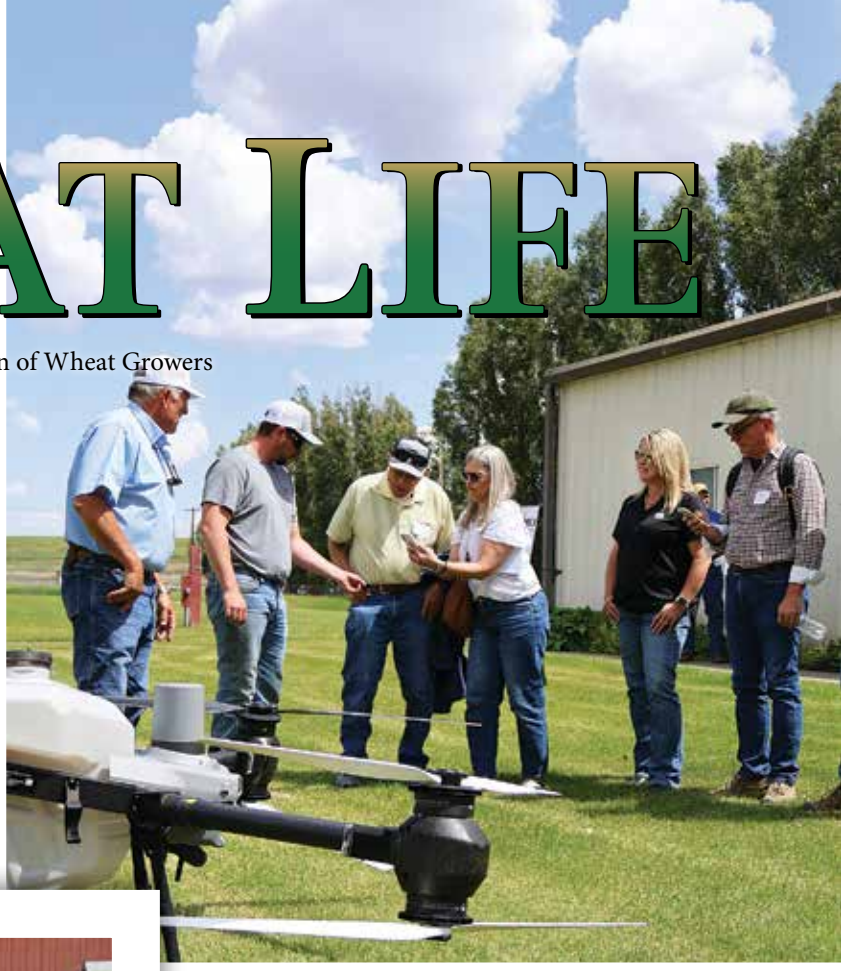
WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

JULY | 2025



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WASHINGTON ASSOCIATION OF WHEAT GROWERS

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President's Perspective

Glyphosate in the crosshairs

By Jeff Malone
President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Our farm started using Roundup (glyphosate) close to 40 years ago. Maybe even 50. What began as a simple weed control solution has become one of the foundational tools in modern agriculture. But today, it's under fire like never before. As regulatory and public scrutiny intensifies, it's time we speak plainly about how glyphosate fits into real-world farming, and what's at stake if we lose access to it.

We use glyphosate every spring. As we've transitioned more toward no-till and direct seeding, glyphosate use has become even more critical. We apply it on our chemfallow acres, helping manage weed pressure in a sustainable, efficient way. I want to be clear. We never use it on our standing wheat crop. We don't desiccate our crop with glyphosate like you see in some other countries. We're fortunate to have a naturally occurring harvest window; our crop finishes on its own.

When we do spray, it's at a low rate, typically a pint per acre. That's not much. It's targeted, efficient, and part of an integrated approach that works with our environment, not against it. And with the rise of precision tools like WEED-IT and other site-specific applicators, the technology is only getting better. These tools allow us to reduce our chemical use even further. That's good for the bottom line, and it's good stewardship.

The push to eliminate glyphosate ignores all of that. It ignores the farmers who rely on it to maintain soil health through conservation practices. It ignores the data showing how glyphosate has enabled fewer passes with heavy equipment, reducing emissions and soil erosion. And it ignores the alternatives we'd be forced to use — chemicals like Paraquat and Gramoxone, which are far more toxic and much more hazardous to apply.

This conversation isn't just about one product. It's about what kind of agriculture we want to support in this country. Glyphosate has become a scapegoat in a broader campaign against modern production practices. Activists have cherry-picked data, amplified worst-case scenarios, and ignored the generations of farmers who've safely and responsibly used this tool. Are there risks? Of course. That's why we have labels and training and safety standards. But let's not confuse precaution with prohibition. The conversation around glyphosate reflects a deeper divide between people who understand food production and those who only consume it. Many in our country have the luxury of being disconnected from the land. They don't know what it takes to grow a healthy, affordable, and sustainable crop. They've never seen the weeds explode after a wet spring. They've never had to budget for diesel and fertilizer and labor in a volatile market. And they've never watched as tools they depend on are stripped away based on misinformation.

I believe this issue represents one of the greatest internal challenges American agriculture faces today: the growing gap between producers and the policies that govern them. As farmers, we're committed to doing things right, to following the science, using the best available technology, and improving year after year. But that only works if we're allowed to use the tools we need. We need to show policy-makers, consumers, and even our neighbors that glyphosate is not the enemy. It's a tool, just like a no-till drill or a crop rotation plan. When used properly, it helps us protect the soil, conserve resources, and grow the food this country relies on.

Glyphosate may be in the crosshairs, but so is the future of practical, sustainable agriculture. Let's not lose sight of what really matters. ■

Cover photo: Photos from the 2025 Wheat College in Ritzville. See story and photos beginning on page 24. All photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

Inside This Issue

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WAWG MEMBERSHIP FORM

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Partnership $600 (1-5 family members)	X	X	X	X		X
Convention $720 (2 individuals)	X	X	X		X	X
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Industry Associate $250	X	X	X			

WAWG's current top priorities are:

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

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WAWG at WORK

ADVOCATING FOR THE WHEAT FARMERS OF EASTERN WASHINGTON

Winter wheat looks good as harvest approaches

At the June Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) board meeting, the last meeting before the summer break, growers reported good stands of winter wheat with some counties expecting an early start to harvest. Overall, spring wheat was struggling and needed "a drink."

The meeting kicked off with a presentation of the Washington State Department of Agriculture's (WSDA) program, Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (STAR), by program manager, Lauren Quackenbush. The STAR program is designed to help farmers evaluate their conservation efforts and provides access to resources and technical implementation assistance through a free, voluntary, web-based program. See page 30 for more on the STAR program.

Abbey Nickelson, WSDA natural resources scientist, gave a short update on Endangered Species Act regulations and mitigation requirements on pesticide labels. The Environmental Protection Agency is looking at using participation in conservation plans, such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), as meeting all runoff mitigation requirements.

2025 LIND FIELD DAY. Gil Crosby, vice president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), spoke at the 2025 Lind Field Day about WAWG's activities as well providing both a state and national legislative update.

Over at the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), State Conservationist Roylene Comes At Night said things are starting to stabilize. The new NRCS chief, Aubrey Bettencourt, has been appointed. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding that had been previously contracted has been approved, but no further IRA monies will be spent. The state office will be returning more than $35 million in EQIP and Conservation Stewardship Program funds. Farm bill funding continues to roll out. Staffing at the state office is down, below 2019 levels, Comes At Night said.

Dennis Koong, regional director for the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), called into the board meeting to give an update. Like the NRCS, the regional NASS office is also dealing with staffing shortages, but they haven't had to discontinue any reports. They are streamlining reporting by not repackaging some national reports for state and regional reports. The information is still available; growers will just need to sift through the national report to find it.

The Farm Service Agency (FSA) was wrapping up Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) sign-ups. Jon Wyss, FSA state executive director, said the agency is approaching the cap. Fortunately, sign-ups this

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year are pretty light, but he is expecting next year to be one of the largest sign-ups the state has seen in quite some time, as a large number of contracts will be ending. He cautioned growers to bid their CRP contracts carefully as the agency will be strictly enforcing contract requirements

In state legislation, WAWG lobbyist Diana Carlen said with the session over, legislators are transitioning into election mode, as there are a number of special elections this year.

At their last meeting, the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) passed next year's budget of $8.3 million, which is $1 million higher than last year's. WGC CEO Casey Chumrau said with projected revenue at $6 million, this means the WGC will be dipping into reserves. They also had unspent monies from the current year's budget that will carry over into next year's budget. All wheat sales are up 13% this year, with soft white up 44% over last year. The WGC was gearing up to welcome the first trade team of the year, and Chumrau encouraged growers to participate by joining the teams as they toured research facilities and at meals.

In national legislation, WAWG Executive Director Michelle Hennings said the budget reconciliation bill that recently passed the House (also known as the Big, Beautiful Bill), included a number of items favorable to agriculture, including increased reference prices, payment caps, and crop insurance subsidies; allowing producers to enroll more base acres; and doubling funding for trade promotion programs. In regards to the farm bill, Hennings said getting it passed is "a heavy lift."

At the time of the board meeting, WAWG was finalizing plans for a visit by a group of Mississippi River stakeholders taking place at the end of June. The visitors will tour the Columbia-Snake River System, starting in Astoria and ending in Lewiston. In August, WAWG will be hosting a group of Congressional staffers on an educational tour about the lower Snake River dams. Hennings said this tour has become a "hot ticket" among staffers in Washington, D.C.

In financial news, the board approved the 2025-26 WAWG budget and passed a motion for officers to take care of business during the summer recess. The next state board meeting will be held in September. ■

Producers reminded to file crop acreage reports

After spring planting is complete, agricultural producers in Washington should make an appointment with their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) county office to complete crop acreage reports before the applicable deadline.

"In order to receive many USDA (U.S. Department of Agriculture) program benefits, producers should file an accurate crop acreage report by the applicable deadline," said Jon Wyss, state executive director in Washington. "Call your local FSA office to make an appointment after planting is complete to report your acreage and take care of any other FSA-related business."

A crop acreage report documents a crop grown on a farm or ranch, its intended use, and location. Producers should file an accurate crop acreage report for all crops and land uses, including failed acreage and prevented planted acreage before the applicable deadline. The major acreage reporting deadlines for Washington state are as follows, though there are other deadlines for specific crops. Check with your county office about the deadline for your crop.

- Jan. 15: Tree fruits and nuts, berries, grapes, and similar crops.
- July 15: Spring-planted crops, forage, and conservation.
- Dec. 15: Fall-planted crops

To file a crop acreage report, producers need to provide:

- Crop and crop type or variety.
- Intended crop use.
- Number of crop acres.
- Map with approximate crop boundaries.
- Planting date(s).
- Planting pattern, when applicable.
- Producer share(s).
- Irrigation practice(s).
- Acreage prevented from planting, when applicable.

There are exceptions to acreage reporting dates. If the crop has not been planted by the acreage reporting deadline, then the acreage must be reported no later than 15 calendar days after planting is completed. If a producer acquires additional acreage after the acreage reporting deadline, then the acreage must be reported no later than 30 calendar days after purchase or acquiring the lease. Appropriate documentation must be provided to the county office.

Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) policy holders should note that the acreage reporting date for NAP-covered crops is the acreage reporting date or 15 calendar days before grazing or crop harvesting begins, whichever is earlier.

Producers should also report the crop acreage they

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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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intended to plant but were unable to because of a natural disaster, including drought. Prevented planted acreage must be reported on form CCC-576, Notice of Loss, no later than 15 calendar days after the final planting date as established by FSA and USDA's Risk Management Agency.

Producers can access their FSA farm records, maps, and common land units through the farmers.gov customer portal. The portal allows producers to export field boundaries as shapefiles and import and view other shapefiles, such as precision agriculture boundaries within farm records mapping. Producers can view, print, and label their maps for acreage reporting purposes. A login.gov account that is linked to a USDA customer record is required to use the portal.

Acreage reports using precision agriculture planting boundaries can be filed electronically with an approved insurance provider or an authorized third-party provider, who will then share the file with FSA staff. Producers should notify their local FSA office if they submitted an electronic geospatial acreage report containing precision planting boundaries that they want to use as part of their FSA acreage report. ■

Spring wheat growers urged to enter national yield contest

Spring wheat growers have until Aug. 1 to put their entries in for the National Wheat Yield Contest, however, it is better to get them in ahead of time.

Growers who have not entered the contest in a couple of years will need to create an account on the new website, wheatfoundation.org/wheat-yield-contest/. Once an account has been created, growers need to log in and go to + New Entry. Please fill in all the entry details. Growers who are in National Association of Wheat Grower (NAWG) states, make sure your membership with your state organization is in good standing. Growers who are not in NAWG states will need to join by paying $100/year. These growers can pay that membership to NAWG upon submitting their entries.

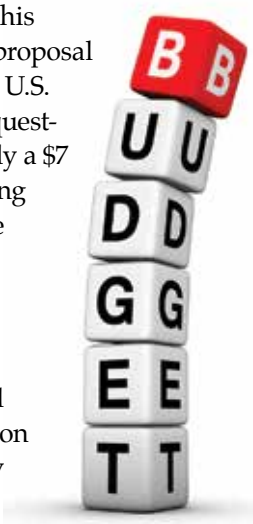
Categories spring wheat growers can participate in are dryland and irrigated. Dryland growers in Minnesota, Montana, North Dakota, and South Dakota can also participate in the pilot digital yield spring category.

National winners will receive a trip to the Commodity Classic in San Antonio, Texas, in February 2026. ■

FY2026 budget request cuts USDA funding by $7 billion

From the National Association of Wheat Growers

In June, Pres. Donald Trump released his budget request for fiscal year 2026. The proposal signals a significant reduction in overall U.S. Department of Agriculture funding, requesting $23 billion for FY2026, which is nearly a $7 billion cut from the current year's funding levels. This represents a 22.55% decrease from the 2025 enacted levels in discretionary budget authority. The National Association of Wheat Growers remains committed to working with the Trump administration to ensure that the critical programs farmers and growers depend on remain fully operational and adequately supported. ■



Year in Review 2024/25

Another year, another 12 months of advocating for the Washington wheat industry. Here are some highlights and a look at what the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) has been up to for the last 365 days.

JULY 2024

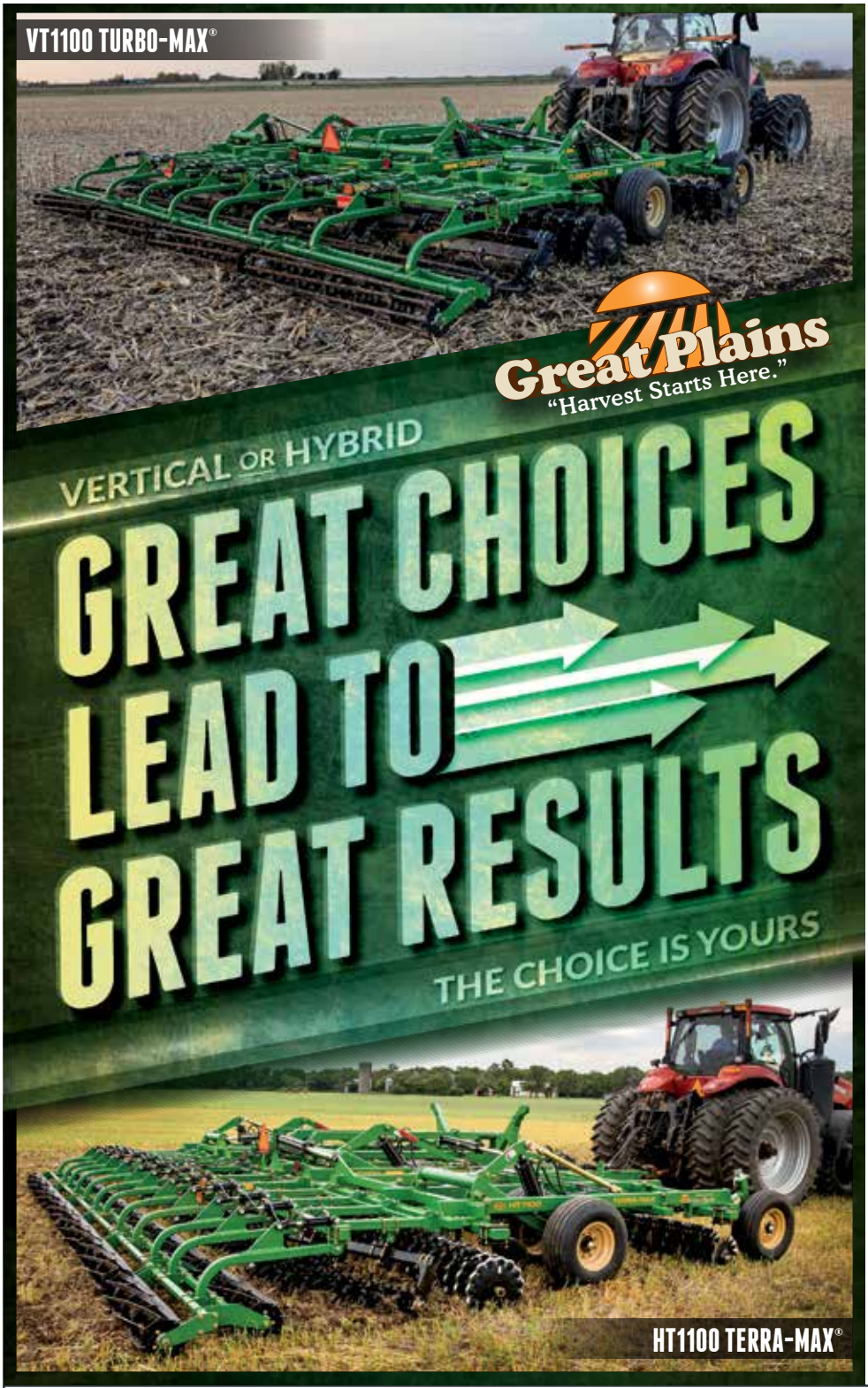
Anthony Smith, president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), takes a break from harvest to attend a Tri-Cities **listening session** led by Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.) on how the proposed removal of the lower Snake River dams would impact local communities. Other local leaders who participate in the session include state legislators Rep. Mary Dye and Sen. Perry Dozier.

After 6 years of negotiation, the Biden administration announces it has reached a tentative agreement with Canada on a modernized **Columbia River Treaty**.

AUGUST 2024

The Washington State Department of Licensing starts taking applications for **refunds for ag producers** who paid taxes related to the state's cap and trade program on fuel purchases.

National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) staff joined Washington wheat representatives to participate in **wheat harvest** on the Bailey family farm in Whitman



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County and tour the Western Wheat Quality Laboratory on the Pullman campus of Washington State University.

Members of the state agricultural industry that participated in the **Riparian Taskforce** submit a letter providing an agricultural perspective in response to some of the recommendations released earlier this summer by Plauche and Carr, the Seattle law firm that led the taskforce. Ag stakeholders re-iterate their support for full and complete funding for the Voluntary Stewardship Program, but push back against using eminent domain as a "regulatory backstop," expressing the concern that "last resort" authorities have too often become overused or even first-step actions in state government.

WAWG, in partnership with the Washington State Potato Commission, The McGregor Company, and Northwest RiverPartners, brings more than a dozen U.S. congressional staffers from Washington, D.C., to Lewiston, Idaho, to **tour Lower Granite Dam** and learn why the Columbia-Snake River System is so critical to the region.

SEPTEMBER 2024

WAWG leaders take a break from fieldwork to travel to Washington, D.C., to take part in a **farm bill fly-in** with other commodity organizations. The groups gather at the NAWG office for a briefing before breaking into multicommodity groups and meeting with nearly 100 Hill offices and Congressional leaders, including Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack. During the meetings, the growers emphasize the need for Congress to act before the end of the year to strengthen farm policy for America's farmers and highlight weakening market prices, increased cost of production, and the overall financial situation in the farm economy.

WAWG signs a **letter to congressional leaders** calling on them to pass the farm bill before year's end.

Michelle Hennings, WAWG executive director, joins other stakeholders on a Northwest RiverPartners **farm bill fly-in** to Washington, D.C. The group discusses the important role the lower Snake River dams play in the region's transportation system, energy production, irrigation, and in rural economies.

The U.S. Department of Energy's Grid Deployment Office announces the **launch of the Pacific Northwest Regional Energy Planning Project**, a planning process that will produce regional analyses of infrastructure investments that will be required to meet the goals and requirements of regional participants. It will examine at least one scenario looking at what infrastructure and resources could be needed to replace the power and services provided by the four lower Snake River dams should Congress authorize removal.

This year's **wheat harvest was slightly ahead of average** in timing, according to the National Agriculture Statistics Service. Most producers report average to slightly better than average yields with average quality in winter wheat. Spring wheat isn't so fortunate, as a cold snap in late spring followed by a very hot, very dry summer hurt yields.

OCTOBER 2024

Hennings is awarded a **Distinguished Service Award** from Pacific Northwest Waterways Association for her commitment to and advocacy for the lower Snake River dams.

NOVEMBER 2024

WAWG leaders and staff travel to the National Association of Wheat Growers' (NAWG) **fall board meeting** in Phoenix, where they take part in committee meetings and consider resolutions to help guide the national organization.

The **2024 Tri-State Grain Growers Convention** takes place at the Coeur d'Alene Resort in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Producers and industry stakeholders hear industry updates, listen to nationally known keynote speakers, and network. Andy Juris is recognized as WAWG member of the year, while Spokane County is recognized as WAWG county of the year.

Jeff Malone, a grower from Douglas County, takes over as **WAWG president**. He replaces outgoing president Anthony Smith from Benton County. WAWG welcomes Spokane County grower Laurie Roecks as the new secretary/treasurer. Gil Crosby, also from Spokane County, steps into the vice president's role.

Karly Wigen from Whitman County and Zach Klein from Adams County are selected as the **2025 Washington Wheat Ambassadors** and are awarded scholarships funded by the Washington Wheat Foundation.

In the **general election**, democrats slightly extend their majorities in the state Legislature. Bob Ferguson replaces Jay Inslee as governor, with Dave Upthegrove becoming the new commissioner of public lands. Nationally, voters elect Donald Trump as U.S. president.

DECEMBER 2024

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) releases a **status report describing existing conditions for barge, rail, and truck activity along the lower Snake River**. The status report is part of a transportation study being conducted by WSDOT that looks at what would happen if the lower Snake River dams were removed.

In D.C., lawmakers are unable to come together to pass a new **farm bill**. Instead, they roll another one-year exten-

sion into a continuing resolution to fund the government. Also included in the bill is billions in emergency economic aid for farmers.

WAWG **Past President Dixie Riddle** from Spokane County passes away. Riddle was WAWG president from 1999-00.

JANUARY 2025

The **2025 Washington State Legislative Session begins** under a budget-shortfall cloud. A seasonal agricultural overtime exemption and ensuring growers have access to carbon fee-free fuel are at the top of WAWG's legislative wish list.

During the annual two-day **Olympia Days trip**, wheat growers hold more than 50 meetings with legislators and department leaders and hand out coffee and cookies in the Capitol Building. During the meetings, growers discuss WAWG's state legislative priorities, including maintaining a viable agricultural industry in Washington, preserving the state's agricultural economic competitiveness, and preserving the lower Snake River dams.

WAWG leaders also spend a week in Washington, D.C., participating in **NAWG meetings** and visiting the state's congressional delegation. National priorities include passing a farm bill that does no harm to crop insurance and adjusts reference prices for the Price Loss Coverage and Agriculture Risk Coverage programs, full implementation and enforcement of existing trade agreements, and protecting our transportation infrastructure.

At the **January board meeting**, Charlie Mead from Columbia County, Ryan Poe from Grant County, and Andy Juris from Klickitat County are approved as members of the executive committee. Committee chairs are also appointed: Ryan Poe for national legislation, Andy Juris for transportation, Jeff Malone for state legislation, Jim Moyer for research, Marci Green for public information, Howard McDonald for membership, Larry Cochran for natural resources, and Matt Horlacher as the National Barley Growers Association representative.

The WGC attends **grower meetings** throughout the month to talk about HB4, the transgenic wheat released by Bioceres Crop Solutions in 2020, and get grower feedback and answer questions. The wheat is being grown commercially in several South American countries and has been approved by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration; however, it isn't being grown for commercial markets in the U.S.

FEBRUARY 2025

Hennings and a group of river stakeholders spend time in Washington, D.C., meeting with members of Congress and committee staff to discuss the **importance of the lower Snake River dams**. Over three days, they attend more than 20 meetings.

WAWG participates in the **Spokane Ag Expo**, handing out association swag to those who can correctly answer a question from the wheat trivia wheel.

In Olympia, one of WAWG's top priorities, a **seasonal agricultural overtime exemption**, receives no hearings and fails to get out of committee.

The 2025 **Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization** (AMMO) series kicks off with sessions on weed management, farm bill, global and local wheat markets, and mental health.

The WAWG board welcomes **two new members**: Andrew Schafer from Franklin County and Matt DeGon from Spokane County.

Brooke Rollins is confirmed as the new **USDA secretary of agriculture**.

The Trump Administration begins firing **federal employees** in nearly all departments, including USDA. The reduction in employees leaves Farm Service Agency and the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) offices shorthanded. In addition, NRCS sees much of its funding temporarily frozen, especially funding allocated through the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) for climate and carbon reduction practices. After many complaints, Rollins unfreezes farm bill funding and any IRA money that has already been contracted out.

The WGC's annual **research review** is held in Pullman, where growers help decide which research projects will receive funding.

MARCH 2025

Hennings returns to Washington, D.C., as part of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association's 2025 **Mission to D.C.** While there, she and several other river stakeholders meet with the White House Office of Public liaison and officials at the Department of the Interior to highlight the importance of the lower Snake River dams, tariffs, and the necessity of getting a farm bill done this year.

WAWG Past President Ryan Poe testifies before the Washington State Senate Committee on Environment, Energy and Technology in **support of a bill** making the exemption for fuels used for the purpose of transporting agricultural products on public highways permanent. Wheat growers are also supporting language in the bill that defines the Columbia and Snake rivers as public highways.

Hennings testifies before the Washington State Senate Ways and Means Committee **opposing a bill** that would elimi-

nate tax preferences for transporting agricultural products. Before passing the bill, the committee reinstated the tax preferences.

Hennings and Casey Chumrau, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission (WGC), send a **letter to Ambassador Jamieson Greer** from the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) expressing concerns regarding proposed actions under Section 301 in response to Chinese vessel dominance, including proposed port entrance fees. In April, USTR finalized its proposed changes after taking into consideration feedback from stakeholders and advisors. After 180 days, fees will be imposed on Chinese vessel owners and operators based on net tonnage per U.S. voyage; fees on operators of Chinese-built ships based on net tonnage or containers; and fees on foreign-built car carrier vessels based on capacity.

USDA releases details on the $10 billion **Emergency Commodity Assistance Program** (ECAP), which will provide one-time payments to help producers dealing with increased input costs and falling commodity prices.

Marci Green, chair of WAWG's Public Information Committee, and Andrea Cox, WAWG conservation coordinator, spend two days in the Tri-Cities sharing wheat's story with fourth graders at the **2025 Farm Fair**, organized by the Franklin County Farm Bureau. WAWG member Peter Smith also volunteers.

APRIL 2025

The state Legislature adjourns on time. In the final week of the session, legislators adopt the **2025-2027 operating, capital, and transportation budgets**. The final operating budget relies on almost $9 billion in new revenue.

One of WAWG's priority bills, the **Agricultural Fuel Exemptions** sponsored by Rep. Tom Dent (R-Moses Lake), is passed by the Legislature and signed by the governor. The final bill requires Ecology to publish a directory by Oct. 1 to notify farmers of retail fuel sellers that sell exempt fuel used for agricultural purposes. The bill also declares it is the legislative intent to continue the rebate program similar to the budget proviso from last year through June of 2027 for farmers who are not able to get exempt fuel. Finally, it extends the exemption for fuel used to transport agricultural products on public highways until Dec. 31, 2029. The final bill clarified that all propane used for agriculture is exempt until 2030.

MAY 2025

Hennings travels to 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 meets with members of Washington state's

federal delegation to discuss farm bill priorities.

WAWG becomes a member of 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 Make America Healthy Again Commission releases 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.

Raj Khosla, a globally recognized researcher on precision agriculture with extensive leadership expertise, is named **dean of Washington State University's College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences**.

Sharing wheat's story continues when Green, WAWG Outreach Coordinator KayDee Gilkey, and Spokane grower Laurie Roecks attend the two-day **Spokane Farm Fair** where more than 1,000 elementary students hear about wheat and its importance to the region. A few weeks later, WAWG joins with the Washington Grain Commission and the Washington Wheat Foundation to share wheat's story at Bloomsday in Spokane.

The Asotin County wheat growers award a $1,000 **scholarship** to Cooper Thomas, a senior at Asotin High School who is planning a career in ag business and sales.

JUNE 2025

Despite a perfect day for spraying, more than 60 growers attend the **2025 Wheat College** at the fairgrounds in Ritzville to hear from Peter "Wheat Pete" Johnson cover a range of topics. Growers also hear industry updates, see a presentation on nutrient management and seed treatments, see a drone demonstration, and a demonstration on how cropping systems impact water retention.

A group of Mississippi River stakeholders spend a week **touring the Columbia-Snake River System**, from Astoria, Ore., to Lewiston, Idaho, to learn about the critical role the river system plays in the Pacific Northwest.

The Trump administration announces it is withdrawing from the **2023 Federal Columbia River Power System settlement**, which was reached by the Biden administration and the states of Washington and Oregon and four Pacific Northwest tribes. The agreement was widely seen as a pathway to breaching the lower Snake River dams. ■

POLICY MATTERS

White House revokes 2023 Biden agreement on dams

By Trista Crossley
Editor, Wheat Life

On June 12, Pres. Donald Trump signed a Presidential Memorandum revoking a 2023 Biden administration memorandum of understanding (MOU) regarding the lower Snake River dams that prioritized fish recovery over energy generation, transportation, and rural economies, and was written with little to no input from many regional stakeholders.

"The livelihood of Washington wheat growers and rural communities depend on their ability to utilize key benefits from the Columbia River System, including transportation, irrigation, and reliable energy, but without the lower Snake River dams, that won't be possible. Over 60% of Washington wheat exports utilize the river system, which is essential for supporting a thriving overseas export market along with providing nearly 4,000 jobs in the region," said Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG). "We look forward to working the federal government and all policymakers to ensure dams and salmon can continue to coexist, and we stand firm in our support of sound science and reliable data to make informed decisions."

The 2023 MOU was negotiated in secret between the Biden administration, the states of Oregon and Washington, the Nez Perce Tribe, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, and the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation. Other stakeholders, such as the states of Idaho and Montana, public utility districts, agricultural groups, and transportation companies were left out of the process.

In return for a 10-year stay of litigation, the Biden administration had agreed to invest more than $1 billion in fish restoration efforts in the Columbia River Basin. The government also committed to supporting the development of Tribally sponsored clean energy production projects that could eventually replace the energy generated by the dams. The MOU was based on the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative, a proposal to the Biden Administration from the states of Oregon and Washington and the four Pacific Northwest Tribes, that asserts that breaching of the lower Snake River dams must happen to restore wild salmon and steelhead stocks to healthy, harvestable populations. Many on both sides of the argument saw the agreement as a roadmap to breaching the lower Snake River dams.

The Trump memo directs the secretaries of Energy, Interior, Commerce, and the assistant secretary of the

Attention

High School Seniors

If your parents are WAWG members and you like to promote wheat, consider applying for our Wheat Ambassador Scholarships. Two scholarships available: one for $5,000 and the other for $4,500.

Learn more at www.wawg.org

Deadline: October 15, 2025

WA Association of WHEAT GROWERS

This is a program of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers.
Contributions made in part by the Washington Wheat Foundation.

Army for Civil Works to withdraw from the Biden MOU within 15 days. It also revokes a December 2024 Notice of Intent for a new Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement, which could have formed the basis for completely different hydropower system operations across the system.

"We are grateful that the administration has chosen to revoke the Biden agreement, recognizing the irreparable harm that would be done to the region's stakeholders if the lower Snake River dams were to be breached," said Jeff Malone, WAWG president. "As harvest approaches, it is reassuring to know that barging, one of the most environmentally friendly, safest ways to transport our wheat to market, will remain a viable option."

The White House caught wind of Hennings and other Pacific Northwest stakeholders' statements and posted them to the White House website at whitehouse.gov/articles/2025/06/what-they-are-saying-president-trump-stops-radical-environmentalism-to-generate-power-for-the-columbia-river-basin/.

WAWG has been engaged on this issue for many years and is encouraged by the actions of the Trump administration to protect the dams. The actions taken through this announcement reflect an understanding of not only the needs of family farmers and ranchers, but the totality of the regional economy. WAWG thanks Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.) for his long-standing advocacy of Marine Highway 84 as well as support from Rep. Michael Baumgartner (R-Wash.) and the rest of the Washington state congressional delegation for their continued leadership in Washington, D.C., to protect the integrity of the Columbia Basin River System, particularly the lower Snake River dams. ■

NAWG applauds memo to protect dams

From the National Association of Wheat Growers

The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) applauds President Donald Trump's recent Presidential Memorandum revoking the Biden administration's memorandum titled "Restoring Healthy and Abundant Salmon, Steelhead, and Other Native Fish Populations in the Columbia River Basin." That memorandum had included recommendations to breach one or more of the lower Snake River dams — an action NAWG has consistently opposed.

The Columbia-Snake River System is a vital piece of national infrastructure, providing a reliable and efficient transportation route for U.S. wheat exports to more than 20 countries across the Pacific Rim. Barging on this river system is the most fuel-efficient and environmentally sustainable method of moving grain — a single, four-barge tow carries the equivalent of 144 railcars or 538 semitrucks. ■

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The benefits of whole wheat and debunking wheat myths

In recent decades, wheat has been at the center of a heated debate regarding its role in our diets. The term "wheat belly," popularized by William Davis' book of the same name, suggested that today's wheat could be responsible for weight gain, metabolic disturbances, and various health issues. However, many of these claims have been debunked with modern scientific discoveries, and it's time to take a fresh look at wheat's place in a balanced diet.

The health benefits of wheat

Wheat, particularly in its whole grain form, is considered a powerhouse of nutrition and is an essential part of a balanced diet. Whole grains and cereals, unlike refined grains, contain all parts of the grain kernel, which means they retain their nutrient-rich bran, germ, and endosperm. This makes them packed with essential nutrients.

Nutrient-rich: Whole wheat, according to the American Heart Association, is rich in a plethora of vitamins and minerals, including B vitamins, iron, magnesium, and selenium. These nutrients are vital for maintaining energy levels, a healthy immune system, and overall well-being.

High in fiber: One of the standout benefits of whole wheat is its high fiber content. As Craig Hunter, RDN, points out, fiber plays a crucial role in digestive health, helping to prevent constipation and promoting a healthy gut microbiome. It also helps to keep us feeling full and maintains our digestive tract.

Heart health: Did you know consuming whole grains like wheat can contribute to heart health? Studies have shown that a diet rich in whole grains is associated with a reduced risk of heart disease. This is largely due to the fiber, antioxidants, and plant compounds found in whole grains.

Debunking the myths

The "wheat belly" phenomenon, which was once of grave concern to many, suggested that modern wheat is less healthy than its ancient counterparts. However, scientific research does not support these claims. As put by ADB Wheat Consulting in conjunction with the Washington Grain Commission, "'Wheat Belly' does not acknowledge the health and nutritional benefits of cereals in general and wheat specifically. The nutrition provided by wheat certainly overshadows the problems with its consumption, excepting those who have celiac or gluten intolerance." Here are some common misconceptions which have now been debunked:

Modern vs. ancient wheat: While it's true that modern wheat has been selectively bred for certain traits, this does not inherently make it unhealthy. As times and technology have advanced, so have breeding capabilities. As Francis Crick writes, "Some DNA can be introgressed ... but all the genes that code for proteins are already in existence in wheat or closely related species." Therefore, the nutrient composition remains similar.

Weight gain and inflammation: There is no substantial evidence linking whole wheat consumption to weight gain or inflammation. In fact, a food review found that in Morocco, per capita wheat consumption is over four times that of the U.S., yet the adult obesity rate is less than half of that in the U.S.

Gluten concerns: While some individuals have celiac disease or nonceliac gluten sensitivity, the vast majority of people can safely enjoy wheat products without adverse effects. For those who can tolerate gluten, wheat remains a nutritious and versatile food choice.

Embracing balance

The key to a healthy diet is balance and moderation. This is relevant not only in food, but also in exercise, rest, and nutritional choices. Whole wheat and other grains can be an integral part of a diverse and nutritious diet. By focusing on whole foods and minimizing processed items, one can enjoy the myriad benefits of wheat without worry.

While the "wheat belly" claims may have stirred controversy and worry, wheat remains a valuable component of a thriving diet. For those navigating a fast-paced lifestyle, embracing whole grains like wheat can contribute to overall health and well-being more profoundly than the several "quick fixes" seen day after day. So, next time you're considering what to eat, remember that whole wheat can be both a nourishing and sustainable choice. ■

Class is in session

'WHEAT PETE' COVERS TOP WHEAT, YIELD ENHANCEMENT NETWORKS AT 2025 WHEAT COLLEGE

By Trista Crossley
Editor, Wheat Life

At the 2025 Wheat College, **Peter "Wheat Pete" Johnson** had a wide-ranging discussion with growers that covered growing top wheat by using grower-collected data, factors that impact wheat yields, and how to counter the public perception of agriculture.

Johnson is a former wheat specialist for the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food, and Rural Affairs. He is a resident agronomist with realagriculture.com and hosts the weekly podcast, Wheat Pete's Word.

Before growers got down to business, they enjoyed coffee and doughnuts provided by the Graybeal Group.

Pride in agriculture

Consumers, especially those in urban areas, generally don't understand what a success story agriculture is. Data collected by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development shows that until about 1960, food production and land use were closely connected — as food production increased, so did the land needed to grow it. But in 1960, food production began to increase much more rapidly than land use. By 2020, growers were producing nearly four times as much food on only about 10% more land, thanks to better genetics, increased use of fertilizer, and weed/pest control.

"Here's what happens without modern agriculture: population goes up, and food production has to go up or people starve. Those are the only options. Without modern agriculture, the only way that you get that extra food production is by bringing more farmland into production — a lot more land," Johnson explained.

Unfortunately, there have been some unintended consequences from modern agriculture, especially with nutrient runoff, that need to be recognized, such as algae blooms from phosphorus in the Great Lakes or hypoxia in the Gulf of Mexico.

"We have to accept our unintended consequences, and we have to do a better job of explaining the good things that we do," Johnson added. "If you're going to have this conversation with a nonfarmer, the first thing you always have to say is, 'What's your concern? I understand.' If you say you're wrong to the urbanite, they shut down right there. You have to accept that we cause issues, but then, if you can, talk to them about the fact that with modern agriculture, instead of having one person in three in the world food insecure, we now have one person in 10. We've had a tremendous positive impact, and I think that we all need to be aware and proud of that impact."

Factors that impact wheat yields

A study from the National Academy of Sciences has shown that the overall biggest factor in increased wheat yields comes from climate (48%), followed by agronomy (39%), and genetics (13%). Other studies might dispute the genetic versus agronomic advances, but the climate impact is more consistent.

"Sunshine is brighter, and there's more carbon dioxide in the atmosphere. Twenty-seven percent of the yield increase you are getting today is because the sunshine has more photosynthetic active radiation in it than it did 30 years ago," Johnson said. "When it comes to climate, there are three things: it's sunshine, it's water, it's carbon dioxide. But at the end of the day, it's all about the water."

According to Johnson, the theoretical maximum number of bushels of wheat per inch of water is 33. Studies have shown that most farmers get an average of seven bushels of wheat per inch of rain. Growers who get better than that tend to be making better use of that water by getting deeper roots and less soil com-

paction. Organic matter is more important for increasing rooting capability than for its moisture-holding capacity.

"It's more what (organic matter) does for that plant to have better rooting and better water migration to the plant," he said. "If you're in a heavy clay soil, water doesn't move to the plant very fast, and sometimes, you can have great moisture in deep profiles and the roots will never get to it. If you can increase your organic matter, you get better rooting depth."

The highest wheat yields in the world tend to come from two locations — the United Kingdom and New Zealand — because their temperatures are cooler overall thanks to the moderating effects of being surrounded by water. Heat is the number one enemy of high wheat yields; the longer the grain fill period and the longer the plant stays green through grain fill, the better the yield potential. On average, growers lose one bushel of wheat per acre per day for every day that the temperature goes over 77 degrees F during grain fill.

"Wheat is a cool season crop. The perfect day of the wheat crop's life is a 65 degree day and 50 or less at night (but above 32 F). That's when you're going to get maximum production," Johnson explained. "If you could get your wheat into that critical period with those temperatures, you are going to blow the doors off from a yield perspective. If you can get your crop to head out earlier, you're going to get more of that grain fill period in those ideal temperatures, and you're going to get higher yields."

YEN-ing

Johnson closed out his presentation by talking about the Great Lakes Yield Enhancement Network (YEN). The YEN takes yield data from farmers' crops and tries to figure out what a high-yield grower is doing differently than a lower-yielding grower. What makes the YEN different from a simple yield contest, however, is the calculation of a grower's yield potential. The Great Lakes YEN includes farmers not only from the Great Lake states and Ontario, Canada, but states like Missouri, Kentucky, New York, and, for the first time, a farmer from Eastern Washington, Jesse Brunner.

"The percent of potential lets you, as a grower, assess yourself against your potential as opposed to the guy with the better farm," Johnson said. "And that is really, really cool. We also collect a lot of data and do a lot of networking. Farmers talk to each other, and we are talking to each other across huge geographies." ▶

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Yield potential is calculated by taking into consideration rainfall, soil-available water, and solar radiation, among other factors. At the end of the growing season, YEN growers get reports that compare their yield and input data against other members. Using Brunner's report as an example, Johnson quickly pointed out some of the differences between the Eastern Washington grower's methods and the other growers in the YEN before leaving to catch his flight back to Canada. Before he left, though, he put in a plug for growers to start their own YEN.

"I hope you will consider joining the YEN because we'd love to have more Washington state growers, but I also hope you will consider doing your own YEN, because there's so much variability in Washington state that I really think you can move the bar forward if you do that," he concluded.

Johnson's podcast is available at realagriculture.com/wheat-petes-word/. He also appears on a video series, Wheat School, which tackles every facet of the wheat growing season. Those videos can be found at realagriculture.com/wheat-school/.

Updates and rotational topics

Following Johnson's presentation, growers heard industry updates from Derek Sandison, director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture; Wendy Powers, current dean of Washington State University's (WSU) College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences; Kevin Klein, chairman of the Washington Grain Commission; and Jeff Malone, president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers.

After lunch, Aaron Esser, WSU Extension agent and the Adams County Extension director, talked about nutrient management as a critical component to high yielding wheat. One of his main points to growers was if they don't measure something, they can't manage it. Some nutrients, like nitrogen (NO3), sulfur, boron, manganese, and chloride are mobile in the soil. Potassium, calcium, molybdenum, and cobalt are somewhat mobile in the soil, while phosphorus, magnesium, and iron are not mobile. In the plant, nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, and chloride are mobile, but sulfur, calcium, boron, copper, manganese, zinc, and iron are not.

"So, if you're looking at when plants need these nutrients, if these aren't moving in the plant, if it takes it up the wrong time, then it's not very useful to the plant. And when you're starting to go out and look at the deficiencies and symptoms to try to diagnose what's going on, understanding if it's mobile or immobile in the plant and where you're seeing the deficiencies can be pretty important," he said.

Esser talked about soil pH, and how closely it's linked with nutrient management. He also touched on the potential impacts of residue removal.

"When you start taking the residue off, you also should be applying lime onto your fields. Just for a general rule of thumb, for every pound of nitrogen you put on your soil, you need about two pounds of calcium carbonate to neutralize it. You remove the residue, and that two pounds becomes four pounds of calcium carbonate you need," he explained. "If you're getting payments for your straw, make sure it's going to be adequate enough to take care of all those hidden expenses with removing it."

Growers have access to multiple tools and calculators on smallgrains.wsu.edu to help them figure out how to manage nutrient applications. Esser encouraged growers to do both soil and tissue samples regularly to build up a picture of what's happening in the field. Growers should consider variable rate applications based on multiple years of data. Esser's approach is to manage the top yielding 22% and the bottom yielding 22% of his fields differently.

"Set up realistic yield goals based on moisture and historical yields," he said. "We all like to be the highest yield around, but make sure you still can remain realistic, don't be afraid to push, but you have to do it with a sense of a framework. Soil sampling, crop nutrient removal, and nitrogen uptake efficiency can be valuable to monitor and make improvements moving forward."

Following Esser's presentation, growers split into groups for the rotational topics, which included seed treatments by Ric Wesselman from Syngenta; a drone demonstration by Terraplex Pacific Northwest Drones; and a soil moisture retention demonstration from the Natural Resources Conservation Service. ■

Derek Sandison
Director, Washington State Department of Agriculture

Wendy Powers
Dean, WSU College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences

Kevin Klein
Chairman, Washington Grain Commission

Jeff Malone
President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Aaron Esser
Director, Adams County Extension


AMMO

A familiar face is back at FSA

Jon Wyss is reappointed to lead state office for the third time

Earlier this year, **Jon Wyss** was reappointed as state executive director of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) for the third time. A lot has changed since his first term in 2019, and we wanted to know what keeps bringing him back, and what's happening at the Washington state FSA office in 2025.

Welcome back for your third term as state executive director (SED). How does the beginning of this term look different than the beginning of your first or second term?

The beginning of this term has not been much different than the first or second term. My job as SED is to carry out the mission of the administration. Through Secretary Rollins, the Trump administration has provided clear guidance. The Trump team at the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) has made this an easy transition.

Your job seems like it could be extremely stressful. Why keep coming back?

Farmers who tend to their lands through generational and applied conservation practices are the ones who have the stressful jobs. As SED, my job is to be here for them when they need the Farm Service Agency to alleviate their stress and to help ensure we address their needs quickly through our extensive conservation, commodity, price support, disaster recovery, and farm loan programs. I have worked closely with producers and their associations to build a long-term relationship, and I am committed to doing whatever we can to meet their financial and technical needs. I love serving the producers of Washington state and this great nation and will continue to do so, in coordination with the administration, for as long as I am able.

Can you tell me what the state office situation is like in terms of staffing?

Over the years, we have utilized USDA data analytics to our advantage in Washington state. In doing so, we've been able to balance the ebbs and flow of staffing that are inherent in any organization of this size. Our amazing staff has stepped up to the plate time and time again to ensure effective and efficient program delivery, and we are all genuinely dedicated to the producers we serve.

There're rumors that USDA plans to close county offices. Have you heard that any of Washington state's offices are going to be closed?

As you know, I have never been one to comment on rumors. I will say that Secretary Rollins has made it clear that she has no plans to close FSA county offices as they are front line USDA offices. We understand GSA (General Services Administration) has undertaken a process to review and consolidate current leases across the country. USDA has identified certain offices as critical offices and has asked GSA to rescind the office closure notifications. Additionally, on other office leases that GSA has slated to end, we are working with GSA to identify where there are multiple leases/facilities available in the nearby area to consolidate the offices. All services are continuing to be conducted.

Is any of your funding or programs on hold?

USDA is reviewing all programs to ensure they align with the Department's goals and priorities. Secretary Rollins understands that farmers and ranchers and other grant-funded entities that serve them have made decisions based on these funding opportunities, and that some have been waiting on payments during this government-wide review. She is working to make determinations as quickly as possible.

Do you see any big changes coming to FSA's mission with this new administration?

The Trump administration has laid out a vision for the country and much of what FSA does is administered through farm bill legislation. Congress is also debating a new farm bill. If any changes come, we will carry out the instructions as provided by the administration and outlined in the farm bill.

Long term, what are your goals and priorities for the next four years?

I met with FSA staff to put together a four-year plan outlining how FSA could better serve the producers of the state. We met directly with employees from across the state who represent a cross-section of our agency to field ideas about how the agency will function over the next four years. I would like to see us complete that plan in alignment with the vision of both Secretary Rollins and

the president's vision for American agriculture and putting farmers first.

Is there anything else you want Washington wheat farmers to know?

It's an honor and privilege to be selected to serve as FSA state executive director and carry messages from Washington to the administration. It's also an honor to represent this administration and help implement the plans and goals they want to achieve to ensure the longevity of the farmers and ranchers of this great state. ■

A 5-STAR rating

Producers wondering how their conservation efforts stack up can find out in new WSDA program

By Trista Crossley
Editor, Wheat Life

The Washington State Department of Agriculture wants to help farmers evaluate their conservation efforts and provide access to resources and technical implementation assistance through a free, voluntary, web-based program, Saving Tomorrow's Agriculture Resources (STAR).

In the online STAR tool — startool.ag — growers answer simple, production-specific questions about their rotations, tillage, nutrient applications, and conservation practices on a field-by-field basis. Answers are converted to a score of one to five stars. Producers' data is kept confidential and is not hosted on the state agriculture department's website due to Washington's privacy and public record requests rules. Information entered into the web tool is not shared.

Although the Washington STAR program is based on a national STAR program, first developed in Illinois, extensive research has gone into tailoring Washington's program to the state's specific crops and resource concerns, said **Lauren Quackenbush**, STAR program manager. Eight unique cropping systems were identified for Washington state, and the first web tool, for grains and legumes, was released in March 2025.

"We know that grains and legumes represent the largest production acreage in Washington. That was the first cropping system that we started with, but we've also recently released the orchards web tool as well," Quackenbush said. "That web tool is aesthetically identical, but the questions are different. The responses are different, and the scoring is different. That's because there are questions that you have in a perennial cropping system that are different than you would have in an annual cropping system."

Other Washington cropping systems that will eventually have a STAR component include vineyards, annual row and root crops, hops, small berries, and hay.

Behind Washington's STAR program is a science committee made up of researchers, agronomists, conservation district staff, and experts in specific cropping systems. Grower feedback was solicited through multiple rounds of crop-specific surveys, which gave the team an on-the-ground perspective of not just what practices were happening, but what stakeholders' perspectives of those practices were, and what kind of on-the-ground results they had seen.

"We also wanted to get an idea of what kind of economic impediments and barriers there were to implementing these practices," Quackenbush said. "For example, we realized that there are very few composting facilities on the east side of Washington. While we recognize that composting is a fantastic soil health practice, we also recognize that the cost of trucking tons of compost halfway across the state is not a reasonable financial ask for a lot of farmers. We took that into consideration when developing our scoring system. It has a high level of points associated with it, but you can still get five stars without using that practice."

The team performed crop-specific, region-specific literature reviews of vetted academic and professional industry publications to evaluate the current understanding of conservation practices, and how practices actually impact conservation and soil health. They followed three specific considerations when choosing those studies: studies had to be field studies (e.g., not modeling studies), they had to have three or more replicates, and they had to include a control treatment. The results of the studies were ranked according to a practice's effect on the resource of concern. Those studies, along with input from the science committee and the stakeholder survey responses, form the basis of the STAR scoring system.

"This is a science-based assessment," Quackenbush said.

Beyond simply giving farmers a method of evaluating their conservation efforts, the STAR tool is also a way to provide technical assistance and implementation support. After scoring, producers are prompted to develop a conservation innovation plan and given contact information for their local conservation district, as well as the technical staff at the state Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). Quackenbush said analogous NRCS practice standards are linked in the STAR tool, so growers can easily find associated agency practice standards. In addition, she hopes to be able to link the STAR tool to the Environmental Protection Agency's new Endangered Species Act pesticide mitigation point system at some

point. See sidebar for an update on pesticide labels.

One of the impediments to implementing conservation practices is the financial cost. In Illinois, Siemer Milling Company is funding a producer reward payment program for regional growers who have implemented conservation practices that result in an improved STAR rating or a 5-STAR rating.

"We see that as a great model, and we have one grant already submitted to help jump start a similar program here in Washington," Quackenbush said. "We're also pursuing other types of financial incentives that may provide value outside of direct cash payments, things like reduced interest rates on farm operation loans."

Another potential financial reward that Quackenbush is exploring is interest rate reductions on direct seed equipment loans for STAR producers. She is also talking to certification programs such as the Spokane Conservation District's Farmed Smart/BioFarming program and the Salmon Safe certification program.

"I want to encourage people to reach out with any questions or if they have any interest in partnering with us. I think it's really important that we continue to engage with stakeholders and farmers and continue to improve the program to best meet their needs," Quackenbush said. "I have a history in production agriculture. I owned a farm for five years. I worked in large scale production agriculture for a number of years, and one of my biggest issues was securing funding for new practices. I'm trying to approach the program development with the mind of somebody who understands the challenges of being a modern farmer."

For more information about the STAR program, visit the program's website at washingtonsoilhealthinitiative.com/star/. ■

Pesticide label changes

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is making changes to the rules farmers and pesticide applicators must follow. Many of these changes will include conservation practices to lower the chance that pesticides will enter the environment through drift or runoff.

If the EPA thinks that the same protections are needed everywhere in the U.S., they will be listed on the pesticide label and utilize the drift and runoff mitigation menus. In cases where the protections are only needed in specific areas, they will be listed on Endangered Species Protection Bulletins on the Bulletins Live! Two website.

Why is this happening?

Since 2001, the EPA has been sued repeatedly for not meeting Endangered Species Act requirements when they review pesticide registrations. Now they must follow a court-ordered schedule to complete Endangered Species Act reviews. They are also required to make sure no endangered species are harmed by pesticides before reviews can happen.

What will change on pesticide labels?

Some pesticide labels will have more requirements to follow. They will still have requirements about application rates, number of applications, and weather, but they may also have requirements about tillage, cover crops, filter strips, buffers, or other practices. The level of requirements will be assigned to each pesticide based on a nine-point menu system for runoff, and/or a buffer reduction menu system for drift.

Where do I find the mitigation menus?

Find them at epa.gov/pesticides/mitigation-menu.

How do I find and use Bulletins Live! Two?

- Download Endangered Species Protection Bulletins online at epa.gov/endangeredspecies/bulletins-live-two-viewbulletins.
- Call 1-844-447-3813.
- Email ESPP@epa.gov.

Being part of a conservation program may meet the requirements.

In a recently published Final Insecticide Strategy, the EPA outlined the potential for some conservation programs to qualify as meeting all runoff mitigation requirements. The first of these approved conservation programs is the Natural Resources Conservation Services Environmental Quality Incentives Program. The Washington State Department of Agriculture is pursuing the opportunity for the STAR program, with their collaboration, to achieve qualification as a conservation program that meets or exceeds all of the runoff mitigation requirements. ■

Compiled by Abbey Nickelson, natural resources scientist, Washington State Department of Agriculture

Franklin growers meet with NRCS staff

By Andrea Cox

Conservation Coordinator, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

In late May, Franklin County growers met with Roylene Comes At Night, Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) state conservationist, to continue brainstorming conservation practice ideas for dryland growers. Producers previously met with Comes At Night and other state staff in February to express their concerns about having utilized most practices available to growers in less-than-12-inch rainfall areas.

Kara Kaelber, Franklin Conservation District manager, also joined in the conversation focusing on the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) and how NRCS and the conservation district could partner.

Participants discussed the Conservation Harvest Management Practice (NRCS Interim Conservation Practice Standard 809). This practice focuses on management or harvest techniques that enhance the orientation, amount, and distribution of residue left on the ground (standing or laying). There is one year left until this practice goes out to the public for comment.

Growers also discussed local working groups and how money and fund pools are allocated. Bobby Evans, NRCS state resource conservationist, explained the once-every-five-year process where the public can provide feedback on prices and that the state technical committee reviews practices. Discussions have been had about revisiting the evaluation process for local workgroups for 2026.

Andrew Schafer brought up to the group that in his opinion, the best way to judge success with NRCS programs is to look at whether practices are being continued after the timeline is complete.

Producers proposed several ideas for additional practices including the utilization of humus liquid biochar, upgrading GPS, and spraying fertilizer to help break down straw in high residue years.

Growers further expressed concern about struggles with practices during drought years. NRCS staff stressed the importance of contacting their planner to let them know what's going on so it can be documented in their file.

State NRCS staff will review recommendations presented at the meeting and reconvene with growers at a later date to discuss opportunities. ■

In late May, Franklin County wheat growers met with Roylene Comes At Night (right), Natural Resources Conservation Service's state conservationist, to discuss potential conservation practices for dryland growers.

Prosser business uses local wheat to produce spirits

Monson Ranch Distillers

By Jennifer Ferrero
Special to Wheat Life

Making spirits from Washington wheat and agricultural products is a unique labor of love. It involves the careful cultivation of soft winter wheat, the creation of custom stills, a meticulous distillation process, and the infusion of the spirits with locally sourced botanicals and fruits. This process, which can take years, is a testament to the dedication and patience of the distillers, not to mention the additional efforts required for marketing and distribution once the product has aged.

Brian Morton, master distiller with Monson Ranch Distillers of Prosser, Wash., is in it for the long haul. His distilling career spans two decades, and he has consulted with over 20 national alcohol distillation companies to make spirits.

Morton and the Monson family partnered to set up a local distribution operation. The Monson's own and operate various farming and vineyard properties in the Yakima Valley. Both families are active in daily operations. Morton's family is also involved in the business, with two of his six children working at the distillery and winery.

Morton said distilling liquor had not been allowed in Washington since prohibition ended in 1933. Other states allowed spirit distillation, but Washington was a holdout. In the early 2000s, when he started making spirits, he was one of the first in the state. Now, there are more than 3,200 distillers nationwide.

Soft winter wheat is the base for the company's vodka and gin. Morton said to make gin, they first make vodka and then add botanicals to obtain the gin flavor. They also make wheat bourbon, starting with 51% corn and a wheat infusion.

"Wheat is the primary flavoring grain in our bourbon: 51% corn, 4% barley, and 45% wheat," Morton explained.

Another product they make is rye whiskey, which Morton said is funny because in Yakima Valley, around the Monson family farm in the Rattlesnake Hills, rye is considered a noxious weed, especially in wheat.

"It's like Superman and kryptonite; most kids on the farm in the valley are paid to pull the rye," he said.

The Monson family grows dryland wheat, which Morton said produces a different profile than irrigated wheat, "every year is a little different," much like grapes, which have distinct flavor profiles each year.

The Monson family likes to farm its own products, called "full integration." They grow wheat, grapes, cherries, apples, and more. They also sell custom services for people who want to buy agricultural products and produce their brands.

The wheat fields in the Rattlesnake Hills go from Sunnyside to Benton City, Wash. The robust wine industry in the region is lined with vineyards and tasting rooms. Morton said the area wasn't irrigated by farmers on the lower part of the Hills until 2017. He said the top part of the Hills will likely never have irrigation.

According to a family spokesperson, "The Rattlesnake Hills are the largest, treeless mountain in the world. Not much is irrigated; our wheat grows on the farms from a six-generation farm, coming from multiple farming families."

Looking at the Rattlesnake Hills from Horse Heaven Hills, across the Yakima Valley, the rolling hills of dryland farming take on a pinkish hue compared to the lush, green valley, which is irrigated.

"In spring and late fall, we can get dry lightning, and those are the hills that usually burn," Morton said, reflecting on the dryness of the semiarid desert.

Monson Ranch Distillers works side-by-side with farmers to select the grain for their liquor. Morton said they use about 1,000 acres of wheat for Monson Ranch Distillers

and 500 acres of rye for the whisky.

"We have some of the best agriculture in the world right here," he said.

The Monson family deeply appreciates their land and tells their stories through their farming practices. Their commitment to farming for the next generation is evident in terms of the quality of their products. Their dedication to showcasing the high quality of their spirits ensures that each bottle is a testament to the rich agricultural region of the Yakima Valley.

The area is highly ag-centric, and Morton said this farming immersion is the reason for schools, restaurants, farms, and jobs.

Additionally, the new Monson Ranch distillation location and tasting room in Prosser had their grand opening this spring. Their building was used for civil defense after WWII. The building was made from cinder block and red brick from a local quarry. They also have old-growth wood from Weyerhaeuser on the tasting room's walls. Another story they tell is that over the years, the building was used to build floats for the many parades in the region. The prom kings and queens signed their names on the floors and are now revisiting the facility to reminisce.

Both the tasting room and website focus on American heritage and family involvement. Tourism is important to Prosser, and there are 30 wineries in the area. The distillery is a unique addition to the wineries.

Both Morton and the Monson family are looking forward to expanding their line of spirits, with a focus on quality and the rich agricultural region of the Yakima Valley.

For more information, visit monsonranchdistillers.com. ■

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Chairman's Column

Growers are invited to meet our customers

By Kevin Klein
Chairman, Washington Grain Commission

Summer is here, and it is that time of year when I find myself walking out the door earlier in the morning and working till the sun goes down. All winter long, we talk about how there are not enough hours in the day to get everything done, and every summer I'm reminded — even with more daylight and longer hours — there still isn't enough time to get everything done! I guess this will always be part of living on the farm.

Even though my to-do list around the farm and at home always seems to get longer, attending the Washington State University (WSU) Variety Testing Plot (VTP) field tours has been a welcome addition to my early summer days. I have had the opportunity to attend a couple of tours and meetings. We commissioners value having representation at most of the events and having the chance to connect with the WSU breeders and our fellow farmers. Thank you to all who attended this year's field tours.

In other important news, at our annual commission meeting in May, we finalized and passed our annual budget at $8.36 million for the new fiscal year. This is about $1 million higher than our previous year's budget of $7.2 million. As of the deadline for this article, we estimated assessment income to reach the $6 million level by June 30, so we will use some reserve savings in order to achieve our budget, which was sharply focused on maintaining our current programs and projects.

This year, we also had a couple of new project opportunities we believed would be very beneficial for the wheat industry. The first proposal was to obtain some significant outside funding dollars for research that required a matching investment. Keep an eye out for information and updates in the near future. Our other significant investment was partnering with the Washington State Potato Commission to fund another 13-episode season of Washington Grown. We recognize this as a great opportunity to gain more exposure and appreciation for the small grains industry across Washington state and beyond.

Research continues to be about 30% of our budget, with the majority funding research projects and breeding programs at WSU. The Variety Testing Program is one of these projects and is gaining good momentum in a positive direction with Karl Effertz taking charge of the trial work.

Education and grower services is roughly 32% of our overall budget, which includes Wheat Week (a hands-on educational program for fourth grade students), the upcoming Washington Grown season, and supporting numerous activities through the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG).

Market development is about 19% of our budget, with investments in both U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) and the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland. Our commission also funds several overseas trips to visit our foreign markets in order to build relationships with customers, understand their concerns and challenges, identify and address barriers to market access, and show appreciation for their business.

One of our most recent trips was to Vietnam for the North Asian Marketing Conference and South and Southeast Asia Marketing Conference, where we were able to personally connect with the 10 countries that represent approximately 80% of the soft white wheat market. You can learn more about these conferences from USW Communications Manager Ralph Loos on page 44. In September, we will host a Club Wheat Technical Exchange with the Japanese Flour Millers Association, and in October, we will travel to the Philippines and Vietnam to meet more customers in those regions.

Last, but not least, the WGC will host five trade teams here in Eastern Washington over the course of the summer, including South America, Japan, Korea, and Southeast Asia. Most of these teams are only here for a couple days before they travel to the next state, so we work to make the most of their visits by arranging expert-led tours of WSU research facilities, shuttle loader facilities, barge terminals, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service's quality lab. To learn more about this year's trade teams and how you can join the group (including a meal!), read WGC Market Development Specialist Jake Liening's article on page 42.

Hosting trade teams is a market development priority for the commission every year. Come see for yourself how we're marketing the quality and value of Washington's wheat production system and contact us at WGC with your feedback, needs, and questions. ■

Growers, meet your wheat customers

The 2025 trade team season stretches through October

By Jake Liening
Market Development Specialist, Washington Grain Commission

Each year from June through October, the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) welcomes international wheat buyers who travel thousands of miles to see the source of their supply. These trade teams are composed of flour millers, bakers, food manufacturers, and grain buyers — many of whom rely on the quality and consistency of Washington-grown wheat classes, which include soft white (SW), club, hard red wheat (HRW), and hard red spring (HRS).

Organized by U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) and hosted by the WGC, our 2025 trade team season will draw in five trade teams, enabling us to build trust, strengthen relationships, and help sustain demand for the SW, club, HRW, and HRS grown in our state. Most importantly, they offer an opportunity for overseas buyers to connect directly with the producers, researchers, and supply chain professionals who grow and deliver their products to market.

Why trade teams matter

Wheat buyers have plenty of options for where they purchase their wheat. Trade team visits help set U.S. wheat apart by providing transparency, technical assurance, and a personal connection to the farmers who grow the grain that will become their region's flour and food products. For buyers, seeing a field of wheat or meeting a breeder gives them confidence in the quality and consistency they expect when choosing where to purchase.

For growers, these visits are a chance to share what makes Washington wheat and Washington farmers unique. Whether it's sustainability, stewardship, or soil quality, our producers have a strong story to tell. Trade team tours allow us to tell these stories directly — often over a shared meal or standing in the middle of a wheat field.

What a trade team visit looks like

Washington's role in these tours is critical. In just a few days, we work to strategically show the full picture of our wheat supply chain and quality practices, including our high-performing wheat varieties, university-backed research programs, cutting-edge quality labs, grain elevators, barge and rail infrastructure, and, most importantly, the farm-

Growers: Get involved

Every trade team visit is made stronger by grower participation. Whether you're open to hosting a farm tour, speaking at a meeting, or just joining us for a meal, your voice helps build the trust and relationships that keep buyers coming back.

Scan the QR code below to let us know you're interested in meeting a 2025 trade team. We'll follow up with opportunities to connect.

You grow it. They buy it. Now's your chance to meet them. ■

ers who grow it all. To accomplish this, a typical trade team itinerary includes:

- Farm and field tours, where trade teams walk fields and talk with farmers to understand growing conditions and production decisions.
- Research and quality labs, where participants meet with Washington State University (WSU) wheat breeders and visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Western Wheat Quality Lab to learn how end-use performance is developed and tested.
- Grain handling and export, which include stops at elevators and shuttle-loading facilities to demonstrate how wheat moves efficiently to the ports.
- Meals with growers, where growers and trade teams casually gather to build long-term connections through an exchange of ideas and information.

2025 trade team schedule

This year's lineup includes both longtime markets and regions where demand is growing. If you see a team that aligns with your interests or customer base, consider getting involved!

SOUTH AMERICAN MILLING ASSOCIATION, JUNE 8–10. SW is gaining ground in South America, particularly along the Pacific Coast, where consistent market development efforts are raising awareness of its quality and value. Chile leads the region in SW imports, while Peru and Colombia represent emerging opportunity markets.

JAPANESE MID-LEVEL MANAGEMENT TEAM, JULY 8–10. Japan traditionally imports Western White (WW) wheat, a blend of SW and over 20% club wheat, mainly from Washington, to produce premium confectionery products. WW holds over 90% of Japan's confectionery flour market.

SOUTH KOREAN CROP SURVEY, JULY 24–27. SW is favored in South Korea for its bright color and soft texture, used widely in high-quality biscuits and cakes. While Australian wheat leads in noodles, U.S. wheat dominates the growing instant ramen flour market.

SOUTHEAST ASIA TEAM, AUG. 6–8. SW is valued across South and Southeast Asia for its low protein, bright color, and soft texture, ideal for cakes, cookies, and crackers. Demand is growing in this region as consumer preferences within these emerging markets shift toward higher-quality, Western-style baked goods.

JAPANESE BISCUIT ASSOCIATION (JBA), OCT. 5–7. After a successful visit in 2024, the WGC is looking forward to hosting the JBA trade team again this October. Japan remains a key buyer of Washington's SW and club wheat, consistently valuing its premium quality for high-end confectionery products. While recent purchases are slightly below the five-year average, current sales are trending higher than last year. ■

The Club Wheat Technical Exchange: A unique collaboration

In addition to the trade teams listed above, a specialized Club Wheat Technical Exchange will take place Sept. 14–16, hosted jointly by the Washington Grain Commission, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS), and the Japan Flour Millers Association (JFMA).

This program differs from USW-funded trade teams. Since 2018, it has served as a direct international collaboration focused on variety development. Each year, club wheat breeding lines from USDA-ARS in Pullman are sent to Japan for testing. Millers conduct detailed analyses — grinding, milling, and baking — then return feedback to U.S. breeders on which lines meet their strict quality standards.

This process allows U.S. breeders to make data-driven decisions about which club wheat lines to advance, aligning closely with market demand. It has led to the development of varieties that excel in both agronomic performance and end-use characteristics.

For Japanese confectioners, club wheat (typically blended with SW as "Western White") is prized for creating a melt-in-your-mouth texture in baked goods without the need for added fats. In the U.S., the same result typically requires much higher fat content. According to wheat quality expert Art Bettge, U.S. food manufacturers could use club wheat to develop healthier, lower-fat products if they embraced it the way Japan does.

As a Washington-specialty class, club wheat presents a unique marketing opportunity, and this exchange ensures it remains aligned with its most prominent club wheat customer. ■

A global perspective

ASIAN CONFERENCES CELEBRATE PAST AND PRIME FUTURE MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

By Ralph Loos
Director of Communications, U.S. Wheat Associates

Getting U.S. wheat customers from across Asia together in one place requires a lot of organization and support from the entire U.S. wheat industry.

In late May, U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) was able to pull it off.

For the very first time, USW held the North Asian Marketing Conference (NAMC) and South and Southeast Asian Marketing Conference (SSEAMC) in one place, back-to-back. Aptly themed "Legacy of Success," the two conferences allowed USW to efficiently plan and execute these two high-impact events.

"The idea was that we could have one set of experts and speakers come to the region and offer their expertise in one trip," explained Joe Sowers, USW regional vice president for South and Southeast Asia. "We leverage the investment in their travel costs, and we're able to include so many more people. Our North Asia conference had 100 participants, and in South and Southeast Asia, we had more than 200 participants."

During USW marketing conferences, the goal is simple, yet complex: experts from each aspect of the U.S. supply chain share information on all U.S. wheat classes. At the same time, customers can ask questions and provide immediate feedback.

Another new twist was included this year at SSEAMC, which took place May 26-28. For the first time, USW conducted a full day of business-to-business meetings.

"We set up 260 meetings between exporters and buyers from across the region," Sowers explained. "The idea was to help establish new relationships by setting up 20-minute meetings. Each exporter had its own booth, and representatives from each exporter welcomed a team of buyers and millers every 20 minutes. This new addition to the program was something they hope to see

Many of the 200 South and Southeast Asian Marketing Conference participants gathered for a photo between a full schedule of conference activities. Several representatives of the Washington Grain Commission attended the conference.

again. I think we can spread it out to other conferences around the world to get established. These relationships are especially important, to bring buyer and seller together in one place."

Partnerships formed between the U.S. wheat industry and customers in Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan decades ago were revisited during the NAMC, held May 21-23.

More than 100 millers and wheat buyers from the three countries participated, joined by U.S. wheat farmers, state wheat association executives, exporters, and a host of milling, wheat foods, and transportation experts.

"It's a chance for us to get together in one place and trade information about the markets, the U.S. wheat crop, the economics of trade, transportation, and all of the things that make up our business," said USW President Vince Peterson. "It's also a chance to cement relationships. Some of these relationships we've had for an exceptionally long time in these markets. This conference has been a tremendously valuable tool for that purpose."

USW Chairman Clark Hamilton presented an "Outlook for U.S. Wheat Farmers" during the conference. He shared with attendees a perspective on global trade — from a producer's point of view.

"I've been on board team trip visits to quite a few of the mills represented here, and several of the customers here have been on trade team visits to my family's farm," Hamilton, who grows wheat in Ririe, Idaho, said after his presentation. "So, there is familiarity, and that comes from building relationships over the years. The U.S. Wheat Associates staff does a fantastic job with this conference, and our customers are quick to express their appreciation for bringing everyone together."

USW Taiwan country director, Ji-I Huang, said customers in his country look forward to blending with wheat buyers and millers from other countries.

"Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have similar consumption trends and backgrounds, so it is a good chance for all of us to exchange information with each other, and our meters can also improve their business," said Huang.

Customers at the NAMC were impressed by the presence of U.S. wheat farmers and their willingness to interact and answer questions about their production back home. Several attendees took advantage of the opportunity to directly pose questions to growers during the Q&A sessions USW conducted.

Speaking of production back home, Casey Chumrau, Washington Grain Commission CEO, said the USW conferences are a great conduit between milling industries

During the South and Southeast Asian Marketing Conference, U.S. Wheat Associates board chair, Jim Pellman, responds to a customer question, which was voted as important to answer by six additional customers: "Do international buyers like us impact your crop decisions, or is it mostly local markets and weather that guide what you grow?"

in Asia and agriculture in the U.S.

"The producers of Washington know how important it is to be here with these markets; over 90% of our production is exported, and so they truly understand that their livelihoods depend on the relationships and the purchases that are made by these markets," Chumrau, who participated in both conferences, said. "And they have been incredibly loyal customers to us. It's a good reminder for all of us in the U.S. how important it is at these times to conduct market development and provide the information that is necessary for these customers."

To gauge the response by customers to the two conferences, USW conducted real-time surveys with participants using a live service. Questions appeared on a screen in the conference hall, and attendees each had a remote device to input their answers. USW also used the service to field questions from the audience.

"What we found this year is that 96% of participants rated the conference as very good or an excellent value for their business," said Joe Bippert, USW assistant director in South and Southeast Asia. "Some other highlights from the conference survey were that 97% stated that the conference was effective in demonstrating how U.S. wheat can be a profitable choice for their business, and 98% of the participants stated that the information from

the presenters will impact their decisions."

Regarding the business-to-business meetings organized by USW prior to the SSEAMC, surveys showed that nearly all who participated believed this new initiative was an effective platform to establish useful contacts with U.S. traders or potential business partners.

One trending item that came from the survey of NAMC and SSEAMC attendees was an indication that Asian mills feel that changes in the industry are increasing the demand for training, specifically in the areas of procurement and contracting, baking sciences, and milling.

"Luckily, customers indicated that activities by U.S. Wheat Associates are supporting those efforts, with marketing programs, such as the contracting for value workshops and procurement courses, improving their ability to make buying decisions, and influencing their interest and ability to use U.S. wheat in their operations," said Bippert. "Overall, it was clear that U.S. wheat programs are well designed to train the milling industry in the areas where they have indicated that there is the greatest need and that those activities are having the desired impact for them to see the value of U.S. wheat classes." ■

Keys to a successful plant breeding program

Interactions with stakeholders help identify objectives followed by years of research to identify and select wanted variations

By Arron Carter

Winter Wheat Breeder and O.A. Vogel Endowed Chair of Wheat Breeding and Genetics, Washington State University

During my 16 years as the lead winter wheat breeder at Washington State University (WSU), I have been asked many times what it takes to make a successful plant breeding program. I have thought a lot about this question, and while I am constantly refining the answer and process, I have come up with three ideas. To have a successful plant breeding program, I believe you need to: identify your objectives, create genetic variation for the traits of interest, and select that variation.

Identifying key objectives for the winter wheat breeding program requires constant interactions with stakeholders across the wheat supply chain. I get the opportunity to interact with growers often, meeting them at field tours, county grower meetings, the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention, and in one-on-one interactions (see Figure 1). During these visits, I try and discuss what traits are needed for a variety to be successful in commercial fields.

FIGURE 1: Dr. Arron Carter interacting with growers and stakeholders at the 2024 Lind Field Day. Carter attends

This is further expanded by visits with seed companies, the Washington Grain Commission (WGC), and export market customers. These interactions further my understanding of the needs of the wheat industry including where markets are heading.

By understanding the unique needs of all Washington wheat industry stakeholders, I shape the core objectives of my winter wheat program. In general terms, the main objectives of it are to develop high-yielding, agronomically adapted cultivars; maintain high end-use quality; and develop genetic resistance to various stress conditions in the ecosystem from other living organisms (known as biotic stresses) and nonliving components, like sunlight and temperature (known as abiotic stresses).

Once these objectives have been established, my next goal is to create variation for the objectives (see Figure 2). I will not get very far if I cross susceptible by susceptible parent cultivars together in an effort to get resistance. A lot of time and effort goes into the process of identifying cultivar parents to cross, along with the specific cross combinations that need to be made each year.

Using the above objectives as my guide, I look at the strengths and weaknesses of many different cultivars

FIGURE 2: Crossing in the greenhouse requires identification of two parents with favorable traits. One parental wheat head has all the anthers removed (right), and the other parent (left) is added and covered with a bag to ensure pollen transfer from one parent to the other.

s multiple field tours and grower meetings each year to discuss the future needs of wheat in Washington.

FIGURE 3. With many different lines to evaluate each year, winter wheat breeder Dr. Arron Carter spends multiple hours each day at various locations collecting data on lines. Evenings are then spent analyzing that data to identify superior lines for advancement in the breeding program.

and breeding lines and start putting together lists of which lines need to be crossed together. My goal is to find lines with complimentary traits, like crossing a high-yielding, disease-resistant line with a high-yielding, high end-use quality line, in an effort to combine all three traits into one cultivar.

DNA markers further help this process, as I can identify lines with specific genes of interest and make crosses that more efficiently transfer those genes into new breeding lines (a process known as introgression). Knowing the relatedness of parental lines is also important, and DNA markers assist with that information. Crossing two parent cultivars that are highly related does not create new genetic variation, while crossing lines which are not adapted to Washington requires a lot of work to select all the favorable genes needed for success. It is a delicate balance to cross lines with genetic diversity that are also adapted to Washington. This important task is needed for any plant breeding program to be successful. Without new genetic variation, no progress can be made.

After this variation has been created, there are tens of thousands of lines to be evaluated. This is where most of a plant breeder's time is spent (Figure 3). There are numerous traits that need to be screened at this stage in the breeding program. The first stage is usually what we call "negative selection" or removing lines from the program that do not meet expectations. They are either susceptible to diseases, do not have good quality, or do not have high grain yield.

After removing the lines that do not have potential, we turn to keeping the best lines with all the great characteristics needed for a new cultivar. This includes screening for diseases such as stripe rust, Cephalosporium stripe, eyespot foot rot, soilborne wheat mosaic virus, and snow mold, among others. Screening is also done for physiological leaf spot, tolerance to low pH soils, emer-

gence potential from deep planting, cold tolerance, and drought tolerance, among other abiotic stresses. Along with the biotic and abiotic stresses, end-use quality is evaluated on every line to ensure it meets export standards. I work hard to get all three of these areas in line with grower and export market expectations!

Due to the large variation of rainfall zones and climates across Washington, I keep a close eye on grain yield in comparison with commercially grown cultivars. Each year, we typically screen at five to eight locations across the state to ensure high and stable performance. These traits are screened for a minimum of three years (but usually four to five years) before being entered into the WSU Variety Testing trials, where they are tested for a minimum of two years before release. This may seem like a long time, but the variability of climates requires a sufficient testing period. I want to evaluate lines in multiple environments over multiple years to ensure a line will perform well over all climates it might be grown in. Since we never know what the next season will bring when making planting decisions in the fall, I want to ensure released cultivars can maintain high yield no matter what environmental conditions come the next year!

One objective of a successful plant breeding program I do not formally have on my list, but which I often talk about, is taking advantage of opportunities in the field. Many times, I will show up to a field location not knowing what will be in store for me, only to see that a location had struggles with emergence or cold injury.

FIGURE 4. A field location showing symptoms of soilborne wheat mosaic virus. Unknown at the time of planting, this field had a high virus load. With a little serendipity, some lines in the program already had resistance to the virus without prior knowledge.

When opportunities arise that allow me to take notes on something I was not expecting, I take full advantage of them. This allows progress to be made in selection. One of those cases is shown in Figure 4. This was a field trial grown along the Oregon/Washington border. Upon inspection of the field in the spring, there was obviously something going on. After talking with plant pathologists, we found out it was soilborne wheat mosaic virus, and there was already resistance in the program! Taking advantage of this unique field location allowed rapid identification of resistant lines and sped up the process of crossing and creating new variations for this trait.

Along with hoping this three-step process helps increase understanding of plant breeding program basics, I also hope this article reveals how all wheat stakeholders are crucial to a successful program. I thoroughly enjoy talking with stakeholders to identify the objectives of the winter wheat breeding program and learning about the future needs in Washington. Then, like a puzzle, I put together different cross combinations that aim to create variation for these traits.

Ultimately, many years are spent evaluating the lines, with many hours each summer spent in the field looking at lines, collecting data, and analyzing differences between each line to find the best of the best. Every year, there are unique circumstances that allow new opportunities for evaluation, all ultimately leading to developing and releasing superior cultivars for the growers in Washington.

While I never know what will come the following year, I am always ready with the tools and technology needed to make the best evaluations of breeding lines and advance the best lines for commercial release for Washington farmers. ■

WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Big crop, bigger questions in global outlook

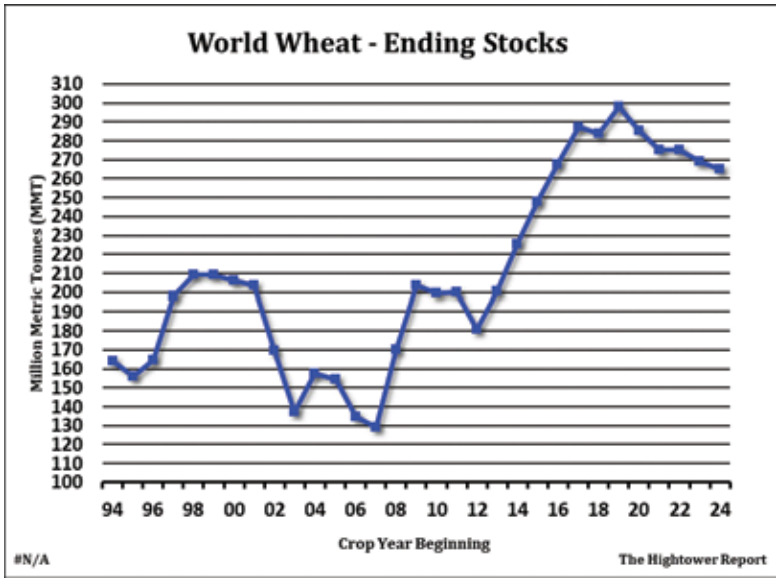
By Allison Thompson
Owner, The Money Farm

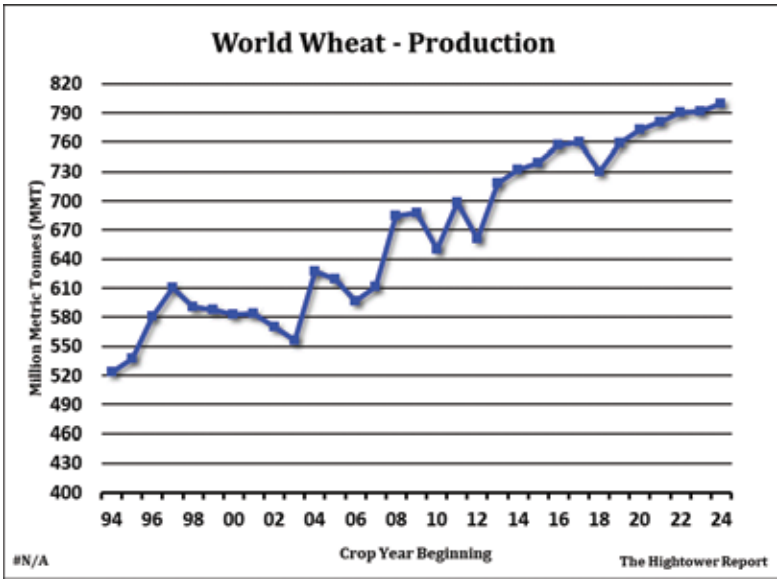
As the 2025-26 marketing year approaches, a global debate is heating up over wheat supply, demand, and trade. The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is projecting record global wheat production and slightly higher ending stocks. On paper, the world appears well supplied, but that outlook depends on execution from the world's top exporters. With Russia, Australia, Argentina, Canada, and the U.S. all facing their own risks, it won't take much of a surprise to move the needle. A shortfall from even one of these players could shift global trade flows fast. Fortunately, the U.S. may be well positioned to benefit from any stumbles.

According to the USDA, global wheat supplies for 2025-26 are expected to rise by 4.9 million metric tons (MMT), reaching just over 1 billion metric tons. That increase is driven by a record production forecast of 808.5 MMT, more than offsetting lower beginning stocks. The USDA expects larger wheat production in Russia, Argentina, and Canada will more than offset smaller production in Australia and the U.S. Still, even with bigger supplies, global demand is keeping pace.

Wheat consumption is projected to hit a record 808 MMT, led by steady growth in food, seed, and industrial use. Global wheat trade is also expected to rebound in 2025-26, reaching 213 MMT, up 6.9 MMT from the previous year. As a result, ending stocks are projected at 265.7 MMT, up just 0.5 MMT from last year. On paper, the 2025-26 wheat outlook appears well supplied, but there isn't much cushion if something goes wrong.

Russia is a consistent wild card in the global wheat market, so it's no surprise it sits at the center of the 2025-26 supply debate. The USDA is projecting Russian wheat exports at a record 45 MMT, a bold call given the current setup. Ending stocks are tighter than a year ago, crop





conditions are average at best, and domestic feed demand is quietly increasing.

Russia's livestock industry continues to grow, with 2–3% annual expansion in pork, poultry, and dairy. That's pushing feed demand higher, especially as wheat is a flexible feed grain, often subbed in for barley or corn depending on price and availability. With barley production expected to decline and corn acreage uncertain, wheat could play a bigger role in Russian rations this year. Despite this, the USDA has trimmed its Russian feed use estimates in recent years, a move that doesn't align with industry growth. Some pri-

vate analysts now believe domestic wheat use could be 2 to 4 MMT higher than official projections. If so, Russia's exportable surplus may be overstated, especially if production comes in below forecast. What matters now is execution. The trade will be watching domestic Russian wheat demand as well as conditions closely, especially as harvest approaches.

The U.S. is in a similar spot with harvest approaching for the winter wheat crop. However, the USDA's outlook differs greatly, with the USDA expecting lower production and exports in the U.S. However, with 769 million bushels in ending stocks — the highest in five years — the U.S. holds a major strategic advantage if global supplies tighten. The U.S. remains a key supplier of high-protein wheat, especially hard red winter and spring classes. Harvest is just kicking off in southern growing regions, and U.S. yields will soon give the market some clarity. If quality holds up and global buyers start looking for a reliable supply, the U.S. is well positioned to respond, particularly in the second half of the marketing year.

Canada's story echoes the U.S. — quieter now, but full of potential. After a weather-challenged crop last year, production is expected to rebound in 2025-26. Early season moisture has improved conditions across the Canadian Prairies, but June and July weather will decide final yield and quality. Like the U.S., Canada is entering a key stretch ahead of harvest later this summer. If conditions hold, Canada will be a valuable supplier of high-quality spring wheat and durum, especially for buyers in Asia and Latin America. As a result, Canada and the U.S. could quickly become the global market's go-to if shortfalls arise.

With that, the Southern Hemisphere's wheat production outlook is starting to gain market attention. Key exporters like Australia and Argentina are wrapping up planting their 2025-26 wheat crops, and conditions are already mixed. In Australia, dry weather in New South Wales and Queensland is already raising concerns. While planting is nearly complete, subpar moisture levels have increased reliance on rain to ensure healthy crop establishment. The USDA has already cut Australia's export outlook for 2025-26, and further downgrades are likely if the rains don't show up. That matters, particularly for the Southeast Asian buyers who rely on Australia as a primary supplier.

Argentina is off to a better start. Planting is on schedule, and early weather has been favorable. The USDA has raised its export forecast for Argentina, and if the weather holds through the growing season, they could fill supply gaps left by other origins. That said, risks remain, and Argentine crops still have a long way to go. It seems Argentina's wheat crop is always one dry spell away from becoming a concern.

The USDA's 2025-26 wheat outlook paints a picture of balance — record production, growing demand, and relatively steady stocks. But that balance depends on a lot going right: Russia hitting full export stride, Australia avoiding prolonged drought, and Argentina following through on early season promise. For now, the global wheat market appears well supplied, but as always, it's the surprises that move the market. If even one key exporter underperforms, the tone could shift quickly. Futures will respond, trade flows will pivot, and buyers will scramble to secure supplies. For producers, that means staying alert. For end users, that means locking in coverage before headlines turn into price action.

There's plenty of wheat — for now. However, in a market like this, surprises are what move the needle. ■

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


Quincy Valley Crops in Your Home


Immigrant Farmers


From Field to Package

Hope and hard work

Exhibit at the Quincy Valley Historical Society and Museum celebrates region's ag history

By Trista Crossley
Editor, Wheat Life

Before Grand Coulee Dam made irrigation viable in the Columbia Basin in the 1950s, farmers struggled to grow food in what was, essentially, a desert. An exhibit at the Quincy Valley Historical Society and Museum (QVHSM), "Hope and Hard Work: The Story of Our Farms and Food," highlights the story of the region's agriculture and the people who make it happen.

"Agriculture has been the main industry in Quincy," said Harriet Weber, director of operations at the QVHSM. "We really wanted to share that story, and we wanted people to understand how important farmers are, be able to connect with them on a more personal level, and help them understand a little bit about how their food is grown and the whole struggle to be able to grow this kind of food here."

An exhibit at the Quincy Valley Historical Society and Museum in Quincy, Wash., teaches visitors the story of the region's agricultural history. Harriet Weber, director of operations at the museum, explains a station talking about native tribes who travelled through the area.

The exhibit is open to the public most Fridays and Saturdays, from 1-5 p.m., located in the QVHSM's heritage barn.

The exhibit is showcased by a large mural depicting 100 years of agriculture, from the native tribes who travelled through the area to irrigation to GPS and automated farm machinery. There's a 1940 John Deere tractor for kids to explore, an interpretive display on irrigation, and samples of many of the different crops that are grown in the region. Other displays talk about the different immigrant groups that came into the area and highlight various crops, such as cattle and sheep ranching and dryland wheat production. Activities for kids include an apple-picking game, a hand-cranked French fry sorter, and a milking cow.

One of the highlights of the exhibit is an augmented reality app with multiple stations. Visitors point a tablet at a silhouette to make a video appear. The videos cover women in agriculture, farm equipment, feedlots, and tell stories of people involved in agriculture.

Stepping back in time

The heritage barn, finished in 2018, is the latest addition to the QVHSM campus, which began to take shape in 2001 when the city was given the old, historic, Reiman-Simmons house with the stipulation that it be used as a community heritage site of some kind. A nonprofit was formed to restore the house. Then in 2007, the very first church built in Quincy was moved to the same site as the Reiman-Simmons house. Using state grants, the nonprofit also restored that building, which is popular for weddings, funerals, concerts, and speakers. Weber said one of the major features of the church is its embossed barrel vault ceiling, something that is very rarely found on the West Coast.

Following the church restoration, the nonprofit added a summer kitchen and a windmill to the Reiman-Simmons house, two features the house would have originally had.

"So we had this whole campus kind of happening, but there really wasn't any place for large gatherings, and we didn't have any place to store collections," Weber said. "We were storing photographs, documents, all those kinds of things, down in the basement of the Reiman-Simmons house, which is not a good place for an archive. The state of Washington approached us, because by then, we had already written two successful heritage capital funds grants. And they said, 'You know, isn't there something else you'd

like to put on this property?'"

The heritage barn project began in 2016. One of the family foundations that helped fund the construction requested that telling the story of agriculture be part of the project. The barn, Weber said, seemed like the perfect place to do that.

"When you look at the pioneering families of this era here, you had their house, which was their home, their family. Then you have the church, which was their faith, and that was an important part of the life of the pioneer here. And then you have the barn, which represents their work and their livelihood. We wanted to tell the story of that," she explained.

Because the barn is a multipurpose building — after getting married in the church, many couples hold a wedding reception in the barn — the exhibit is made to be mobile; it can be stored in a side room during events.

Although the barn is new, it was built in the same architectural style as many of the older pioneer barns in the area, including three diamond-shaped windows arranged in a triangular pattern in the center gable, a trademark of one of the area's past barn builders.

"We have really made it our goal as a board for a long, long time to be more than just a museum. We are not just a place where you go and look at things and then you leave. In fact, we just changed our mission statement this last year to reflect that to say that we want to be a gathering place for our community for all generations," Weber said. "We're more than a museum. It's like a cultural center as well."

Stepping farther back in time

While native Americans traveled through the Quincy valley, the lack of water discouraged permanent settlements. Pioneers began settling in the area around 1902 when the railroad came through. Many of the early settlers were German-Russian immigrants who brought their knowledge of growing wheat with them.

"From those early days, when it was all

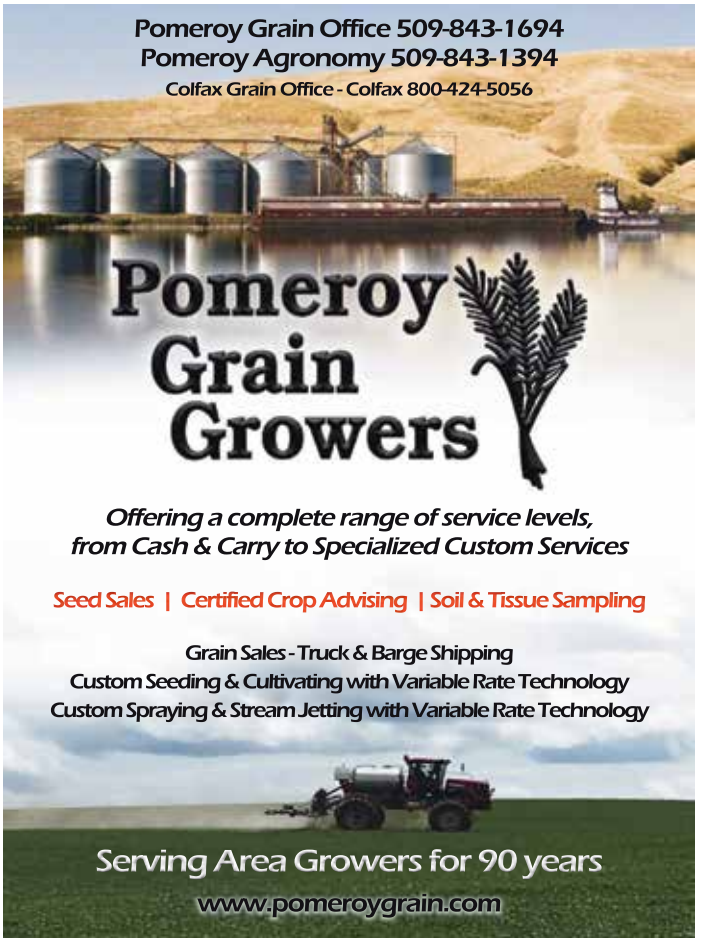
(Above) The barn on the Quincy Valley Historical Society and Museum's campus is home to an exhibit, "Hope and Hard Work: The Story of Our Farms and Food," which celebrates the region's agricultural history. The exhibit uses games and videos so children (and adults) can better understand the struggles growers had and still have. (Left) The campus includes a restored church that is a popular place for weddings. (Below) In one of the parlors in the restored Reiman-Simmons house, visitors can learn more about the family who built the house in 1904.

dryland wheat or rye, that's pretty much all you could grow," Weber said. "Quincy was in danger of really dying out in the 1930s and 40s. The population really declined. We had our own mini dust bowl, if you will, from about 1912 to 1918, and a lot of people left, gave up their homesteads and moved down to the Yakima area or other places. The people that stayed were pretty hardy souls, and they believed that they were going to get irrigation water here at some point."

Of course, that water came with the completion of Grand Coulee Dam, and so did another wave of immigration as the potential for more and different types of crops opened up. While agriculture is still very important in Quincy, another type of farm has recently been growing — server farms. While that has helped the local economy, it comes at the cost of traditional farms, especially when the server farms are built on existing farmland.

"I hope to always be able to tell the story of how this region became such a prime agricultural area," Weber said. The campus hosts field trips for school children who get to be a pioneer for a day, experiencing traditional pioneer skills such as pressing apple juice, making beeswax candles, and turning milk into butter. "It's really important for us to teach this to the children that come, what it was like to be a farm family in those early days. It's really heartwarming for me, because I have grown people now that come back and get married in the pioneer church, and they remember coming to the third grade field day." ■

The exhibit is housed in a barn that doubles as an event space.



THE
BOTTOM LINE

Reviewing the Enhanced Coverage Option

By Curtis Evanenko
McGregor Risk Management Services

Glad tidings readers!

Our topic of conversation is a product that is not necessarily new, though it's gaining traction and increased interest due to recent enhancements from the Risk Management Agency. When introduced in 2020, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO) premium costs outweighed the coverage benefit for many producers, making participation low. The intent of ECO is to provide "shallow loss" coverage for producers on a countywide basis.

ECO is a county-level crop insurance product that mirrors your underlying Multiple Peril Crop Insurance (MPCI) coverage: revenue protection or yield protection. If you have yield protection, then ECO covers yield loss. If you have revenue protection, then ECO covers revenue losses. Producers have the option to insure at either 90% or 95% coverage level, with the amount of coverage determined by your underlying MPCI policy.

ECO provides a band of protection down to 86% of the guaranteed yield or revenue. This policy coverage will sit just above your underlying MPCI policy and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's commodity title choice: Agriculture Risk Coverage or Price Loss Coverage. ECO does not restrict the choice of the commodity title program.

How does ECO work? I'm glad you asked. ECO is not impacted by indemnity payments made by your underlying MPCI policy, as it is a separate policy reflecting your revenue or yield coverage. ECO pays a loss on an "area basis," think county, and an indemnity is triggered when there is a decline in the county-level yield or revenue. As indicated above, ECO has two trigger levels: 90% and 95%. If the county yield or revenue is reduced beyond the trigger level, you will receive an ECO indemnity.

ECO does have a couple noteworthy items that may be a negative feature for some producers, in my opinion. First, the premium is due at the same time as your underlying MPCI policy. Second, this is an "area-wide" coverage option, not an individualized coverage like your MPCI policy provides. Lastly, the county revenue and yield information are released by the National Agricultural Statistics Service generally in late spring. This means premiums are paid nearly nine months prior to a potential indemnity payment. That said and with harvest complete, one will have a pretty good indication if a potential indemnity exists

Beginning with the 2025 crop insurance year, premium subsidies were increased to 65%, significantly reducing premium costs for the additional coverage. Many producers have chosen to add this product to their risk management tool chest.

With the additional premium cost share, I believe this is a great tool available for growers to provide shallow loss coverage for your operation. Sales closing deadline mirrors that of the crop insured. All wheat types have a Sept. 30 deadline. ECO should be analyzed by all growers with your crop insurance partner to see if it's a fit for your operation.

As always, please feel free to contact me with any concerns or additional questions. I wish you a bountiful and safe harvest season. ■

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

The Northern Lights are a colorful backdrop to farm equipment outside of Palouse. Photo by Brooklyn Bailey.

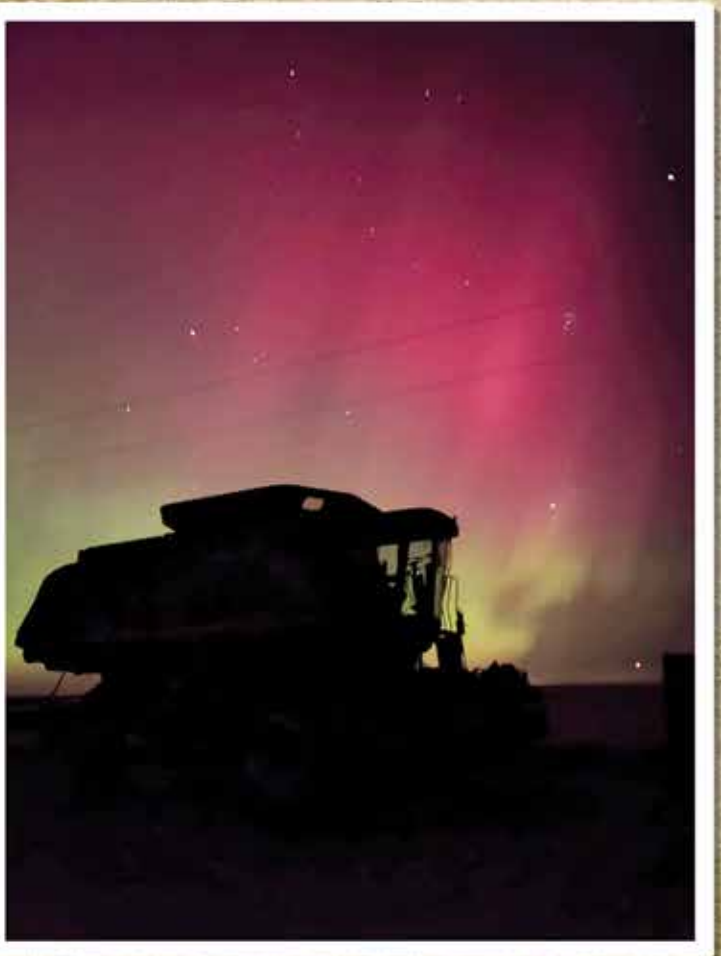
Mayson Yager (8) enjoying harvest experiences with Mike Glorfield in Lamont. Photo by Kerri Mays.

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

Daniel Moles (3) watching Scott "Papa" Roecks sample the field at SLR Farms outside of Spangle and hoping he can get a ride. Photo by Aly (Roecks) Moles.

Your wheat life...

Brown's Harvest in Steptoe with our future combine and truck drivers. From left are Wren (10 months), Briar (3), Bayler (2), Lincoln (5) holding Beckett (1 month), and Sutton (1). Photo submitted by Emma Brown.



Combine against the Northern Lights outside of Harrington. Photo by Britney Wagner.

Opening day of deer season in Prescott. Photo by Sarah Wilson.

HAPPENINGS

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

JULY 2025

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

4 GRAND OLD FOURTH. Pancake breakfast, parade, fireworks, car show. Pasco, Wash. www.pascogo4.com

4 FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION. Entertainment and fireworks. Sunnyside Park in Pullman, Wash. pullmanchamber.com/events/4th-of-july/

11-13 CHENEY RODEO. Dances Friday, Saturday nights after rodeo. Saturday parade. Cheney, Wash. cheneyrodeo.com

18-20 PIONEER DAYS. Parade, music, BBQ, chalk contest, vendors. Davenport, Wash. davenportpioneerdays.org

26 PALOUSE MUSIC FESTIVAL. The festival opens at 11 a.m. and concludes at 7 p.m. and features local musicians performing throughout the day. There will also be arts and crafts vendors, nonprofit organizations, and several food vendors. Hayton-Greene Park in Palouse, Wash. facebook.com/PalouseMusicFestival/

AUGUST 2025

1-3 KING SALMON DERBY. Over $10,000 in prizes. Registration required. Brewster, Wash. brewstersalmonderby.com

2 SCOTTISH HIGHLAND GAMES. Enjoy the traditional features of Scottish Highland Games, such as massed bands, pipe band exhibitions, individual piping, heavy athletics and highland dancing. 9 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Spokane County Fair and Expo Center in Spokane Valley, Wash. spokanehhighlandgames.net

6-9 YAKIMA VALLEY FAIR AND RODEO. PRCA rodeo, car show, parade, beer garden. County Fair Park in Grandview, Wash. yvfair-rodeo.com

7-9 MOXEE HOP FESTIVAL. Parade, beer garden, live entertainment, crafts, BBQ cookoff. Moxee, Wash. evcea.org

7-10 OMAK STAMPEDE. Parade, carnival, art show, rodeo dances and vendors. Omak, Wash. omakstampede.org

12-16 GRANT COUNTY FAIR. Ag exhibits, livestock competitions, carnival, arts and crafts, entertainment, food. Moses Lake, Wash. gcfair.fun

15-24 NORTH IDAHO FAIR AND RODEO. Fireworks, rodeo, petting zoo, entertainment, carnival. Kootenai County Fairgrounds in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. northidahostatefair.com

16 NATIONAL LENTIL FESTIVAL. Stop by and see the world's largest bowl of lentil chili. Fun run, parade, softball tournament, beer garden. Pullman, Wash. lentilfest.com

19-23 BENTON FRANKLIN FAIR AND RODEO. Demolition derby, parade, live entertainment. Kennewick, Wash. bentonfranklinfair.com

21-23 LINCOLN COUNTY FAIR. Rodeo, exhibits, food, games. Davenport, Wash. lincolncountywa.com/497/Fair-Rodeo

21-24 NCW FAIR. Live entertainment, carnival, livestock sale, rodeo and horse. Waterville, Wash. ncwfair.org

23 SPRINT BOAT RACING. Enjoy 5 grass terraces, two beer gardens and a great atmosphere to watch racing 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. (509) 553-1014 or webbsslough.com

28-31 WHEAT LAND COMMUNITIES' FAIR. Rodeo, exhibits, entertainment, vendors. Ritzville Rodeo Grounds. wheatlandfair.com

29-SEPT. 1 PIG OUT IN THE PARK. Music and food. Riverfront Park in Spokane, Wash. spokanepigout.com

29-SEPT. 1 ELLENSBURG RODEO AND KITTITAS COUNTY FAIR. Carnival, midway, pancake breakfast, parade. Ellensburg, Wash. ellensburgrodeo.com

30-31 METHOW VALLEY RODEO. Saddle bronc, bareback, bulls, barrel racing, team roping, junior events. Rodeo grounds, between Twisp and Winthrop. methowvalleyrodeo.com ■

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