. Just be sure to read the fine print and factor repayment terms into your budget.

Create additional income streams

Even in a tight farm economy, opportunities exist to bring in additional revenue. Custom work — from planting and spraying to harvesting — can help improve your cash flow. Many times, I've seen a client pay for a piece of equipment just from the income their custom work generates. If you have underutilized equipment or labor, consider offering services to neighbors who may need short-term or even annual support.

Stay in touch with your local Farm Service Agency office to stay informed about new and upcoming programs. Conservation incentives, disaster relief payments, and Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage programs will not cover all your shortfalls, but they can provide meaningful supplemental income.

As tempting as it can be, don't shortchange yourself on crop insurance. While cutting coverage might save you a few bucks up front, it can expose your operation to devastating risk if disaster strikes. In today's volatile climate, the potential cost of farming without coverage far outweighs the savings.

Finally, consider taking your marketing to a new level. Locking in prices at the right time can be just as important as producing a good crop. Call up your local grain merchandiser and become familiar with HTAs (Hedge-to-Arrive) and basis contracts. Understanding and using these tools can give you more control over your final selling price — and help improve your peace of mind.

Final thoughts

While there's no magic bullet for navigating a tough farm economy, disciplined financial management can help you make better decisions, reduce risk, and position your operation to emerge stronger when conditions improve. Farming has never been easy, but with smart financial strategies, you can keep your operation on solid ground and prepare for the better days ahead. ■

Kameron Schultz is a CPA with Leffel, Otis & Warwick, P.S. and works out of the firm's Fairfield, Tekoa, and St. John offices. He was raised around agriculture and has a decade of farming experience. He works primarily with farmers and ag businesses. For information, visit low.cpa.

Your wheat life...

Email pictures to editor@wawg.org. Please include location of picture, names of all people appearing in the picture and ages of all children.

Adelle (4) and Milo (2) Timm from Okanogan visit Knapp Farms in Harrington. Photo by Ace Timm.

Sixth generation Austin (7), Sawyer (4) and Dylan (3 months) Bright helping uncle Lynn Curtis, ALC Farms, harvest east of St. John. Photo by Kristy Bright.

Maia Goetz (3) standing on straw bale watching the sunset in Davenport. Photo by Natasha Goetz.

Harvest sunrise north of Wilbur.
Photo by Lori Miller.

Blair Bafus (1½) cutting wheat outside of St. John. Photo by Hailey Bafus.

The sun sets on Harvest 2024 for Heitstuman Farms in Pomeroy.
Photo by Stephanie Heitstuman.

November moon. Photo by John McCaw.

HAPPENINGS

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

JUNE 2025

3 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Horse Heaven, Wash., at 8 a.m. For information call Karl Effertz at (701) 471-7850 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

3 WAWG BOARD MEETING. Meeting starts at 10 a.m. at Washington Wheat Foundation Building, Ritzville, Wash. (509) 659-0610, wawg.org

4 WHEAT COLLEGE. AMMO workshop featuring Peter "Wheat Pete" Johnson. Registration starts at 9:30 a.m. Preregister by calling (509) 659-0610. No charge, and lunch will be provided. Wheatland Fairgrounds in Ritzville, Wash.

5 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Ritzville, Wash., at 9 a.m. For information call Aaron Esser at (509) 659-3210 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

7 REARDAN MULE DAYS. Three on three basketball tournament, poker ride, car show, parade, vendors. Reardan, Wash. reardanmuledays.com

6-7 ROSALIA BATTLE DAYS. Community festival, parade, car show, vendors market, pin-up contest, fun run, kids activities, family games and more. Rosalia, Wash. rosaliabattledays.info

9 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Harrington, Wash., at 10 a.m. For information call Aaron Esser at (509) 659-3210 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

10 PENDLETON STATION FIELD DAY. Event begins at 7:45 a.m. at Pendleton Station on Tubbs Ranch Road outside Pendleton, Ore. For information call Debbie Sutor at (541) 278-4405.

11 WSU WEED TOUR. Palouse Conservation Field Station in Pullman, Wash., at 1:30 p.m. For information call Drew Lyon at (509) 335-2961 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

11 MORO FIELD DAY. Event begins at 7:45 a.m. at Sherman Station on Lone Rock Road outside Moro, Ore. For information call Debbie Sutor at (541) 278-4405.

12 LIND FIELD DAY. Event begins at 8:30 a.m. at the WSU Dryland Research Center in Lind, Wash. For information call Samantha Crow at (509) 677-3671 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

13-14 DEMOLITION DERBY EXTRAVAGANZA. Combine demolition derby, parade, barbecue. Lind, Wash. lindcombinederby.com

13-15 PROSPECTORS' DAYS. Three on three basketball, soap box derby, vendors, classic car show, music. Republic, Wash. republicchamber.org/prospectors-days

13-15 ALL WHEELS WEEKEND. Car show, music, food. Dayton, Wash. historicdayton.com/all-wheels-weekend

14 SNAKE RIVER FAMILY FESTIVAL. Celebrate the lifeblood of the Palouse and enjoy a free lunch and ice cream, live music, favorite exhibitors, and kids' activities. Boyer Park and Marina, Colfax, Wash., 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. portwhitman.com/snake-river-family-festival

14-15 UNION GAP OLD TOWN DAYS. Washington state's biggest civil war reenactment. Trading post, blacksmith shop, train rides, games and wagon tours. Fullbright Park in Union Gap, Wash. centralwaagmuseum.org/old-town-days-union-gap.asp

16 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. CHS Wheeler Office in Moses Lake, Wash., at 9 a.m.. For information call Andy McGuire at (509) 754-2011 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

17 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Winter, spring cereals. Mayview, Wash., at 9 a.m. For info call Karl Effertz at (701) 471-7850 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

17 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Spring canola. Mayview, Wash., at 9 a.m. For information call Jesse Ford at (509) 990-6313 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

18 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Fairfield, Wash., at 1 p.m. For information call Karl Effertz at (701) 471-7850 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

20 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Palouse, Wash., at 10 a.m. For information call Karl Effertz at (701) 471-7850 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

20 WSU COOK AGRONOMY FARM SPRING CANOLA TOUR. Cook Research Farm in Pullman, Wash. For information call Jesse Ford at (509) 990-6313 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

20-22 WENATCHEE RIVER BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL. Adults/children workshops, food, vendors, live music. Chelan County Expo Center in Cashmere, Wash. cashmerecoffeehouse.com/wrbfest.htm

21 SPRINT BOAT RACING. Enjoy 5 grass terraces, two beer gardens and a great atmosphere in St. John, Wash. Fun for the entire family! Bring the lawn chairs, sunscreen and blankets. 10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. or until racing is finished. webbsslough.com or (509) 553-1014.

23 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Eureka, Wash., at 9 a.m. For information call Rachel Wieme at (509) 524-2685 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

23 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Walla Walla, Wash., at 1 p.m. For info call Rachel Wieme at (509) 524-2685 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

23 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Spring canola in Waitsburg, Wash., at 3 p.m. For info call Jesse Ford at (509) 990-6313 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

24 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Reardan, Wash., at 11 a.m. For info call Aaron Esser at (509) 659-3210 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

24 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Almira, Wash., at 3 p.m. For info call Aaron Esser at (509) 659-3210 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

25 SLIPPERY GULCH DAYS. Chamber breakfast, fun run, tractor show, parade, music, vendors, fireworks. Tekoa, Wash. slipperygulch.com

26 WILKE FARM FIELD DAY. Davenport, Wash., at 8:30 a.m. For information call Aaron Esser at (509) 659-3210 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

27 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. Dayton, Wash., at 9 a.m. For info call Rachel Wieme at (509) 524-2685 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/

28-29 GAS ENGINE SHOW AND SWAP MEET. Eastern Washington Agricultural Museum on the Garfield County Fairgrounds in Pomeroy, Wash. ewamuseum2008.gmail.com

30 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR. St. John, Wash., at 10 a.m. For info call Karl Effertz at (701) 471-7850 or smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/ ■

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