

WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

JANUARY | 2026

A LOOK AHEAD

What's on tap for state House, Senate
ag committees in 2026 session?

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

A decade of Ecology's Ag and Water Quality
Advisory Committee

Spotlight on 2026 AMMO schedule

WGC 2024/25 Annual Report

Waterville mural gets major facelift

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Washington Association of Wheat Growers

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WHEAT GROWERS**

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President's Perspective



Showing up matters the most

By Gil Crosby

President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

If you've ever wondered what happens when a farmer tries to navigate the maze of state and federal politics, you are in the right place. Working in Olympia and Washington, D.C., has taught me that the distance between a farm and lawmakers is far greater than the miles on a map. I have watched how decisions about agriculture are influenced, debated, and sometimes misunderstood.

The first time I attended the Washington Association of Wheat Growers' (WAWG) Olympia Days, I was a bit nervous, but those nerves quickly subsided after our planning dinner the night we arrived. I don't remember who initially told me, but I have been told several times since then: just tell your story as it pertains to the topic at hand. I have always tried to relate my personal experiences in some way to find common ground with legislators, or at least they are hearing about experiences of a farmer in rural Washington state. Attending Olympia Days has really set me up for success in D.C. as well and has always been a great experience. You find out quickly that some legislators have never been across the mountains and have no idea what it is like to live in rural America, where your closest neighbors are miles away, not just on the other side of a backyard.

D.C. can be very intimidating at first, but like anything, the more you do something, the more comfortable it gets. I have been inside most of the Washington state delegation's offices, and each one is different, but at the same time, similar. One thing common to all of those offices is that if growers don't speak up, someone else will speak for them. For the most part, every politician is keen to hear our story and perspective as farmers and how policies impact our farms. I've had many great opportunities to go to D.C. with other groups from all over the U.S. One group that stands out is the Modern Ag Alliance, which provided opportunities to visit with lawmakers from other states like North Carolina, Maine, Montana, and Idaho. This diverse group of different ag sectors, such as cotton, beets, wheat, barley, and soybeans, talked about MAHA (Make America Healthy Again) concerns and the effects it would have on farmers, such as the removal of glyphosate from our operations and the creation of a pesticide label standard across every state. It was a great opportunity to hear from other states and to be able to share Washington state's ag story. I have also had opportunities to attend D.C. with Washington State University (WSU) and talk about research funding and how important it is for both WSU and our state's ag industry. We highlight the importance of research to our farmers and how our close partnership determines what is essential for our success. There is always the added bonus of getting to see the nation's capital from the inside out and to attend some great events, for instance, the "Taste of Washington" that was in the historic Kennedy Caucus room and was attended by most Washington state legislators and their staff. A truly proud moment for everyone.

At the end of the day, whether I am walking across the Capitol Mall in D.C. or climbing the steps in Olympia, my hope is that more people from rural communities, farmers, ranchers, business owners, and young leaders find their way into these conversations. I've learned that policy moves fastest when no one is watching. Agriculture can't afford to sit on the sidelines, or our farms, our livelihood, and our future will be in jeopardy. The next chapter belongs to all of us, and I intend to keep showing up. I hope you will, too. ■

Cover photo: A typical sight in January and February across Eastern Washington: Snow-covered fields along Highway 195. Photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

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ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25



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Non-Voting Membership						
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Industry Associate \$250	X	X	X			

WAWG's current top priorities are:

- ✓ Preserving the lower Snake River dams.
- ✓ Fighting mandatory climate/carbon regulations.
- ✓ Lobbying the state Legislature for a seasonal overtime exemption.

- ✓ Maintaining a strong, reliable safety net by preserving crop insurance and making sure farm commodity programs work.
- ✓ Maintaining a safe, sound transportation system that includes rail, river and roads.

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Strategic planning focuses on state, federal

As we enter 2026, I am reminded of how quickly time seems to pass. The past six months have been especially eventful for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG). Since my previous column, our organization has remained actively engaged in a wide range of initiatives and advocacy efforts. Our commitment to supporting wheat growers across the state has kept us busy, and we continue to work diligently to address both ongoing and emerging challenges within our industry.

We recently held our annual convention at the Coeur d'Alene Resort in November where we renewed our strategic plan. A strategic plan is essential for WAWG because it provides a clear roadmap for achieving the organization's long-term goals. By outlining priorities and setting measurable objectives, the plan helps ensure our resources are used efficiently and our efforts are aligned with the interests of wheat growers across the state.

The plan this year focused on state and national political influence. With the current legislative atmosphere in our state, including a budget shortfall, and the lack of understanding about how growers are being impacted by regulations and increased taxes, we focused on top state strategic priorities that included:

- Maintaining our tax exemptions by explaining to decision-makers that farmers are price takers, not price setters, and emphasizing the importance of agriculture to rural America.
- Advancing the idea of "doing no harm" on agriculture by establishing new legislative and executive relationships. We want to become a reliable source of information for legislators and committees.
- Passing a seasonal exemption for ag overtime. Implementation of the ag overtime law has led to workers getting less hours and pay. Crops have been left in the field because of the overtime restrictions, which threatens the security of our food systems.
- Adopting a complete and permanent Climate Commitment Act exemption on transportation fuel (including propane and lubricants) for agriculture products. This was always the intent of the original



Michelle Hennings,
Executive Director
*Washington Association
of Wheat Growers*

legislation. Fuel is often one of the most expensive inputs a farmer has.

Action items to help accomplish these objectives were to have freshman legislator days; mobilize our WAWG members to advocate and monitor current legislative session issues; target legislative visits on key issues and be more visible in Olympia; engage legislators and the speaker of the House on food literacy with a developed tool that shows the impact of healthy agriculture operations on food security and distribution; and arrange wheat grower participation in legislator townhalls.

On the national side of the strategic plan, priorities included:

- Passing a farm bill that considers Washington state impacts as defined by WAWG policies.
- Ongoing public education on how the Make America Healthy Again agenda negatively impacts agriculture, such as flour being classified as "ultra-processed" and the critical role of pesticides and herbicides in a successful farming operation.
- Lowering farm expenses. Profitable farms mean prosperous farming communities and helps increase interest in farming in the next generation.
- Passing congressional protection of the lower Snake River dams that uses science-based research to invest in technology that helps protect fish and continues to increase their numbers.

Action items on the national priorities include conducting successful fly-ins for hill visits on high priority political influence issues; engage with national partners and the National Association of Wheat Growers regarding backing national legislation; develop support letters and talking points that are distributed to key decision-makers; and continue to build and participate in national coalitions.

These are only the top state and national priorities that we identified; there are many more that were mentioned by our officers and board.

As noted above, coalition building remains a central part of our strategy. I've discussed in previous articles how a united voice is more effective than a single one. We have worked diligently to strengthen our presence by

participating in national fly-ins alongside other agricultural groups such as corn, soy, cotton, peanuts, and farm credit organizations. Additionally, we have remained active in trade coalitions to advocate for increased funding for the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development program. A notable recent initiative is our developing partnership with the Upper Mississippi Waterway Association. This collaboration is intended to create a unified voice regarding our working river systems and infrastructure and supporting the long-term interests of wheat growers and the agricultural community.

It's clear we have big tasks to complete in the next couple of years, and our ability to advance as an organization hinges on active participation from our members and county associations. The Washington State Department of Ecology continues to push wholesale riparian buffers and other best management practices that are unreasonable and fail to take into account conditions on the ground. Our state is studying how to mitigate the effects of dam breaching without including entire sectors that would be impacted. Taxes and high input costs continue eating away at our ability to make a living as farmers, while our transportation infrastructure falls further behind in maintenance and improvements.

Our advocacy must remain strong and unified, especially as we navigate updates to the farm bill and respond to ongoing lower Snake River dam litigation. Every member's voice matters in shaping our policies and direction, and it's crucial we don't allow complacency to set in. Reflecting on WAWG's evolution over the past two decades, I'm proud of the progress we've made, but recognize there is always room for improvement, a goal that can only be achieved through continued collaboration and dedicated input from our members.

Farming has been challenging the last few years with low prices and ever-increasing input costs, and the way we can help you have a voice in these issues is through our membership dollars. Some of you may have noticed a "membership" wrap on your front cover. If you did, this means you are not currently a member of WAWG. *Wheat Life* is distributed to everybody who pays the assessment on wheat, regardless of whether or not they are a WAWG member. It has always been a struggle to get farmers to understand that WAWG membership dues are paid separately from their assessment and *Wheat Life* subscription. If you are already a WAWG member, you won't see our membership wrap, and we thank you for your support and commitment to funding our organization to continue our efforts to defend "our right to farm!" ■



WAWG comments on Ecology BMPs for ag

In late November, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers joined a coalition of ag industry organizations from across the state to submit comments on the Washington State Department of Ecology's (Ecology) voluntary best management practices (BMPs) that are part of the department's Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture.

The coalition identified two key concerns with Ecology's guidance:

- The BMPs do not appear to be truly voluntary, but carry the weight of mandatory practices with a regulatory backstop of enforceable violations on agricultural lands if not fully implemented.
- A heavy reliance on large buffers as being best science, a fact consistently disputed and challenged by sound science.

Agriculture believes that the buffers called for in the guidance are extremely expensive to implement, take too much farmland out of production, have questionable legality, and cannot achieve desired goals because they do not match with currently successful programs now funded by federal, state, and local agencies.

"We ask that any buffer discussion be constrained by these realities," the comments say.

The coalition asked that Ecology's guidance include strong references to voluntary programs already working in the state, specifically the Voluntary Stewardship Program (VSP).

"This program is active in 28 counties and is making great strides to protect the environment while maintaining the viability of agriculture. VSP has demonstrated time and again that agencies cooperating with landowners can achieve great results, results that not only protect the environment but ensure that producers can continue to

farm and help ensure our food security. We would like to see a stronger reference to the VSP program and on-the-ground benefits of a truly voluntary program within the submission to EPA," the comments state.

Ecology was collecting comments as part of the process of developing its Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture, which is part of its plan to address nonpoint sources of pollution. The department had planned a response to comments and to submit the plan update to the Environmental Protection Agency by the end of 2025.

More information about Ecology's nonpoint pollution plan and its voluntary guidance for agriculture are at ecology.wa.gov/regulations-permits/plans-policies/plan-to-control-nonpoint-sources-of-pollution#update ■

Whitman County growers elect new county president

Whitman County growers met in December to elect a new county president and to discuss other county business.

Growers nominated and approved Kelli Weber as their new president, replacing Dave Swanneck. Randy Suess will remain as vice president and Tom Kammerzell as secretary/treasurer. The county won several auction items at November's annual convention, and growers decided to give a Chipman and Taylor gift certificate to Dave Harlow and hockey game tickets to Jaimie Appel.

The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) was on growers' minds. They discussed the department's plan to control nonpoint source pollution through its Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture. Leslie Druffel told the group about a situation where a Whitman County grower had applied for a permit to remove sediment in Spring Flat Creek. Ecology had signed off on all the required paperwork, but when the grower began work, an Ecology employee told him to stop, saying he had no voluntary conservation plan. Letters and the plan were sent to the department, including to Ecology Director Casey Sixkiller. The confusion was blamed on miscommunication.

Druffel also talked about the lower Snake River dams. The stay of litigation has been lifted, and environmental

Members needed

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers is looking for members to join us in Olympia Jan. 18-20 to help us connect with state legislators. Call the WAWG office at (509) 659-0610 for more information.

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groups have submitted comments on why additional spill is needed. Dam stakeholders are preparing comments on the impacts increased spill will have on power generation and navigation. She expects both sides will be back in court in early 2026 for oral arguments. The Washington State Department of Transportation is working on a cost model to predict the effects on transportation if the dams were breached. Druffel raised concerns about the accuracy of the model.

Andrea Cox, conservation coordinator for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), told growers that Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) employees are back in the office and working to get payments out. NRCS is revamping the Conservation Stewardship Program, but no details have been released. WAWG is gearing up for the annual Olympia Days trip, and Cox urged growers to participate.

Ben Barstow, Washington Grain Commission (WGC) commissioner, said the national wheat industry fall meeting in Austin, Texas, went very well. Some of the topics that were discussed included wheat research, fertilizer supply and demand, and trade. The U.S. uses less than 10% of the world's fertilizer (China uses about 24%), and Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia produce most of the world's fertilizer. In trade news, overseas millers are worried about the potential for fees being applied to Chinese vessels in port, and the industry is closely watching the discussion around the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement.

WGC staff has recently been in South America for crop quality seminars, and Barstow said he thought the region has the potential to become a large market for the Pacific Northwest. ■

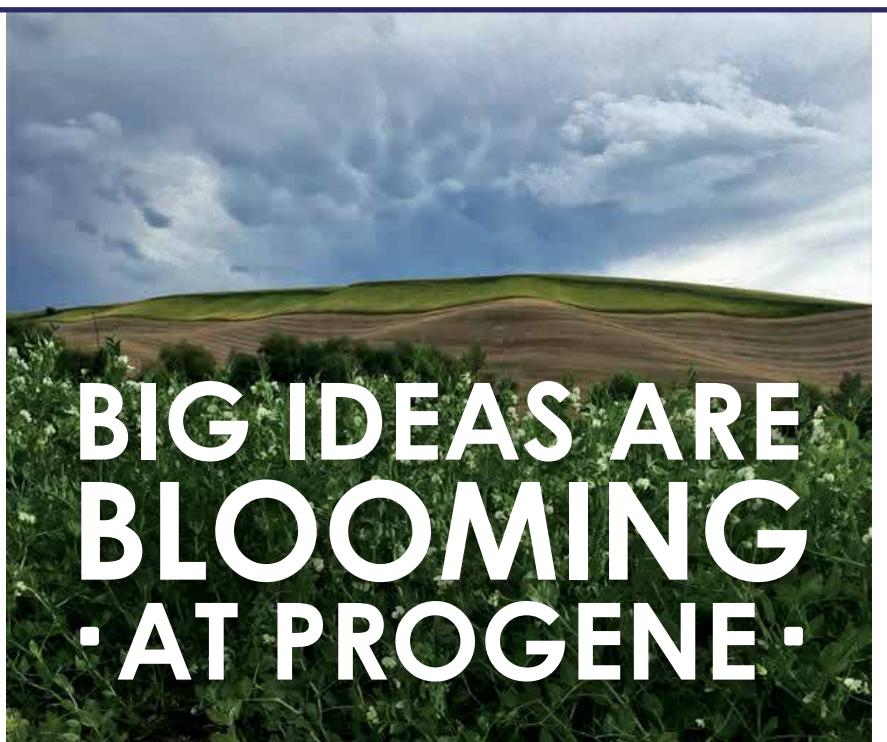
NAWG dives into FBA details for wheat

From the National Association of Wheat Growers

The one-time, \$12 billion Farmer Bridge Assistance (FBA) program is intended to help producers through market disruptions and elevated input costs until the One Big Beautiful Bill Act goes into effect next fall. Row crops will receive \$11 billion, and specialty crops will receive \$1 billion. After U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) rulemaking and software development, the goal is to disburse payments by Feb. 28, 2026.

Payment limits include:

- FBA payments will be limited to a maximum of \$155k for each person/partner/legal entity (in line with the One Big Beautiful Bill Act).
- The farm bill's \$900k AGI payment eligibility test will be in effect.
- FBA will not use a 75% farm income test. ▶



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Basis for commodity payment rates will be based on:

- Reported planted acres. Planted acres for 2025 must have been reported to the county Farm Service Agency office on Form 578 no later than Dec. 19.
- USDA's Economic Research Service projected production cost data.
- WASDE price projections to model economic losses.

USDA planned to announce payment rates by commodity after the Dec. 19 acreage reporting deadline but before the end of the year:

- Payment rates won't be a flat rate across commodities. Different payment rates will be calculated for each eligible crop based on the \$11 billion funding cap.
- USDA intends to issue a single payment to eligible producers, not a factored payment.

Additional details:

- Wheat acres planted in fall 2024 and harvested in 2025 will be eligible.
- Double-crop acres will be eligible.
- Payments will be considered taxable income for recipients.

- Crop insurance indemnities will not be considered for calculating payments.
- Prevent plant acres are not eligible. ■

USDA announces batching deadline for NRCS programs

In December, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) announced the establishment of a national Jan. 15, 2026, batching deadline for the first funding round of key conservation programs. This national batching date ensures producers have a clear, consistent timeline for participating in Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP), Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP), and the Agricultural Conservation Easement Program. This includes the new NRCS Regenerative Pilot Program, which provides targeted assistance through EQIP and CSP.

NRCS programs are continuous sign-up programs, but due to the government shutdown, the agency is implementing an initial national batching period to ensure producers have access to funding and support. ■



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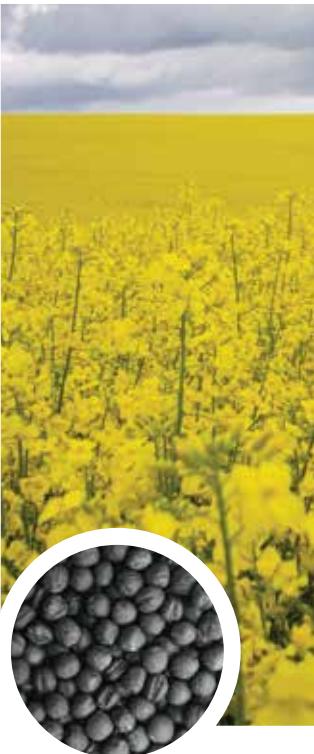
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POLICY MATTERS

Budget shortfall hangs over 2026 session

By Diana Carlen

Lobbyist, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

On Jan. 12, 2026, the Washington State Legislature will be back for a 60-day session. It is the second year of the legislative biennium, and a “short” legislative session. During a short session, lawmakers generally focus on making adjustments to the biennial budgets adopted the previous April. Short sessions are fast-paced, and lawmakers consider not only new bills introduced for the 2026 session, but all bills from the previous session are still technically alive.

Politically, the makeup of the Legislature is unchanged from last year, with Democrats having large majorities — 60% in each chamber.

Once again, the state is facing a budget shortfall over the next four years of between \$2 billion and \$5 billion that’s poised to dominate the 2026 session. Last session, Democratic lawmakers pushed through over \$9 billion in new and increased taxes, along with spending cuts, to bridge a projected gap around \$16 billion over four years.

To kick off the budget development process this session, Gov. Bob Ferguson will release his budget plan before Christmas (not available at time of printing), with his proposed tweaks to the two-year, \$77.8 billion framework lawmakers passed last April. This current budget runs through June 30, 2027. As he prepared to release his budget proposal, Gov. Ferguson has stated that his proposed budget will rely solely on budget cuts, not new taxes. He also stated that he would veto any new property or sales tax increases that reach his desk. However, he has been silent about his position on other tax proposals that are under consideration by Democrats. Some of the other revenue ideas floating around are a payroll tax on employers for highly compensated employees, a wealth tax, and an income tax on individuals making over \$1 million annually.

Legislators returned to Olympia in early December for Committee Assembly Days, an annual chance for lawmakers to gather ahead of the 2026 session and set the agenda for the months ahead. Over two days, legislators met in their committees and caucuses to review emerging issues, preview major policy debates, and shape priorities for the short 60-day session. Emerging policy themes for the upcoming session centered around recent federal



activity, including potential Medicaid coverage options for Washingtonians who may lose eligibility, along with policies addressing food security, housing insecurity, and immigration.

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) will be actively engaged in discussions regarding the role of agriculture in producing food and distributing food through the supply chain. The House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee chair, Rep. Kristine Reeves (D-Federal Way), is working on a state farm bill focused on shoring up the farm system and the agriculture industry in recognition that having a viable agricultural industry is critical to food security. WAWG has joined other agricultural groups in sharing their priorities for a state farm bill including:

- Do no harm and enhance food security. Refrain from adopting new taxes or regulations that increase costs for Washington agriculture and become an additional barrier to food security.
- Agricultural labor — flexibility from overtime to protect Washington’s food supply. Adopt reasonable,

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seasonal flexibility or mitigation measures to ensure crops can be harvested on time and allow farmworkers to earn additional income.

- Permanent exemption for special agricultural fuels from the Climate Commitment Act (CCA). Exempt all special agricultural fuels, including propane, from the CCA, regardless of on-road or off-road use, to maintain reliable and affordable energy for food production.
- Exclude lubricants from the Climate Commitment Act. Exclude lubricants from the CCA to reduce agriculture's operating costs and maintain competitive food production.
- Strengthen Washington's local food supply chain. Invest in local food distribution infrastructure to strengthen Washington's regional food system and food bank network.
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- Washington agriculture competitiveness and rural trade strategy. Advance a trade strategy that reduces costs, expands export capacity, and strengthens Washington's agricultural competitiveness.

For more on the Washington State Senate and House ag committee priorities, see page 24.

WAWG will be hosting their annual Olympia Days Jan. 18-20. We encourage our members to come experience Olympia days and meet with elected officials so that they can learn more about our industry from the people who grow the food that feeds the world. For more information, contact the WAWG office at (509) 659-0610. ■

State bill aims to make lubricants more affordable

Washington State Sen. Mark Schoesler (R-Ritzville) has filed legislation that aims to make lubricants for vehicles and other machinery more affordable.

Senate Bill 5856 would exempt emissions associated with lubricants from coverage under the state's "cap-and-tax" policy, formally known as the Climate Commitment Act enacted in 2021.



Schoesler said his bill would have Washington join California and Oregon in exempting lubricants, including motor oil, hydraulic fluid, transmission fluid and grease, from surcharges created by each state's carbon-pricing system.

"California and Oregon don't impose a carbon-pricing surcharge on vehicle and machinery lubricants but Washington does," said Schoesler, a member of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee. "Removing this surcharge wouldn't only help our state's agricultural industry, which can't pass along these extra costs, it also would improve affordability for Washington drivers whether they have conventional, hybrid, or electric vehicles. Changing the oil and other fluids is part of routine maintenance, and the hidden carbon taxes add up."

Schoesler said SB 5856 would not harm the state's general fund, considering how much the state is collecting by auctioning carbon credits.

The 2026 Legislative Session begins Jan. 12 and is scheduled to last 60 days.

Schoesler represents the 9th Legislative District, which covers all or part of Adams, Asotin, Columbia, Garfield, Lincoln, Spokane, and Whitman counties. ■

Newhouse won't seek re-election

In December, Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.) announced he will not run for re-election in 2026.



"After over 25 years of public service, including more than a decade in the House, I am grateful to the Washingtonians who put their faith in me, as well as the colleagues I have served with on both sides of the aisle," he said in a press release. "I thank my family for their steadfast love and support, which allowed me this opportunity to serve. I am truly humbled by this uniquely American journey that took a farm boy from Sunnyside, Wash., clear across the country to represent his friends and neighbors in the 'other' Washington. I will continue to serve my district with energy and enthusiasm until the end of my term." ■

How are we doing?

Let us know by emailing your comments and suggestions to editor@wawg.org or mail them to 109 East First Avenue, Ritzville, Wash., 99169-2394. Submissions may be edited for length. ■



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The quiet, invisible season that helps winter wheat grow

In Washington's wheat country, vernalization isn't just a technical term from a plant physiology textbook; it's the quiet, invisible season that determines whether a fall-seeded field will ever turn gold. Vernalization is essentially a cold-triggered developmental switch. For winter wheat, the plant begins life unable to flower. It must first live through several weeks of cool temperatures (generally 32–50°F or 0–10°C) before its internal flowering genes turn on.

After this cold exposure, the plant is "vernalized," meaning it now has the ability to form a head and eventually produce seed. A lot of familiar crops besides wheat also rely on vernalization to do their thing. Many winter cereals — like barley, rye, and triticale — need a good stretch of cold weather before they can even think about making seed. Quite a few vegetables, especially the biennial ones such as carrots, onions, sugar beets, and the cabbage family, also need that winter chill to shift into flowering and seed production. Bulb plants, like tulips and daffodils, won't bloom without a solid cold spell. And even though we don't usually call it vernalization in fruit trees, apples, cherries, peaches, and almonds all have their own "chill hour" requirements that work the same way.

When winter wheat is seeded in late summer and early fall, growers in Eastern Washington are counting on one crucial promise: that the coming months will provide enough steady cold for the plants to complete their vernalization period and be ready to head out in spring.

Most Washington winter wheat varieties need around eight weeks of cool temperatures to fully vernalize. By midwinter, that requirement is usually met. They don't rush to head because another safeguard — photoperiod sensitivity — holds them back until the days grow longer.



This balance is critical in a landscape where a false spring can arrive in January, only to be slammed by Arctic air in February.

Looking across the northern tier of the U.S., you can see how the same biological process is tuned differently for harsher or slightly milder climates. In North Dakota, winter comes earlier, stays longer, and cuts deeper. The

concern isn't just "will it get cold enough," but whether the wheat will survive months of subzero temperatures with minimal snow cover. Vernalization and winter hardiness are almost fused concepts: a variety that vernalizes well but can't withstand the cold is useless.

In Minnesota and South Dakota, Extension specialists focus heavily on timing and emergence. Late-planted wheat that doesn't emerge until very late fall may technically experience cold, but not for long enough in the right temperature band to fully vernalize. The result can be delayed heading and yield loss. Vernalization isn't just about low temperatures, it's about the interaction of genetics, seeding date, and the actual pattern of the season.

What makes Washington distinct is how variable its environments are. A winter wheat grown near the Columbia River, in a relatively mild region, faces a very different winter than one on the high, windswept plateaus in Lincoln, Douglas, and Grant counties. Washington State University's breeding program selects varieties that match these microregions: stronger vernalization and winter-hardiness for the coldest zones, more flexible types where winters are shorter and the risk of late spring frost is lower. For growers and breeders in Washington, paying attention to those parallels helps refine strategies at home, ensuring that when the hills finally flush green in spring, the crop is not just alive, but perfectly timed. ■

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Finding common ground

AG AND WATER QUALITY COMMITTEE BRINGS DIVERSE GROUPS, ECOLOGY TO THE TABLE

By Trista Crossley

Editor, Wheat Life

In an attempt to clear the air over agriculture and water quality, the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) convened the first meeting of the Ag and Water Quality Advisory Committee in March 2014 under then-director Maia Bellon. More than 10 years and three directors later, the committee is still going strong.

From the beginning, wheat growers were strong participants in the group. Nicole Berg, a grower from Benton County and a past president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), said the idea for the committee may have gotten planted during a conversation between herself and Bellon at a time when growers were particularly frustrated with Ecology's methods.

"Director Bellon and I were in the back of a car on a tour, and she was asking how to get agriculture to have a conversation," Berg said. "I basically told her she needed to set the table with growers in the room, because when growers get in the room, they will help problem solve. That's exactly what she did. She created the ag and water quality group with the idea of having a statewide conversation with regards to ag and water quality that's solution oriented and not just farmers and Ecology battling each other."

Larry Cochran, a wheat grower from Whitman County and another past president of WAWG, has been involved in the committee from the beginning. He remembered being optimistic that if growers could hear what Ecology's concerns and plans were, agriculture could understand



In 2015, the Ag and Water Quality Advisory Committee, led by Ecology's then-director, Maia Bellon (standing), met in Sprague, Wash.

where the department was coming from and provide feedback.

"I didn't know whether it would make a difference or not, but like everything else, if we didn't try, we knew we wouldn't make a difference," he said.

Heather Bartlett, Ecology's deputy director, has also been involved in the group from the beginning. In 2014, she was leading Ecology's water quality program and recalled that period as a "very tense time," especially between the department and the livestock industry. Just a year earlier, the state Supreme Court had ruled in favor of Ecology in the Joe Lemire case, saying Ecology was not required to rule out other sources of pollution in a nearby creek; they only had to prove that the conditions in the creek were consistent with cattle having unrestricted access to it.

"Director Bellon really wanted to forge relationships that would give us the opportunity to find common ground, where we could learn from the ag industry, and we would no longer be kind of nameless, faceless, regulatory bureaucrats. We'd be people seeking to find solutions that worked in our watersheds, for agriculture and for clean water," Bartlett said.

The stated aim of the group was to provide an open forum for dialogue ensuring both water quality protection and a healthy agricultural industry. Bartlett believes the group has achieved that goal, finding solutions that work for the department to achieve water quality that have not come at the expense of agriculture, such as how the department identified a potential problem, how the department contacted landowners, and how they've communicated with landowners. Bartlett said the group was critical of the way Ecology had been contacting landowners and gave suggestions that were later incorporated into the department's communications.

"We had spent a lot of time in technical assistance, trying to share information with the landowner, but what was happening early on is the way in which we were saying things or the way in which we were approaching it immediately put a landowner on the defense," she explained. "That's not a good a posture for



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coming up with solutions or talking through options. The committee really shaped how we wrote our letters. They informed how we went about our work."

The committee also shaped how Ecology approaches nonpoint pollution work. They recommended that when an issue was identified, the department needed to be more consistent in how and when they approach a landowner. They also recommended focusing on one watershed at a time, rather than multiple watersheds all at once.

Another success the committee has had a hand in that Bartlett pointed to were commodity buffers and working with conservation districts to put in riparian buffers that protect water quality and help offset crop loss.

Since the Lemire case put a spotlight on "substantial potential to pollute," defining what that actually means has been an ongoing issue the group has tried to address.

"The potential to pollute that's in the RCW is one of the things that we've always battled," Berg noted. The RCW, or the Revised Code of Washington, is the official, organized collection of all permanent laws currently in force in the state. "What's the definition of 'potential?' I think we've kept that at bay, because we can communicate what is actually happening on the farm and that we don't run out and try to farm with a potential to pollute."

The latest director of Ecology, Casey Sixkiller, was appointed by Gov. Bob Ferguson in 2025. While the committee has met less frequently in later years, Sixkiller has expressed interest in continuing the committee and possibly expanding its focus, which has raised some concerns among ag stakeholders. Bartlett said that expanded focus might include talking about greenhouse gas emissions and dairy

digesters as well as adjudication issues.

"I think we're in that transition place of how to hold that water quality priority while also providing a forum in which we can have these open conversations about other places that Ecology has a nexus with agriculture," she said. "I think that's the balance that we're trying to find right now, because it is important while also creating some space in a regular forum that meets with Director Sixkiller to talk about other things that might have an Ecology component."

Neither Berg nor Cochran are opposed to expanding the committee's focus, reasoning that the more ag is involved in Ecology's work, the better.

"Water rights are becoming a big issue in this state. Water adjudication is something they (Ecology) want to look at," Cochran said. "There's a lot of things out there that we probably need to understand. Whatcom County is doing their water adjudication, and, basically, the water is already overallocated. That's going to be coming more and more around the state. If I can help Ecology figure out how to save water, and we can work together, that's a good thing."

Berg feels it is important that the group meets at least quarterly (in 2025, the group only met once) and works on creating measurable goals with follow through.

"It's important that we keep that voice of agriculture speaking to the regulatory authorities, especially in the state of Washington," she added.

The committee has also been influential in helping Ecology develop its voluntary clean water guidance. Bartlett said the members stressed the importance of including researchers, applied researchers, and conservation districts in the work. Especially important to the committee was forming a workgroup that looked at the actual implementation of the best management practices (BMPs) that the department would be recommending.

"We did that. I think that has been really important for the utility," she said. "We didn't want to develop something that sat on a shelf and was never useful to conservation districts and landowners. We wanted something that was practical, that people could feel had been proofed out, so to speak. Not just proofed out in research, but proofed out on the ground. This committee was instrumental in that." ■



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A LOOK AHEAD

WHAT'S ON TAP FOR STATE HOUSE, SENATE AG COMMITTEES IN 2026 SESSION?

As the 2026 Washington State Legislative Session gets underway on Jan. 12, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers is preparing for a short, intense session that is likely to bring some challenges.

While wheat growers will be formalizing state and national priorities for the year at the Jan. 13 state board meeting in Ritzville, Wash., that list will likely include a seasonal exemption for overtime, protecting agriculture's tax exemptions, and making the Climate

Commitment Act exemption for ag fuels permanent. Like last year, the state is facing another budget shortfall, which could impact programs that farmers rely on, increase taxes, and decrease funding for voluntary conservation efforts. See WAWG Lobbyist Diana Carlen's legislative preview on page 14 for a rundown of what growers might expect.

Wheat Life sent a list of questions to the leaders of the House and Senate ag committees to see what their priorities are for the 2026 session, what budget concerns they have, and how they plan to address ag viability in Washington state. Legislators' answers are presented on the following pages. Answers are edited slightly for clarity and length. ■



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Sen. Mike Chapman, District 24

Chair of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Editor's note: This transcript of an interview with Sen. Chapman has been edited for clarity and length.

What are your priorities for the 2026 Legislative Session?

I try to run the committee in a collaborative format, so my priorities will be what the committee's priorities are. I'll certainly see what Sen. Short, her team, and the Republican side's priorities are. Then I'll see what the Democrats' priorities are. I'll certainly take a lot of input from my ranking member, Sen. Short. I think it's a committee that works better if it's a bipartisan effort.

We've started looking at how the Department of Fish and Wildlife is governed and making sure that everybody across the state feels comfortable about how it is operating. Another priority will be food and food insecurity, and what can we do to help the farming community grow the crops we need to feed the world.

What budget concerns are at the top of your committee list?

Thankfully, my committee doesn't deal with a lot of budget issues. Looking at the overall state budget, I don't want to see an inordinate amount of budget cuts, if they come down, impact the Department of Agriculture, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, DNR (the Department of Natural Resources), those natural resource-based committees. Everybody will probably take some sort of haircut, though. But we need the Department of Ag to do the work that they do so that our farmers are still supported.

How worried should growers be about losing WSDA funding and cuts to the programs they rely on?

Some of that starts at the federal level and then kind of trickles down through the state. Let's be honest, I don't think farmers ever lack for things to be concerned about. They're in a tough business. I'd like to just raise the awareness of the tough business that farmers find themselves in, whether it's federal cuts to certain programs or spending cuts, but also just the rising costs of inputs and the fact that they are price takers, not price makers.

I'd like to be known as a committee where we'll hear



concerns from the farming community. We may not always be able to fix them, but at least they feel like they've got a place where they can air their concerns and get a fair hearing.

There's been a lot of talk this year about ag viability. A recent report from WSDA estimates that Washington loses an average of two farms a day, with more than 3,700 Washington farms lost between 2017 and 2022. In September, the House did a work session on ag viability that emphasized the need for proactive and strategic approaches to ensure the sustainability of agriculture in the state, and in an August legislative tour in the Skagit Valley, legislators heard firsthand the economic and regulatory struggles growers in the state are facing. What can the Legislature do to help lessen the burdens farmers are facing?

That statistic is depressing.

I think the Legislature should be aware that as we lose small family farms, we also lose small family businesses, small grocery stores, neighborhoods, laundromats, neighborhood bookstores. All of that impacts the way of life in rural Washington, impacts our economy, and impacts the state's tax collection. If farmers aren't growing crops, they aren't buying supplies or paying sales taxes.

We need to continue to look at the policies writ large that impact our small businesses, such as taxation and costs of doing business. I would hope that my committee would raise those issues.

There's also been much discussion about food security and food distribution issues. Do you anticipate your committee will be addressing these issues? How could growers help solve the problems?

That seems to come up every year. Growers can help solve those problems by growing their crop.

I think farmers, traditionally, have been pretty giving when they have excess crop. A farmer wants to make a

living, but I know they also want to keep the costs down so that other people have access to food. I think listening to the farmers as to what is driving up the costs would be a good start. Everybody deserves a good meal and affordable food, so I think Washington farmers do a great job of providing that.

We've been hearing concerns that the environmental crimes bill from the 2025 session may resurface, and many of our growers are worried that agriculture may be unintentionally impacted. How do you see that playing out in the 2026 session?

I think the attorney general needs to raise the issues, the concerns they have, but with any legislation, there's always a good heart behind it. I would encourage anyone that if there are specific concerns with any legislation, always bring those concerns forward to their legislators, but also, what are the solutions? We need to have more of a dialogue across party aisles and across the state, from the ag community, from the timber community that I represent with those who may come from a more urban area. My urban legislators have big hearts, and they want to help people across the state. When we have a better dialogue, we're going to get a better outcome.

Sometimes, I think titles can drive people into corners. I understand, maybe a farmer's not going to like the title of an environmental crimes bill, but did you read it, because when you read it, it's like, "oh, we're already doing that." "Oh, that's already federal law." I would encourage farmers to come to the table. If you have concerns, raise them, and let's see if we can't find solutions. I find that most of my colleagues want good legislation, and they want legislation that's going to be positive across the state; I would say that about all of my colleagues, whether they are Republican or Democrat. They want to work on legislation that they can see is going to be a benefit to the state.

Wheat growers recently joined other commodities in sending a letter to Gov. Ferguson disputing the direction of the Riparian Taskforce put forward by the firm overseeing the process. We stand firm that voluntary efforts, rather than mandatory requirements, are the best way to achieve conservation goals. With the current budget situation, how can the state continue to fund voluntary efforts so we don't lose the progress we've made? Is there a potential that funding could increase to meet demand?

This is an issue I've worked on for a number of years. We funded voluntary programs at a higher level than ever

before in last year's budget. I don't want to see that money taken away in the supplemental budget, and I don't think it will be.

I think the voluntary approach has been and continues to be an approach that works for the farming community, but also works for those that are concerned about water habitat, fish habitat. I represent six federally recognized tribes. Generally, they've been pretty supportive of working with farmers to get projects on the ground that do the most good. I also think that when you have a voluntary approach, it gives various state agencies, local tribes, local landowners the ability to identify and say, "This is the best use. This is going to do the most good. This is definitely worth investing \$2 to \$3 million here."

If you go the regulatory route, then it's just left up to the state with very little public input or local input. We've seen that with some of the fish barrier projects. There's a hotel in Port Angeles that we would have to tear down to remove the fish barrier.

You know what never comes out of a voluntary approach? Lots of lengthy, costly lawsuits. That's something that, from a legislator's standpoint, is not a good use of taxpayer dollars — to pass legislation that you know is going to end up in the courts. It costs a lot of money.

I appreciated the letter, and I think I've worked tirelessly to take the voluntary approach. I have also been in a position on the capital budget to make sure that we put more money in for these voluntary projects. I've also seen them on the ground. They work. I don't know of any lawsuits that have occurred out of a voluntary approach.

Is there anything else you want Washington growers to know about your ag committee and the upcoming 2026 Washington State Legislative Session?

It's an honor to serve as the chair of the committee. I hope I always have an open door. Farmers are welcome to get on my calendar and come say hi if they are in Olympia. But also, please let me know when there are bills before the committee, if there's problems, let me know what they are. I hope wheat farmers consider me a friend, even though I represent timber country and shellfish and salmon fishing. I'm on the coast — not a lot of wheat farms out here, but I hope that they can count me and the committee as a friend.

Also, I really appreciate Sen. Short in her role as the ranking member. It's so vital that the chair and the ranking member have a good relationship, and I have the best relationship and the highest respect for Sen. Short. ■

Sen. Shelly Short, District 7

Ranking Member of the Senate Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

What are your priorities for the 2026 Legislative Session?

Agriculture in our state is at a critical juncture; its viability is a top priority this session. We've all watched the impacts on agricultural operations from burdensome and costly labor policies and incessant regulations. I want to focus on alleviating that burden. We see the loss and sale of so many farms in our state, which impacts the food security in our communities and our state. It wasn't that long ago that store shelves and food bank shelves were empty during the pandemic; it should be a wake-up call and serve as a reminder of the importance of agriculture today and for future generations.

I'm also working on some bills that would protect landowners from agency overreach. It is important that the state stay in its lane and quit overburdening landowners with regulations that cost the landowner productive use of their land. I appreciate the work that Sen. Muzzall is doing to push agencies to quantify the financial impacts of regulation on agricultural operations and to minimize the impact of the same. The framework is really based on long-standing federal and state laws with respect to small business impacts.

What budget concerns are at the top of your committee list? How worried should growers be about WSDA funding and cuts to programs they rely on?

Many of WSDA's programs are fee based and are not reliant upon general fund money. I am less concerned about those programs. One of my biggest priorities specific to Northeast Washington and now to Southeast Washington has been to ensure that the wolf conflict funding continues to be funded and expanded. It's a relatively small part of the budget, and it's a program that is critical for those that are at the center of wolf recovery, but it's success relies on funding for the wolf conflict specialist and the range riders.

There's been a lot of talk this year about ag viability. A recent report from WSDA estimates that Washington loses an average of two farms a day, with more than 3,700 Washington farms lost between 2017 and 2022. In September, the House



did a work session on ag viability that emphasized the need for proactive and strategic approaches to ensure the sustainability of agriculture in the state, and in an August legislative tour in the Skagit Valley, legislators heard firsthand the economic and regulatory struggles growers in the state are facing. What can the Legislature do to help lessen the burdens farmers are facing?

I share ag's concerns about the loss of farms and the need to ensure farming will continue. Labor and regulatory costs are at the top of the list of costs that producers discuss that are pushing them towards shutting down. I believe that relaxing the ag overtime requirements and backing off of over-reaching land-use restrictions, as well as permitting costs, would help producers be able to breathe. Ag producers need to be profitable to be sustainable, and the more that they have to spend in order to comply with the ever-changing agency rules, the less sustainable they can be.

There's also been much discussion about food security and food distribution issues. Do you anticipate your committee will be addressing these issues? How could growers help solve the problems?

I am hearing that food security is likely to be addressed in the incoming session. Fundamentally, food security and food distribution rely on a healthy grower climate and available markets and a robust supply chain. If growers and producers cannot afford to do business, then food availability suffers. The best thing we can do to promote food security is to lower labor costs, lower fuel costs, and reduce regulation on farmers and ranchers. The more time and money they have to spend to comply with government control, the less they can invest in providing food to the public. I would like to see growers make their voices heard in Olympia by interacting with legislators and participating in the process so that legislators who don't have ag in their districts can meet growers firsthand and better understand the importance of ag, the environmental commitment ag has and understand the unintended consequences of the policies that have been enacted by the Legislature. Equally important is for ag to speak with one voice and to develop partnerships beyond themselves.

We've been hearing concerns that the environmental crimes bill from the 2025 session may resurface, and many of our growers are worried that agriculture may be unintentionally impacted. How do you see that playing out in the 2026 session?

I completely concur and share your concern regarding unintentional impacts of the environmental crimes bill on agriculture. I believe the way it is currently written will increase the constriction on land and water use that is already hurting agriculture and will give Ecology and others tremendous authority beyond what they have. I will continue my conversations with Sen. Trudeau to see if there are opportunities to help her communities without creating significant regulatory burdens elsewhere in the state. Absent that, I will continue to push back against the bill and do everything I can to ensure it doesn't pass.

Wheat growers recently joined other commodities in sending a letter to Gov. Ferguson disputing the direction of the Riparian Taskforce put forward by the firm overseeing the process. We stand firm that voluntary efforts, rather than mandatory requirements, are the best way to achieve

conservation goals. With the current budget situation, how can the state continue to fund voluntary efforts so we don't lose the progress we've made? Is there a potential that funding could increase to meet demand?

I will continue to work with other legislators to fight for the continued level of funding. It is unlikely that funding will be increased, however, the benefits of voluntary efforts undertaken need to continue to be shared and kept front and center in the meantime. It is possible that money from NRCS could be utilized to supplement that funding.

Is there anything else you want Washington growers to know about your Ag Committee and the upcoming 2026 Washington State Legislative Session?

Be very vigilant and engaged with your associations and signing up to testify on bills. More importantly, continue efforts to build partnerships within and outside of ag, working together, speaking with one voice, for the benefit of the greater ag community. Ag is in a dire situation, and it's important that the Puget Sound lawmakers know that the grower community is important and has a voice. Continue to communicate with legislators about how serious this situation is. ■

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Rep. Kristine Reeves, District 30

Chair of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

What are your priorities for the 2026 Legislative Session?

While I am working on a variety of policy proposals, including textile recycling to take on the impacts of fast fashion on our waste streams, tobacco/vape regulation to protect our kids, natural resource policy that provides balance between the state's economic needs and our vision for environmental protections, and wildfire response policy that works to address liability for strong investments in protection, the top priority for me this session is combatting food insecurity through farm supports that protect agriculture efforts in our state, works at driving down the cost of groceries for working families, and shoring up the food bank system.

What budget concerns are at the top of your committee list? How worried should growers be about WSDA funding and cuts to programs they rely on?

I am most worried about the loss of 3,700 farms in the state over the last five years. I am concerned about the impacts of the loss of federal funding and programs growers have come to rely upon via the U.S. Department of Agriculture, as I do not believe the state or Washington taxpayers will have the capacity to back-fill these losses immediately, if at all, and given these are our federal tax dollars being withheld from our growers, I worry about the deepening of farm loss in our state. It is why I am introducing a state farm bill to draw attention to the needs of the farm community in meeting our state's food security needs in the short, medium, and long term.

There's been a lot of talk this year about ag viability. A recent report from WSDA estimates that Washington loses an average of two farms a day, with more than 3,700 Washington farms lost between 2017 and 2022. In September, the House did a work session on ag viability that emphasized the need for proactive and strategic approaches to ensure the sustainability of agriculture in the state, and in an August legislative tour in the Skagit Valley, legislators heard firsthand the economic and regulatory struggles growers in the state are facing. What can the Legislature do to



help lessen the burdens farmers are facing?

As the chair of the House Ag and Natural Resources committee, I am honored to be partnering with organizations like the Washington Farm Bureau, wheat growers, potato growers, shellfish growers, and others to understand what steps we can be taking as a state to support farmers and work toward preventing continued loss of farms in our state. We are working to elevate these struggles through the lens of promoting food security in our state. We can't feed Washingtonians without farmers. That is why we are introducing a state farm bill to draw attention to these issues. We are also introducing a farm-to-schools, farm-to-food banks, and statewide food security strategy bill this session.

There's also been much discussion about food security and food distribution issues. Do you anticipate your committee will be addressing these issues? How could growers help solve the problems?

Post-COVID, the increased need for food assistance has continued to rise. What this signals to me is an economy that isn't working for working families, isn't working for college kids, or seniors. Recently, with the government shutdown, we watched thousands of Washington military personnel have to rely on food assistance and food banks to feed their families.

With the rising cost of groceries, with the lack of affordability, and the loss of farms across our state, I am particularly concerned about food security for all Washingtonians. So, yes, as the chair of the committee tasked to address food production, food processing, food assistance, and food policy, our committee will be working on this.

Personally, as someone who grew up food insecure in a family that relied on "welfare," as someone who was homeless in my teens due to a drug-addicted mother, and now a mother of two kids watching the rising cost of groceries impacting the ability of my neighbors being able to feed our families, we need to address the affordability and access to food in our state.

We've been hearing concerns that the environmental crimes bill from the 2025 session

may resurface, and many of our growers are worried that agriculture may be unintentionally impacted. How do you see that playing out in the 2026 session?

In 2025, I worked hard to make sure that the agriculture community was included in the stakeholder conversations regarding this legislation. I am an ardent advocate that when we talk about equity and inclusion, it must be for everyone impacted by policy we make, not just people who think like me, vote like me, or look like me. As such, I will continue to look to the industry and the community to articulate not just the intent of the policy, but what does implementation and impact of the policy mean for them. As we work to address the impacts pushing farms out of business and threatening our state's food security, we must look at policies like the environmental crimes bill to find balance between protecting the environment and feeding our families, and I believe that farmers are on the front lines of managing that balance and should be some of the first group of folks we are talking to about how best to accomplish the regulatory protections we need in this space.

Wheat growers recently joined other commodities in sending a letter to Gov. Ferguson disputing the direction of the Riparian Taskforce put forward by the firm overseeing the process. We stand firm that voluntary efforts, rather than mandatory requirements, are the best way to achieve conservation goals. With the current budget situation, how can the state continue to fund voluntary efforts so we don't lose the progress we've made? Is there a potential that funding could increase to meet demand?

As I mentioned in the environmental crimes bill question, there needs to be a balance between protecting the planet and feeding the people on the planet. Losing sight of that balance is dangerous for the long-term health, wealth, and well-being of our state and the goals we are working to accomplish.

Is there anything else you want Washington growers to know about your Ag Committee and the upcoming 2026 Washington State Legislative Session?

I would just like to thank all the farmers who hosted me on ag tours this summer. I think I did eight tours in Eastern Washington and northwest Washington, did six natural resource tours, and the amount of time, energy, and investment folks are making to ensure that as a new chair, I am up to speed on the issues impacting you all has been so heartening.

As an Eastern Washington kid from Moses Lake, now

living in suburban Western Washington, I was a little nervous that our hyperpartisan politics would get in the way of our ability to come together to find common solutions to solve problems on behalf of our communities. But I am so humbled to find the agricultural community the same as I left it, when I went off to college at WAZZU, a group of committed and caring community members interested in feeding our families and our neighbors. I am excited to keep building relationships and partnering with you all to tackle the work ahead, so just a thank you for what you do and for your willingness to engage in the work. ■

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Rep. Tom Dent, District 13

Ranking Minority Member of the House Agriculture and Natural Resources Committee

Editor's note: This transcript of an interview with Rep. Dent has been edited for clarity and length.

What are your priorities for the 2026 Legislative Session?

We did a bill here two, three years ago about the use of aircraft and wildfire, the Aviation Assurance Funding bill. That bill allowed our small rural fire departments to access the aerial assets on contract to the state. In order to get the bill through, we had to put a sunset in it, which is July of 2027. Nobody had a bad thing to say about the bill because we got our aerial assets on fires quicker than we were used to. We actually saved the state substantial funds because we were able to knock fires down, and they didn't get away from us. The bill I'm working on now takes the sunset off.

Something else I'm working on involves state trust lands. In 1937, the state got counties to put their forest development lands in a trust, and that was the beginning of DNR. But there's some questions about tying up this ground in a trust. The concern is that we're tying up something that we can't harvest; that was not the purpose of the trust. The bill I'm working on is going to establish a JLARC study on this and see if we can have some direction for the Legislature.

There's another bill relating to updating the timber sales process and streamlining how DNR can put timber sales together.

I'm pretty passionate about mental health challenges and suicide, especially in agriculture. Three years ago, we formed a committee to take a deeper dive into this issue. We finished that committee last summer and put out a report. We outlined some of the challenges that are facing our agriculture producers and farm labor. A couple of the things that really rose to the top were the regulatory environment that our agriculture producers and workers work in and the economic situation we're in right now. Farmers don't really have any control over that stuff. How can we revise our state's regulatory environment to become a more agriculture-friendly state?

What budget concerns are at the top of your committee list? How worried should growers be about WSDA funding and cuts to programs they rely on?



To tell you the truth, the whole state should be worried. I'm going to fight for our producers, but I also am very well aware of the fact that we have to prioritize our budget. We are in a spot, and if we don't take a hard look at this, it's just going to get worse. We have to get a handle on the spending. When Microsoft says "you do it to me again, we're gone," they mean it, right? People that can leave are leaving. Yes, it's kind of hard to pick up your farm and take it anywhere else, but maybe that grower doesn't want to farm anymore. That's very concerning to me.

Our state is a high regulatory environment for everybody. We need to get a grip on this stuff in order for everybody to thrive. We're in a deep financial hole.

There's been a lot of talk this year about ag viability. A recent report from WSDA estimates that Washington loses an average of two farms a day, with more than 3,700 Washington farms lost between 2017 and 2022. In September, the House did a work session on ag viability that emphasized the need for proactive and strategic approaches to ensure the sustainability of agriculture in the state, and in an August legislative tour in the Skagit Valley, legislators heard firsthand the economic and regulatory struggles growers in the state are facing. What can the Legislature do to help lessen the burdens farmers are facing?

We should have more answers there than we have. I do think that economic and regulatory battles are the biggest thing that we can look at.

There's also been much discussion about food security and food distribution issues. Do you anticipate your committee will be addressing these issues? How could growers help solve the problems?

I participated in a recent meeting where the question was raised whether or not foodbanks asked farmers if they could plant a couple extra rows of something and have that available for a food donation. I hadn't thought about that. I think there's going to be interest in talking to producers about what they could do and how they could grow maybe just a little bit extra here and there, although

in order to do that, they have to have the seeds and be able to afford it.

Overall, I think an awareness would really help.

We've been hearing concerns that the environmental crimes bill from the 2025 session may resurface, and many of our growers are worried that agriculture may be unintentionally impacted. How do you see that playing out in the 2026 session?

I know it's coming. When Sen. Trudeau decides she wants to move it, I'm going to be over in her office asking her about it.

Relationships are everything in the Legislature. People who have the ability to talk to folks and go through some of the challenges and issues that we're facing are really important. These folks may perceive a problem, but when they learn more about it, they realize maybe it's not what they thought it was. If we want to eat, then we need to work on these issues. Could the bill come out and run over us? Sure. Things have run over me before, that's for sure.

I think it's really important that we be reasonable about what we expect from people. Nobody can be perfect, but I think agriculture, as a whole, does a pretty darn good job of looking out for the environment, taking care of their land, taking care of their communities. It's important to them because they understand the land. The last thing they want to do is trash what they have. I think sometimes folks who didn't grow up in this environment or don't live in this environment don't totally understand that, but it's an opportunity to educate them and teach them.

Wheat growers recently joined other commodities in sending a letter to Gov. Ferguson disputing the direction of the Riparian Taskforce put forward by the firm overseeing the process. We stand firm that voluntary efforts, rather than mandatory requirements, are the best way to achieve conservation goals. With the current budget situation, how can the state continue to fund voluntary efforts so we don't lose the progress we've made? Is there a potential that funding could increase to meet demand?

We'll all be there fighting for that. We don't want to cut the budget for DNR for wildfire suppression, because it is cheaper on the front end than it is on the back end. Same thing here.

I think it's really important growers put together a solid one pager and send it out to every legislator, the governor's office, the Department of Ecology, and try to have relationships with the tribes. We know what happens when we

get into mandatory requirements; everybody fights them. We also know that when we have voluntary efforts, things work.

The most important thing is that our growers, our agriculture producers, wheat growers, cowboys engage. If you don't know your state representative or state senator, there's something wrong. You should know them well enough that they know you. Everybody has to put out the effort. I'm working really hard to push back on some of this stuff we know is really wrong, but I'm much more effective when I have a couple hundred wheat growers behind me, writing letters or making phone calls or driving to Olympia. It makes all the difference. It might not seem like it does at the time, but it does.

Is there anything else you want Washington growers to know about your Ag Committee and the upcoming 2026 Washington State Legislative Session?

It's important to be aware of what's going on in these committees. We can all complain, but maybe show up. Maybe make calls, write some letters. It's important that growers stand up and be counted. We can do a lot more when there's a whole lot of other folks behind us making noise. The process is a marathon, not a sprint. ■



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	Andrew Barkis	R-Lacey	19	Jim Walsh	R-Aberdeen	36	R-Allyn
	Matt Marshall	R-Eatonville	Joe McEntire	R-Cathlamet	D-Seattle		D-Seattle
	Natasha Hill	D-Spokane	Peter Abbarno	R-Centralia	D-Seattle		D-Seattle
	Timm Ormsby	D-Spokane	Ed Orcutt	R-Kalama	D-Seattle		D-Seattle
3	Suzanne Schmidt	R-Spokane Valley	21	Strom Peterson	D-Edmonds	38	D-Everett
	Rob Chase	R-Liberty Lake	Lillian Ortiz-Self	D-Mukilteo	D-Seattle		D-Seattle
	Zach Hall	D-Issaquah	Beth Doglio	D-Olympia	R-Lake Stevens		R-Lake Stevens
	Lisa Callan	D-Issaquah	Lisa Parshley	D-Olympia	R-Sultan		R-Sultan
6	Mike Volz	R-Spokane	23	Tarra Simmons	D-Bremerton	40	D-Bow
	Jenny Graham	R-Spokane	Greg Nance	D-Bainbridge Island	D-Bellingham		D-Bellingham
	Andrew Engell	R-Colville	Adam Bernbaum	D-Port Angeles	D-Bellvue		D-Bellvue
	Hunter Abell	R-Colville	Steve Tharinger	D-Sequim	D-Blaine		D-Blaine
8	Stephanie Barnard	R-Pasco	25	Michael Keaton	R-Puyallup	42	D-Bellingham
	April Connors	R-Kennedick	Cyndy Jacobsen	R-Puyallup	D-Bellville		D-Bellville
9	Mary Dye	R-Pomeroy	26	Adison Richards	D-Gig Harbor	43	D-Bellville
	Joe Schmick	R-Colfax	Michelle Caldier	R-Port Orchard	D-Blaine		D-Blaine
	Clyde Shavers	D-Oak Harbor	27	Laurie Jenkins	D-Federal Way	44	D-Bellingham
	Dave Paul	D-Oak Harbor	Jake Fey	D-Tacoma	D-Bellingham		D-Bellingham
11	David Hackney	D-Tukwila	28	Mari Leavitt	D-University Place	45	D-Bellingham
	Steve Bergquist	D-Renton	D-Bonoske	D-Lakewood	D-Bellville		D-Bellville
	Brian Burnett	R-Wenatchee	29	Melanie Morgan	D-Parkland	46	D-Bellville
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13	Tom Dent	R-Moses Lake	30	Jamila Taylor	D-Federal Way	47	D-Blaine
	Alex Ybarra	R-Quincy	Kristine Reeves	D-Federal Way	D-Blaine		D-Blaine
14	Gloria Mendoza	R-Grandview	31	Drew Stokesbary	R-Auburn	48	D-Blaine
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16	Mark Klicker	R-Walla Walla	33	Edwin Obras	D-Seattle		D-Seattle
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U.S. Senate 17/51

U.S. House of Representatives 47(D) 53(R) 219(R) 213(D)

U.S. House of Representatives

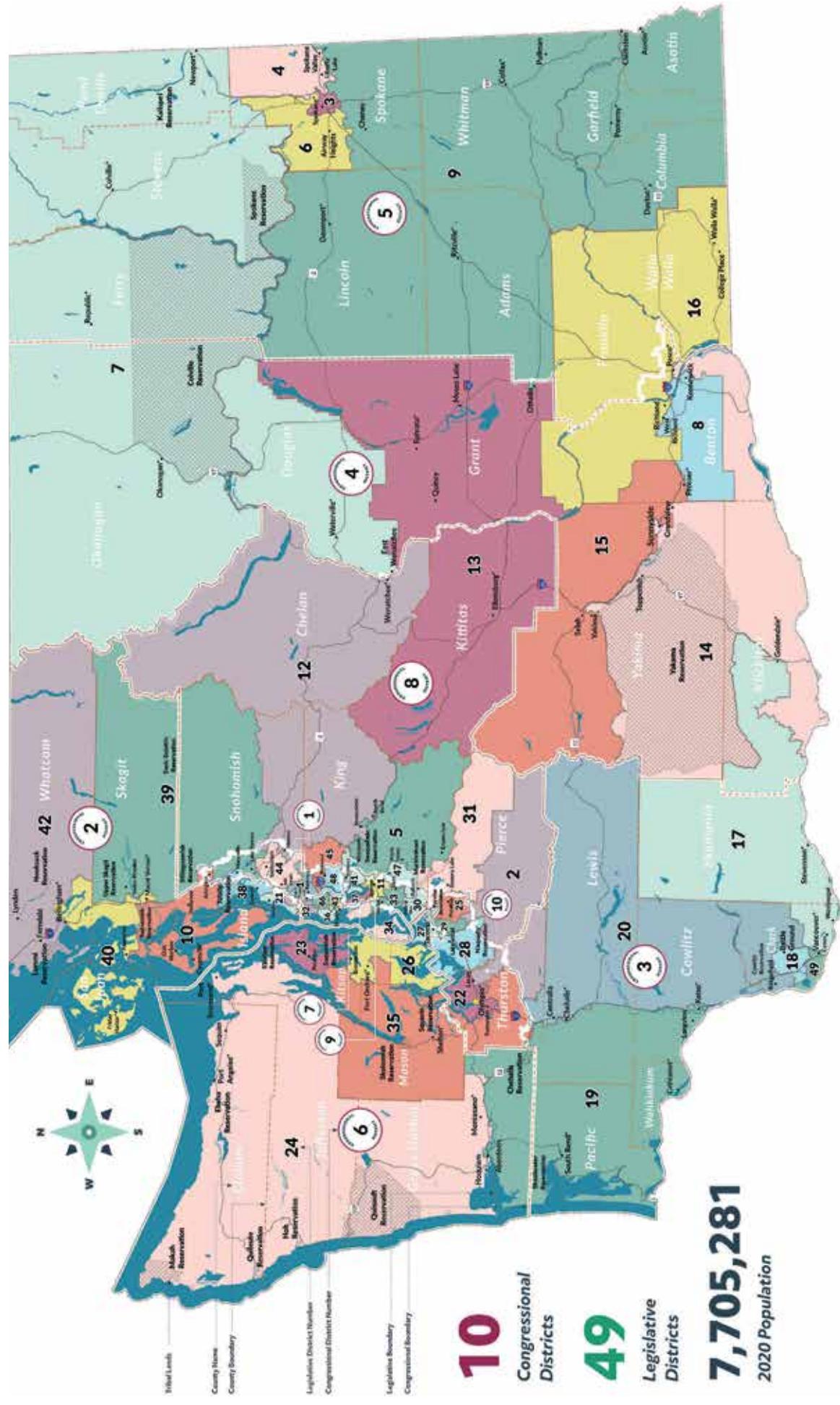
State Legislature in 2026:

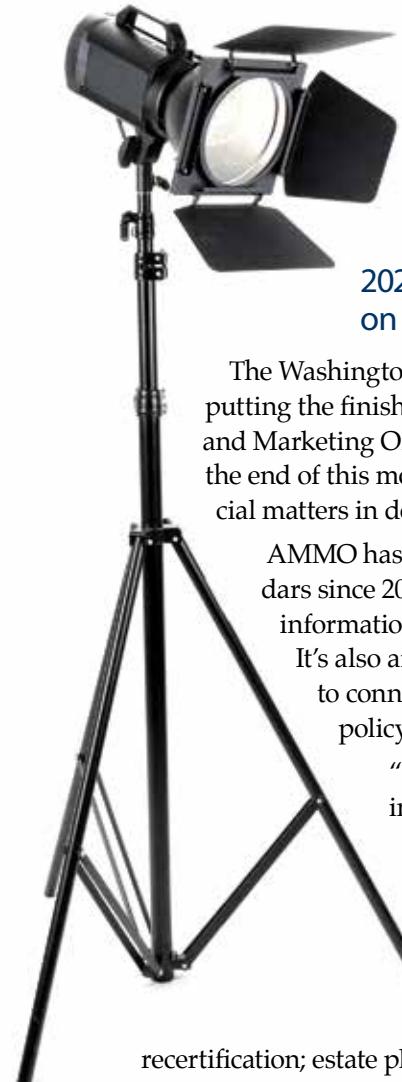
State Senate

30(D)

State House of Representatives
59(D) 39(R)

Shelly Short	R-Addy	24	Mike Chapman	D-Port Angeles	41	Lisa Wellman	D-Mercer Island
Matt Boehnke	R-Kennewick	25	Chris Gildon	R-Puyallup	42	Sharon Shewmake	D-Bellingham
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Ron Muzzall	R-Oak Harbor	27	Yasmin Trudeau	D-Tacoma	44	John Lovick	D-Mill Creek
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Spotlight on AMMO

2026 schedule kicks off at the end of January with sessions on herbicide resistance, financial matters in down times | By Trista Crossley

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) staff are putting the finishing touches on the 2026 Agricultural Management and Marketing Organization's (AMMO) schedule, which will kick off at the end of this month with sessions on herbicide resistance and financial matters in down times.

AMMO has been a mainstay of wheat farmers' winter calendars since 2009. It's an opportunity for growers to learn valuable information and enjoy the company of other growers over lunch. It's also an opportunity for researchers and industry leaders to connect with growers and share the latest in research, ag policy, and economics.

"Each year we ask growers what topics would be important to them, and we do our best to incorporate those ideas," said KayDee Gilkey, WAWG outreach coordinator. "We know how busy our farmers are. Our goal is to make sure that when a grower attends an AMMO session, it is worth their time away from the farm."

Topics this year will include pesticide license recertification; estate planning; cereal variety testing updates; ag policy and trade developments; and using marketing as a risk management tool. There will be a mix of in-person events and webinars, and pesticide credits have been applied for for pertinent classes.

All in-person sessions begin with registration, coffee, and pastries at 9 a.m., with presentations beginning at 9:30 a.m. Lunch will be included. WAWG members can attend AMMO sessions free of charge; nonmembers will be charged \$25 per session. Preregistration is required.

In early January, WAWG members will receive an AMMO pamphlet with detailed information and the sessions, dates, and locations. Additionally, more information will be available at wawg.org/ammo-workshops/ as well as a registration link, and reminders will be included in the weekly Greensheet email. Growers can also call the WAWG office at (509) 659-0610 for more information and to register.

Wheat College, also part of the AMMO offerings, is scheduled for early June with more details to be announced soon. Wheat College typically offers a mix of indoor and outdoor presentations, providing interactive demonstrations on the latest agronomic research being conducted in the Pacific Northwest. Registration reminders will be mailed prior to Wheat College to WAWG members. Unlike the regular AMMO sessions, admittance for Wheat College is free of charge to both WAWG members and nonmembers. ■

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REGISTER ONLINE: WAWG.ORG/AMMO-WORKSHOPS

Call: 509.659.0610 or email: kgilkey@wawg.org for more information.
 Advance registration is required three days prior to the program.
 Free admittance for WAWG Members. \$25 for non members.

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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



Adapting to change in the field and in the markets takes preparation

By Kevin Klein
*Chairman,
Washington Grain
Commission*

This is one of my favorite pictures from this past

harvest season. Harvest is reliably the highlight of my year, especially when everything is going right: nice weather, average or better yields, working equipment, and a harvest crew that's having a good time! Of course, every farmer knows something unexpected can happen on any given day, demanding we pivot to fix whatever broke down or change what's not working. For me, keeping a good attitude and working through challenges is part of the job, made easier by a strong harvest crew who's willing to help or do whatever is needed to ensure a successful harvest.

Though this last harvest ended five months ago, farmers also know preparing for the next crop starts a year or more before the combine ever rolls into the field. So even though winter months may seem like the off-season and are short on daylight, I have found myself working just as long or hard as I do in the height of harvest and planting. Whenever the weather is decent, I find myself outside, cleaning, fixing, or rebuilding fences or catching up on equipment repairs with hopes of fixing issues before they become real problems! As I look at the 15-year-old combine in the picture, I know it will need some time in the shop this winter to ensure it can run for another season without any major breakdowns, even as the process of obtaining all the parts I need seems to change and be more challenging every year.

The older I get, the harder it is to accept change, though the changing times have meant I, too, must change. Now, instead of waiting until the last minute to decide, I realize preordering my inputs — months before I need them — increases my time



and cost savings. All my preplanning starts months before the time of need, which can be challenging when there are so many unknown variables ahead. The same is true for the Washington Grain Commission. We have the stability of knowing what's needed for our everyday operations and normal activities throughout the year, alongside needing to adapt to changes and pursue new opportunities, even when we don't know all the variables that will be at play.

For example, in 2025, our industry representative of five years, Brian Liedl, completed his service at the commission to join U.S. Wheat Associates as their vice president of overseas operations. At this year's Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) convention in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho, and as part of his new role, Brian led a breakout session on the current state of soft white wheat markets and regions primed for growth, such as Bangladesh and Indonesia. Though efforts like these will take significant planning and time, the commission has already started exploring our possibilities to expand into these markets, and we look forward to continuing to work with Brian as we advance these initiatives. We also welcome new industry representative, Tony Benefiet, senior merchandiser at United Grain Corporation. Tony will begin his service at the January board meeting, and we look forward to the positive changes his experience and perspectives will bring.

As we kick off 2026, the commission will also continue to evolve and change, entering new territory from how we've operated for the past number of years. Alongside staff changes and job description updates, our research review on Feb. 19 will include our new Research Advisory Committee. Building upon the success of increased grower engagement and improved communications last year, we'll also attend grower meetings this winter and ensure you're informed of our activities and opportunities to participate through our newsletters and social media throughout the year. As we wish you a successful year ahead, we encourage you to sign up or follow us for updates and to contact your district commissioner with your questions and feedback. ■



ANNUAL REPORT

2024/25



Growing Our Mission

The Washington Grain Commission is committed to enhancing the long-term profitability and competitiveness of Washington small grains and small grain producers by responsible allocation of assessment funds in research, marketing, and education.

Keep reading to learn how we invested grower dollars to drive measurable results toward our mission in fiscal year 2024/25.

From Our Leadership



Dear Growers,

As we reflect on the 2024/25 fiscal year, we first want to acknowledge that growers and farm families continued to face significant challenges. Grain prices remained low while input costs stayed high, straining farm operations across our state. The Washington Grain Commission (WGC) remains deeply aware of this difficult environment and is committed to supporting you through strategic market development, research, and education.

In that, one of our key priorities this fiscal year was developing a new strategic plan that, for the first time, incorporates measurable goals to guide our work for the next 3-5 years. After two working sessions in January and February, the board approved the plan's initial draft in May 2025, with final refinements, board approval, and implementation launching in fiscal year 2025/26.

Grower engagement was also a top priority throughout Winter 2025. As part of our ongoing effort to listen directly to producers about key research and marketing issues, commissioners and staff worked to attend as many grower meetings as possible across Eastern Washington. At 18 meetings, we gathered more than 400 completed surveys—and invaluable grower feedback that will help direct our work in the years ahead, including that growers want their dollars focused on market development.

This year, commissioners and staff visited multiple countries in Southeast Asia, home to both our largest soft white markets and regions with significant growth potential. WGC representatives participated in both the North Asia Marketing Conference and the South and Southeast Asia Buyers Conference, a gathering of over 200 US wheat customers, hosted by U.S. Wheat Associates (USW). We also partnered with USW to conduct a joint market development mission to South America with our fellow Pacific Northwest commissions in Oregon and Idaho. Closer to home, we increased direct grower interaction with seven visiting trade teams by inviting producers to participate in tour stops and joint meals.

Finally, the WGC continued its strong advocacy for research funding, with successful outcomes including additional support for the PNW Herbicide Resistance Initiative and the Barley Scab Initiative—critical investments in the long-term competitiveness of our industry.

Despite current economic headwinds and thanks to smart resource allocation over the past several years, the Washington Grain Commission is in a strong position and remains committed to strengthening demand, advancing research, and preparing for future opportunities. We encourage you to stay engaged with your commissioners and WGC staff and follow us on social media to get the latest news on how your assessment dollars are working for you.

Sincerely,

Casey J. Chumrau

Casey Chumrau, CEO

Scan the QR code to
get our newsletter and
find us on social media



Commissioners

Districts:

- 1 **Mike Carstensen**
- 2 **Ben Barstow**
- 3 **Brit Ausman**
- 4 **Ben Adams**
- 5 **Nicole Berg**
- 6 **Art Schultheis**
- 7 **Kevin Klein, Chair**

Industry Rep

Ty Jessup,
Vice Chair

WSDA

Scott Steinbacher

Staff

Casey Chumrau, CEO

Sarah Márquez,
Manager of
Communications

Jake Liening, Market
Development Specialist

Parker Dawson,
Systems and Records
Specialist

Shari McCarthy,
Office & Program Support
Specialist

Market Development

Our Objective

To strengthen and sustain our market position as a Tier-1 global grain supplier, focusing on domestic and international markets.

Our Key Activities

TRADE TEAMS

7

Trade Teams



8

Countries Represented



Japan, Indonesia, South Korea, the Philippines, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador & Brazil

Trade team engagement helps strengthen customer confidence in the quality, consistency, and reliability of Washington-grown wheat while reinforcing the critical role of U.S. Wheat Associates' (USW) overseas offices and programs.

VISITING CUSTOMERS

4

Marketing Trips



6

Countries Visited



4

Commissioners Traveled



These trips enable Washington growers to understand regional challenges and opportunities and build customer relationships. In 2024/25, we visited customers in the Philippines, Thailand, Singapore, Vietnam, Chile, and Peru.

END-USE QUALITY

1



RVA Donated to USW South America Lab

429



Soft White Harvest Samples Taken & Tested

4



Overseas Crop Quality Seminars Delivered

In-country quality testing reinforces overseas confidence in U.S. wheat, while annual crop quality analysis and seminars strengthen customer relationships and Washington's reputation as a high-quality supplier.

Spotlight: Resolving Indonesian Trade Barrier

In June 2025, a united effort by USW, the USDA, and the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) successfully resolved a technical trade barrier in Indonesia, a key market for U.S. soft white wheat.

The issue arose in October 2023 when the Indonesian Quarantine Agency (IQA) mandated a significantly higher dosage of phosphine fumigation for all wheat imports, potentially closing the market due to safety and efficacy concerns.

The U.S. industry mobilized, leveraging scientific evidence to demonstrate the rule was unnecessary. **A crucial turning point was a December 2024 technical visit hosted by the WGC, where IQA officials toured the U.S. wheat supply chain, gaining firsthand knowledge of our farming, cleaning, storage, and traceability practices.**

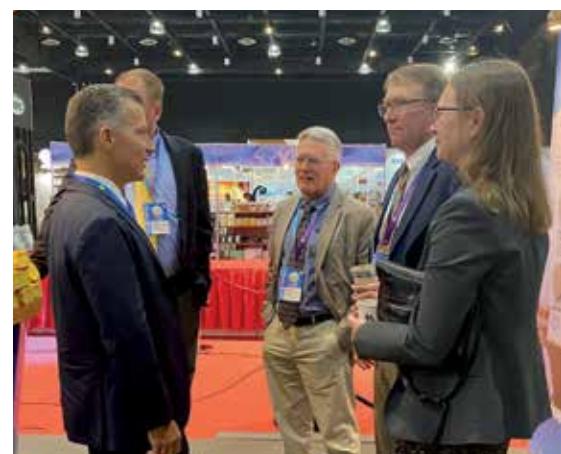


During a site visit with the Indonesian delegation, dryland farmer Mike Miller (right) demonstrated how our seed treatments persist through winter, prevent disease, and reduce excessive fumigation at shipping.

This diplomacy and science-based engagement led the IQA to officially drop the high-rate fumigation requirement on June 15, 2025. This resolution—a direct return on farmer-funded market development—not only preserved market access but contributed to a subsequent surge in U.S. wheat sales to Indonesia. The collaboration underscores how ongoing trade servicing can address complex non-tariff barriers.



USW Japan Country Director Rick Nakano (center left) translates for members of the Japanese Biscuit Association during their tour of the USDA-ARS Western Wheat Quality Lab.



Commissioner Ben Barstow (center) at the Filipino-Chinese Bakery Association's Bakery Fair in Manila.

Research

Our Objective

To drive practical, forward-looking public and private grain research that improves crop performance, boosts production efficiency, and explores new uses for wheat and barley.

Our Key Activities

GROWER-LED RESEARCH

27 

Research Projects Funded

5 

Research Funding Advocacy Trips

6 

Perpetual Endowments

In 2024/2025, we invested in variety development (71%), cropping systems (13%), barley breeding and evaluation (8%), plant protection (5%), and other projects (3%). The six endowments established by WGC since 1990 require no additional funding from WGC and currently fund seven research faculty positions at Washington State University.

ROYALTY REVENUE



In May 2012, the WGC supported a WSU-sponsored initiative that led to license its future wheat variety releases, charging 2 cents per pound of certified seed sold.

Starting in July 2024, Washington State University (WSU) royalty revenue from their spring wheat varieties began offsetting \$250,000 in annual research funding requests to the commission for spring wheat breeding projects.

This means that the commission can now allocate more funds to other research projects that benefit Washington growers, while still supporting the breeding program. This is a testament to the strategic foresight and success of the WSU breeding programs and breeders, including Drs. Mike Pumphrey, Arron Carter, and Kimberly Garland-Campbell.

Education

Our Objective

To serve as a reliable source of information for farmers and the public and educate key audiences on the importance of small grains production to food systems, communities, and the economy.

Spotlight: Grower & Community Education

GROWER MEETINGS

18

Grower Meetings



950

Grower Attendees



422

Completed Surveys



From Jan–Feb 2025, WGC staff traveled across 12 counties to provide an update on HB4, discuss GMO wheat acceptance, and survey growers on how they want WGC to invest grower dollars. Their top answer? Marketing.

WHEAT WEEK

24

WA Counties



286

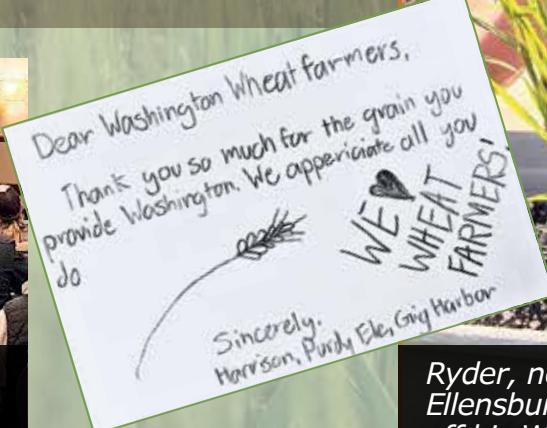
In-Person Programs



Wheat Week, funded by WGC and delivered by Franklin Conservation District, reached 21,631 students with both in-person and online programming, including 68% (14,823) students in Western WA.



CEO Casey Chumrau (standing) presenting an HB4 update at one of 18 grower meetings WGC attended in early 2025.



Ryder, now a 5th grader in Ellensburg, proudly shows off his Wheat Week plant.

Organizational Success

Our Objective

To build a collaborative team of commissioners and staff who are well-equipped to carry out the Washington Grain Commission's mission and guide the industry toward long-term success.

Spotlight: National Leadership & New Faces

CARSTENSEN JOINS U.S. WHEAT

At their January 15, 2025 meeting in Washington, D.C., the U.S. Wheat Associates board of directors elected WGC District 1 Commissioner Mike Carstensen to serve as secretary-treasurer for the 2025/26 term.

Carstensen's election is a milestone not only for him and his family, but also for the entire Washington wheat industry. It highlights the leadership, vision, and values that our growers contribute to the national conversation. We are proud to support Mike in his new role and thank him for the many years he has contributed to guiding the strategy, stewardship, and success of the Washington Grain Commission's mission.



Mike Carstensen (3rd from left) hosting a personal harvest tour near Almira, Wash. for the Nissin Flour Milling Crop Survey team in August 2025.

NEW WGC TEAM MEMBERS



Ben Adams
Commissioner
(District 4)



Nicole Berg
Commissioner
(District 5)



Jake Liening
Market Development
Specialist

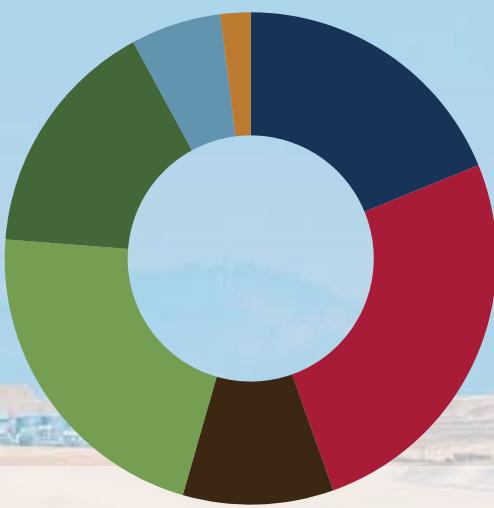


Sarah Márquez
Manager of
Communications

Financials

2024/25 Budget

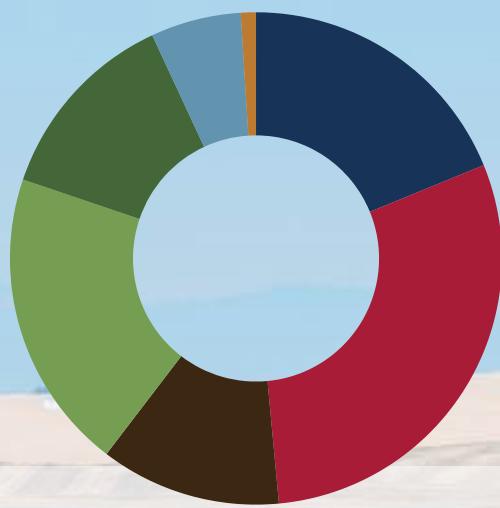
\$7,287,379



19% Market Development
26% Research
10% Education
22% Grower Services
16% Professional Services
6% Office Operations
2% Policy Development

2025/26 Budget

\$8,360,278



19% Market Development
30% Research
12% Education
20% Grower Services
13% Professional Services
6% Office Operations
1% Policy Development

2024/25 Summary

Actual Expenditures

\$7,021,162



Total Revenue

\$6,737,510

Wheat: \$5,582,820
Barley: \$102,357
Other: \$1,052,333

Total Ending Assets

\$18.2M

25/26 Budget: \$8.3M
General Reserves: \$6.4M
Marketing Reserve: \$1.5M
Unallocated Funds: \$2.0M

WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

World production, ending stocks reach highs



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

Based on the December 2025 World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE), the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) predicts U.S. wheat acres harvested in 2025 were down 1.4 million compared to 2024. However, reduced acres were offset by record yields, which were up 4% compared to 2024. As a result, total U.S. wheat production increased 10% between 2024 and 2025. The combination of increased production and a large wheat carryout from the 2024-25 marketing year led the USDA to estimate the national average wheat price for the 2025-26 marketing year to be \$5 per bushel, down from the average price of \$5.52 per bushel in the 2024-25 marketing year.¹ If realized, this will be the lowest average U.S. wheat price in seven years. Figure 1 shows the USDA's most recent balance sheet estimates for U.S. wheat, including the USDA's market year price forecast.

Demand for U.S. wheat has remained robust through the first half of the marketing year. Total demand is expected to exceed 2 billion bushels for the first time since the 2020-21 marketing year, led largely by a substantial increase in U.S. wheat exports this year. Exports are expected to total 900 million bushels for the first time since 2020-21. This represents an increase of 9% over the previous year and about 45% of total U.S. wheat production for 2025. Further,

Figure 1: U.S. wheat balance sheet (June-May), based on 12/25 WASDE

Marketing Year	USDA 2018-19	USDA 2019-20	USDA 2020-21	USDA 2021-22	USDA 2022-23	USDA 2023-24	DEC EST 2024-25	DEC Fore 2025-26
(in million acres/million bushels)								
Beg Stocks	1,099	1,080	1,028	845	674	570	696	851
Imports	135	104	100	96	122	138	149	120
Acres Planted	47.8	45.5	44.5	46.7	45.8	49.6	46.3	45.3
Acres Harvested	39.6	37.4	36.8	37.1	35.5	37.1	38.6	37.2
% Harvested	82.8%	82.2%	82.7%	79.4%	77.5%	74.8%	83.4%	82.1%
Yield	47.6	51.7	49.7	44.3	46.5	48.7	51.2	53.3
Production	1,885	1,932	1,828	1,646	1,650	1,804	1,979	1,985
Total Supply	3,119	3,116	2,957	2,588	2,446	2,511	2,824	2,955
Food	954	962	961	971	972	961	969	972
Seed	59	60	64	58	68	62	62	62
Feed and Residual	88	97	93	64	74	86	117	120
Exports	937	969	994	796	762	706	826	900
Total Demand	2,039	2,087	2,111	1,889	1,888	1,815	1,974	2,054
Ending Stocks	1,080	1,028	845	698	570	696	851	901
Stocks To Use	52.97%	49.26%	40.03%	36.95%	30.19%	38.35%	43.11%	43.87%
Avg. Farm Price	\$5.16	\$4.58	\$5.05	\$7.63	\$8.83	\$6.96	\$5.52	\$5.00

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, World Outlook Board

export pace through Dec. 1, 2025 (the start of the third quarter of the marketing year), suggests the USDA's export forecast may be too conservative, and we could see an increase in the export forecast this spring. However, even though U.S. wheat exports are expected to be the largest in five years, they are still well below the 1.1 to 1.2 billion bushels we exported just over a decade ago.

Even with the year-over-year improvement in total wheat demand, increased production and large stocks left over from previous marketing years led the USDA to forecast a May 31, 2026, U.S. wheat carry-out (the amount of wheat we have available as we head into the 2026 marketing year) of 901 million bushels. This is an increase of 6% from May 31, 2025, wheat ending stocks and the largest carry-out since May 2020. This is price negative and helps explain the USDA's expectation of low prices this year.

In addition to an increase in U.S. wheat ending stocks this marketing year, the International Grains Council (IGC) is forecasting an increase in world ending stocks for 2025-26. They anticipate world wheat ending stocks will increase by over 4% this year compared to last and result in the highest world ending stocks since 2022-23. This comes despite an expectation of record world wheat consumption.

IGC currently estimates total world wheat consumption will be up 1.3%

¹The U.S. wheat marketing year runs from June 1 (just before U.S. producers begin wheat harvest) to the following May 31.

²Figure 3 shows the average Washington price across all classes of wheat grown in Washington weighted by volume, not just white wheat. At the time of this writing, prices reported for 2025 were not available past August due to the federal government shutdown beginning in October.

this year, with increases in both food and feed use of wheat. In addition, they are forecasting an increase in total wheat trade volume across the globe. From a price perspective, however, this is tempered by expectations of production increases for every major world wheat exporter in 2025, and production increases for many major importers. Thus, the world market not only has lots of wheat available, but the wheat is also well distributed across all the major exporters, giving no one an opportunity to take advantage of production issues among their export competitors. Wheat importers do not need to be concerned with supply constraints in the current market environment and can focus on price and quality.

Figure 2 provides the USDA's most recent supply/demand estimates for U.S. white wheat. According to the USDA, white wheat exports will be down this year compared to last by over 10%. This is partially offset by an expected increase in domestic white wheat demand, but even so, white wheat ending stocks May 31, 2026, are expected to increase 15% compared to May 2025. Through November 2025, white wheat exports lagged the previous year's exports but were on pace to match exports from 2022-23. That year, total U.S. white wheat exports were 190 million bushels, just under the current forecast for this year's exports. Thus, the pace of white wheat exports through the first half of the marketing year appears consistent with USDA's export forecast for the entire year.

South Korea has been the largest importer of U.S.

Figure 2: U.S. white wheat balance sheet (June-May), based on 12/25 WASDE

	USDA 21/22	USDA 22/23	USDA 23/24	USDA DEC Est 24/25	USDA DEC Fore 24/26
(in million bushels)					
Beg Stocks	70	54	74	85	80
Imports	5	7	6	7	5
Production	201	272	234	276	283
Total Supply	276	333	314	368	368
Domestic Use	75	71	77	66	81
Exports	148	190	152	222	200
Total Demand	222	261	229	288	281
Ending Stocks	54	74	85	80	92
Stocks To Use	24.32%	28.35%	37.12%	27.78%	32.74%

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, World Outlook Board

Figure 3: Washington vs. U.S. wheat prices



Source: USDA, National Agricultural Statistics Service

white wheat thus far this year, accounting for almost 27% of total purchases. The next two largest buyers are the Philippines (25%) and Indonesia (16%). Combined with Japan, these countries in aggregate have accounted for over 80% of total U.S. white wheat exports through the first two quarters of 2025-26.

Prior to the 2022-23 wheat marketing year, Washington wheat producers generally enjoyed a premium price compared to the national wheat market. However, as wheat prices began to decline in the second half of 2022, Washington wheat prices traded below the national average price. Beginning June 2025, relative prices appear to have returned to their pre-2022 relationships. Figure 3 shows average monthly wheat prices in Washington compared to national average wheat prices over the last few years.² While returning to a price premium over the national average price is good news for Washington producers, we are still facing a challenging price environment going into the next marketing year. Prices in the soft red wheat futures market suggest some price improvement going forward, as prices for months with later deliveries are above prices for earlier deliveries. But, like the U.S., most other major wheat exporting countries have relatively large wheat stocks. This means the export environment will remain very competitive, making it difficult for prices to move significantly higher over the next few months leading up to spring planting, unless there is some sort of geopolitical friction that disrupts trade flows. ■

Randy Fortenberry 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.

'New' mural celebrates Waterville history

By Trista Crossley
Editor, Wheat Life

Like the early 1900s aerial tramway it depicted, a 30-year-old mural on the side of the Douglas County Museum in Waterville, Wash., was in danger of fading into obscurity. But over the past summer, it got more than just a facelift, thanks to local artist Don Nutt.

"The mural had deteriorated to a point where it was almost impossible to see it, and so the Douglas County Museum board of directors first asked if I would just repaint it," Nutt said. Nutt owns Cariboo Trail Studio in Coulee City, Wash. "Well, there wasn't enough image up, and we had to replace the substrate. There's no reason to paint on boards that are going to pull apart, so I told them I didn't want to repaint another artist's work. I told them I would do my own interpretation of it, so that's what I did."

The 60-foot-long mural celebrates an integral part of the region's agricultural history. Beginning in 1902, an aerial tram located north of Orondo carried sacks of wheat from

the plateau 2 miles down the bluffs to the Columbia River, crossing several canyons along the way. At the river, grain was loaded into steamboats and shipped to the Great Northern railroad in Wenatchee. According to newspaper articles from the time, the tram had the capacity to move 12-15 tons of cargo per hour and cost between \$25,000 and \$30,000 to build.

The tram seemed to be successful. A December 1907 excerpt from a local paper said, "There is over 200,000 bushels of wheat now piled up at the Tram awaiting shipment. It is being sent out as fast as the boats can carry it. Wheat is coming to the Tram from 30 miles away. The roads to the river are not good for sleighing, and it is fine to the Tram, hence they haul there. If it were not for the Tram, at present, the farmers would be up against a hard proposition to get off their wheat crop."

The tram became obsolete in 1910 when a branch line of the Great Northern was built to Mansfield. In the intervening years, the structure has fallen victim to fire, weather, and scrap metal collectors, leaving very little evidence be-



Last summer, Coulee City, Wash., artist, Don Nutt (right), and his assistant, Emma Buchanan, painted a new mural depicting the Waterville tram on the side of the Douglas County Museum. The original tram was built in 1902 and ran for eight years. It carried sacks of grain nearly 2 miles down the bluffs to the Columbia River. Photo courtesy of Don Nutt.

hind. When Nutt got the commission to repaint the mural, the first thing he did was a little historical research. The next step was seeing how the tram might have fit into the landscape. He and a friend got permission to visit the site of the tram, which is mostly on private ground, and used a drone to take aerial photos of the area.

"We knew where the top of the tram was, and we knew where it came to the river, more or less, but it was unusual, because it had to cross a couple of smaller ravines on its way down. There were a lot of questions I had about exactly how this would look," Nutt said.

One of the structures that helped hold up the cables was part of the original mural and was staying. Nutt had to take that into account.



Drone photos taken by Terry Urness show the landscape the Waterville tram would have traversed on its way down to the Columbia River. Artist Don Nutt used the photos as inspiration for his mural.

"From an artist's point of view, there's so many options. I've got this giant canvas," he said. "I thought it would be cool to show them loading sacks of wheat on a steamship and have the tram going up the hill, from that perspective. But (the museum) didn't want to take that truss out of there, so that really limited what I could do."

Armed with photos and research, Nutt did two different to-scale paintings for the museum board to choose from. Once the choice was made, Nutt and his assistant, Emma Buchanan, got to work. The first thing they did was replace the substrate. Once the surface was ready, they used chalk lines to establish a grid, and then the painting commenced. It took about nine days to actually paint the mural, using house paint with a UV coating over top.

Nutt hopes the new mural, which faces Highway 2, gets people intrigued enough to stop at the museum and ask questions. He said he was surprised by how few people knew about the tram.

"The old mural had been there for so long, and, of course, it had faded. It was well past the point of being a mural. Thirty years is a lot to ask of anything. It just kind of became part of the scenery, and I don't think people in Waterville really noticed it very much anymore," he said. "I was surprised at how many people stopped by and asked, 'What is this thing you're painting? Is that the ski hill? Is that a ski lift or something?' It was kind of surprising how few people really knew what it was and knew about the history. I think it's good for the community to know this thing happened here, you know?"

More information about Nutt and his work is at caribootrilstudio.com. Information about the Douglas County Museum and the tram is at douglascountymuseum.com. ■



County Museum in Waterville, Wash. The tram was built

THE BOTTOM LINE

The next chapter: Planning for retirement

By Jordan Thayer, CFP
Financial Advisor, Morgan Stanley

You have a unique vision for your retirement. Whatever that vision is, proactive planning is the first step toward helping bring it to life. Unfortunately, more than half of adults feel they're behind on retirement planning. The truth is, the sooner you start planning and saving for your retirement, the better.

Envisioning your retirement lifestyle

Rather than planning your life around your money, plan your money around your life. The first step in planning for retirement is defining what retirement means to you and answering some important questions. When do you plan to retire? How will you spend your time in retirement? Can you afford long-term care if you need it? Will you need to care for your parents or other loved ones? Are there charities you want to support?

Articulating the retirement you



envision helps you set concrete goals and determines how much income you will need in retirement to achieve those goals.

As you map out your road to retirement, it is important to consider the following factors, which could impact your ability to enjoy your current quality of life as you progress through retirement.

Longevity. With advances in medicine and an increased emphasis on wellness, people are living longer, healthier lives. As a result, many people underestimate their lifespan and their risk of outliving their assets. When building your retirement income, allow for the possibility you'll live longer than you expect.

Market risk. This involves not only the possibility that the market will move against you, but also that it will move against you immediately before or after you retire, and you will have to begin withdrawing assets to meet expenses. However, keep in mind that over the long-term, stocks have outperformed other asset classes and should likely still have a place in your investment strategy.

Inflation. If your assets do not grow as quickly as the inflation rate, you could lose purchasing power. Consider allocating a portion of your retirement portfolio to investments with the potential to outpace inflation.

Asset allocation. This strategy combines various asset classes — such as stocks, bonds, and cash equivalents — into your portfolio to meet your unique risk preferences and return objectives. As you move toward retirement, your asset allocation strategy will generally become more conservative, shifting from equities and growth to fixed income and cash equivalents that provide income and capital preservation.

Rate of withdrawal. Withdrawing too much from your retirement nest egg early on can increase your chances of outliving your assets. Generally, your withdrawal rate should reflect your asset allocation, life expectancy, time of retirement, portfolio value, and tax impact. It may also have to consider cur-

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rent or future required minimum distributions from your retirement account.

Health care costs. For many people approaching retirement, future health care costs are a source of anxiety, especially as medical costs outpace inflation. Historically the cost of healthcare has outpaced inflation, making it one of the large items in most retirees' budgets. In addition, fewer individuals have employer-sponsored healthcare in retirement, so it's important to understand how and when to start using Medicare.

An experienced financial advisor can help you define your goals, prepare for your vision of retirement, and make changes as needed along the way. Look for an advisor who will support you every step of the way, from determining your income needs and allocating your investment portfolio to monitoring your plan and adjusting your strategy as your life evolves or priorities change. It's your retirement; don't settle for anything less. ■

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Calan (7) and Leeah (5) Badten joining their dad, Tyler, on the combine at Badten Farms near Waterville. Photo by Taerrah Badten.



Carley Lawrence (middle) made a harvest visit to Dale and Phyllis Heitstuman south of Pomeroy, where she enjoyed her first-ever combine ride at the age of 100. Photo by Lola Knapp.



Ross Fox (in the bank-out wagon) and his son, Jason (in the combine), during harvest 2025. This was Ross' last dryland wheat harvest before he retired. Photo by Courtney Fox.



Kolter Sieverkropp (3) and Millie Sieverkropp (5) during harvest 2025 at K & M Family Farms in Creston. Photo by Karl Sieverkropp.



Andrew Miles harvesting his first wheat crop on the Plucker Family Farm in Touchet. Photo by Nick Plucker.

HAPPENINGS

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

JANUARY 2026

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

13-14 2026 CROPPING SYSTEMS CONFERENCE. Three Rivers Convention Center in Kennewick, Wash. Registration and more info at directseed.org

16-19 LAKE CHELAN WINTERFEST. An event for the whole family! Ice sculptures, fireworks, ice slide, and more! Chelan, Wash. lakechelan.com/winterfest/

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

18-20 OLYMPIA DAYS. WAWG's annual advocacy trip to Olympia needs grower participation from every county. Call the

WAWG office at (509) 659-0610.

21-22 2026 NORTHWEST HAY EXPO.

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

28 STAYING AHEAD OF RESISTANCE: HERBICIDE-TOLERANT CROPS AND THE ITALIAN RYEGRASS CHALLENGE.

AMMO session that begins with registration at 9 a.m., at the Courtyard by Marriott in Pullman, Wash. Register at least 3 days in advance by calling 509-659-0610 or kgilkey@wawg.org.

29 FINANCIAL MATTERS IN DOWN TIMES. AMMO session that begins with registration at 9 a.m., at the Hampton by Hilton at the Spokane airport. Register at least 3 days in advance by calling 509-659-0610 or kgilkey@wawg.org.

FEBRUARY 2026

3-5 SPOKANE AG SHOW. The largest farm machinery show in the Inland Northwest. More than 250 agriculture suppliers and service companies all

under one roof. Held at the Spokane Convention Center. agshow.org

MARCH 2026

1 73RD ANNUAL SAUSAGE DINNER.

Tickets available at the door; cash or check only. 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Menu includes homemade sausage, sauerkraut, mashed potatoes, green beans, roll, applesauce and pie. Uniontown Community Center, Uniontown, Wash. facebook.com/groups/2523604837767404/

6-8 SPRING ARTS AND CRAFTS SHOW.

Professional artists and crafters from across the Northwest will display and sell their fine art, hand crafts and specialty foods. Spokane Fair and Expo Center, Spokane, Wash. custershows.com

20-22 SPRING ARTS AND CRAFTS SHOW.

Professional artists and crafters from across the Northwest will display and sell their fine art, hand crafts and specialty foods. HAPO Center, Pasco, Wash. custershows.com ■

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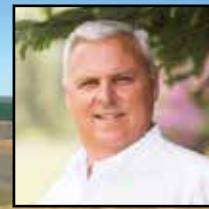


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