

WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

NOVEMBER | 2025

*Happy Thanksgiving
from our family to yours*



IN THIS ISSUE:

Legislators “savor the land” in Skagit Valley

Meet Arlan Suderman, convention speaker

The PNW Herbicide Resistance Initiative

Catching up with club wheat

Growers attend low-till drill demo

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EDITOR

Trista Crossley • editor@wawg.org
(435) 260-8888

AD SALES MANAGER

Lance Marshall • lance@wawg.org
(253) 221-7000

GRAPHIC DESIGN

Devin Taylor • Trista Crossley

AD BILLING

Michelle Hennings • michelle@wawg.org
(509) 659-0610

CIRCULATION

Address changes, extra copies, subscriptions
Keri Gingrich • keri@wawg.org
(509) 659-0610
Subscriptions are \$60 per year

WAWG EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Michelle Hennings

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President's Perspective



Looking back

By Jeff Malone

President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

As I sit down to write this final column, I can't help but reflect on what a whirlwind this past year has been. Between the phone calls, emails, and texts (on top of farming), there were days when it felt like I was juggling 20 things at once. But when I look back, I realize how much I've learned, how many people I've met, and how proud I am to have represented Washington's wheat growers.

This past year has taken me from the rolling hills of home all the way to Washington, D.C., and just about everywhere in between. Being in D.C. opened my eyes to how government really works ... or sometimes doesn't. I met people who truly care about agriculture and others who had no idea what it takes to get a crop from the field to the table, and I'd like to think I helped open a few eyes to what farmers are really going through, because when you're standing in front of policymakers, looking them in the eye, and explaining how their decisions affect real families back home, it changes the tone of the conversation.

I also had the chance to spend time in Olympia, where, again, it was great to put faces to names. There's something about sitting across the table from someone that can't be replaced by an email or a phone call. Whether we agreed or disagreed, I appreciated the opportunity to talk through issues that matter to our growers. It reminded me that relationships are what move things forward.

Another highlight was traveling to Pasco to work through Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) program options. Those meetings weren't just about policy, they were about finding real solutions that could make a difference on the ground. Seeing so many people show up for our Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) meetings was also encouraging. They were well attended and filled with great conversations. Those moments reminded me why I took on this role in the first place, to be a voice for the farmer and to make sure that perspective is always at the table.

Over the past year, we've faced our fair share of challenges. From tariffs that squeezed wheat prices to NRCS funding freezes that put conservation programs on hold, it's been a reminder that farming is never just about the weather. We've seen commodity prices that make us feel like we're still selling wheat for what our fathers did in the 1970s. But somehow, we keep going because farmers have always been optimistic, sometimes stubbornly so. Even in uncertain times, we find a way forward.

Earlier this year, I wrote about trying for certainty in an uncertain world. That message still rings true. Whether it's the farm bill debates, labor shortages, or new regulations, uncertainty has become a constant companion in agriculture. The one thing I've learned is that showing up makes a difference. When farmers take the time to engage, whether by attending a WAWG meeting, writing a letter, or visiting a legislator, it matters. We may not win every battle, but we keep the conversation honest.

Being WAWG president has also reminded me how important it is to have a

→ President's Perspective continues on page 13

Cover photo: The Washington Association of Wheat Growers wish all a joyful Thanksgiving. All photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

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Contributors

Jeff Malone, president, Washington Association of Wheat Growers
Kevin Klein, chairman, Washington Grain Commission
Sarah Márquez, communications manager, Washington Grain Commission
Jake Liening, market development specialist, Washington Grain Commission
Mike Moran, executive director, Wheat Marketing Center

Ralph Loos, director of communications, multimedia and global outreach, U.S. Wheat Associates

Kimberly Garland-Campbell, research geneticist, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, Washington State University

T. Randall Fortenbery, Thomas B. Mick Endowed Chair in Grain Economics, Washington State University

Tim Cobb, owner, Farmland Company

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WAWG's current top priorities are:

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

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

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Dialogue

WGC employee termination unacceptable

Dear Editor,

We, a broad coalition of concerned wheat farmers, former Washington Association of Wheat Growers presidents, former Washington Grain Commission commissioners, and industry leaders, write to express our unequivocal condemnation of the Washington Grain Commission's (WGC) recent elimination of Mary Palmer Sullivan's position and employment with the WGC.

Mary dedicated 37 years of service to Washington wheat growers. Her leadership, professionalism, and tireless advocacy secured critical funding for research at Washington State University, advanced grower interests in Washington, D.C., and strengthened trade relationships worldwide. Her record speaks for itself: she always worked for growers, not for personalities or internal politics.

Her abrupt and unexplained dismissal — during harvest and just before an international trade team visit — shocks and alarms us. The action is not only poorly timed and deeply disrespectful, but it also signals a troubling shift within the commission. Instead of serving growers, the WGC appears increasingly driven by internal politics and personal agendas. This was painfully evident at the September WGC meeting, where the chairman belligerently refused to accept written public comments from constituents. This betrayal of trust demonstrates a dangerous drift away from the commission's statutory mission to serve the producer community.

We remind all wheat farmers: the WGC operates with your money — the assessments deducted from every bushel you grow. The commissioners are your elected representatives. Their duty is twofold: to make decisions that strengthen the wheat industry and to represent your views. When they fail in that responsibility, it is up to growers to hold them accountable.

We call on every Washington wheat farmer to take notice and to take action:

- Contact your commissioners and demand answers.
- Write letters to make your views known.
- Attend WGC meetings and speak out.
- Hold your elected representatives accountable.

The future of our industry depends on leaders who will represent growers — not resent them. The dismissal of Mary Palmer Sullivan was a grievous error, and silence from growers will only allow this dangerous precedent to stand.

We urge you, our fellow farmers, to join us in condemning this decision and to demand that the Washington Grain Commission return to its true mission: to serve, protect, and advance the livelihoods of Washington wheat growers. This situation makes clear a deeper failure of governance at the commission. While the decision to dismiss

Mary was made and carried out by CEO Casey Chumrau, it is ultimately the responsibility of the commissioners to ensure policies are in place to safeguard the operation of the commission, the investment of our checkoff dollars, and its operational responsibilities. Lack of adequate oversight, policy, or consideration allowed this action to occur without transparency or accountability.

Mary deserved far better from the people she worked alongside for decades than what she received. As assessment payers, so do we. This is not only a black eye on the WGC, but also on the wheat industry as a whole, and it represents a significant setback for all of us. This, combined with the current severe economic challenges confronting Washington wheat farmers, demands change at the WGC. Your dollars, your commission, your voice.

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WAWG state board meets in October

At October's board meeting of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), counties reported good progress with seeding winter crops despite the lack of rain in many areas.

With the government shutdown in force, there were no reports from U.S. Department of Agriculture agencies.

WAWG lobbyists Diana Carlen and Mark Strueli made the trip over from Olympia to give a state legislative report in person. Carlen said that the latest revenue report showed the state with a \$1.5 billion shortfall over the next four years, despite the plethora of new taxes the Legislature passed in 2025. Looking ahead at the 2026 session, Carlen said bills that cost money are going to be challenging to pass, and it's possible legislators will be looking at rescinding tax exemptions as a way to raise more revenue. She said agriculture has an opportunity to highlight the industry's role in food security and should emphasize the fact that farmers regularly donate their crops to food banks.

Strueli added that many in the state Legislature are seeing a lack of oversight from the federal government and may use that as an excuse to implement more regulations. With elections coming up, he encouraged growers to donate to the Wheat PAC; legislators keep track of who donates to their campaigns.

"It's meaningful, even if it doesn't feel like it," he said.

Speaking of taxes passed in the 2025 session, Carlen said Comcast has filed a lawsuit regarding taxes on digital advertising. If that effort is successful, the projected state revenue shortfall will increase. Any tweaks to the new tax legislation will be hard to do if they cost money. Carlen wrapped up her report by cautioning growers to watch local worker bill of rights bills in Tacoma and Olympia as those regulations could end up being applied statewide.

WAWG's annual Olympia Days trip is scheduled for Jan. 18-20. All members are invited to participate.

In Washington Grain Commission (WGC) news, the commission had just wrapped up its last trade team of the summer, a visit from the Japanese Biscuit Association, and many of the staff and commissioners were on a marketing trip in Southeast Asia.

In national legislation, several WAWG leaders and staff participated in a National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) fly-in to Washington, D.C., in September. WAWG Executive Director Michelle Hennings said they were able to meet with the White House, where they talked about litigation on the lower Snake River dams. The group also met with staff from the House Agriculture Committee, several Washington delegation offices, and Farm Service Agency administrators. Farm bill, food aid, pesticide labeling, and reauthorization of the grain standards act were all discussed.

"NAWG did a great job getting meetings set up, and I feel like we had very meaningful discussions," she told the board.

Hennings reported to the board that NAWG has hired a new CEO, Sam Kieffer, who came from the American Farm Bureau Federation and had lots of experience in D.C. See more about Kieffer on page 14.

Andrea Cox, WAWG's conservation coordinator, gave a report on the recent low-till and no-till drill demonstration that she helped organize (see page 48). She also reminded



BUILDING THE ECONOMY. In October, Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, participated in the Pacific Northwest Economic Region's Build Northwest Economic Forum to discuss permit and regulatory reform, supply chain resiliency, and infrastructure needs in the region's transportation network. Pictured (from left) are Hennings; Scott Corbitt, general manager of the Port of Lewiston; and Jennifer Riddle, corporate communications and marketing manager for Tidewater Transportation and Terminals.

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growers about an EPA and pesticide labeling workshop in Walla Walla, Wash., at the end of October.

In transportation news, WAWG signed onto a letter to Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson, urging him not to sign on as a plaintiff in lower Snake River dams litigation. Ads were also placed in the *Seattle Times* and the *Spokesman-Review*.

Research Committee Chair Jim Moyer talked to the board about creating a research advisory committee to work with the WGC and researchers. The committee would be made up of 10 growers from across Eastern Washington who would act as conduits between the industry and researchers to help shepherd research projects from beginning to end. The idea is to make research more responsive to grower needs, provide feedback from growers to researchers, and help inform lobbying efforts. The number of meetings would be limited to three or four per year. Moyer is looking for nominations. Interested parties should contact the WAWG office at (509) 659-0610.

There will be no WAWG board meeting in November.

Instead, growers are encouraged to attend the WAWG committee session and resolution and annual meeting on Tuesday, Nov. 18, at the annual convention in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. ■

Whitman County growers meet

Even though seeding was still in full speed in Whitman County, growers took a few hours off for a monthly meeting at Eddie's Restaurant in Colfax, Wash.

Andrea Cox, conservation coordinator for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), gave an association report, reminding growers of the upcoming convention and asking for young producers who haven't been to convention before to participate in the 15x40 program. Participants are able to attend convention free of charge, are provided a hotel room, and if they aren't WAWG members, get a year's membership for free. Interested growers should contact the WAWG office at (509) 659-0610. Cox also reported on the recent low-till and

Wheat growers thank convention sponsors, exhibitors

The 2025 Washington Grain Growers Convention is almost here. We would like to thank all of our 2025 sponsors and exhibitors. They make this annual event possible:

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no-till drill demonstration (see page 48).

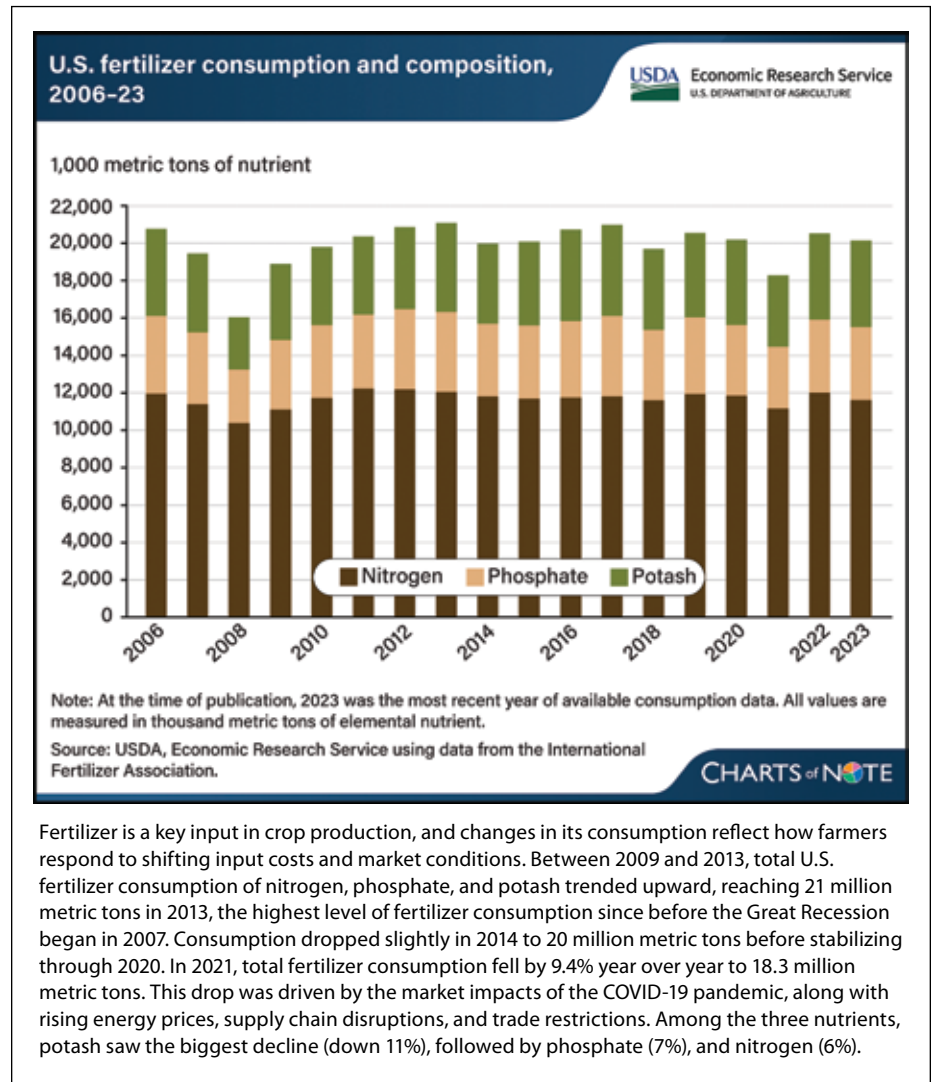
Grower Larry Cochran talked about a recent meeting he had with Washington State Department of Ecology director, Casey Sixkiller. During the meeting, pesticides, including glyphosate, were discussed, as were buffer regulations.

Washington Grain Commission (WGC) commissioners Ben Barstow and Art Schultheis talked about the effort to revamp the commissions research efforts by forming a research advisory committee with growers from each of the WGC's six districts. A team from the Japanese Biscuit Association recently came through Eastern Washington and visited Schultheis' farm. Washington State University's (WSU) barley breeding program, which is partially funded by the WGC, may be shifting its focus from brewing barley to barley that can be used both for brewing as well as feed.

Morgan Menaker from WSU Extension said he is getting a lot of inquiries about weeds, including controlling feral rye in pasture and along fence rows. He also discussed the strengths and weaknesses of yield monitors in the Palouse. On Dec. 5, Extension will hold a virtual and in-person pesticide update meeting. Credits will be available. WSU's Wheat Academy is filling up fast, so interested growers should apply soon. Whitman County growers agreed to help fund lunch at the event. ■

Ecology publishes ag exempt fuel retail directory

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) has created a new Agricultural Exempt Fuel Retail



Fertilizer is a key input in crop production, and changes in its consumption reflect how farmers respond to shifting input costs and market conditions. Between 2009 and 2013, total U.S. fertilizer consumption of nitrogen, phosphate, and potash trended upward, reaching 21 million metric tons in 2013, the highest level of fertilizer consumption since before the Great Recession began in 2007. Consumption dropped slightly in 2014 to 20 million metric tons before stabilizing through 2020. In 2021, total fertilizer consumption fell by 9.4% year over year to 18.3 million metric tons. This drop was driven by the market impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, along with rising energy prices, supply chain disruptions, and trade restrictions. Among the three nutrients, potash saw the biggest decline (down 11%), followed by phosphate (7%), and nitrogen (6%).

Sellers Directory, which can be found at ecology.wa.gov/air-climate/climate-commitment-act/cap-and-invest/emissions-reporting/fuelexemptions?utm_source=chatgpt.com. On this webpage, growers will also find guidance on which fuels are exempt, and how to register for the directory if you are a retail fuel seller.

The page also includes an interactive map titled "Retail Fuel Sellers Offering Agricultural Fuel Exemptions." Please use this map to see the names and addresses of stations that offer exempt fuels for agriculture.

If you are a fuel supplier and/or retail fuel seller that offers exemptions, please see Ecology's guidance document for how to register your fueling station at apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/SummaryPages/2514085.html. ■

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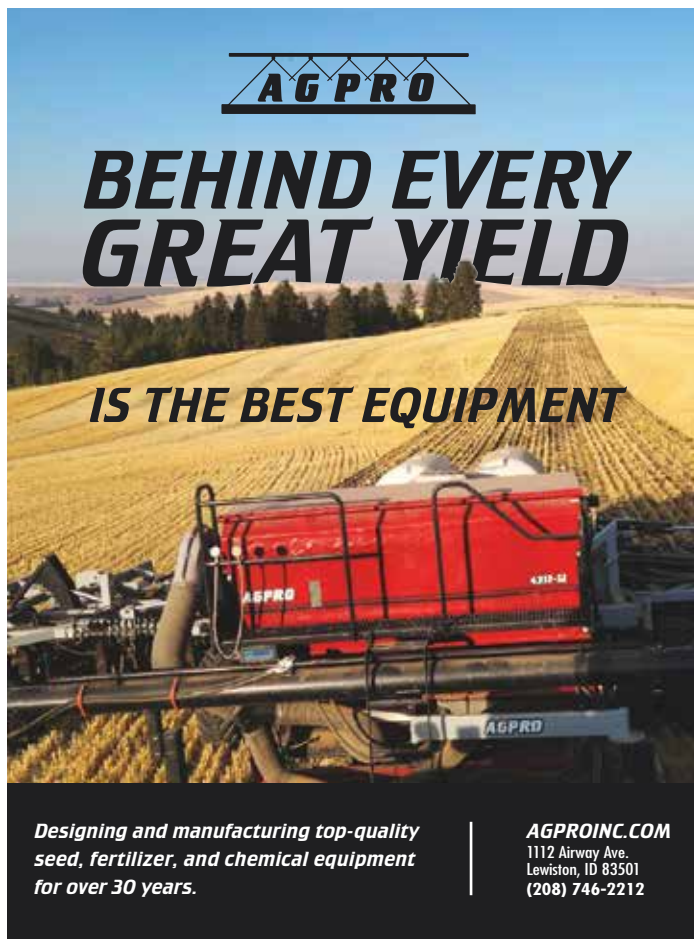
good team around you. From the board members who give their time and ideas, to the staff who make sure things run smoothly, it's been a privilege to work alongside people who truly care about agriculture. When you have a great group, it makes the long days of travel, policy discussions, and advocacy not only bearable but enjoyable.

My biggest takeaway from this experience is that politics, for better or worse, is a game of chess. It only takes one person or one move to change the board. Sometimes that works in our favor, and sometimes it doesn't. That's why it's so important that farmers stay engaged. If we're not at the table, someone else will make the move for us.

As I wrap up this final column, I want to say thank you to all the growers who've taken the time to share their stories, concerns, and ideas. You're the reason I've been proud to serve. It's been an honor to represent our industry and to speak on behalf of people who put their trust in me to carry their message forward.

The challenges in agriculture aren't going away anytime soon, but neither is the determination of the American farmer. So, as I sign off for the last time, I'll leave you with this: stay optimistic, stay involved, and never underestimate the power of one voice to make a difference.

Because sometimes, that one voice — yours — is exactly what changes the game. ■



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POLICY MATTERS

Letter urges governor to stay out of dam litigation

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers joined with other Columbia River System Operations stakeholders in a letter to Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson, urging him to refrain from becoming a plaintiff in river system litigation and meeting with stakeholders instead to discuss the benefits of the system.

“Washington and other regional stakeholders are at a critical crossroads; we are hoping to steer toward a collaborative path of discussing and acting on workable solutions for the state and region, not continuing down the divisive path of litigation. Our region’s nonprofit, community-owned electric utilities are the primary funders of one of the world’s largest fish and wildlife mitigation programs, and along with the responsibility of providing reliable, safe, and affordable electricity to millions of people, are invested in solutions that help both salmon and people,” the letter states.

Over the past few years, Washington state has gone from having some of the lowest retail electricity rates in the country to barely remaining in the top 10. According to recent reporting, residential electric rates in the state increased by more than 12% between May 2024 and May 2025.

“Approximately 60% of Washington’s electricity is generated from hydropower. The federal dams in the FCRPS (Federal Columbia River Power System) supply millions of people we serve with reliable, clean, and affordable hydropower, provide essential irrigation and cargo transportation, support municipal water and wastewater treatment facilities, and have helped establish a significant recreation economy,” the letter said.

Reports from the Western Electricity Coordinating Council warn that all subregions in the West are moving towards an elevated risk for blackouts. The four lower Snake River dams play a crucial role in both preventing blackouts and mitigating their impacts if they occur. The dams typically carry about 25% of the operating reserves of Bonneville Power Administration and were critical in preventing rolling blackouts during the June 2021 heatwave.

“We remain hopeful that your administration will consider working with the region to continue making progress on our clean energy and salmon recovery goals,

which do not involve the state’s participation in the litigation involving the FCRPS,” the letter concludes.

Besides the letter, stakeholders also placed ads in the *Seattle Times* and the *Spokesman-Review*. ■

NAWG announces hiring of Sam Kieffer as next CEO

On Oct. 2, the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) announced that **Sam Kieffer** had been selected to serve as the organization’s next CEO starting Nov. 1, bringing more than 20 years of experience in agricultural leadership and farm policy to the role.

“I’m honored to join NAWG at such a pivotal time for wheat growers across the country,” said Kieffer. “Having grown up on a farm, it has been a privilege to dedicate my career to serving farmers, and I’m proud to champion their cause in this new role. I look forward to working alongside NAWG’s dedicated members, board, and staff to tackle challenges and ensure a bright future for farm families and rural America.”

“Sam brings a wealth of experience and a deep understanding of both the policy landscape and the needs of wheat growers. We’re excited to welcome him as CEO and are confident farmers will be well served by his thoughtful leadership and strong voice in Washington, D.C., and beyond. We’re grateful to Eric Steiner for his service as our Interim CEO,” said Pat Clements, NAWG president.

Kieffer most recently served as vice president of public policy at the American Farm Bureau Federation, where he led policy advocacy and economic analysis for the nation’s largest general farm organization. In that role, he oversaw strategic advocacy initiatives impacting federal legislation and regulatory frameworks across the agriculture sector. Prior to that, he held several key leadership positions at the Pennsylvania Farm Bureau, working with farmers at the state and local level. ►



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A Pennsylvania native, Kieffer grew up on his family's grain and beef cattle farm and proudly served as an officer in the U.S. Army and the Pennsylvania Army National Guard. He holds a bachelor's degree in political science from Dickinson College, a master's degree in public administration from Widener University, and an MBA from Delaware Valley University. ■

Legislation introduced to support Washington farmers, conservation efforts

In mid-September, Congresswoman Kim Schrier (D-Wash.) and Congressman Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.) introduced the Eliminating Needless Administrative Barriers Lessening Efficiency for Conservation Act (ENABLE Conservation Act), to allow more farmers to participate in voluntary conservation programs. The legislation will help support Washington state's Conservation Reserve Program's (CRP) State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) initiative.

"Farmers and landowners are eager to participate in the SAFE initiative, which pays farmers to allow some of their land to return to its natural state, preserves vital habitat for threatened species, and has protected thousands of acres in Washington state," said Schrier.

"Many farmers across central Washington work hard to protect habitats for vulnerable species, and this legislation ensures those who wish to participate in conservation programs like SAFE and CRP can do so without the burden of acreage caps," said Newhouse.

The act will permanently establish the SAFE initiative under CRP to ensure that farmers who would like to participate in this program are able to do so. Currently, there is a cap on how much land can be included in CRP, making it difficult for all farmers who want to participate to do so. This bill reverts to a previous policy enacted under the 2014 Farm Bill to allow for SAFE and other important conservation programs to be waived from the county cap if it meets the U.S. Department of Agriculture's and the county's shared goals.

Specifically, the ENABLE Conservation Act would benefit farmers and eliminate barriers to accessing CRP by:

- Simplifying the waiver process to allow counties to enroll land beyond the 25% cap if the associated project meets the county and USDA's shared goals.
- Allowing for the continuous enrollment of land under the SAFE initiative. ■

IPNG concerned over dam motions

From the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association

In October, the Inland Ports and Navigation Group (IPNG) voiced serious concerns over preliminary injunction motions filed by the National Wildlife Foundation (NWF) and the state of Oregon to increase spill operations at the eight lower Snake River and Columbia River dams, as well as to change the operating level of the reservoirs behind the dams. IPNG has consistently sounded the alarm that operational changes such as this can disproportionately hurt navigation, resulting in disruptions in the flow of commerce that has a highly destructive impact on our communities and economy.

Increasing spill creates unpredictable river conditions for lock operations, threatening the safety of employees and passengers on barge and cruise vessels.

These conditions compromise irrigation infrastructure and forces river freight onto already congested rail and highway routes.

In response to this latest action, IPNG is prepared to continue its role as a defendant-intervenor to support the findings of the 2020 Columbia River System Operations Biological Opinion and Record of Decision. IPNG will continue to advocate for a balanced solution reached by all stakeholders, rather than the plaintiffs' myopic approach called for in this request for injunction. ■



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Beyond the table: Giving thanks for our food safety

As we prepare for the upcoming holiday season, we prepare our tables for laughter, family, and copious amounts of our favorite foods. When I pick up my favorite piece of pie, I don't even think about whether or not it will make me sick — how lucky am I?! From the farm gate to the dinner plate, we live in an era where most Americans can trust that the food they eat will nourish, not harm. That trust is not accidental. It is earned each day through rigorous food safety systems, government oversight, industry diligence, and the dedication of farmers, processors, and regulators. We should be deeply thankful for these safety measures because they keep us fed, healthy, and safe.

Food is not merely a commodity. It is our sustenance, our health, and our connection to the land, but when it's mishandled or contaminated, food becomes a serious public health risk. According to the World Health Organization, globally, unsafe food causes an estimated 600 million illnesses each year — nearly one in 10 people on the planet — and leads to about 420,000 deaths. In low- and middle-income countries especially, foodborne disease places a heavy burden on health systems, economies, and vulnerable populations.

In contrast, the U.S. food system is among the safest in the world. What makes the U.S. system strong? First, regulation and oversight. The U.S. food supply is governed by over 30 federal laws, administered by 15 different agencies, covering everything from farm practices to import inspections to processing and retail. One landmark law is the Food Safety Modernization Act, which shifted the focus from reacting to contamination to preventing it.

Second, science, monitoring, and surveillance, from microbial testing to residue checks to outbreak tracing. The U.S. has long invested in foodborne disease surveillance, "farm to fork" traceability systems, and programs to monitor and benchmark safety across the food supply.

Third, cooperation among producers, processors, regulators, and consumers. Farmers and food businesses adopt best practices, third-party audits and certifications, improved hygiene, and better handling and packaging. Regulators and consumers provide a check-and-balance



system: recalls, audits, reporting, and consumer awareness all help maintain integrity.

We should be deeply thankful for these efforts. Every time we prepare a meal, feed children, or enjoy a loaf of bread, we benefit from invisible systems that catch hazards before harm. In many parts of the world, consuming food carries far greater risk: unsafe water, weak regulation, minimal oversight, or supply chain gaps lead to far higher rates of foodborne disease and death.

Food safety supports confidence in our farms. It allows farmers to invest in quality, knowing that the crop they grow will be judged not only by yield, but by purity, safety, and integrity. It enables trade and supports more markets because safety systems create reputation and reliability.

Food safety is a quiet but essential pillar of modern society. It is not glamorous, but it is life-saving. We should recognize and give thanks to the farmers, scientists, inspectors, regulators, and educators who labor behind the scenes so that we may eat, nourish our children, and live with confidence. Their work helps turn wheat into bread, fields into meals, and crops into health. For that, we should never take food safety for granted. ■

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This year our auction will be held on the second night of convention Tuesday, Nov. 18, 2025, at The Coeur d'Alene Resort. We moved it earlier in the schedule so our exhibitor friends will also be able to attend.

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Savoring the land

WASHINGTON STATE LEGISLATORS HEAR FROM SKAGIT VALLEY AG INTERESTS

By Trista Crossley
Editor, *Wheat Life*

Wheat, potatoes, shellfish, and irrigation interests came together in late August to help state legislators “savor the land” during a day-long agricultural tour across the Skagit Valley.

Approximately 20 legislators took part in the tour, which included visits to several farms, a local flour mill, a tidegate, and an estuary restoration project. At each stop, farmers and stakeholders talked about their operation and some of the obstacles they were dealing with. Legislators had the opportunity to ask questions and hear how rules and regulations being passed in Olympia were directly impacting those who make a living off the land. Some of the topics discussed included farm labor, riparian buffers, regenerative agriculture, conservation, dike and drainage infrastructure, and technology. The tour was sponsored by the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, the Washington State Potato Commission, the Pacific Coast Shellfish Growers Association, and the Skagit Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium.

The tour kicked off the night before at Christianson’s

Nursery and Greenhouse in Mount Vernon where Derek Sandison, director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), gave an overview of agriculture in the state during a meal made primarily from local ingredients. Sandison highlighted the ongoing loss of farms in the state, telling the group in the past five years, Washington has lost about 3,000 farms through closures, consolidations, and purchases by investment firms. He explained that when a farm is purchased by an investment firm, it means they usually aren’t buying supplies locally and aren’t part of the community.

“I’m concerned about what that means for rural communities,” he said.

Agriculture in Washington — and across the nation — is seeing the cost of production exceeding price. Trade is down, but it isn’t the only factor impacting agriculture. Sandison pointed out other factors including:

- Reduced funding for research.
- Regulatory burdens, such as overtime laws.
- Climate impacts such as drought, which impact water supply for irrigators.
- Pest pressures. ▶



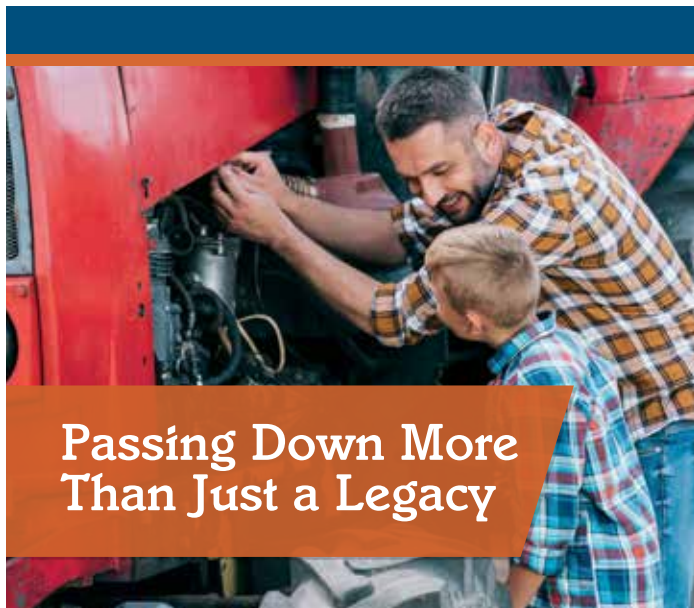
Legislators and industry stakeholders met at Christianson’s Nursery and Greenhouse in Mount Vernon, Wash., where Derek Sandison (left), director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA), gave an overview of agriculture in the state during a meal made primarily from local ingredients.



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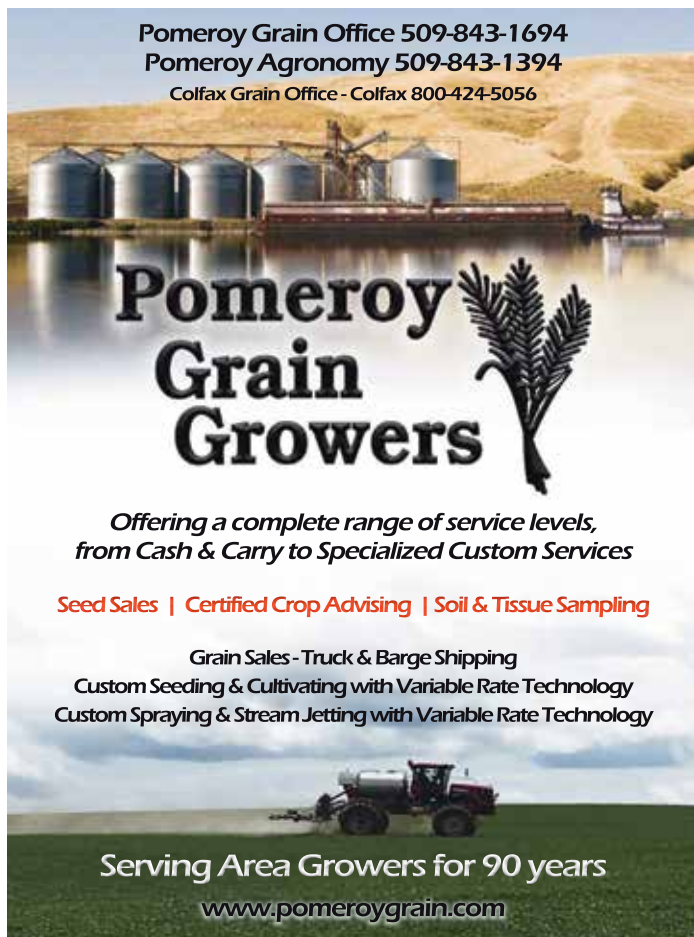
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The WSDA is working with the Washington State University Impact Center to break down what's happening with farmers' bottom line, and how the department can help. WSDA is working to expand consumer access by promoting Washington-grown products and supplying food pantries and banks with local products.

"That bolsters all size farms in all parts of the state," Sandison said.

The director also touched on the urban/rural divide, saying it is important to work with the urban community and legislators to explain what and why farmers are doing, and what it takes to produce food.

The next morning, legislators boarded a bus for the tour. Each stop highlighted a particular aspect of the valley's agriculture industry.

Boldly Grown in Bow, Wash., is a 45-acre certified organic family farm that focuses on winter crops, such as kale, cabbage, beets, carrots, and radicchio. The farm includes established riparian buffers. Owner Amy Frye explained that if they had to install buffers that met the maximum tree height specification, they would lose about eight acres, which would put them out of business. She told the group that a uniform buffer doesn't make sense, and depending on the location of the buffer, the shade it creates could limit what crops can be grown. Frye also said that Washington regulations and codes make farming much more expensive and don't make sense in all situations. She wanted legislators to keep farmers in mind when making policy. "Farmers are trying to do their best," she said.

Cairnspring Mills, a tenant at the Port of Skagit in Burlington, Wash., is an example of a private/public partnership. The mill was founded in 2016 to partner directly with growers and support regenerative



Tour members enjoyed a meal at Christianson's Nursery and Greenhouse in Mount Vernon the day before the tour of Skagit Valley agriculture began.

farming practices, keep farming economically viable, and to revitalize the local food system. Co-founder Kevin Morse said they contract about 5,000 acres of wheat annually and pay their growers roughly \$9 per bushel, which they can do because their flour costs more on the shelf. "Flour can be special," Morse said. The group discussed farmland preservation, infrastructure support, and building domestic markets for high-value crops.

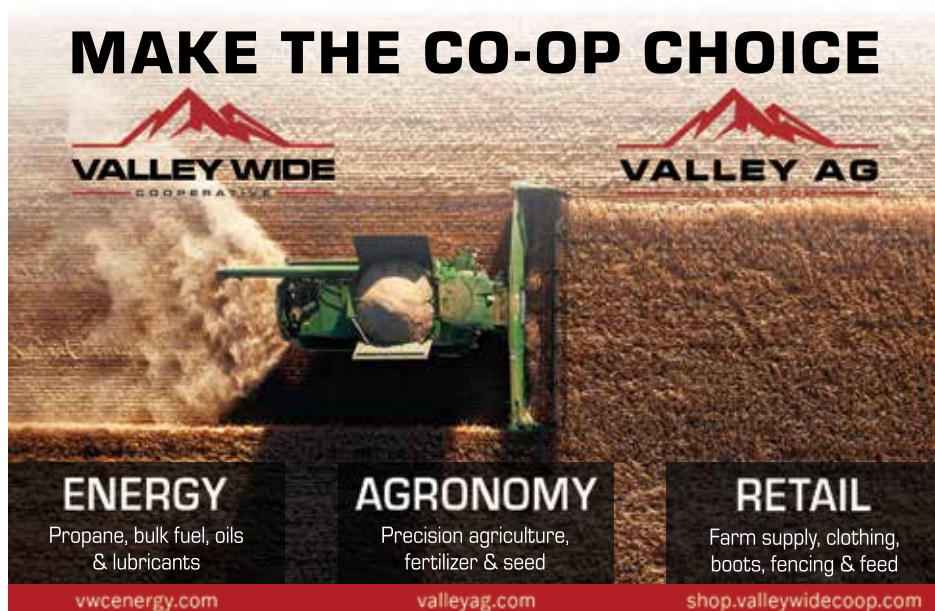
At **Taylor Shellfish**, Bill Dewey, director of public affairs for Taylor Shellfish Farms, told legislators that the company was "farming in the water." Water quality challenges, labor issues, and invasive green crabs were some of the topics he discussed. "Shellfish are filter feeders, so any pollution in the water is bad and can shut us down," he said. Heather Bartlett, deputy director at the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology), touched on nonpoint pollution, reviewing some of the department's different projects, such as the Clean Samish Initiative, which seeks to improve water quality and restore ecosystems in the Samish River watershed and Samish Bay, and the Agriculture and Water Quality Advisory Committee.

At the **Joe Leary Slough Tidegate** just west of Bow, legislators heard the important role tidegates play in maintaining farmland drainage while improving fish passage. This infrastructure is a key component in regional flood control and works alongside dike and drainage infrastructure to protect over \$300 million in annual crop output across the delta region. Owen Peth is the fifth-

generation at his family's farming and ranching operation. He told the group that farmers have to take care of the land in order to keep farming it. Jenna Friebe, executive director of the Skagit Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium, said that funding for the infrastructure is not keeping pace with needed costs and repairs. The consortium is working on a climate resiliency project to make the dikes be able to withstand stresses, but the "cost is more than local farmers can bear," and they are looking to the state for leadership for consistency in funding and environmental compliance.

Thulen Farms is a multigenerational, family-owned potato farm in Mount Vernon. Several years ago, the operation spent \$2 million to automate the sorting and grading of potatoes in an effort to reduce labor costs. Father and son team, John and Wylie Thulen, said that while technology is good, there are additional maintenance and upgrades that have to be factored in. They also pointed out that farmers are generally not seeing their prices increase even as consumer prices increase.

The final stop on the tour was at the **Fir Island Farm Estuary Collaboration**. Located at the mouth of the Skagit River where it meets Puget Sound, the Fir Island Farm property includes over 131 acres of restored estuarine habitat. Managed by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW), it is adjacent to highly productive farmland still in active rotation, demonstrating the coexistence of agriculture and restoration. Friebe and WDFW's Marcus Reeves told legislators that "farmland is not compatible with estuary restoration. You get habitat gains but at the cost of agriculture." Ron Wesen, Skagit County Commissioner, said it is hard to get everybody involved that needs to be in estuary restoration. "We want fish. We want ag. How do we do that?" he asked. ■



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(Left) Boldly Grown co-owners Amy Frye (in green) and Jacob Slosberg (in black) point out the riparian buffers on their farm and explain how expanding them would put them out of business.



(Right) Bill Dewey (left), director of public affairs for Taylor Shellfish Farms, talks about sustainable farming in the water. (Above) Lunch was paella cooked over an open fire.



(Above, left) Jenna Friebe, executive director of the Skagit Drainage and Irrigation Districts Consortium, talks about the Fir Island Farm Estuary, located at the mouth of the Skagit River where it meets Puget Sound. The site includes over 131 acres of restored estuarine habitat and is next to farmland.



At Thulen Farms, Wylie Thulen (right), talks about the state-of-the-art sorting and grading equipment the family has installed to reduce labor costs on their potato farm (audio aid by lobbyist Mark Strueli).



(Above) Owen Peth, the fifth-generation at his family's farming and ranching operation, talks about the importance of dike and drainage infrastructure in regional flood control.



The group poses for a photo outside of Cairnspring Mills, a tenant at the Port of Skagit. Co-founder Kevin Morse (third from right, front row) contracts about 5,000 acres of wheat annually, mostly from local growers.

Winter vegetables, like kale, are one of the major crops raised by Boldly Grown Farm in Bow, Wash. In late August, Washington state legislators visited the farm during a legislative tour.





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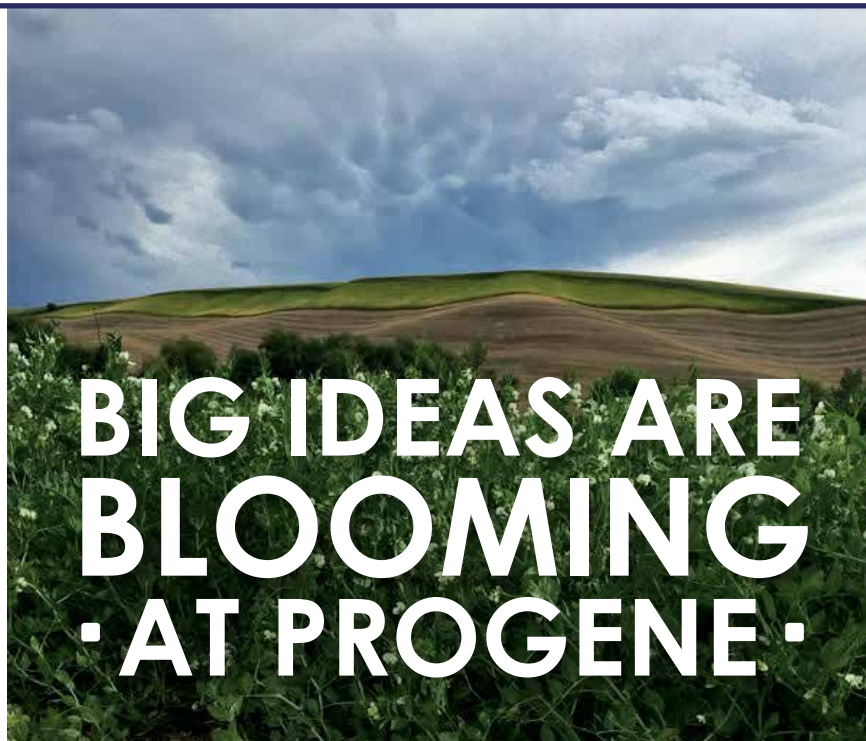
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Market intelligence

CONVENTION SPEAKER WILL LOOK AT COMMODITIES' MACRO-ECONOMIC PICTURE

By Trista Crossley
Editor, *Wheat Life*

In early October, when *Wheat Life* spoke to **Arlan Suderman**, it was too early for him to know exactly what he'll be talking about at the convention later this month. In fact, depending on world headlines, he might be putting the pieces together at the very last minute so growers have the most up-to-date information they need to make smart marketing decisions.

"I do daily commentary twice a day, and there have been times when I've had to change my commentary three times before hitting the publish button because the headlines kept changing it," Suderman said. "I can tell you that we'll be looking at the larger macro-economic picture in this tariff world that we live in, in Trump policy and how that's impacting commodities, and then narrow down more specifically to the wheat sector. And between now and then, we will get a Supreme Court decision on the legality of President Trump's tariffs, and that could change everything, some positive, some negative."

Suderman is the chief commodities economist for the StoneX Group, a financial services provider for global markets. He oversees the company's commodity market intelligence efforts, providing market insights on global macro-economic trends and their implications for the commodity markets. Suderman is scheduled to be the breakfast speaker on Wednesday, Nov. 19, at the 2025 Washington Grain Growers Convention at the Coeur d'Alene Resort in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Growers can register for the convention at grainconvention.com.

Suderman grew up on a small south central Kansas wheat farm that included sheep and hogs. He started his career as an agronomist, but got interested in the markets when his growers started asking marketing questions. He noticed that the commentary out of Chicago about why the markets went up or down didn't always seem to fit with the day's price action, so he started studying connections between the grain and oilseed markets and other financial markets. His focus eventually landed on macro-economic trends and emerging geopolitical risks, and



how they influence the commodity markets.

"The markets always manage supply and demand. That's their job," he explained. "In times of surplus, you take prices down to stimulate demand and discourage production, and when you have short supplies, prices go up to stimulate production and ration demand. Identifying those bigger trends that are influencing money flow and identifying how those levels are changing has a big impact on what we can anticipate from marketing opportunities all the way to the farm gate."

When giving advice to growers, Suderman said it's important to recognize where we are in the cycle. For the past year, he's been sounding the warning that the agricultural industry is entering a period where farmers need to be defensive in their marketing. Growers should focus on getting the price they need to protect their equity in the farm, rather than getting the highest price possible, because there's more downside price risk than upside price risk right now.

"I've been in this business for more than four decades, and these cycles can last for multiple years, so it's important that we go in a little bit more of a survival mode and maybe accept prices at times that we don't like, but that help make sure that we're still in business a year from now," he said.

Suderman also advises growers against making decisions based on what they see on social media, because "social media is always full of people selling their services, and for that, they need to get the farmers' attention. They're always building bullish cases of why prices are going to be surging." That can give growers a false sense of security that better prices lie ahead when the fundamentals don't necessarily support them.

Some of the world events Suderman has been tracking in the past year include:

- The war in the Black Sea region.
- The crisis in the Red Sea region that is impacting traffic through the Suez Canal.
- Tensions with China, which is the world's largest com-

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RAY STARLING has been the Chief of Staff to a U.S. Senator and Cabinet Secretary, worked at the White House, and been involved in crafting public policy for more than 15 years. Ray returned to North Carolina in 2019 to serve as General Counsel to the NC Chamber of Commerce.



JOLENE BROWN is a walking/talking champion for the people of agriculture. She shares her credibility, authenticity, humor, and wisdom with audiences worldwide through her writing, appearances, and workshops. Jolene helps farm families navigate business transitions.

ARLAN SUDERMAN is the Chief Commodities Economist for StoneX Group Inc. Arlan oversees the company's commodity market intelligence efforts. He provides unique market insight on global macro-economic trends and their implications for the commodity markets.



ERIC SNODGRASS is a Science Fellow and the Principal Atmospheric Scientist for Nutrien Ag Solutions. He develops predictive, analytical software to help ag producers manage weather risk. His frequent weather updates focus on how high-impact weather events influence global ag productivity.

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Auction and Dinner

The auction and dinner this year will be held Tuesday, Nov. 18, at 6 p.m. Social hour starts at 5:30. Donation forms for auction items can be found at wawg.org.



Watch wawg.org/convention for updates

modity importer.

- The development of agriculture in Brazil, combined with a break in their currency, that has made them very competitive and challenging for U.S. agriculture.
- The advent of artificial intelligence, and how that can open doors but also presents risks.

Suderman does twice daily commentary and says his day begins with reading updates on U.S. trade or other policy news, scanning global headlines to see what might impact commodities, getting a daily wire from an employee in Shanghai, and looking at the weather in major commodity-producing countries. He uses those bits of information to puzzle out a picture of what's impacting that day's markets — a picture that can change with very little warning.

"That's the world that we live in today, where the picture is constantly changing. You have to change your strategy in putting the puzzle pieces together, constantly interpreting it how it changes the picture," he said.

Read Suderman's commentary at stonex.com/en/thought-leadership/market-experts/aran-suderman/. He can also be found on X (Twitter) at @ArlanFF101. ■

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Montana native's resume sails from Navy to Idaho's seaport

Scott Corbitt, general manager, Port of Lewiston

By Trista Crossley
Editor, *Wheat Life*

Scott Corbitt calls his position as general manager at the Port of Lewiston the most diverse job he's had, which is saying something from a man who once hunted submarines on a Navy destroyer.

"This job goes in 15 different directions every day, and I have to be up on 10 different industries to the point where I can negotiate with the CEO of whatever company to be a steward of the Port's resources. It's an incredible amount of work," Corbitt explained.

Corbitt grew up in Kalispell, Mont., graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in biological oceanography, then went into the Navy as a commissioned officer. He spent six years on the USS O'Brien, hunting the aforementioned submarines and then as the ship's navigator. Following his stint in the Navy, Corbitt returned to Montana, went to law school, and practiced law for about 10 years. He ended up in the Lewiston-Clarkston (LC) Valley in 2009 working for Clearwater Paper, which was followed by jobs at Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories and at an economic development agency, Valley Vision. In 2022, he became general manager of the port when the former manager of 28 years, David Doeringsfeld, retired.

"I remember the old adage, 'never follow the guy that's been there forever.' You want to be the second one in, but the timing wasn't going to work to be second, so I decided to come in and follow David and have been here for just over three years," Corbitt said. "The things that I've been doing in this valley since I got here in 2009 have really been focused on trying to make the valley a better place to live and do business. That's really what drives me. There's so much opportunity to make that impact here (at the port) with some resources that other entities don't have."

Besides Corbitt's "amazing" team, the port owns and controls its own land, which Corbitt said goes a long way towards attracting businesses, and is completely self-sufficient. Recently, the port received a \$10 million allocation from Idaho's governor to use towards projects that improve access to the port. One project finished over the summer was the completion of a cruise boat terminal at



the port's Confluence Riverfront facility.

The Port of Lewiston is an important economic driver in the LC Valley that often flies under the public's radar. It is Idaho's only seaport, a fact that Corbitt likes to emphasize when speaking to the public.

"The role we play in agriculture for north central Idaho and this part of Washington goes really unnoticed, but without us and the ability to bring barges up to Lewiston and have Lewis Clark Terminal fill those barges full of soft white wheat or whatever product that is going in, our economy and our society, really, would change," Corbitt explained. "The 10.2 million bushels of storage capability give us a very unique position for being 465 miles from the ocean. It gives our farmers the ability to be able to endure a down year on yield or a down year on price because of the price advantage that barging can give to them."

The port also provides warehousing space for manufacturers such as Clearwater Paper or Sofidel (a producer of tissue paper products), something that Corbitt said is in short supply in the LC Valley. The port is also a multi-modal transportation hub, having access to rail, barges, and trucks.

"The ability to bring all of that together is really critical for the logistics of north central Idaho, and it's critical for some of our larger businesses who really could not exist

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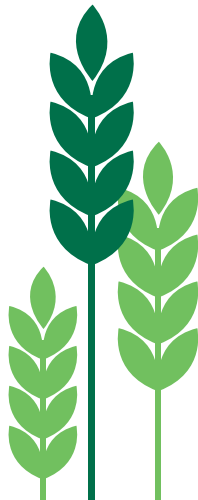
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without this sort of transportation hub,” Corbitt said.

Idaho’s only seaport relies on the Columbia-Snake River System, especially the four lower Snake River dams. Corbitt calls the LC Valley “ground zero for dam removal,” explaining that there’s no other place along the river that would be more impacted by removal of the dams. He is a fierce advocate of the dams and spends much of his time talking to the public and to legislators about them.

The eight locks and dams along the Columbia-Snake River System lift vessels approximately 735 feet in elevation. Besides barges, cruise boats take advantage of the ability to navigate 465 miles inland, from Astoria, Ore., to Lewiston. In 2024, more than 20,000 cruise passengers traveled through Lewiston, bringing millions of dollars to the LC Valley.

“You have to tell them (the public), show them, educate them on why this matters to them, why this is a big deal for them,” Corbitt said. “For this valley, we talk about infrastructure. We talk about jobs, we talk about industry, we talk about the Port of Lewiston and the fact that to get to this port, you have to take eight steps up from the ocean, and without each and every one of those eight steps, you’re not going to get here.”

Corbitt said the LC Valley is also ground zero for the arguments used by the six sovereigns who oppose the presence of the dams. The six sovereigns are the states of Idaho and Washington and four Pacific Northwest tribes.

“You have to be able to understand and articulate what those perspectives are in a persuasive way that is respectful, but also cognizant of what the actual situation is, because sometimes, they’re not the same,” Corbitt said.

Managing the port is a seven-day-a-week job, but when he can, Corbitt likes to spend time outdoors. He said he also recharges by working with the “Dam Heroes” group, which is a group of stakeholders from the Pacific Northwest who have been advocating for the Columbia-Snake River System for the past few years.

“That group is different in that it has a level of passion and commitment and skill and articulation you don’t see very often, that you don’t get to interact with very often. So pulling energy from them is a way that I try to remain energized,” he explained.

Corbitt and his wife, Suzie, have two children: Madison who works in Moscow as an analytical chemist, and Jack, a culinary arts student in Pullman. To learn more about the Port of Lewiston, visit portoflewiston.com. ■



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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



Marketing Washington wheat: Hands-on experiences made personal

By Kevin Klein
Chairman, Washington Grain Commission

Every year, the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) partners with U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) to bring trade teams to the

U.S. to get a personal, first-hand experience of our wheat supply chain. Representing both long-standing and emerging markets, trade team delegates are typically midlevel to senior leadership from their countries' top flour mills and snack producers and are often in positions to either influence or make their company's wheat purchases. Each team is also accompanied by a regional USW representative who speaks the team's language(s) and can help answer their marketing and trade questions that arise during the team's visit.

When they arrive stateside, teams tour several key wheat-producing states, including the Dakotas, Montana, Idaho, Oregon, and Washington. When Washington is chosen to host a team, the WGC works to create an impactful schedule of sights and activities, including personalized briefings at the WGC office, meetings with breeders and researchers at Washington State University (WSU) greenhouses and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service's Western Wheat Quality Lab, and tours of wheat transport facilities like HighLine Grain Growers' Four Lakes elevator and Pacific Northwest Farmers' Cooperative Snake River terminal. As most tours are intentionally scheduled during harvest season and delegates value connecting with growers, many trade team tours also include a harvest tour — with combine rides whenever possible!

This year, WGC hosted five teams — all of which represented countries from our top 10 markets:

- South American Milling Association, June 8-10.
- Japanese midlevel management team, July 8-10.
- South Korean Crop Survey team, July 24-27.
- South Asia Team, Aug. 6-8.
- Japanese Biscuit Association, Oct. 5-7.

I had the opportunity to host this year's South Korean team for both a harvest tour and farm dinner. On a hot Saturday afternoon, WGC staff drove the team to watch winter club wheat being harvested just outside Ritzville. For several delegates, this was their first time riding a combine and witnessing harvest firsthand. I then invited the team by the home place to see some of my family's

generational farming and Eastern Washington heritage before bringing them to my house for an outdoor country dinner, complete with sunseting skies over open fields on a calm, peaceful evening.

This year, District 6 Commissioner Art Schultheis hosted both the Japanese Midlevel Management Team and Japanese Biscuit Association, providing a harvest tour in July and a seeding tour in October. While every trade team and the country they represent is unique, trade team delegates consistently share how much they value the opportunity to interact with the farmers who grow the wheat they purchase. As our time with each team is brief, we always aim to have both commissioner and grower representation at the dinner table, wherever that may be, so we can share appreciation for their business, answer their questions, and get to know the people who make flour and foods from the wheat we grow.

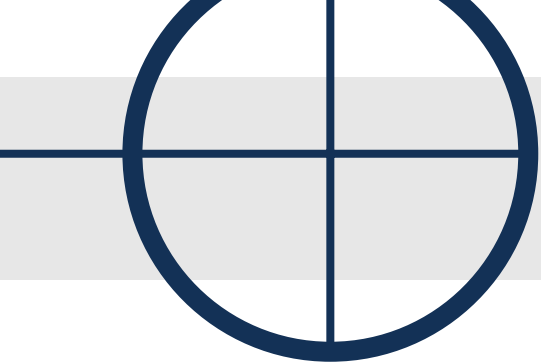
As I reflect on my visit with the Korean Trade Team, I continually return to how appreciative they were to see the family farm in action, experience the history of five farming generations, and be welcomed to a farmhouse meal away from the busy city life and noise!

A few days before I wrote this article, I joined WGC's dinner for the Japanese Biscuit Association and was encouraged by their vocal appreciation for the quality of our Western White wheat (a blend of soft white wheat and about 20% club), which they use for their biscuits (cookies) and treats. Over 80% of the wheat they use for their Western White wheat blend is soft white wheat purchased from the Pacific Northwest!

While I am struggling to sell my wheat because the price is below my cost of production, I am encouraged to hear these teams speak to the superior soft white wheat quality of the Pacific Northwest. While we cannot control prices, we can always control building strong relationships that weather market changes while continuing the practices that have long secured Washington's reputation for superior quality and value.

Hosting trade teams has always been a central program for the WGC's marketing plan and will continue to be. To ensure you receive updates on this key market development strategy and to learn about opportunities to get involved, scan the QR code to sign up for WGC's two newsletters, Commission Matters and the Washington Crop and Quality Monitor. ■





REPORTS

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Inside the Herbicide Resistance Initiative

By Jake Liening

Market Development Specialist, Washington Grain Commission

Herbicide resistance is one of the most pressing issues facing Pacific Northwest (PNW) farmers. Because weeds continually evolve to survive current herbicide technologies and practices, managing herbicide resistance now requires more than new chemistry. It takes collaboration, creativity, and commitment across state lines. That unified effort is exactly what the Pacific Northwest Herbicide Resistance Initiative (PNWHRI) hopes to achieve.

Launched through the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) and the region's three land-grant universities — Washington State University, Oregon State University, and the University of Idaho — the PNWHRI brings together more than 25 scientists, extension specialists, and industry partners. Funding support also comes from grower commissions and commodity organizations across Idaho, Oregon, and Washington, including the Washington Grain Commission (WGC).

The initiative's overarching goal is simple but ambitious: to reduce the threat of herbicide-resistant weeds across the PNW's cereal-based cropping systems and safeguard the long-term productivity, profitability, and export reliability of regional grain.

From monitoring weed seedbanks to applying machine learning, PNWHRI's research network spans experimental farms and farmer-cooperator fields across all three states. The 2024 Annual Report highlights major achievements:

- **Rotation and seedbank studies.** Long-term trials in Washington, Oregon, and Idaho show that diversified rotations — especially those including alfalfa — can reduce weed seedbanks by up to 94%, providing

a proactive tool against resistant populations.

- **Resistance surveys.** Regional screening has confirmed widespread resistance in species like downy brome, Italian ryegrass, and Palmer amaranth, underscoring the urgency of integrated management.
- **Technology and innovation.** New tools such as machine-learning weed-seed identification, infrared seed-deactivation systems, and GIS-based resistance mapping are giving researchers and farmers better data and faster decisions.
- **Co-innovation with growers.** Farmer-led “co-innovation” groups are testing harvest weed seed control mills and exploring new rotational crops like grain sorghum for dryland systems.

At this year's PNWHRI annual meeting in Moscow, Idaho, Casey Chumrau, WGC CEO, represented the commission and experienced the initiative's collaboration firsthand.

“Washington, Oregon, and Idaho researchers, extension professionals, and industry partners are fully committed to this unified effort. No one is working in isolation,” Casey said. “The diversity of approaches shows just how multifaceted our fight against herbicide-resistant weeds has become.”

Casey also expressed appreciation for long-time contributors, Dr. Ian Burke and Dr. Drew Lyon, whose work has shaped PNW weed-science programs for more than a decade. Both will be moving on to new opportunities by the end of 2025, leaving a lasting legacy of innovation and mentorship in regional weed management.

Through continued research, grower engagement, and shared commitment, the PNWHRI is positioning the Pacific Northwest as a national model for collaborative, science-based solutions to herbicide resistance. To explore ongoing projects, partners, and resistance-tracking maps at the county level, visit pnwhri.org. ■



Reinforcing reliability

2025 PACIFIC NORTHWEST SOFT WHITE WHEAT CROP DELIVERS SOLID RESULTS

By Mike Moran

Executive Director, Wheat Marketing Center

The Pacific Northwest soft white wheat (SWW) industry continues to demonstrate resilience in the face of variable growing conditions, delivering consistent quality to the global market. Despite a growing season marked by moisture variability, the 2025 crop delivered solid results that reflect both the adaptability of Pacific Northwest (PNW) wheat and the expertise of regional growers. With Washington exporting approximately 80% of its soft white wheat crop to markets across Asia and beyond, consistent quality remains paramount, and this year's harvest reinforces the region's reputation for reliability.

The Wheat Marketing Center (WMC) in Portland, Ore., serves as the cornerstone of quality assurance for the PNW wheat industry. Through comprehensive testing and evaluation, WMC provides critical insights that guide marketing decisions and support buyer confidence in soft white wheat's unique characteristics: low protein content, mild flavor, fine texture, and light color. These attributes make it the preferred choice for pastries, cakes, cookies, crackers, and a range of other applications valued by customers worldwide.

A season of contrasts

The 2024-25 growing season started off strong. Adequate-to-excellent soil moisture at planting across most of the region supported good emergence and establishment. Winter precipitation provided favorable conditions for early crop development, allowing plants to build



Laboratory and baking tests are used to ensure performance across multiple applications, so customers can continue to rely on the Pacific Northwest's soft white wheat's distinctive properties for their diverse range of wheat food products.

robust root systems before spring. However, late spring and summer brought below-normal precipitation across much of the growing area. Washington's spring wheat areas faced particularly challenging conditions, with an extended dry period from April through July that limited moisture availability during critical growth stages.

Yet the crop adapted. Milder temperatures through June compensated for reduced moisture, enabling healthy plant development even as precipitation fell short. When hotter conditions arrived during maturity, they facilitated a timely harvest. Low disease and pest pressure throughout the region further contributed to the crop's success.

Production and quality results

The 2025 PNW soft white and club wheat crop totaled an estimated 6.63 million metric tons (MMT). While this represents a slight decline from 2024's 6.71 MMT, production remains above the five-year average of 6.11 MMT. Washington contributed 3.85 MMT, or 141.5 million bushels, to this total, maintaining its position as a leader of U.S. soft white wheat production, while accounting for approximately 7% of the nation's wheat output.

The 2025 crop quality assessment shows a soft white crop with a more typical protein distribution compared to 2024. The overall crop grades as U.S. #1, with an average protein content of 10%, slightly below the five-year average but higher than 2024. This protein profile aligns well with buyer specifications for soft white wheat applications. Test weights remained consistent with the previous year, while thousand kernel weights tracked in line with the five-year average, indicating good kernel development despite the season's moisture challenges. ►

End-use performance

Laboratory and baking tests conducted by the WMC demonstrate that the 2025 crop performs as expected for high-quality soft white wheat, including above-average milling performance. Farinograph, Alveograph, and Solvent Retention Capacity (SRC) measurements all indicated very weak to medium gluten strength, the desired characteristics for traditional soft wheat flour products and blends with hard wheat. End-product testing shows acceptable-to-good performance across multiple applications, confirming the wheat's suitability for the diverse range of products that rely on PNW soft white wheat's distinctive properties.

Customers can approach this year's crop with confidence. The wheat demonstrates consistency with typical soft white quality standards, while offering the functional characteristics necessary for successful production of cookies, cakes, crackers, steamed breads, and other specialty applications. Used alone or in blends, the 2025 PNW soft white wheat crop delivers the performance buyers expect.

Looking ahead

The 2025 crop year underscores an important reality: variability in growing conditions doesn't preclude quality outcomes. Through careful variety selection, adaptive management practices, and the region's inherent agricultural strengths, PNW growers continue producing wheat that meets global market standards. The comprehensive quality evaluation provided by the Wheat Marketing Center ensures that buyers receive accurate, detailed information to support their purchasing decisions, maintaining the transparency and trust that define the PNW wheat industry's approach to international trade. ■

2025 crop hits quality

USW's annual report delivers key data to global customers

By Ralph Loos

*Director of Communications, Multimedia, and Global Outreach,
U.S. Wheat Associates*

Soft white wheat grown in the Pacific Northwest (PNW), once again, has a strong presence in the annual Crop Quality Report produced by U.S. Wheat Associates (USW). Released this October, the 2025 report covers every aspect of this year's harvest and offers international customers, which include wheat buyers, millers, and bakers, a thorough look at the entire U.S. wheat industry.

The annual Crop Quality Report is just one of the many services USW offers to customers, and one that requires dedicated effort from USW staff and strong coordination with our nationwide partners. With support from state wheat commission members, public and private industries, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Foreign Agricultural Service, USW compiles data on U.S. wheat's milling and baking qualities to ensure our customers have the vital information they need to keep producing the highest quality wheat foods.

Erica Oakley, USW's vice president of programs, leads the effort, spending many long days putting the annual report together. But Oakley is quick to put a bright spotlight on the valuable information packed into each Crop Quality Report.

"The Crop Quality Report provides data to help wheat buyers make informed decisions and to support our millers and bakers in understanding how this year's crop will perform in their operations," Oakley explained. "Importantly, a report like this would not be possible without the dedication of U.S. wheat farmers."

This year, stable overall production and increased supplies have positioned U.S. wheat as a reliable and competitive option for buyers. While total U.S. production of all wheat classes is slightly down compared to last year, production is higher than the five-year average. Buyers around the world have recognized the excellent value U.S. wheat offers, as current price levels are making high-quality wheat more accessible.

As the top producers of soft white wheat in the U.S., Washington, Oregon, and Idaho have a reason to be proud. The 2025 Crop Quality Report highlights how the PNW's commitment to both responsiveness to buyers' needs and quality continues to drive success shared by farmers, USW, and the entire U.S. wheat industry.

Throughout the PNW, farmers worked extremely hard to balance weather, timing market conditions, and everything else involved in agriculture to produce another high-quality soft white wheat crop. As always, USW takes a deep dive into soft white in the 2025 Crop Quality Report. Some of the highlights for soft white wheat:

- Soft white production is estimated at 7 million metric tons (259 million bushels), up 4% over last year.
- Soft white experienced good moisture and moderate temperatures during the first part of the growing season, followed by drier conditions later in

the year. This resulted in a wheat crop with a more typical protein distribution.

- This year's soft white crop has appropriately weak-to-medium gluten strength and produces finished products with acceptable-to-good characteristics.
- Soft white wheat is used in cakes, pastries, cookies, and snack foods. The higher protein portion of this year's crop can be used in blends for crackers, Asian noodles, steamed breads, flat breads, and pan breads.
- Soft white wheat test weight averages trended higher, with all protein composites above 60 pounds per bushel (78.9 kg/hectoliter).
- Wheat protein averages are slightly higher than last year due to less moisture late in the growing season; both remain within normal range.
- Wheat ash is significantly lower in soft white compared to last year and the five-year average due to drier conditions late in the growing season.
- Falling number averages exceed 300 seconds. Soft white is slightly below the five-year average due to localized freeze events during grain filling.
- Soft white dough shows typical properties, ranging from very weak to medium gluten strength and low water absorption.

This is the 46th year of USW's Crop Quality Report. As previously mentioned, farmers play a key role in building this valuable report. Each year, samples are collected during wheat harvest, starting in spring and ending in late summer. These samples are sent to USW's six partner laboratories across the U.S., where rigorous testing and analysis are conducted. The results are then compiled into the final product.

Even after 46 years, USW is still working to improve the report. This year's edition includes several updates, including the introduction of new sponge cake data to provide more end-product performance information. Additionally, USW has separated the analysis methods into a standalone document, allowing more context and clear definitions for each test.



The full report is available on the USW website (uswheat.org). Regional reports and translated versions will also be accessible in Arabic, Chinese, French, Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese.

Again this year, USW is conducting Crop Quality Seminars around the world to share this year's report with U.S. wheat customers. The seminars, which began in early November, will run through December in North Asia, South America, Europe, South and Southeast Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, Mexico, Central America and the Caribbean, the Middle East, and North Africa.

USW encourages all wheat farmers to read the 2025 Crop Quality Report and to remember that customers around the world depend on it to provide valuable information about the world's most reliable wheat. ■

Bridging breeding and baking

CLUB WHEAT EXCHANGE ENSURES COLLABORATION BETWEEN RESEARCHERS, CUSTOMERS

By Jake Liening

*Market Development Specialist,
Washington Grain Commission*

When it comes to specialty wheat classes, club wheat holds a unique place in Washington's export portfolio. While it only accounts for about 5% of Washington's production, club wheat stands out in global markets, but not for its yield or agronomics. Instead, club wheat is sought after for its unparalleled end-use quality, and that's where the Club Wheat Technical Exchange comes in. A direct collaboration between U.S. breeders and Japanese millers, the Club Wheat Technical Exchange ensures the characteristics of Washington's club wheat stay in sync with the quality standards of its most discerning customer.

What is the Club wheat Technical Exchange?

Unlike standard trade teams, the Club Wheat Technical Exchange is not directly focused on sales and marketing. Since its launch in 2018, the exchange has served as a technical, variety-development partnership between:

- U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service's (USDA-ARS) Western Wheat Quality Laboratory in Pullman.
- Japan Flour Millers Association (JFMA)
- Washington Grain Commission (WGC)
- Washington State University

Each year, a selection of club wheat breeding lines from Pullman is shipped to Japan, where millers grind, mill, bake, and analyze the lines against strict quality



Members of the Japan Flour Millers Association review club wheat breeding data with U.S. researchers during the 2025 Club Wheat Technical Exchange, held in Pullman, Washington.

standards. Once tests are complete, members from each organization meet to share results, equipping U.S. breeders with direct customer feedback to decide which lines to advance. This two-way dialogue aligns breeding decisions with real market needs and has resulted in the release of several high-performing varieties tailored to Japanese quality standards and preferences.

The 2025 exchange: Strengthening technical collaboration

From Sept. 14–16, 2025, Washington hosted the latest iteration of this program, jointly organized by USDA-ARS, JFMA, and WGC, with assistance from U.S. Wheat Associates in Tokyo. The 2025 exchange brought Japanese milling and research representatives to Eastern Washington where they directly reviewed variety performance, observed trial plots, and met with breeders and quality specialists. Participants discussed milling and baking performance, blending ratios between club and soft white, and target thresholds for moisture absorption, crumb structure, and finished-product texture. The exchange again demonstrated that this program goes beyond the strong marketing focus of traditional trade teams, instead centering a scientific, quality-driven collaboration that directly informs the next generation of breeding decisions and, therefore, the next generations of Washington club wheat purchases. This year, all the varieties tested by the exchange met the JFMA quality standards and will advance in the breeding process.

Why club wheat matters to Japan — and Washington

Western White (WW) wheat, commonly used in confections like sponge cakes, cookies, and crackers, is typically a blend of soft white (SW) and 10% white club wheat. But for Japanese blends of WW, club wheat often comprises 20% or more of the mix. Produced primarily in Washington, this blend holds over a 90% share of Japan's confectionery flour market.

For Japanese millers and bakers, club wheat delivers a "melt-in-the-mouth" texture without added fats, something that, in the U.S., usually requires

higher shortening content. As wheat quality expert Art Bettge notes, the same unique starch and protein characteristics that make club wheat valuable overseas could also help U.S. food manufacturers develop healthier, lower-fat products if adopted more broadly.

Japan's ongoing commitment

Japan remains one of Washington's most consistent and quality-focused customers. In marketing year 2024-25, Japan was the third-largest buyer of Washington soft white wheat, purchasing 25.11 million bushels (683,000 metric tons (MT)), a 7% increase from its five-year average of 23.46 million bushels (638,000 MT).

As of Sept. 18, year-to-date sales of soft white to Japan totaled 12.79 million bushels (348,000 MT), also up 7% year-over-year. Japanese buyers consistently value Washington's soft white and club wheat for its reliability and premium quality, particularly for high-end confectionery and snack products.

Washington's sustained and substantial Japanese market share underscores the impact of the Club Wheat Technical Exchange. By aligning breeding goals with Japan's quality expectations, this initiative not only strengthens buyer confidence but also ensures the Western White blend continues to meet the specifications of Japan's milling and baking sector.

A model for collaborative wheat development

For Washington's wheat industry, the Club Wheat Technical Exchange represents the best of what market-driven research can accomplish. By linking field trials to flour performance and connecting breeders to customers, the exchange bridges two ends of the value chain, on opposite sides of the Pacific Ocean.

Through programs like this, Washington growers don't just plant seed, they invest in long-term trust, partnership, and market sustainability. The result is a product that performs as well in a Pullman test plot as it does in a Tokyo bakery. ■

From Pullman to Tokyo

Breeding quality club wheat for those who grow, eat it

By Kimberly Garland-Campbell

Research Geneticist, U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service, Washington State University.

One of the pleasures of being a wheat breeder is talking directly with our growers. More than one grower this year has told me that it's been a tough year with low prices, higher fertilizer and chemical costs, unstable weather, and other market forces that impact profits. As a public sector researcher, I am paid by tax dollars. I work for you, the people who grow the club wheat varieties I develop and the people who eat the products made from my club wheat varieties.

While I can't influence market forces or the weather, I can bring the power of plant genetics to solve at least one of your problems: producing grain that is desired in the market. I develop club wheat varieties that are resistant to disease, producing good quality grain in diverse environments that also meet the high standards of our export customers.

Another pleasure of being a wheat breeder is talking directly with our export customers. Through the efforts of U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) and the Washington Grain Commission, multiple trade teams visit the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service (USDA-ARS) and Washington State University (WSU) facilities each summer. Our customers journey from Taiwan, the Philippines, Thailand, Japan, Korea, and South America to visit growers, grain elevators, and our research facilities in Pullman, Wash. Five trade teams and one technical team visited us in 2025, including three from Japan — the primary buyer of club wheat. During their October visit, this



Daniel "Danny" Zborowski, biological science technician for the cultivar development team, explains the flour testing and analysis he performs at the Western Wheat Quality Lab to the 2025 Japanese Midlevel Management Trade Team.

year's Japanese Biscuit Association team informed me that Japan has been purchasing club wheat for at least 80 years. They now purchase club wheat in a typically 20% blend with soft white wheat, which is marketed as "Western White."

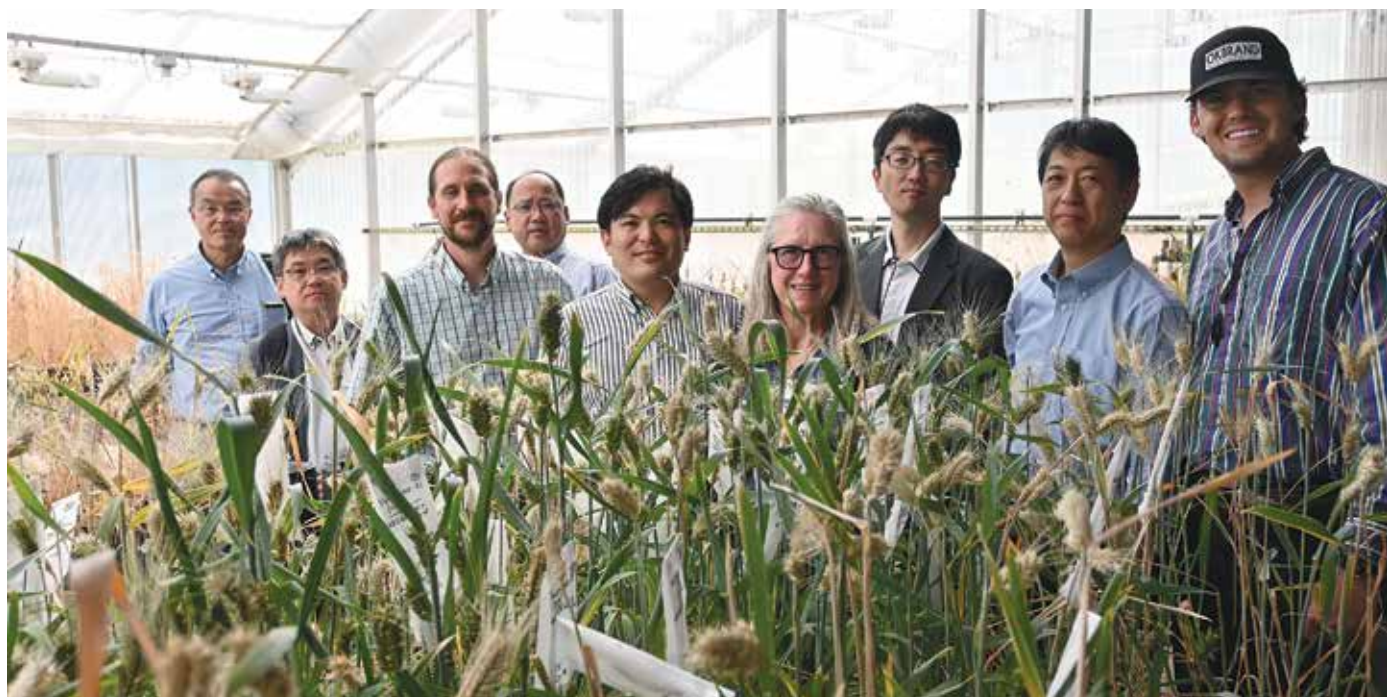
Japan considers club wheat to be so valuable that they worked with USDA and the Washington Grain Commission to establish the Japanese Club Wheat Technical Exchange. Since 2019, each year, we send grain of our most promising breeding lines, along with currently grown club wheat cultivars and a Western White blend as checks, to the USDA Western Wheat Quality Lab where it is distributed to multiple Japanese flour milling companies. The Japanese labs evaluate milling quality, cookie and cake baking quality, taste, and texture before we meet in the summer to discuss results. Since the Club Wheat Technical Exchange was established, we have met in Tokyo, Pullman, and via Zoom. Our major customers have been able to walk through club wheat in the field. The USDA Western Wheat Quality Lab revised its sponge cake method to better match the Japanese method. We dropped two promising club wheat cultivars because they didn't meet quality expectations, in addition to revising our selection methods. Since 2020, every promising club wheat variety that we have sent to Japan has passed their testing for good quality. This collaboration is critical to maintaining the market, especially as the PNW is the only place in the world where club wheat is commercially produced

for export. The quality of club wheat is the foundation for Washington's status as the supplier of high-quality grain.

Managing the production of club wheat has been a challenge. When the supply is adequate, the premium for club wheat vanishes. When the supply is low, the premium increases. At times, the premium has reached as high as \$3 to \$4. The premium was nonexistent for most of 2025, but has recently increased to about \$.35. Unfortunately, when the premium is too high, the percentage of club wheat requested in the Western Wheat blend is lowered. Therefore, the market demand is best when club wheat achieves a significant, but not extraordinary, premium.

Naively, when I arrived in Pullman in 1999, I thought that developing club wheat varieties that were competitive with the best soft white wheat varieties would even out the fluctuations in the premium. I didn't realize that overproduction of high-performance club wheats like Bruehl and Crescent in the 2008-2012 period would flatten the premium and necessitate off-loading club as feed wheat.

Even so, my goal is to develop club wheat varieties that are competitive with the best soft white varieties. The selection goals of the club wheat breeding program are to maintain and even improve the club wheat quality profile: low gluten strength, high break flour yield, high flour yield, and low water absorption. Growers and seed growers have many more choices of what soft white wheat to grow in 2026 than they did when I arrived in



Dr. Kimberly Garland-Campbell (center), who has been breeding club wheat since 1999, provides Washington Grain Commission's international trade teams with expert tours of Washington State University's wheat greenhouses and club wheat breeding program every summer.

1999. They don't have bin room for more than one or two club wheat cultivars, which means the club wheat cultivars that are released by the USDA club wheat breeding program have to be widely adapted.

Currently, the club wheat varieties Pritchett and Castella each occupy about 50% of the club wheat acreage. Both varieties have excellent club wheat quality, with Castella delivering a yield advantage while Pritchett demonstrates better emergence from deep sowing. They are both resistant to stripe rust, but Castella has fewer problems with low falling numbers. Bruehl was a parent of Pritchett, contributing to low falling numbers. Castella has a very diverse pedigree that includes soft red winter wheat lines from New York and Arkansas. In addition to problems with lodging due to its tall height, Castella is awnless (without bristles on the wheat head), which can cause issues with game feeding and lodging.

While most of the club wheat production arcs between Lind, Odessa, Douglas, and Harrington, Wash., there are several growers on the Palouse who consistently plant club wheat. We recently released Cameo, the product of another diverse pedigree that includes parents from the eastern soft red market class. These parents contribute to Cameo's excellent disease resistance, including eyespot and stripe rust, the major diseases impacting wheat in Eastern Washington. Cameo has good standability and performs best on the Palouse in Idaho and Washington. Growers who want to take advantage of a good premium also have the option of planting spring club wheats developed by Mike Pumphrey. Melba is a traditional spring club, and Hedge CL+ has the two gene imazamox resistance trait, useful for replant-



Dr. Alecia Kiszonas, director of cultivar development, showcases the 2024 Preferred Variety Brochure to the 2025 Japanese Midlevel Management Trade Team as they took notes on variety testing details and selection process.

ing onto ground where group 2 herbicides were previously used.

In 2026, we are proposing a new winter club variety, ARS14X114RS3-CBW, for release as a Castella replacement. This new variety is shorter, has awns, and is competitive with soft white wheat cultivars throughout the region. Ironically, one of its parents is Xerpha, a poor-quality soft white winter wheat. Some of you will remember that Xerpha did yield well, although problems with stripe rust and grain quality could take it down. By crossing Xerpha with club wheat, we've managed to keep its yield potential in a high quality and disease resistant background.

Interest in herbicide resistant wheat cultivars is on the rise. After a major crossing project, Dr. Arron Carter and I have several herbicide resistant winter club wheat cultivars in the WSU variety testing trials this year. One of our favorites is ARS18X376-16CBW CL+, derived from a cross between Stingray CL+ and Castella. We have this line and three others in the traited nursery with the WSU variety testing program, with multiple trials sprayed with Beyond herbicide to justify our release decisions.

We have also been working on Co-AXium (Co-AX) Herbicide club wheat cultivars. The Co-AX trait came to us as a hard red winter wheat from Colorado. Dr. Carter has done a great job of moving the Co-AX trait into high-quality soft white winter wheat. Nova-AX is a good example. However, moving Co-AX to club wheat is a tougher challenge. We have lines in multiple environments and in spray trials in 2025 and expect that some of these will be competitive enough for variety trial testing in 2027.

The members of the Japanese Biscuit Association pointed out that wheat growers are paid based on delivering clean, high test weight, weed-free grain to the elevator, but that they aren't paid for the various quality characteristics. They wanted to know why we emphasized quality to the extent that we do. Wheat grower and former commissioner Brian Cochrane had a great answer. "Quality," he said. "It's all quality. We know you can go elsewhere for your wheat. We want you to come to us." ■

WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Why global supply is capping US returns



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

In their September World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) estimated the national average wheat price for the 2025-26 marketing year would be \$5.10 per bushel.¹ The final marketing year price is calculated based on monthly average prices between June and the following May, weighted by total farm-level wheat sales each month. If the September USDA forecast for this year is realized, it would be the lowest average wheat price since the 2020-21 wheat marketing year (Figure 1).

Over the last decade, the Portland soft white wheat price for the marketing year has averaged about \$.92 per bushel over the national average price, but with significant variation across years. However, if the \$.92 premium holds for this year, then producers can expect Portland soft white prices to average about \$6.02 per bushel this marketing year. From June 1, 2025 (the start of the marketing year), through the third week of October, Portland soft white wheat prices have averaged about \$5.96 per bushel, suggesting that — if the USDA marketing year price forecast holds — there may not be much upside in the Portland market in coming months. As seen in Figure 2, Portland prices bottomed out in late July/early August in 2024 and then increased throughout harvest. This year, we experienced higher prices in most of the marketing year's first quarter but have seen prices deteriorate as we moved into harvest. This has occurred despite significant improvement in U.S. wheat exports this year compared to last and an anticipated reduction in wheat ending

Figure 1: USDA marketing year average wheat price

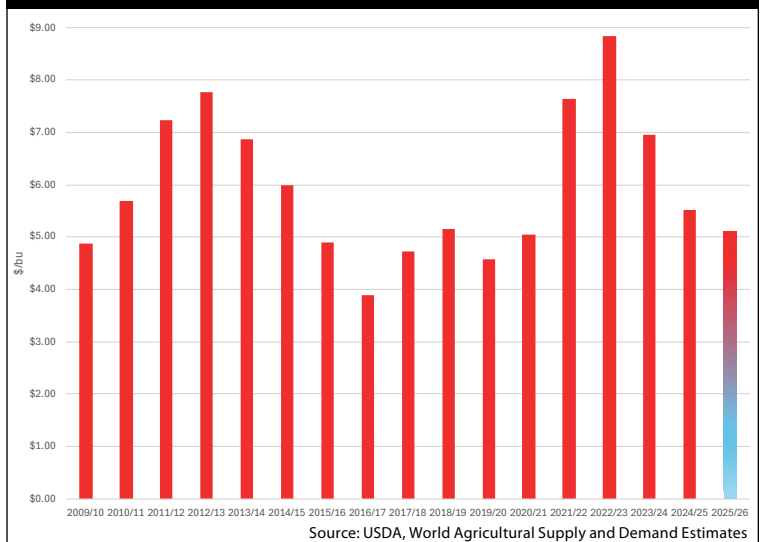


Figure 2: Daily soft white wheat prices - Portland



stocks this year compared to last.

Prior to the government shutdown, U.S. wheat exports were running about 16% ahead of year-ago levels, though white wheat shipments were lagging last year by about 16%.² White wheat shipments to Japan and South Korea are behind year-ago lev-

¹Normally this price would have been updated in October, but the U.S. government shutdown has resulted in a suspension of any data or report updates from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Over the previous five years, the October price estimate was increased three times compared to the September estimate, reduced once, and was unchanged in 2024.

²The government shutdown did not stop exports, but the U.S. Department of Agriculture is not reporting export volumes during the shutdown.

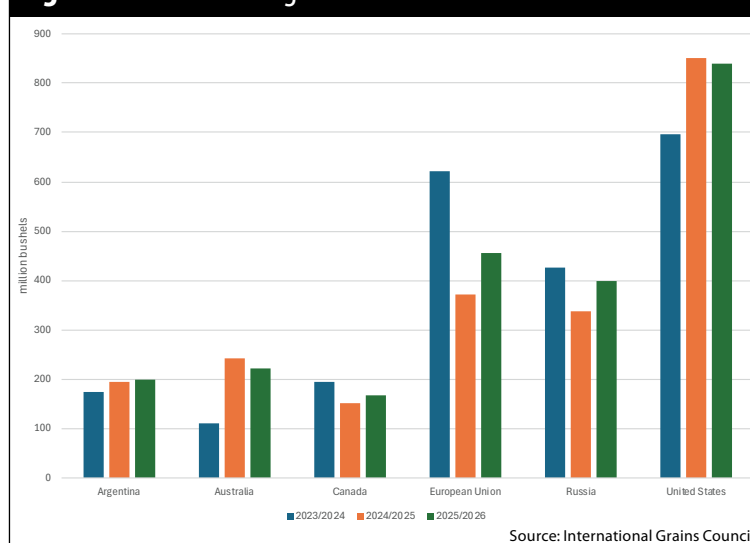
els, but shipments to the Philippines are up year-over-year.

The year-over-year improvement in the U.S. wheat balance sheet is offset by the more bearish picture globally, and this is contributing to current price challenges. In the last WASDE, the USDA was forecasting a slight increase in world wheat ending stocks for the current marketing year, while the most recent forecast from the International Grains Council (IGC) is for year-over-year ending stocks to remain unchanged. However, IGC is anticipating global wheat production to increase this year and result in the largest global wheat crop ever. They are forecasting a small reduction in total wheat acres worldwide but offsetting decreased acreage with very good yields. In total, they expect world wheat production to be up 2.3% compared to last year, leading to a 1.3% increase in total wheat supply (production plus wheat left over from previous years). The only major exporters expected to harvest a substantially smaller crop this year compared to last are the U.S., Ukraine, and Kazakhstan. However, the EU crop is projected up almost 18% this year and the Russian crop 5%. In addition, EU wheat quality improved this year with an increased percentage grading as milling quality compared to last year. Total world wheat consumption is also expected to increase this year, but not enough to offset the increase in production. In addition, the total world wheat trade is expected to increase in 2025-26.

Even though IGC estimates suggest little change in year-over-year world wheat ending stocks, there are significant changes in where the stocks are held. Specifically, the major wheat exporting countries are expected to see a net increase in ending stocks of 7% this year compared to last and about a 6% increase compared to the previous five-year average. Figure 3 shows wheat ending stocks over the last few years for most major wheat exporters. Note that while U.S. ending stocks are expected to fall in 2025-26, they are still well above projected stocks levels for the other major exporters.

Given that the U.S. export pace already exceeds last year by a significant amount and that our export competitors are also holding substantial amounts of wheat, it seems unlikely that over the next few months, U.S. export volume will exceed what the market is already anticipating. Thus, any price increase in coming months

Figure 3: Wheat ending stocks



will not likely be the result of unanticipated demand increases.

U.S. exports are benefiting from recent reductions in the value of the U.S. dollar relative to currencies of our export competitors. But because the market is already anticipating a continued weakening of the dollar (the futures contract for the U.S. Dollar Index for March delivery is trading at a discount to the futures price for December delivery), we are also unlikely to see significant wheat price appreciation in coming months from a change in relative currency values.

As we look into the third quarter of the marketing year (December through February), any significant increase in U.S. wheat prices will need to come from one of two things: a deterioration in crop prospects from some of our trade competitors or a political event that disrupts trade and results in increasing our relative advantage in global wheat trade. As of mid-October, IGC was forecasting an improved wheat crop in the Southern Hemisphere this winter compared to last, estimating Argentina's wheat crop will exceed last year's by 9% and Australia's production to be down less than 1%. Aggregating the two still results in increased production from our Southern Hemisphere competitors of 3%. If these forecasts hold, they may impede substantial price improvement going into the Southern Hemisphere harvest.

One result of current low wheat prices is that there may be a reduction in globally planted wheat acres fall 2025 and spring 2026 and thus some price improvement in the 2026-27 marketing year. However, reasonable estimates of actual acreage will not be available until spring, so any market support from reduced acreage is not likely to be realized until we enter the 4th quarter of the marketing year. ■

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

Getting seed in the ground

LOW-TILL DRILL DEMONSTRATION TAKES PLACE IN FRANKLIN COUNTY

By Trista Crossley
Editor, *Wheat Life*

In early October, Grassl Farms in Franklin County was a hive of activity as more than 100 growers gathered to learn about low-till and direct seeding methods and see several drills in action.

The low-till drill demonstration was organized by Kara Kaelber, district manager of the Franklin Conservation District (FCD); Kim Brunson, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association (PNDSA); and Andrea Cox, conservation coordinator for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG). Additional support was provided by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The Bank of Eastern Washington sponsored a BBQ lunch.

“We had a phenomenal grower turnout, especially considering how busy growers are right now seeding their winter crops. I appreciate that they stepped away from their fields and took the time to attend,” said Cox. “This event would not have been possible without the partnership between WAWG, PNDSA, FCD, and NRCS. I’m hopeful we can bring more of these events to growers across Eastern Washington.”

The event began with a panel of growers who introduced themselves and talked about their experience with low-till and direct seeding. Devin Moon from Benton County said he seeds some wheat shallowly and some more deeply, with different drills, at his farm in the Horse Heaven Hills. Rob Dewald from Adams County said he’s

played with a lot of different drills and recommended crop rotations. Jeff Shawver from Franklin County said he went to direct seeding about five years ago, using NRCS funds to help purchase equipment. He typically starts seeding early and doesn’t go deep with his seed. So far, his yields have at least matched the county average of 40 bushels per acre. Stacy Kniveton from Franklin County said he is still “newish” to dryland agriculture and direct seeding. Luke Van Hollebeke, also from Franklin County, said he is “dabbling” in later seeding and is trying to control mare’s tail (a weed).

Questions that were asked of the panel included:

- **Residue management: What has worked or not worked?** Moon recommended spreading the residue as evenly as possible. He said if the stubble reaches a certain threshold, he will mow it before seeding. Dewald recommended learning to drive a combine — getting a laugh out of the crowd — and not leaving residue higher than the row spacing. Shawver said he uses a chopper and will spot mow if necessary before seeding. He also said header height to drill is important. Van Hollebeke said he is still learning how high to leave stubble.

- **What are some of your weed control strategies?** Moon said he’s tried just about everything, but ammonia sulfate seems to work the best overall, although he is also having issues with mare’s tail. Moon uses a Weed-It, calling it a great tool but that it can be frustrating. Dewald said manual methods of weed control may be necessary to control mare’s tail, and he recommended getting at it



while it is young. He uses drones to scout his fields and then spot sprays as necessary.

• **What are some of the changes from going to low-till and direct seeding that can be quantified?** Shawver said he's able to take soil samples with a 3-foot probe without issue, and there's generally moisture all the way to the top. Van Hollebeke said for him, it's hard not to be able to watch the wheat come up, that he has to wait for rain. He has also seen a savings in manpower hours. Moon said it was about three years after moving to no-till before he saw his yields respond. "There's so much going on underneath the ground that you can't wrap your mind around it," he said. Dewald recommended buying a shovel, digging a hole, and "learning what's going on under your feet." He recommended spreading out fertilizer applications instead of applying it all at once, such as applying part of it in the fall and letting it leach over winter and then doing a foliar application in the spring.

For growers trying no-till and direct seeding, the panelists recommended seeding early so the seed is in the ground when rain hits.

"You don't have to follow what you've always done. You've got options. Learn to play the game," Dewald said.

Kaelber said feedback indicated that growers appreciated the opportunity to talk to other growers who are using these type of drills

"The panel of low-till growers answering some hard questions about converting to low-till was very helpful for those considering the pros and cons of conversion," she said. "I had two growers email me the next day saying they were interested in getting a low-till drill so they could start converting! In my mind, that proved our day was successful."

Following the panel and lunch, growers were able to see four drills in action. Manufacturers represented were AGPRO, Case IH, John Deere, and Great Plains. The Franklin Conservation District will be monitoring the test strips throughout the winter.

"PNDSA was proud to participate in the drill demonstration in partnership with the Washington Association of Wheat Growers and the Franklin Conservation District. Any day we can spend in the field with farmers and ag professionals is a great day," Brunson said. "This event drew a strong turnout of professionals who were excited to see direct seed drills in action and learn more about conservation-focused farming practices." ■

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THE BOTTOM LINE

Shifting gears in farmland leasing

By Tim Cobb

Owner, Farmland Company

Growing up on the farm provided me with several opportunities to operate equipment with manual transmissions. Several sets of gears allowed the operator to find the very best speed/power for any circumstance, whether in the field or out on the road, empty or fully loaded with produce. One gear in particular I will always remember was the “compound gear,” affectionately called the “granny gear” on our farm. When you needed and found the granny gear, it was because the load or hill was particularly strenuous, or perhaps the road was too muddy for regular passage. Somehow, the granny gear would synchronize the effort of each wheel at just the right speed to provide additional torque and keep the optimal traction to get the load through.

The current farmland leasing market is experiencing similar shifting with a strenuous load to carry and a need for the discovery of consistent traction. Specific external trends are defining the market for leased farmland across the entire commodity complex, with every crop and land type feeling the effect.

From landlords to producers, let’s consider three important trends impacting owner returns and producer sentiment amid the leasing landscape.

Land values and shrinking farmland returns.

Historically, farmland values across the country have enjoyed steady and moderate appreciation. However, over the last 15-plus years, the pace of this appreciation has been accelerated beyond normal year-over-year appreciation. On-farm liquidity, higher commodity prices, and solid returns invited internal and external capital to move the market for farmland of all types, all looking to capture percentage returns higher than other standard financial instruments following the economic downturn of 2008.

The natural course of any market that sees sustained and relentless upward movement is that, eventually, it will find that it has arrived or passed the ability to continue the same pace under the given market conditions. The market will begin to moderate and

even somewhat retrace its path in a search for grounded foundational support to justify the continued influx of investment.

From crop share to cash leasing arrangements, the past 18-24 months have seen pressure and retraction of per acre returns to farmland owners due to both internal and external forces that have shaped uneven outcomes. Agriculture is prone to up and down markets as demand and productivity pass through cycles, and while acute in nature, this moment in the cycle feels especially heavy due to the number of factors at play.

External forces of impact influencing current leasing decisions. Compounding the search for market stability amid higher land values are earnest producers doing everything they can to find profitability amid rising crop inputs, cost of operating capital, labor dynamics, regulation, and the maintenance or replacement of the machines necessary to maintain nominal production levels.

The short of it is that the American farmer’s effort to grow a bushel of grain, a bin of apples, a ton of hay or potatoes is colliding with the forces of inflation, product demand, foreign trade, and depressed commodity prices not seen for many decades on a scale that outstrips previous challenging times. Considering the most basic questions at the forefront of a producer’s demand for farmland are what to plant, and how much can be put into the crop. These forces are moving many producers to make difficult decisions regarding leased farmland as well as the size and scope of their operations. Working for “break-even”

propositions under moderately growing financial stress is becoming an apparent overall producer sentiment.

Producer sentiment and demand for leased land. Given the price levels of commodities across all agriculture sectors, active producers are experiencing legitimate pause in the consideration and demand for additional leased farmland acres. Across the region, producers, for the most part, have continued to maintain long-standing leasing relationships, which remain an important barometer to the leasing market.

Furthermore, producers once historically eager to add acres to their opera-

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tion — knowing that growth in land base often translates into an increased ability to produce at a more efficient and productive level — are now reducing their demand and pace for additional acres, looking instead at remaining viably “right sized” to their current team and fleet of operations. For some operators, this slowing in expansion will likely prove to aid in their ability to weather the current challenges facing the industry.

Looking forward, producers and owners of farmland would do well to have an open conversation about what is sustainable given the challenges that face the entire

agriculture industry. Efficiency, grit, and a willingness to “shift” to find sustainable traction will be required by all who intend to produce food, fiber, and fuel in this environment. Perspective and perseverance are the hallmarks of involvement in farmland stewardship and will be key to coming out on the other side of these headwinds. ■

Tim Cobb is a farm kid from Eastern Washington and is the owner of Farmland Company, based in Spokane, Wash. Farmland Company specializes in direct farmland management, real estate brokerage, and consulting across the PNW. For more information, visit the company at farmlandcompany.com.

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Lorus Scrupps (left) from Odessa and Gary McKay from Almira supervising a combine project in front of Jake Schlimmer's shop near Odessa and talking about conventional vs. no-till farming and playing against each other in town team basketball. Neither was wearing their hearing aids so the visit was pretty comical. Photo by Jake Schlimmer.



Ava McCaw checking the high water on the Touchet River in Waitsburg. Photo by John McCaw.

Fall Seeding
above Colfax at
Monson
Brothers. Photo
by Cadence
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of all children.



Harvest by the James Henry Swannack family in Lamont in the early 1900s. Photo submitted by Don Swannack.



(Above) This oldie but goodie has been part of the Jessup family for a long time. The farm is located on Rock Bottom Ranch in Lincoln County. Photo by Callie Jessup. (Left) 2025 Harvest on C&C Farms in Prescott. Combine is being operated by Kevin and Colton Chabre. Photo by Addilyn Chabre.

HAPPENINGS

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

NOVEMBER 2025

5-7 WASHINGTON STATE WEED ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE. Trade show, workshops, break-out sessions, credits requested. Wenatchee Convention Center, Wenatchee, Wash. Register at weedconference.org

14 WASHINGTON STATE CROP IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION ANNUAL CONFERENCE. Northern Quest Casino, Spokane, Wash. Register at washingtoncrop.com

17 WASHINGTON WHEAT FOUNDATION MEETING. Meeting begins at 1 p.m. at the Wheat Foundation Annex in Ritzville, Wash.

17-19 2025 WASHINGTON GRAIN GROWERS CONVENTION. Industry presentations, break-out sessions, exhibitors. Coeur d'Alene Resort, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Register online at wawg.org/convention/registration/

20 WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION BOARD MEETING. 9 a.m. Spokane, Wash. Call (509) 456-2481 for more information.

27-29 CHRISTMAS AT THE END OF THE ROAD. An old-fashioned cow-

boy Christmas! Skate with Santa, caroling, fireworks, and sleigh rides. winthropwashington.com/events/christmas-festival/

DECEMBER 2025

5-7 HOMETOWN CHRISTMAS. Santa, parade, shopping. Waitsburg, Wash. waitsburgcommercialclub.org/events

9-10 WSU WHEAT ACADEMY. Increase your knowledge of disease diagnostics, insect pest management, herbicide decisions and nutrient management. Registration is required. Pullman, Wash. <https://smallgrains.wsu.edu/event/2025-wsu-wheat-academy/> ■

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The Washington Wheat PAC is a nonpartisan political action committee that is dedicated to supporting ag-friendly candidates.

The Washington Wheat PAC pledges to promote and support elected officials from all parts of the state who positively influence agriculture.

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Washington farmers are losing ground politically! The ability to protect our interests is slowly dwindling. Washington wheat producers need elected officials who know and understand the industry. Without these relationships our ability to remain competitive is at risk. Now is the time for the industry to join together and proactively influence legislation that directly impacts the Washington wheat producer.

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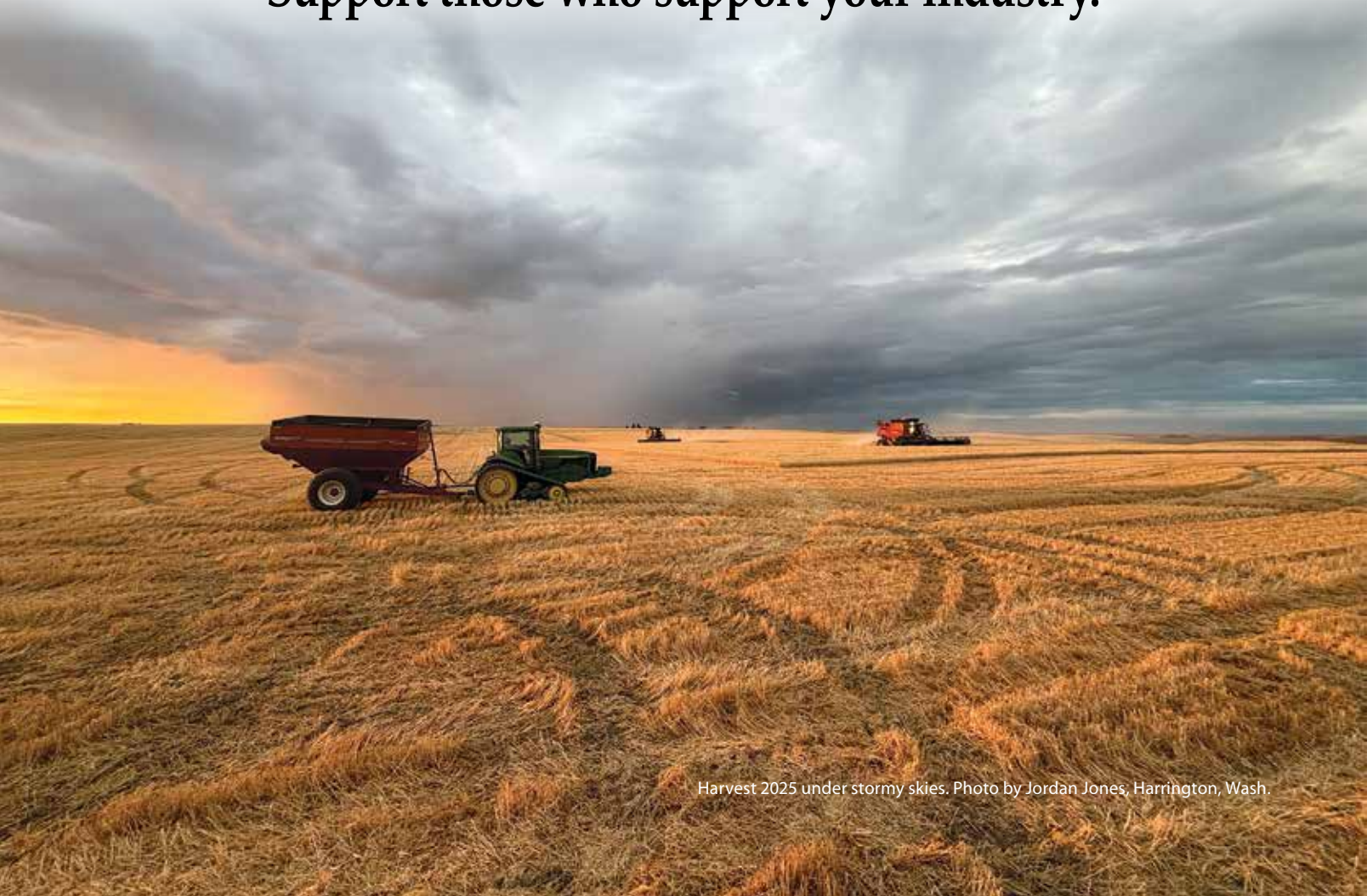
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