

# WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

FEBRUARY | 2026



## OLYMPIA DAYS 2026

Growers descend on state capitol to advocate for industry

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Washington Association of Wheat Growers



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# President's Perspective



## Social media helping spread misinformation

By Gil Crosby

President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

I'm sure almost everyone has scrolled through social media and come across a post, video, or article that made them stop and think, "can this really be true?" I experience this reaction with nearly every topic I see online. While some of the general information may be accurate, most of the details are skewed, misinterpreted, or just plain made up. In today's digital world, misinformation often spreads faster than facts, shaping public opinion and influencing people's personal decisions.

One area where misinformation is especially influential is agriculture, particularly when it comes to food production. Public understanding of how crops are grown is often shaped by social media content rather than scientific evidence, which can lead to confusion and fear.

Recently, I watched a video from a well-known actor who discussed a trip to Italy and claimed that food in Europe is healthier because they do not use genetically modified (GMO) wheat. He suggested that this is why people can eat bread in Europe without issues, while bread in the U.S. is harmful due to GMO wheat. While the claim may sound convincing, it's inaccurate. In reality, GMO wheat is not commercially grown in either Europe or the U.S. In the U.S., product consistency is important, so bakers tend to use commercial yeast with fast rising times, while bread in Europe is often naturally leavened (sourdough) with long, slow proof times. That long, slow fermentation is shown to partially break down gluten proteins, making bread easier to digest. This type of misinformation is harmful because it misrepresents modern agricultural practices and creates unnecessary distrust in the U.S. food system.

This example highlights how individuals with large followings can strongly influence public perception. Because the speaker is famous, many viewers assume he is well informed. As the video is shared and reposted, the misinformation spreads, reinforcing false beliefs among people who may not take the time to verify the claims.

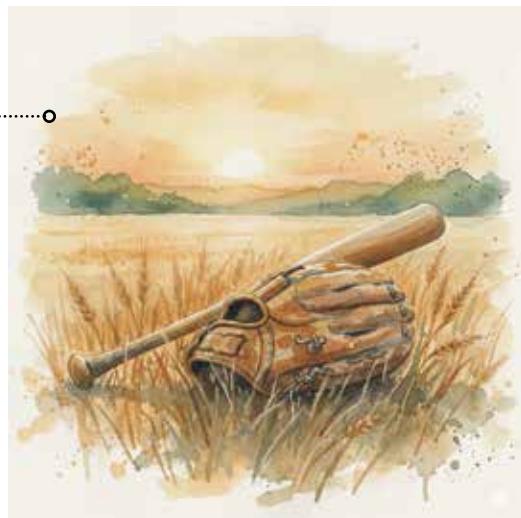
A quote often attributed to former CIA Director William Casey captures the danger of widespread misinformation: "We'll know our disinformation program is complete when everything the American public believes is false." While the origin of this quote is debated, its message remains relevant. When misinformation dominates public discourse, it becomes increasingly difficult for people to separate fact from fiction, especially in areas like agriculture, where most consumers are already disconnected from how their food is produced.

I have been trying to combat this misinformation by participating in organizations such as the Washington Association of Wheat Growers and the Modern Ag Alliance to help spread the message that farmers use the safest possible approaches to agriculture while also being good stewards of the land. Through meetings in Olympia and Washington, D.C., and in conversations with organizations like the Washington Grain Commission and the National Association of Wheat Growers, I believe we can make a meaningful difference. However, this effort requires all of us to stay active and to help inform those who may be mistaken. ■

**Cover photo:** Advocacy was the name of the game last month as growers spent two days in Olympia meeting with legislators. See story and photos beginning on page 22. All photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

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<b>Family \$250</b> (2 family members)	X	X	X			X
<b>Partnership \$600</b> (1-5 family members)	X	X	X	X		X
<b>Convention \$720</b> (2 individuals)	X	X	X		X	X
<b>Lifetime \$3,000</b> (1 individual)	X	X	X	X		X
<b>Non-Voting Membership</b>						
<b>Student \$90</b>	X	X	X			
<b>Industry Associate \$250</b>	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.

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

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# Dialogue

## What is true unity?

### Unity

*"Unity without verity (truth) is no better than conspiracy."*

— John Trapp, 17th century English theologian

Unity has become a ubiquitous word — invoked in public discourse, mourned in its absence, championed in corporate messaging, and offered as a cure-all for cultural and organizational discord. Yet its overuse has dulled its meaning, and its misuse has weaponized it. Appeals to “unity” now too often serve as a shield for behavior that is otherwise divisive, unethical, or plainly wrong.

Given this climate, it is no surprise that many people have grown skeptical of unity itself. Some dismiss it as naïve; others distrust it outright, having seen it exploited by those acting in bad faith.

So what is true unity? In a society that often feels as though it is fraying at the edges, the question is both timely and necessary. Clarity is the place to begin.

### What Unity Is

Unity is shared purpose.

It is the collective commitment of individuals working toward a defined, meaningful goal. Those who are united subordinate personal agendas to the mission they have agreed to uphold.

Unity is grounded in truth. As Trapp notes, unity without truth is not unity at all — it is conspiracy. Genuine unity requires honesty about the cause, the need, and the direction. Without

truth, agreement becomes manipulation; cooperation becomes coercion.

Unity is humble. Pride, selfishness, and greed cannot coexist with true unity. Humble individuals understand their role, respect the roles of others, and accept that the welfare of the whole outweighs the desires of a few.

Unity is open. Secrecy corrodes cooperation. Hidden agendas suffocate trust. Those who operate in the shadows — whether through concealment, selective disclosure, or manipulation — undermine unity at its foundation.

### What Unity Is Not

While disunity can indeed be the absence of the virtues above, there is an additional, more insidious counterfeit worth naming.

Many organizations practice what can be called “cheap unity.” Cheap unity flourishes in environments shaped by toxic individuals or ineffective leadership. In such groups, domineering personalities often surround themselves with sycophants who pressure others to conform. Attempts — however small — to question harmful behaviors or warn of emerging dysfunction are met with disproportionate outrage. Truth becomes labeled “divisive.” Those who speak it are shamed, silenced, or expelled.

Calls for “unity” in these settings are never reciprocal; they flow only toward protecting the powerful and preserving the status quo. Secrets accumulate. Agendas multiply. Pride drives the machine. In this way, cheap unity becomes the accelerant for

institutional decay and, eventually, societal destruction.

So what?

Volumes could be written on this subject, but exhaustive analysis is not the purpose here. Instead, consider this an invitation — and a warning.

Examine the groups and institutions you participate in through the lens above. Seek real unity, not its counterfeit. And if you discover you are part of a toxic environment, begin by examining yourself. Cheap unity is gaining ground precisely because too many people participate in it — actively or passively.

This trajectory must end. It is eroding institutions built by generations who labored for shared prosperity. Those who seek to divide us lose their power the moment we refuse to be manipulated. Only together can we meet the challenges ahead, and only together will we have earned the future we hope to share.

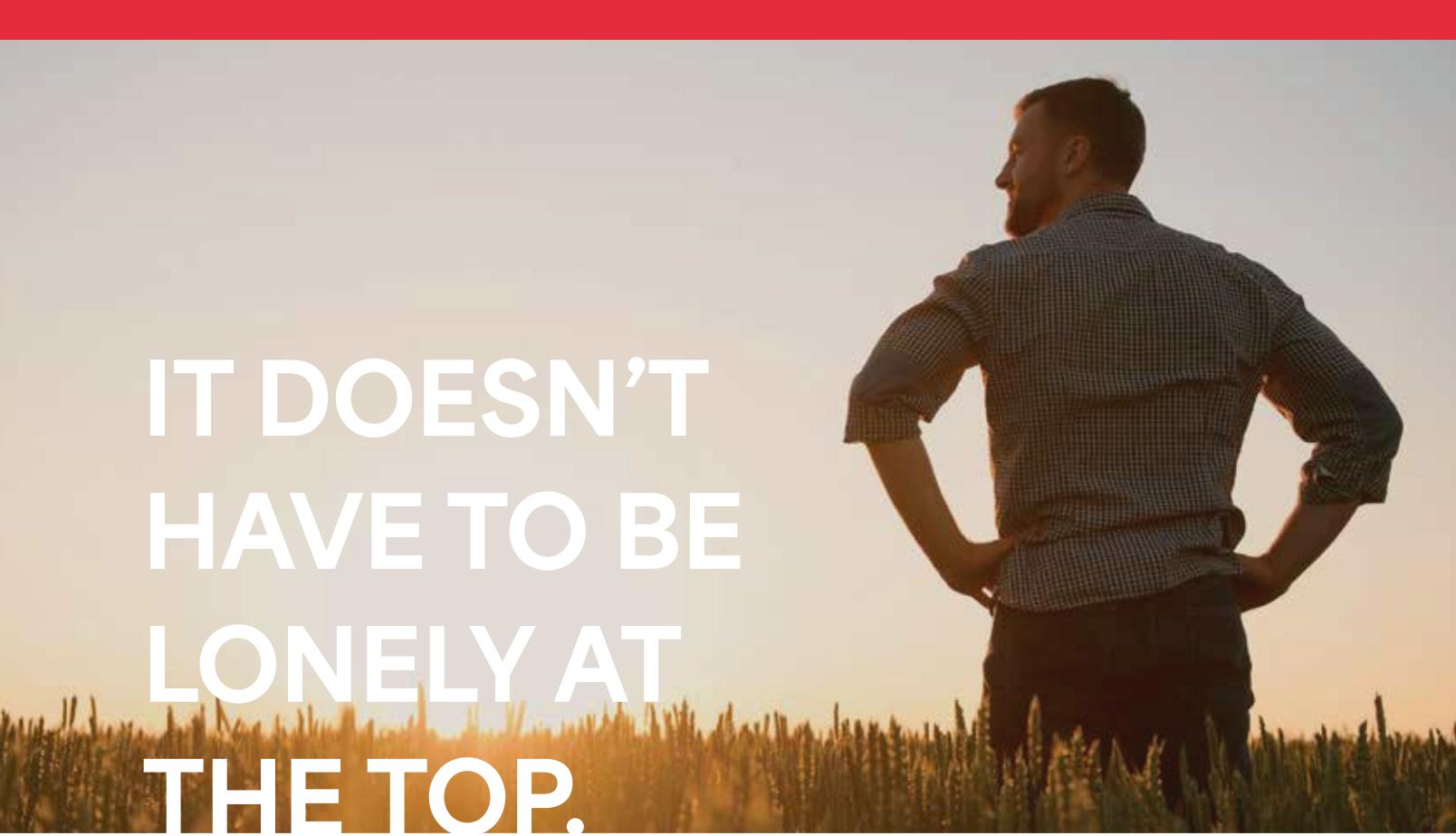
Andy Juris, Farmer  
Bickleton, Wash.

## Auction is a success

On behalf of the Washington Wheat Foundation, we want to thank all of you who contributed an auction item, made a purchase, bought a floor tile, or raised a paddle for a direct contribution at the 2025 Washington Wheat Growers Convention. Thanks to all of you, we raised over \$30,000 for the Foundation, which is a record amount.

If you were not at convention and would still like to purchase a floor tile, you can get a form from myself or go to the Washington Wheat Foundation website at [wawheat.net](http://wawheat.net) and select “fundraising” under the “About” tab to get to the form. The Foundation will continue accepting floor tile orders until the end of February. I can be contacted at [rlsue23@gmail.com](mailto:rlsue23@gmail.com) or (509) 413-2043.

Randy Suess, President  
Washington Wheat Foundation



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## Growers approve state, national priorities at board meeting

The first board meeting in 2026 of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) was focused on preparing for legislative visits to Olympia and Washington, D.C.

Growers reviewed and approved WAWG's state and national priorities ahead of the Jan. 18-20 Olympia Days visit. See page 22 for more on that trip. The board also reviewed and approved the proposed schedule for leaders' visit to the nation's capital at the end of January. The East Coast trip corresponds with the National Association of Wheat Growers' winter meeting.

Patrick Bell, the new Farm Service Agency (FSA) state executive director, stopped by the meeting to introduce himself. He told growers that FSA programs "need to

**The next state board meeting of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 20, beginning at 10 a.m. at the Wheat Foundation Building in Ritzville.**

work for you." He said he is working on submitting names for the state committee and addressing staffing issues at the agency. Members of the board brought up concerns about the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP), stating that because of certain limitations, the program isn't working very well

for dryland growers. Bell said he would like to continue discussions between FSA and growers about CRP.

"Success at FSA is service to you," he said.

Andy Pittenger from the Washington State Department of Natural Resources introduced Kristina Horn, the land manager for Grant County. Horn advised growers to consider asking to add crops, such as canola, to their leases to give themselves planting options.

In county news, all counties reported the winter as being warm and wet so far. Moisture is looking good because all of the precipitation has been able to go into the ground, but everybody would like to see some snow cover. Some growers in lower elevations, especially in the southern part of the state, have started seeding spring wheat. Stripe rust is becoming a major concern.

Casey Chumrau, CEO of the Washington Grain

Commission (WGC), said global production will likely hit a record this year, so despite high demand, wheat prices are probably going to remain low. As of Jan. 1, 2026, sales of all U.S. classes of wheat are up 18% over last year. Hard red wheat is leading the way, up 82%. Soft white is at about the same level as last year.

Japan, one of the Pacific Northwest's (PNW) most important buyers, is concerned with soybean contamination in shipments of wheat. Chumrau said the country has very strict requirements on how much soybeans can be in a load of wheat. Because very few soybeans are grown in the PNW, the problem is mostly likely a transportation issue.

The WGC continues to work with researchers and Korean millers to find or develop a wheat that is well suited for noodles. Currently Korea buys most of their noodle wheat from Australia.

In state legislation, lobbyists Diana Carlen and Mark Streuli reported on the first week of the Washington State 2026 Legislative Session. Like last year, the budget is a major concern. Despite raising taxes last year, the budget shortfall is estimated at \$2.3 billion. In his proposed budget, Gov. Bob Ferguson signaled support for taxing residents who earn more than \$1 million. Another tax that has been proposed is an employer payroll tax. Streuli said agriculture is uniting with the business community to oppose that. Sen. Mark Schoesler has introduced a bill to exempt lubricants from carbon taxes. The industry is watching two bills that could impact agriculture: an environmental crimes bill as well as a bill that would allow ag employees to unionize.

"It's all going to come down to budget conversations," Streuli said.

Both Carlen and Streuli continue to be involved in discussions around riparian buffers. The Tribes would like to see a regulatory backstop, which agriculture opposes. Farmers would like to see a focus on voluntary efforts.

In national legislation, WAWG Executive Director Michelle Hennings said moving the Food for Peace program to the U.S. Department of Agriculture is a big win for the wheat industry. She said the new NAWG CEO, Sam Kieffer, is settling into the position and doing a good job. The Trump administration just released new

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food guidelines that flipped wheat to the bottom of the food pyramid. The guidelines impact which foods are allowed in certain government programs.

Ryan Poe and Jeff Malone recently returned from a preliminary NAWG strategic planning session in Minneapolis. Poe said there seems to be a push from several states to find new uses for wheat, and there were a lot good conversations that happened.

WAWG has been busy advocating for the region's transportation systems. The organization signed onto a letter supporting the I-5 bridge replacement between Vancouver and Portland. WAWG also submitted comments regarding the Washington State Department of Ecology's total maximum daily load plan for temperature in the Columbia and Snake rivers. Hennings is preparing for a fly-in to D.C. in early February to meet with legislators about the lower Snake River dams and what's happening in the courts.

In WAWG business, President Gil Crosby nominated Andy Juris of Klickitat County and Charlie Mead of Columbia County to the Executive Committee. The board nomination was Andrew Schafer from Franklin County. All three were approved. The board also approved WAWG committee chairs: Nicole Berg and Larry Cochran for natural resources, Andy Juris for marketing, Howard McDonald for membership, Marci Green for public information/public relations, Jim Moyer for research, Gil Crosby for state legislation, Andy Juris for transportation, Ryan Poe for national legislation, and Matt Horlacher for barley. The next WAWG state board meeting is scheduled for Friday, Feb. 20. ■

## Introducing Kelli Weber

At their December meeting, the Whitman County Wheat Growers Association elected **Kelli Weber** as their new president and Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) state board representative.

Weber grew up on a farm in southern Whitman County where her father and grandfather raised mostly wheat with some barley and stand-up peas. After graduating from Colton High School and attending the University of Idaho, Weber took a job with Twin City Foods running a green pea viner. She spent time in 2006 and 2007 doing custom harvesting in Oklahoma, Kansas, Nebraska, Wyoming, and Montana where she got a taste of harvesting mustard, which she wasn't fond of. Weber also got a chance to harvest rice in California.



"That was interesting. It was the first crop I ever cut that they wanted moisture at 20%," she said. "About five weeks before cutting, they'd drain the water off the fields so you had a firm base, but that wasn't always the case. Cutting rice is also where I learned how to brake-steer combines. I had a lot of fun, but I don't want to be a rice farmer. I have a whole new respect for growers who cut crops that wet."

In 2007, Weber went to work for Whitman County farmer Dave Harlow. Since 2023, she's been employed by Jon Semingson Farms out of Pullman, Wash.

When she was first approached about taking on the Whitman County president's role, Weber said she wasn't sure she could commit enough time to doing the job properly.

"If I can't give it everything I have, I don't want to screw it up or take away opportunities from someone who would have the time. It's an honor to even be mentioned and more of an honor to be approved," she said. "We all know the good that the county associations and WAWG does, but I'm really looking forward to actually being a part of it and being able to gain even more knowledge as to what truly goes into the results that we see."

Weber is hoping to set an example and start getting some younger growers involved at both the county and state levels. She said that if younger growers don't get involved, they won't have the background knowledge needed to make effective decisions.

"Somebody's got to be able to take the reins and to step into these roles as (older) people decide they want to slow down. The earlier you get involved, the easier that transition is going to be," she explained.

Besides the Whitman County growers, Weber also sits on the Spokane Junior Livestock Show board of directors and is very active in rec league softball. ■

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# First 2026 forecast calls for severe level of stripe rust

By Xianming Chen

USDA-ARS Research Plant Pathologist

Based on the weather data of November and December 2025, stripe rust in the 2026 wheat growing season is predicted to be in the upper range of severe epidemic level (40-60% yield loss on susceptible varieties).

Using a set of forecast models based on the weather data of these two months, potential yield losses in 2026 caused by stripe rust on highly susceptible winter wheat varieties are predicted to be in the range of 35.3% to 78.2% with an average of 56.7%. The predicted severe epidemic level is attributed to the relatively warm weather so far. Based on the potential epidemic level, yield losses of commercially grown varieties are predicted to be 0% to 40% depending upon the level of resistance or susceptibility of individual varieties.

The next forecast will be made in early March based on the entire winter (November- February) weather data. According to the current forecast, fields planted with winter wheat varieties with stripe rust ratings 5 (moderate) to 9 (susceptible) may need early fungicide application at the time of herbicide application. Resistant (ratings 1 and 2) and moderately resistant (ratings 3 and 4) spring wheat varieties should be selected to plant, and varieties with moderately susceptible and susceptible ratings (6-9) should be avoided. ■

# Whitman County growers meet in January

At their January meeting, Whitman County growers heard brief updates that covered the lower Snake River dams, Spring Flat Creek, Farm Service Agency payments, and pesticide license testing.

The big news came from Whitman County Commissioner Art Swannack. He told growers that work on Hume Road, between Highway 195 and Oakesdale, will be completed this year.

Washington Grain Commissioner Art Schultheis had recently returned from Kansas where he attended a flour milling clinic. The group discussed hosting a meeting with the area's congressional representative, Michael Baumgartner, so growers could get to know him better. Washington Wheat Foundation President Randy Suess said the foundation's auction at the 2025 convention was very successful, and they sold more floor tiles than they were expecting. KayDee Gilkey, outreach coordinator for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, encouraged growers to take part in the upcoming Olympia Days trip. She also reminded them about the Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization seminars that began at the end of January. ■



**FRANKLIN COUNTY MEETING.** Last month, more than 50 Franklin County growers gathered at the Kahlotus Grange Hall in Kahlotus, Wash., to hear updates from the Washington Grain Commission and the Lind Dryland Research Station. Growers also heard presentations about range and pasture management, fungicides used on stripe rust, and Italian ryegrass control. Growers earned three pesticide credits, and lunch was provided by the Farmers' Daughter.

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JAN 28

### Staying Ahead of Resistance: The Ryegrass Challenge

Pullman, WA

Featured speakers: Morgan Menaker, Karl Effertz

JAN 29

### Financial Matters in Down Times

Spokane, WA

Featured speaker: Jon Paul Driver

FEB 10

### Webinar Ag Policy Outlook

11:30 am

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Featured speaker: Jim Wiesemeyer

FEB 11

### Global Wheat Markets

Spokane, WA

Featured speaker: Allison Thompson

FEB 18

### Tools For Managing Herbicide Rotations

Ritzville, WA - 2 pesticide credits applied for.

Featured speakers: Aaron Esser, Karl Effertz

FEB 25

### Estate Planning

Washtucna, WA

Featured speakers: Tara Wiswall, Corey Brock, Jared King

FEB 27

### Pesticide Recertification

Ritzville, WA - Pesticide credits applied for.

Featured speaker: Dr. Henry Wetzel

Pesticide credits applied for.

MAR 4

### Pesticide Recertification Webinar

11:30 am - Pesticide credits applied for.

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Featured speaker: Dr. Henry Wetzel

June 2026 Wheat college



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Advance registration is required three days prior to the program.

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# POLICY MATTERS

## State lawmakers kick off 2026 Legislative Session

By Diana Carlen

*Lobbyist, Washington Association of Wheat Growers*

The 2026 Legislative Session kicked off on Jan. 12, 2026. As this is a “short session” year, the session is scheduled to last 60 days, ending on March 12, 2026.

Politically, the makeup of the Legislature is unchanged from last year with Democrats having large majorities — 60% in each chamber. The primary task of the Legislature is to write a state supplemental budget. A supplemental budget is an amendment to the main biennial budget that typically makes minor adjustments to the biennial budget adopted the previous April. This is the second year in a row that lawmakers and Gov. Bob Ferguson must deal with a budget shortfall that the governor estimates to be around \$2.3 billion. Last session, Democratic lawmakers pushed through over \$9 billion in new and increased taxes, along with spending cuts, to bridge a projected gap of around \$16 billion over four years.

Before the new year, the governor released his budget proposal. Ferguson’s proposal included a \$79 billion operating budget that avoids general tax increases, but does target a few business tax incentives. His budget also cuts or delays an array of state services while tapping \$1 billion from the state rainy day fund and redirecting nearly \$570 million in Climate Commitment Act money to maintain the Working Families Tax Credit that provides credits ranging from \$325 to \$1,290 to low to moderate income families. While



PHOTO BY JAMIE APPEL

Gov. Ferguson’s budget proposal does not include any new taxes, he did publicly endorse his support for a millionaires’ tax, an income tax. The millionaires’ tax is a 9.9% tax on adjusted gross income above \$1 million. The tax is estimated to raise \$3 billion per year from roughly 20,000 households. It is not assumed in the budget because it would not generate revenue to the state until 2029 and would certainly be challenged in court since the Washington State Supreme Court has previously held that a state income tax violates the Washington State Constitution.

As of press deadline, the Legislature had completed the second week of its session. Committees have been busy holding public hearings and passing bills out of committee. Many bills are being continuously amended as they move through the process. As of Friday, Jan. 23, 1,047 bills have been filed this session. The first legislative deadline is Feb. 4, when all bills must be voted out of their respective policy committees to remain alive. We also saw the beginning of floor action with passage of some holdover bills from last session.

### **Labor committees hear bills to unionize agricultural workers**

The Senate and House labor policy committees both heard two sets of companion bills that would allow ag workers to unionize. Farmworkers currently can unionize in Washington state, but the National Labor Relations Act excludes farmworkers from submitting their contract demands to binding arbitration.

Senate Bill 6117/HB 2471 would extend collective bargaining rights for employees not covered by the National Labor Relations Act, including agricultural employees, domestic workers, and some small businesses. This would put them under the jurisdiction of the state’s Public Employment Relations Commission. Three commissioners, appointed by the governor, rule on alleged unfair labor

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practices. The commission also assigns mediators to take part in stalled contract talks. If mediation fails, an arbitrator can impose contract terms. Senate Bill 6045 and House Bill 2409 apply collective bargaining rights just to farmworkers.

The agricultural industry was united in opposing these bills, arguing that while agriculture supports their workers who are integral to their operations, agriculture is unique and that is why the federal law does not allow farmworkers to unionize. Representatives from the industry also noted how fragile the ag economy is currently and that labor costs are already among the highest in the U.S. while profits are the lowest. Most importantly, if farmworkers were allowed to strike during critical times of the season, it could threaten a farm's entire annual crop.

### Court hears natural gas initiative challenge

On Jan. 22, the Washington State Supreme Court held oral arguments on the constitutionality of a ballot measure passed by Washington voters to protect access to natural gas service in homes and other buildings.

Environmental groups and local governments brought a challenge against Initiative 2066, arguing the measure is unconstitutional because it covers more than a single subject and does not contain the full text of state laws it would alter. Last March, a King County Superior Court judge agreed. Backers of the initiative appealed the case directly to the Washington State Supreme Court, bypassing the court of appeals.

The Building Industry Association of Washington, a trade group for homebuilders, sponsored the initiative and is defending it alongside the state attorney general's office. The state has to defend the initiative because it was passed by voters. Proponents argue Initiative 2066 is constitutional because each of the provisions is germane to the general subject of protecting access to and use of natural gas.

The court will take the case under review and likely reach a decision in the next six to 12 months.

### Boehnke to run for Newhouse seat

State Sen. Matt Boehnke (R-Kennewick) announced on Jan. 22 that he is forgoing re-election and entering this year's race to succeed retiring Republican Dan Newhouse in central Washington. He is the third republican to get in the race after Jerrod Sessler and Amanda McKinney.

Boehnke is in his first term representing the 8th Legislative District after serving four years in the House.

The same day as Boehnke's announcement, State Sen. Nikki Torres (R-Pasco) announced she will abandon her campaign for re-election in the 15th Legislative District and run for Boehnke's seat instead.

For weekly legislative updates, go to [wawg.org](http://wawg.org). ■

## Industry welcomes decision to hear Roundup appeal

The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) welcomed the U.S. Supreme Court's decision to review Bayer's petition to decide whether the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act pre-empts a label-based failure-to-warn claim where the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has not required the warning. While oral arguments have not been scheduled, a decision may be announced as soon as this summer.

The case is Monsanto Co. v. Durnell, John L and centers on a critical issue for America's farmers. Crop protection tools reviewed and approved through the federal regulatory process are evaluated using rigorous science and risk-based standards to ensure the tools can be used safely and responsibly, said Sam Kieffer, NAWG CEO.

"The Environmental Protection Agency's determinations provide farmers with a nationwide clear and consistent framework for the use of crop protection tools. When state lawsuits conflict with federal approvals, it creates uncertainty for farmers who rely on EPA-approved products to help protect their crops from weeds and insects to produce a safe, affordable food supply," he said. ■

## Bell appointed to lead Washington FSA office

On Jan. 6, 2026, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins announced that **Patrick Bell** had been appointed as the new state executive director of the Farm Service Agency (FSA) in Washington state. Bell was raised in a multigeneration farming and ranching family in Stevens County and brings deep agricultural roots and a lifelong connection to rural communities. He has served in public service in Washington, D.C., and Eastern Washington, helping shape and implement policy affecting agriculture, natural resources, and rural economies statewide.



Since 2023, Bell has worked as the Spokane County communications director. He previously worked for eight years as a senior staff member for former Eastern Washington Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers.

Bell replaces Jon Wyss, who was fired from the top state position in October with no explanation. ■

# NAWG promotes Peña to VP position

The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) has announced that **Anthony Peña** has been promoted to vice president of policy and communications. Peña joined the NAWG team in March 2025 as policy manager, where he has played a key role in advancing the association's policy priorities and strengthening engagement



on behalf of U.S. wheat farmers. In his new role, he will lead NAWG's policy and communications strategy as the organization continues to advocate for a brighter future for wheat farmers and rural America.

Prior to joining NAWG, Peña served as government relations manager at the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA). He also previously worked for U.S. Sen. Patty Murray. A native of Vancouver, Wash., Peña earned his Bachelor of Arts degree from Eastern Washington University.

"I'm honored to step into this new role and continue serving our nation's wheat farmers," Peña said. "Working alongside NAWG members and staff over the past year has been deeply rewarding, and I'm excited to build on that work to ensure wheat farmers' voices are heard and their priorities are advanced in Washington and beyond."

"We are thrilled to have Anthony step into this leadership role," said NAWG CEO Sam Kieffer. "He has done an excellent job as our policy manager, and we look forward to continuing to work with him as we advance NAWG's mission of building a better future for wheat growers and rural America." ■

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Wheat breeding is the scientific process of developing new wheat varieties by selecting and crossing plants with desirable traits. For thousands of years, humans have worked to improve wheat so it grows better, produces more grain, and meets the nutritional and functional needs of people around the world.

At its core, wheat breeding relies on natural genetic diversity. Breeders cross parent plants that each have valuable traits, such as high yield, drought tolerance, or strong gluten for breadmaking. The offspring are then carefully evaluated over many years, and only the best-performing plants are selected for further development. This process is known as conventional breeding, and it does not involve adding genes from unrelated species.

We breed wheat because the challenges facing agriculture are constantly changing. Farmers must contend with plant diseases, pests, climate variability, and limited natural resources such as water and fertile soil. Taller wheat varieties, for example, have been bred for regions with low rainfall or poor soil where straw is also valuable, while shorter varieties are better suited for high fertility or irrigated conditions. Some wheat types are bred to have low protein and weak gluten for cakes and noodles, while others have strong gluten needed for bread and pasta.

Wheat breeding plays a crucial role in feeding the world.



Today, wheat provides about 21% of the food calories consumed globally and supplies a major portion of daily protein for billions of people. In many developing countries, wheat is a dietary staple because it is affordable, stores well, and can be grown in a wide range of environments.

By improving yield and disease resistance, wheat breeders help farmers produce more food on the same amount of land, which is essential as the global population continues to grow. Breeding also helps stabilize food supplies by developing varieties that can withstand droughts, heat stress, or plant diseases, reducing the risk of crop failure.

A common topic in discussions about wheat breeding is genetically modified organisms, or GMOs. GMOs are organisms whose DNA has been

altered using genetic engineering techniques, often by inserting genes to introduce new traits. While GMOs are used in some crops, there are currently no commercially available wheat varieties grown in the U.S. that are genetically engineered. All wheat grown today for American store shelves is the result of conventional breeding.

Misunderstandings about wheat breeding have led some people to believe that modern wheat is fundamentally different or harmful. In reality, wheat has been part of the human diet for thousands of years, and its basic composition has not changed. Proteins like gluten and gliadin have always been present in wheat, including ancient varieties. Breeding has improved how these proteins function in food and how reliably wheat can be produced.

In Eastern Washington, wheat breeding is not an abstract scientific concept. It is a living partnership between the land, the farmer, and research institutions that support our region. By building on the natural genetic diversity of wheat and pairing it with the knowledge passed down through generations, breeders help ensure that wheat continues to thrive across all of our unique microclimates. ■

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# Olympia Days 2026

GROWERS TAKE PART IN ANNUAL TRIP TO EDUCATE LEGISLATORS, ADVOCATE FOR INDUSTRY

By Trista Crossley

*Editor, Wheat Life*

Last month, growers and staff of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) spent three days in Olympia, discussing WAWG priorities with legislators, handing out cookies, and meeting with the governor and his staff to advocate for the state's wheat industry.

"We met with more than 40 legislators from both sides of the aisle and several agency leaders to talk about the

instrumental in setting appointments and putting together talking points for the meetings, which they reviewed during a dinner with growers the evening before appointments began. The visit was sweetened by cookies and coffee that WAWG handed out in the Capitol Building rotunda to legislators and staff. On hand to help serve the goodies were 2026 Wheat Ambassadors, Isabella Huntley of Colfax, Wash., and Luke Goetz of Coulee City, Wash. The ambassadors also attended legislative meetings and ate lunch one day in the Senate dining room as guests of Sen. Mark Schoesler (R-Ritzville).

Lawmakers were invited to an evening legislative reception at a local restaurant. The event gave growers the opportunity to meet with officials in a more relaxed setting.

"Our reception was very well attended, and I think legislators appreciated the opportunity to be able to relax and mingle with growers in a more casual setting," Hennings said. "We were able to continue some of the discussions we started earlier in the day and meet with legislators who were unable to set appointments with us."

While at the capitol, growers were able to sit in on Senate and House hearings. They were also able to share some upsetting information recently released by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Economic Research Service that shows Washington was ranked last in the nation for take-home pay in 2024.

"Farmers know how tough it has been to make a living farming, but that information is sometimes hard to quantify," said Gil Crosby, WAWG president. "Being able to back that up with USDA data puts hard numbers on what we are experiencing. It was eye-opening to some of the urban legislators we met with."

WAWG's priorities for the 2026 Washington State Legislative Session include:

**Maintaining a viable agricultural industry in the state is vital for food security, the state's economy, and environmental stewardship.** The agriculture industry in Washington state faces significant challenges. According to data from the USDA, Washington state lost 3,717 farms from 2017 to 2022. That means approximately two farms a day are lost, every single day, with an average 450 acres of farmland taken out of production every day as well. It is essential that Washington adopt a "do no harm" approach to new taxes or regulations, especially related to food production. Washington state ranks 50 in the U.S. in farm take-home income at a negative \$259 million. Our



PHOTO BY JAMIE APPEL

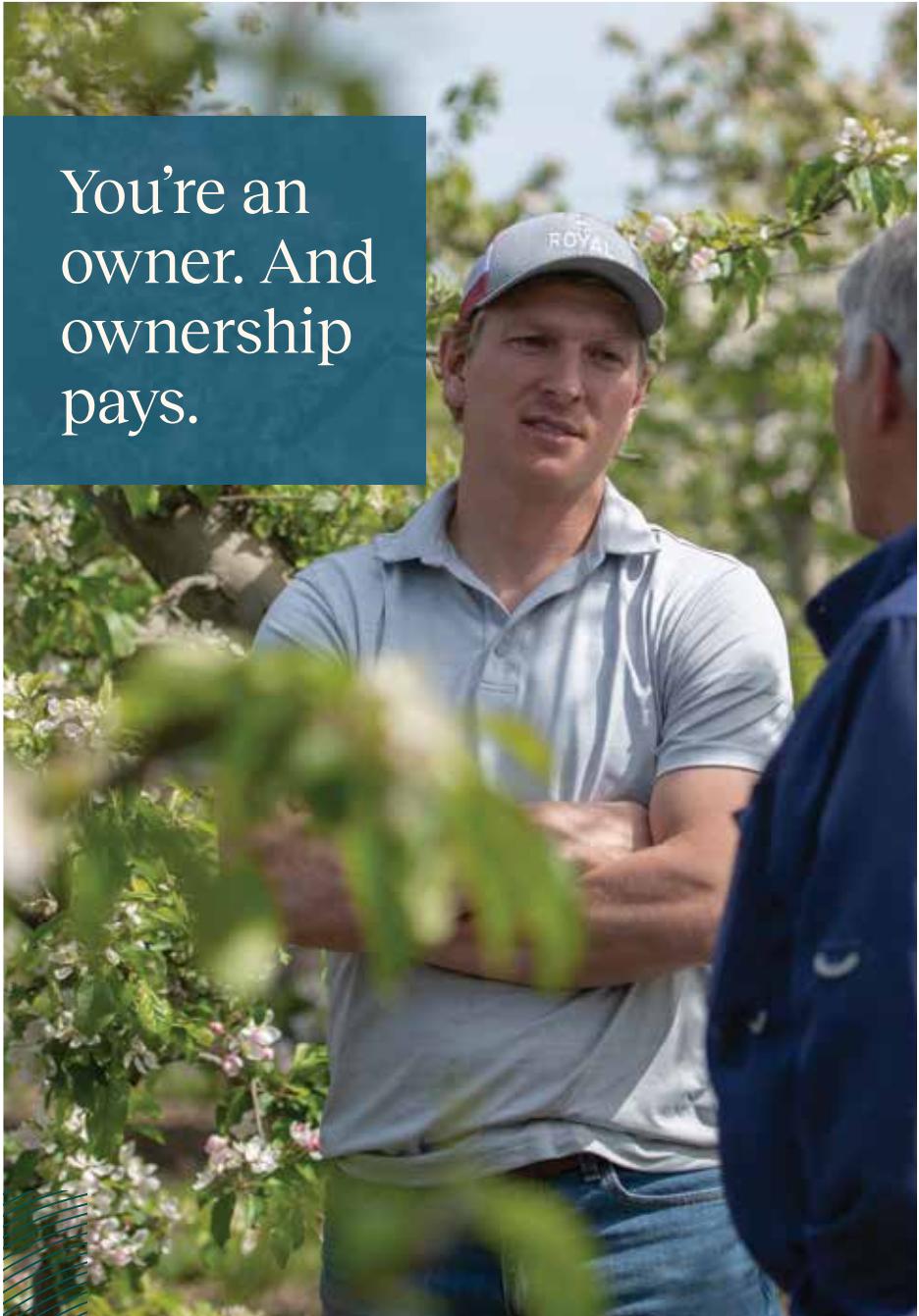
state's wheat industry and discuss legislation being proposed," said Michelle Hennings, WAWG executive director. "We also had an opportunity to meet face-to-face with Gov. Ferguson to express our concerns about ag viability. Farmers are facing so many hurdles right now, from onerous regulations to depressed wheat prices to high input costs. We appreciate his time and willingness to meet with us, as well as the growers who took the time to make the trip and advocate for their industry."

WAWG lobbyists Diana Carlen and Mark Streuli were

public policy focus should be to reduce, not add to, the cost of getting Washington-grown products to the dinner tables of Washingtonians, Americans, and global consumers. Any added fees, compliance burdens, or permitting delays fall disproportionately on producers who are operating on tight margins, especially in rural communities. Increased costs weaken local economies, threaten the viability of family-run operations, and make it harder for Washington-grown products to reach markets. Policies that keep production and transportation costs manageable directly support the economic health of rural areas and the overall stability of the state's agricultural sector. *WAWG urges the Legislature to remember the uniqueness of the industry when crafting public policy that may result in increased production costs and further threaten the viability of family farms in the state.*

**Exempting lubricants from the Climate Commitment Act.** California and Oregon currently exempt emissions from lubricants, including motor oil, hydraulic fluid, transmission fluid, and grease, from their cap-and-trade programs, recognizing that lubricants aren't combusted, their emissions aren't direct, and can't be precisely quantified. Unfortunately, lubricant emissions are covered under Washington's Climate Commitment Act, which results in farmers and Washington drivers paying a carbon surcharge. As Washington is pursuing linking their program with California, Washington state should follow California and improve affordability for the agricultural industry and all Washington drivers. Exempting emissions from lubricants would recognize their similar role as necessary, noncombustion inputs that support the operation and maintenance of farm equipment. As essential components for running tractors, potato diggers, and combines, lubricants such as engine oil and hydraulic fluid are recurring maintenance

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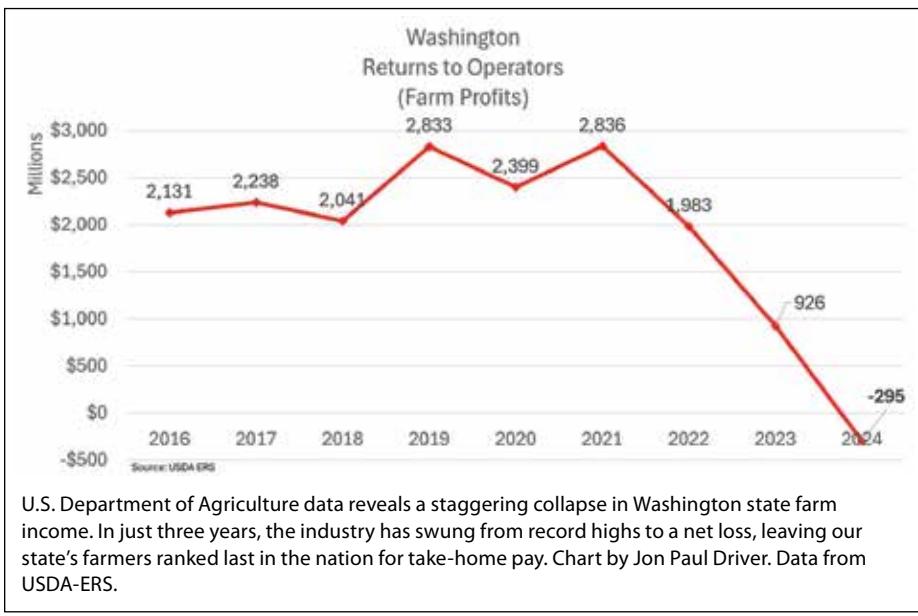
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inputs in agricultural production. WAWG supports Senate Bill 5856 to reduce the cost of growing and harvesting food, keeping Washington farms productive and competitive.

**Protecting future viability of ag through voluntary conservation programs.** WAWG is supportive of voluntary conservation programs that offer flexibility and fairly compensate farmers for riparian protection. WAWG stands in firm opposition to *new regulatory requirements such as mandatory riparian buffers* based on Site Potential Tree Height as it threatens the future viability of agriculture by removing significant portions of productive farmland out of production. *In addition, mandatory buffers also jeopardize federal conservation funding.* WAWG also supports full funding of voluntary conservation programs like CREP and the Voluntary Stewardship Program.

#### Preserving the lower Snake

**River dams.** WAWG supports keeping the lower Snake River dams intact as they are vital to Washington's and the nation's economy and transportation infrastructure. WAWG also supports funding for maintaining the Columbia-Snake River System. Removal of the four lower Snake River dams would significantly increase carbon emissions and jeopardize health, safety, and livelihoods in already economically fragile local and regional economies. WAWG supports the findings in the federal EIS and opposes any state, legislative, or administrative effort to remove or disrupt the Snake River dam system, including the recent U.S. Government's commitments in support of the Columbia Basin Restoration Initiative. WAWG is deeply disappointed by the lack of transparency in the mediation process. Despite consistent efforts to engage, Washington's agriculture industry was effectively excluded from this process even though our members would be directly impacted by significant changes to the river system.



**Pesticide safety.** Access to pesticides is essential to keeping Washington agriculture productive and globally competitive. WAWG supports the professional use of crop protection products, which have been shown to be safe and effective through science-based research.

#### Providing seasonal flexibility to benefit both workers and farmers.

Agricultural workers became eligible for overtime pay in 2021 after the Legislature removed the agricultural overtime exemption and adopted a phased-in approach. In 2022, overtime kicked in after 55 hours in a week, dropping to 48 hours in 2023, and down to 40 hours in 2024. Unfortunately, Washington's overtime requirement does not address the seasonal needs of Washington agriculture given the time-sensitive nature of growing and harvesting mature field crops and vegetables. Washington pays 462% more in labor costs than the national average and 76% more in overall operating costs. The agricultural industry is unique from other types of industries because of pressures on farmers, ranchers, and workers caused by issues mainly out of their control such as uncertainty of weather, yields, calving, national and international shifts in trade policy, and transportation inconsistencies. In addition, the overtime requirement has unintended consequences for farmworkers. A recent examination of California's overtime requirement for agriculture conducted by a professor at the University of California-Berkeley found that as a result of the overtime law, California farmworkers worked a total of 15,000 to 45,000 fewer hours and earned a total of \$6 to \$9 million less. WAWG supports legislation allowing farmworkers to earn money for up to 50 hours per week for 12 weeks of the year before overtime provisions kick in. This legislation will allow agricultural employers limited flexibility to shape work schedules during a narrow window of time to best fit the peaks of labor demand, thereby providing them some ability to weather the unpredictability of agricultural work and ensure that Washington's second largest industry remains vital and strong while also ensuring security for farm workers.

**Protecting existing tax policy.** Retaining all food- and farm-related tax incentives are critical to the agricultural industry. Agriculture tax incentives are a valuable benefit to our economy and offer farmers a more level playing field with other major ag production states. Incentives are intended to be a long-term state investment into the agricultural industry. ■

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# Olympia Days 2026



# Pesticide license update

MOST WASHINGTON APPLICATORS WILL NEED TO TAKE EXTRA STEP TO RECERTIFY

By Trista Crossley

*Editor, Wheat Life*

Beginning Jan. 1, 2026, almost everyone in Washington state holding a pesticide applicators license will be required to take at least one extra step before recertifying their license in order to meet updated Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) standards.

A notice from the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) was sent out to licensees in 2025 informing them of the changes, leaving many growers confused as to what they actually had to do. While the requirements depend on the license type and category, most wheat growers will need to take a specific certification and training (C&T) course OR pass a quiz. Both the course and quiz are available online. In addition, many agricultural organizations are offering the course as part of their regular pesticide recertification classes. Growers must complete the course OR quiz before their regular, five-year recertification cycle is up. The one-credit course also counts towards a licensee's regular recertification credit requirement.

"Because it's a five-year cycle, about a fifth of our licensees have to meet this new requirement by the end of this year and then the next fifth by the end of 2027 and the next fifth by the end of 2028, etc.," explained **Christina**



**Zimmerman**, program manager for WSDA's Licensing and Recertification Program. "The people with the shortest amount of time have one year to meet this new requirement."

While the word "quiz" left some growers thinking they'd need to retake their pesticide license exam, Zimmerman said that's not the case. The quiz consists of 10 questions. There are no study materials because all the information growers need to answer the questions is provided in the quiz. The quiz is offered in both English and Spanish and is free online. Licensees can also sign up to take a paper version at a testing center or at WSDA's computer-based testing centers for a fee.

"It's a reading comprehension type of thing. The answers are going to be pretty clear in each question as long as they read the material. What we're doing is making sure the licensee is receiving that information," she said.

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) will be offering the C&T course as part of its Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization's 2026 winter schedule. An in-person session will be held on Feb. 27 at the Washington Wheat Foundation Building in Ritzville, Wash., beginning at 9 a.m. WAWG members can attend free of charge; nonmembers will be charged \$25. Preregistration is required; lunch is included. Besides the



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in-person session, a webinar will be held on March 4 beginning at 11:30 a.m. Registration information can be found at [wawg.org/ammo-workshops/](http://wawg.org/ammo-workshops/).

Some types of licenses will have to take a new exam, for example, anybody who applies fumigants in an enclosed space, such as a silo, or applies pesticides aerially. WSDA's website includes information about the C&T rule changes and what is required of each type of license. Visit [agr.wa.gov/services/licenses-permits-and-certificates/pesticide-license-and-recertification/pesticide-and-spi-licensing/pesticide-licensing-webinars/certification-training-updates](http://agr.wa.gov/services/licenses-permits-and-certificates/pesticide-license-and-recertification/pesticide-and-spi-licensing/pesticide-licensing-webinars/certification-training-updates) or scan the QR code above.

"Every licensee is going to have to take some steps to meet the new requirements, and we want them to know that they're not on their own in figuring those out. We encourage everyone to look through our webpages — they have really useful online charts, how-to charts — and reach out to us if they have questions, because our goal is to make sure that every licensee has the information and the support to understand the changes," Zimmerman said. "They need to stay compliant as these changes are



being rolled out. It's their livelihood, and we want to make sure that they understand."

While the changes may feel abrupt to growers, the EPA began updating the Federal Certification of Pesticide Applicators rule in 2017. Zimmerman said EPA made extensive changes to the standards that pesticide applicators had to meet, and every state was required to submit a plan laying out how they were going to meet those new standards. Washington state's plan was approved in November 2022, and WSDA began the process of changing their rules. The new rules that became effective on Jan. 1 include changes to categories; updated definitions, like definition of use; additional dealer record keeping requirements; and requirements for the direct supervision of noncertified applicators that use restricted-use pesticides.

"Washington state already had pretty high standards for licensees to meet in order to obtain a license, but we still needed to make some changes as well as add new categories required by EPA," she said. "The biggest hurdle is that the federal rule does not allow states to grandfather in licensees that were licensed under the standards before the rule change." ■

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# Let's make a marketing plan (Part 1)

## THE GOAL IS TO SELL WHEAT FOR A PRICE THAT MAKES GROWERS A PROFIT

By Howard Nelson

*Special to Wheat Life*

The articles that I've been writing this past year have all been leading up to this one — making a marketing plan (broken into two parts). I've covered the basic principles and some of the marketing tools that you need to understand and know how to use. The first thing we should do is establish a goal for our marketing plan. It's unstated, but we want to sell our wheat at a price where we make a profit, and to do that, we need to sell at a good price, which becomes our goal. A good price is different for each party in the market. For many absentee landlords, it's the price shortly after weights and grades are completed for the crop. For you, the wheat producer, a good price is one that covers your costs of production and provides a profit. But the market doesn't care if you make a profit. Supply and demand factors will interact, and they will determine the price. A good price for me is a price that is in the top third of the market range for that year. We're not trying to hit home runs, but make hits and get runners on base!

There is no one right way to make a marketing plan. Over the years, I have attended meetings where different

strategies were presented and used to make a marketing plan. One strategy recommends that you market percentages of your crop during the four growing seasons: preplant, growing, harvest, and storage. This strategy often had growers marketing wheat during periods when the prices were at lows in the market, which lowers your average marketing price.

Another recommended strategy is that growers market when wheat prices are above their cost of production. This is a sound strategy in principle, but there are issues in implementation of this approach. First, you need to accurately calculate your cost of production. This becomes a tough calculation, especially if you are growing several different crops. Expenses directly associated with a crop are easy to determine, but allocation of overhead expenses is more difficult. Any mistakes in this calculation could mislead you into marketing your crop at the wrong time. In addition, if prices are below your cost of production, do you wait for higher prices? Maybe you need money to meet cash flow needs. If you market below your cost of production, the next sale needs to be made at your cost of production plus the loss realized from your previous sale, or you reduce working capital, which is a problem.



The following plan utilizes a marketing philosophy that I have developed over the past 50 years based on my farming and work experiences. My approach is to try to market our crop in the top third of the marketing range each year. This approach is not perfect either, especially since you have no idea when to expect the top third of the market to occur. To anticipate when we may expect this goal to occur, we use analytics — how the market responded in past years given similar circumstances. Analytics gives us a probability that the market will react similarly to events that occurred in the past under similar conditions. To keep a perspective on this, I like to look at the probability that an event will not occur. If the probability that an event will occur is 80%, then the probability that it won't occur is 1 out of every 5 events.

There are four parts in a marketing plan: projection of bushels to market (this year and next year), market outlook, market strategy based on market outlook, and implementation of the marketing strategy.

Crop insurance needs to be included as a part of this plan, but it doesn't replace having a market plan. There are several different forms of crop insurance, but the most common type is revenue coverage. It combines the proven yield for a unit (this may be a single field or several fields put together) with a price guarantee. The price guarantee is the higher of the projected price (determined in the fall prior to harvest) or the harvest price (determined in August of the crop year). The projected price is calculated by adding a basis to the CBOT September futures close starting in the middle of August and finishing in the middle of September. The harvest price is the Portland cash price for August as reported by the Portland Merchants Exchange. Growers can choose different levels of guaranteed revenue (proven yield times projected price) up to 90%. Different insurance premiums are associated with each level of coverage.

The first step is a projection of the quantity of bushels of wheat to market, and we're going to calculate this for our current year and also project bushels of production for next year. The best way to do this is to build a spreadsheet listing all your fields with their acreage and the crop that will be grown in each field each year, including summer fallow. You will also need to include the crop share for each field.

Next, we estimate yields. There will be three yields: a projected yield, a crop insurance projected yield, and the actual yield determined after harvest. I am going to use my farm in Lincoln County as an example in our discussion so I can use real numbers. My first projection is made in the fall after planting. I use a yield that I feel is reasonable given my farm's past history. I may update my

projection at any time if I feel that weather conditions or something else has impacted yields. I compare my yield forecast to my actual production history (APH) calculated for crop insurance coverage. I have two production units, and the APH is slightly different because the fields were in wheat production different years. We need to do this for both winter and spring wheat fields. I have two fields that were planted this fall, one is winter wheat and the other is winter canola, and we are currently not planning to plant any spring wheat on my farm. The winter wheat field is



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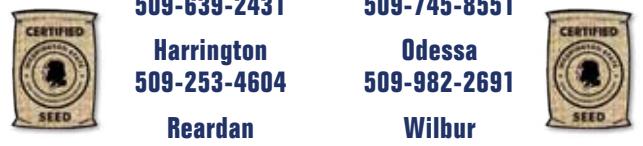
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probably my best field and has APH yields ranging from 51 to 99, and a 10 year average of 76 bushels per acre. I am going to use a 70 bushels per acre yield for my preharvest estimate until we get through the winter and get enough soil moisture to support a higher yield.

For crop insurance, different levels of coverage can be selected, and your choice is usually determined by the insurance premium that will be charged. I choose the 85% level, which gives me the desired balance between cost and coverage. The APH is multiplied by the level of coverage that was selected, giving us an insurance yield guarantee of 64.7 bushels per acre. The projected price last fall was \$6.94 per bushel, and the premium was \$19.81 per acre, I paid \$.306 per bushel to protect that 64.7 bushels per acre at the \$6.94 per bushel level. This looks similar to buying a Put option with a Strike Price of \$6.94 per bushel (this is a type of option that I haven't explained, but it protects you from lower prices).

We now calculate the bushels we have to market by multiplying the acres in production by our projected yields and the crop share. The crop insurance marketing estimate will not change, but our marketing estimate will change if we change our yield estimate. After harvest, we'll again update our production when we know our ac-

tual yields and calculate our final total bushels to market. It's going to take some work and time to put this information together, but once you've completed the spreadsheet, you can use it for following years.

We're going to need to pause here in our marketing plan discussion, and the completion of this article will continue in the March edition of *Wheat Life*. ■

*The information in this article should not be considered a solicitation. Past performance, whether actual or indicated by simulated historical tests of strategies may not be indicative of future results. Trading advice reflects good faith judgment at a specific point in time and is subject to change without notice. There is no guarantee that the advice given will result in profitable trades. Any strategy that involves trading futures or option contracts can involve losses that may be substantial and not suitable for everyone. Each person should carefully consider if trading futures is appropriate because of your financial condition.*

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

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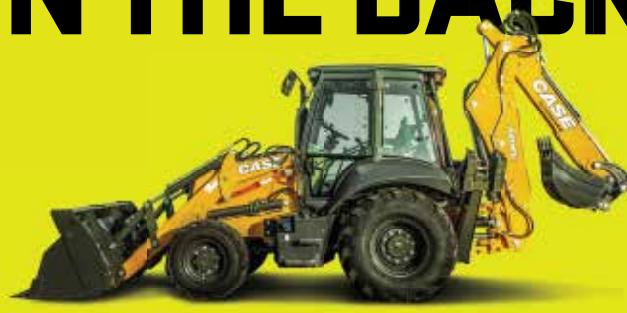
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## Business has been protecting farmers' crops for nearly 100 years

### Western Insurance Associates

By Trista Crossley

*Editor, Wheat Life*

For nearly a century, farmers in the Palouse have been able to rely on Western Insurance to help them through crop failures, revenue losses, and everything else a crop insurance policy protects.

Western Insurance was originally formed as Fairfield Waverly Insurance in 1916 when Waverly Exchange Bank merged with the Bank of Fairfield. Over the years, the insurance company grew, adding Latah Insurance in 1961 and The Wall Agency in Tekoa, Wash., in 1984. In 2009, the company was purchased from the Bank of Fairfield, and in 2016, Fairfield Waverly Insurance merged with Hodgson and Associates to become Western Insurance Associates.

Today, Western Insurance is headquartered in Spokane, Wash., and has seven offices around Eastern Washington, including offices in Odessa, Wilbur, Walla Walla, Rosalia, and Clarkston. While the company offers traditional insurance policies, such as home and auto, it has also offered crop insurance since at least the 1930s, when crop insurance was first permanently authorized by Congress.

"I'm not biased, but we have the best team," said Christy Harrison, a crop insurance agent who has worked for Western Insurance since 2017. "Our farm and crop team works really closely together."

The other members of the farm and crop team include Jake Holling, Sherry Watkins, Tawnya Myers, Heidi Moffet, Mandi Braun, and Celeste McDonald.

Harrison herself didn't come from a farming background. She began



Western Insurance Associates' farm and crop team are, from left, Jake Holling, Sherry Watkins, Celeste McDonald, Mandi Braun, Heidi Moffet, Tawnya Myers, Christy Harrison.

her journey into crop insurance in 2014 when she was hired as an underwriter for a Tri-Cities company. The new job came with a steep learning curve for the self-described city girl, but in the end, "ag came in and stole my heart," she said with a laugh.

"Everybody says it takes three years to learn (crop insurance). The devil is in the details. There's a lot of details in this program, a lot of deadlines. Every policy is different. It takes so much time because you've got to go through each growing season and see it from start to finish and see those cycles," she explained.

Harrison describes crop insurance as having a lot more "service" work than other types of insurance. A crop insurance policy typically has three separate deadlines: the sales closing date, the production reporting date, and the acreage reporting date.

"Those are the three main deadlines, and every time, we're touching our entire book of business. It's almost like we're renewing policies or having those annual reviews three times a year. It's data entry; it's a lot of numbers. It's a lot of making sure acres are right, making sure the policy is set up correctly," she said. "You're putting in data, but you're also looking at the policy as a whole to make sure it's written right for that producer. Every farm's so different."

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Risk Management Agency oversees the administration of crop insurance, working with private-sector companies known as approved insurance providers, or AIPs, who sell and service the crop insurance policies. Crop insurance agents work closely with AIPs to stay informed of changes to existing products as well as learn about new products being made available to producers. Agents are not allowed to be involved in the loss process on something like a multiperil crop insurance policy. AIPs hire adjustors who go into the field to inspect or appraise a crop, usually when adjusting a claim. ▶



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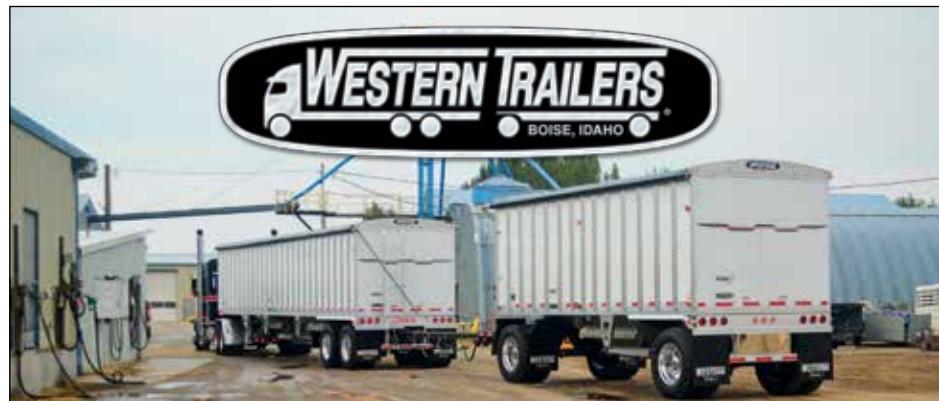
Western Insurance has expanded far beyond its beginnings in Fairfield, but the company prides itself on retaining a sense of small-town service.

"I think that that's our 'special sauce.' We're all really connected with our clients. That's really important to us, and as we grow, that's just something that we're not going to let go of," Harrison said. "We love what we do. We love serving farmers and providing them risk management tools that can put their mind at ease. That's our job, so we've got to take care of the people we serve. We don't have jobs if we don't have our farmers."

Because crop insurance is such a critical part of a grower's risk management strategy, Harrison said it is important to work with an agent that they trust and that they communicate well with. They also need to be diligent in reporting any farm and or crop changes to their agent. And crop insurance isn't just for producers; landlords, especially those in a crop share agreement, need to make sure their portion of the crop is protected.

"We have so many different coverage levels, different plans of insurance (for landlords). It's the job of a crop insurance agent to ask the client about their concerns and needs," she said. "If they're relying on this income to live off of, then they probably need to buy a higher coverage level, and they probably need to have that revenue side in addition to the yield side. It's really important that we're having those conversations."

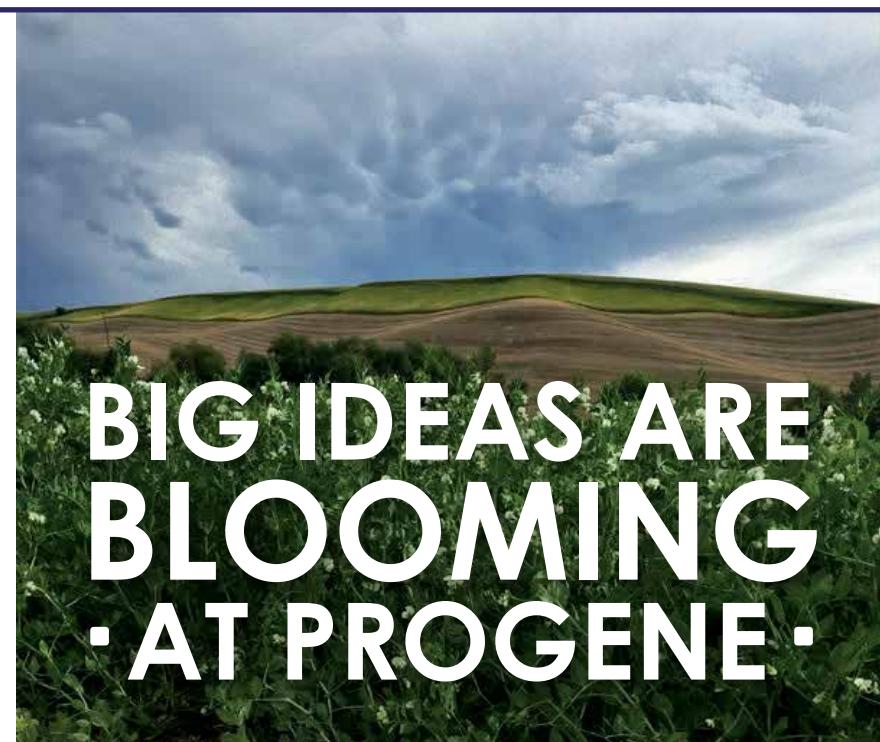
Last year, the company's flagship office in Fairfield was sold, and they are looking for a new office in Spangle. More information about Western Insurance can be found at [westerninsurance.com](http://westerninsurance.com). ■



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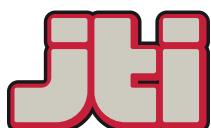
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# CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



**Join our annual Research Review on Feb. 19**

By Kevin Klein

*Chairman, Washington Grain Commission*

This time of year, wheat growers are a lot like winter wheat. To the outside world, the crops we planted in fall seem to go dormant, but we know that what looks like stillness is actually the critical process of vernalization — preparing the plants to head in spring. The outside world is also likely to assume farmers get to go dormant for a while, but we know it's actually the "meetings" time of year! We do get a break from most of our field work, which we must use wisely to prepare ourselves and our businesses for the rush of spring work and the year to come. From grower meetings to board meetings, the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) meeting season is also in full swing.

Starting in January, the WGC began attending grower meetings, following the success of last year's series. While last year we focused on HB4 updates and discussions, this year we're focusing on how the WGC is actively looking for new markets while working to expand and strengthen our current ones.

In mid-January, WGC commissioners and staff traveled to Pullman for two meetings. On Jan. 14, we met with our current endowment holders to hear their updates and also to provide feedback and direction, and on Jan. 15, we held our first board meeting of the year.

On Feb. 19, the WGC will join Washington State University (WSU) for our annual research review. During this meeting, we'll hear updates from projects that are up for renewal alongside new proposals for consideration. Over the past year, the WGC has been working to improve this research review process to provide more oversight and increase grower involvement, which led to the formation of the Research Advisory Committee. Chaired by Washington Association of

Grain Growers (WAWG) Research Chair Jim Moyer, the purpose of this committee is to:

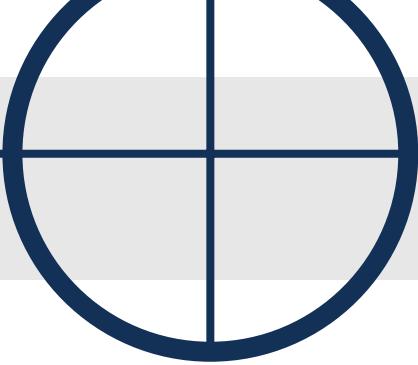
- Provide stewardship of the \$2 million annual investment of grower dollars dedicated to research.
- Ensure that the funded research reflects the strategic interests of the WGC and is faithful, relevant, and beneficial to Washington grain producers.
- Provide oversight of grower dollars and corresponding research projects to deliver the greatest results and maximum return on investment.
- Increase grower involvement in research investment decisions and engage additional growers in leadership roles.

Committee members were selected from each of the rainfall regions, with operations in both dryland and irrigated and conventional and minimal till. Each committee member will focus on a couple of select projects, with the whole group providing recommendations to the WGC board. On Jan. 13, the Research Advisory Committee met in Pullman to gain an understanding of the process and to get a behind-the-scenes view of the research facilities at WSU.

Though the research committee process is new, the annual Research Review will remain a key component of the review process. This annual opportunity is where all growers are welcome to come listen, ask questions, and provide feedback on projects and proposals. Most importantly, the researchers look forward to updating and informing growers on the outcomes of their projects!

We hope you'll join us for this year's annual research review, which will start at 9 a.m. at the Courtyard by Marriott in Pullman, Wash. Scan the QR code to RSVP so we can ensure lunch is provided for you. ■





# REPORTS

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

## Opinion: Food by permission, not price

Humanitarian aid, contested access, and market collapse in Yemen and Sudan

By Jake Liening

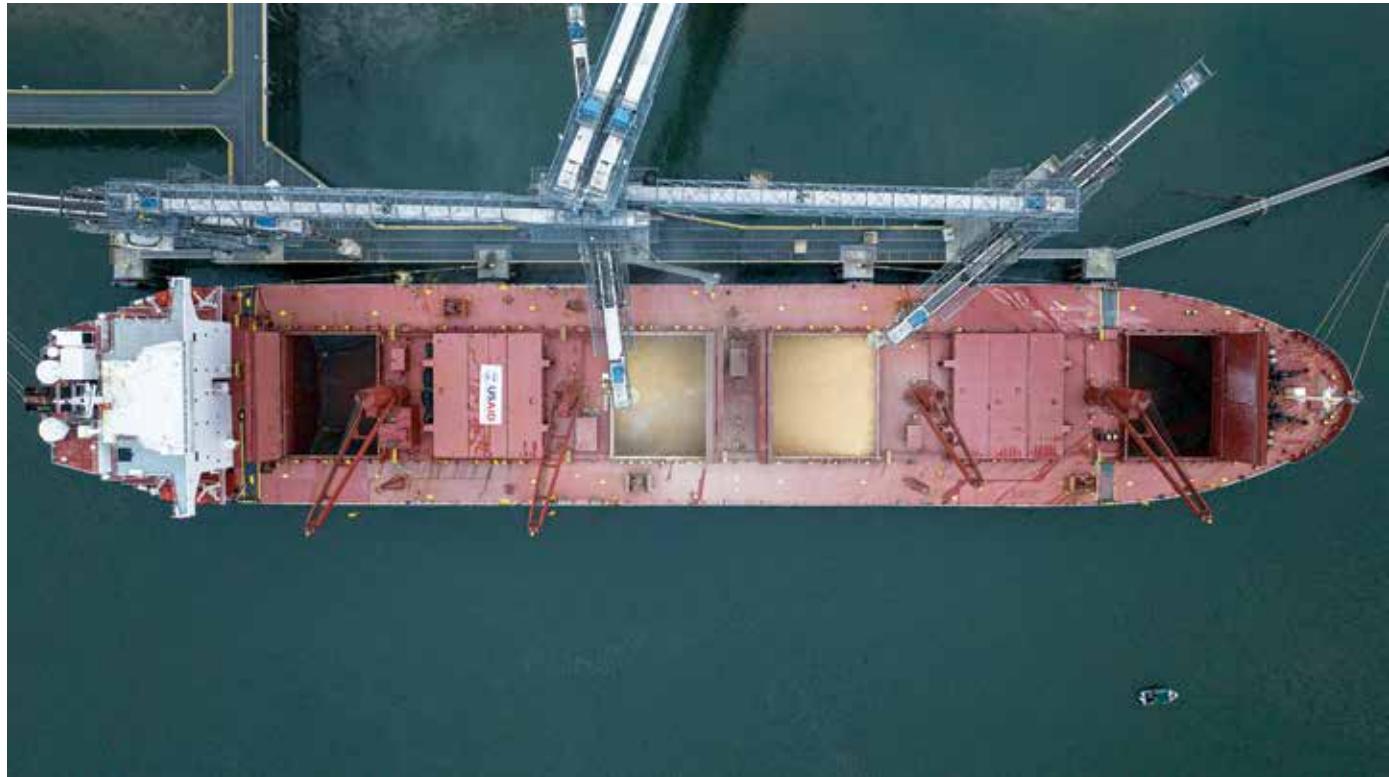
*Market Development Specialist, Washington Grain Commission*

I work in the world of wheat, and most of what I deal with is practical rather than theoretical. My lane is Washington soft white wheat and the markets where it competes. In my role with the Washington Grain Commission I plan international market development programs and work directly with stakeholders across the wheat supply chain, from growers and elevators to exporters, millers, and end users. It forces a practical mindset: how wheat moves when the world is calm, and what happens when trade, logistics, or politics start to interfere.

Alongside my civilian work, I've spent the past six years as an enlisted airman in the Air National Guard.

Most of my service has focused on maintaining an aerial refueling aircraft, a role that lives in logistics, contingency planning, and reliability. That work teaches you how dependent large systems are on access, coordination, and timing, and how quickly small constraints turn into major limitations when conditions deteriorate. I've seen that dynamic up close, in deployed environments, and it's the same lens I bring to humanitarian food aid: once a system starts degrading, outcomes become less predictable and far harder to control.

I want to be clear about the boundaries of that perspective. I haven't attended the National War College, and I don't work on policy or claim the authority of those whose careers are spent designing national security strategy. I most definitely do not have a crystal ball. Instead, I have an instinct to interrogate assumptions,



Washington soft white wheat is loaded aboard a USAID vessel at the Port of Longview for delivery into global food aid channels.



USAID PHOTO

identify waste, and ask what the system is truly optimizing for. My combined experiences have given me a practical way of thinking about how complex systems behave under stress, and how intentions and theories often diverge from outcomes once real-world constraints show up.

When it comes to food aid, Yemen and Sudan are great examples of where those constraints show up in the most consequential way. These are not places where the market can be counted on to fill the gap when conditions deteriorate. In Yemen, U.S. humanitarian food assistance, much of it being soft white wheat, has become structurally central as import dependence and conflict have hollowed out normal food markets. In Sudan, humanitarian food assistance from hard red wheat has played a similar role as violence, displacement, and fragmented territorial control have rapidly dismantled what remained of a functioning food system.

In both cases, food does not move freely. It moves through contested space, negotiated access, and systems shaped as much by power and leverage as by supply and demand. This is the environment in which humanitarian food aid is forced to operate: not functioning markets, but their collapse.

This is where my discomfort and my interest sit. Humanitarian food aid is morally necessary in places like Yemen and Sudan, but it does not operate in a clean or neutral environment. It moves through collapsed

markets, contested access, and systems shaped by power as much as need. The question isn't whether food aid should exist; it's what we expect it to accomplish and whether we are optimizing for moral intent, strategic leverage, or measurable outcomes. In these environments, you rarely get all three at once.

## How humanitarian food aid works

Modern U.S. humanitarian food aid did not emerge in response to conflicts like Yemen or Sudan. It grew out of post-World War II agricultural policy, Cold War surplus management, and an early recognition that food could function as both a domestic stabilizer and foreign policy tool. Programs that would later be consolidated under Food for Peace were designed to move U.S.-produced commodities off domestic balance sheets while advancing strategic objectives abroad. Over time, those programs were reoriented toward humanitarian response as conflicts, state collapse, and chronic food insecurity replaced surplus disposal as the dominant driver. What remained constant was the basic structure: U.S.-grown commodities purchased under federal authority and delivered outside normal commercial channels when markets could not function.

When the U.S. decides to send food aid to places like Yemen or Sudan, it does not move through a typical commercial transaction. There is no commercial importer placing an order, and no private sale contract priced and settled like normal trade. Under Food for Peace Title II, commodities are procured under U.S. program rules and donated through implementing partners for distribution, not repaid through commercial sales, though some nonemergency programs may monetize commodities to fund operations. Historically, this authority has been exercised through statutory humanitarian programs such as Food for Peace Title II and USDA-managed initiatives like McGovern-Dole, with responsibility for procurement, oversight, and implementation shifting over time across federal agencies and multilateral partners depending on policy, structure, and mandate.

Title II has historically been the backbone of U.S. emergency food aid. Authorized under the Food for Peace Act of 1954, it allowed the purchase of U.S.-grown commodities, including wheat, for direct distribution in humanitarian crises. In Yemen, this resulted in soft white wheat moving not because a market demanded it, but because the humanitarian system required a calorie source that could be procured at scale, shipped reliably, milled into flour, and turned into culturally appropriate staple foods like flatbread under constrained conditions. In Sudan, hard red wheat played a similar role, tied to bread

consumption and whatever milling capacity remained accessible. These were not symbolic choices; they were operational ones.

Once a Title II response was triggered, wheat was procured from U.S. commercial suppliers under program rules that prioritized accountability and traceability over speed. That procurement was paired with shipping requirements, including cargo preference under the Cargo Preference Act of 1954, which requires that at least half the annual tonnage move on U.S.-flag vessels, and shaped both timeline and costs. From there, commodities were transferred to implementing partners, most often the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), which assumed responsibility for moving food from ports into country and ultimately to distribution points. At each stage, oversight was layered deliberately. Monitoring, reporting, and compliance requirements were not add-ons to the system; they were central to how it was designed to function in high-risk environments.

Separately, the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program is designed for a different operating environment. Managed by the USDA, McGovern-Dole is a development-oriented food aid tool designed to support school attendance, child nutrition, and longer-term food security in relatively stable environments. It relies on predictable access, functioning education systems, and multiyear continuity to achieve

its objectives. As a result, it is structurally mismatched to active war zones. In places like Yemen and Sudan, where schools are disrupted, populations are displaced, and access is negotiated day by day, U.S. food assistance has been delivered overwhelmingly through Food for Peace Title II rather than McGovern-Dole. The distinction matters because it underscores that different food aid tools are built for different conditions and that emergency responses operate under fundamentally different constraints than development programs.

What distinguishes humanitarian food aid from commercial trade is not just who pays for the wheat, but why it moves at all. Wheat markets are shaped by supply and demand, but also by weather, energy and input costs, currency risk, and freight rates, because you can't trade wheat at scale without financing, fuel, and a reliable way to move it. In Yemen and Sudan, those conditions did not gradually deteriorate; they collapsed. Currency instability, fuel shortages, port disruptions, insecurity along transport corridors, and fractured authority made normal import transactions either prohibitively expensive or outright impossible. When private trade contracted, it didn't leave behind a thinner market. In some areas, markets and economic activity effectively ground to a halt. That is the point at which food stops moving by price and starts moving by permission, bringing the humanitarian system directly into a threat environment.

## Threat environments: Why food doesn't move freely

In Yemen and Sudan, commercial markets still exist on paper, but access is controlled by actors who can impose friction at will. This is not a setting where humanitarian systems fail because they are poorly designed. It is a setting where they are forced to operate inside active threat conditions, which are inherently unpredictable. The result is that food aid enters a security landscape first and a humanitarian one second, which means leverage and coercion often precede meeting needs.



Armed men stand on a beach as the commercial vessel Galaxy Leader — seized by Houthi forces — remains anchored offshore on Yemen's Red Sea coast in December 2023. Reuters photo.

## Yemen: Maritime interdiction and external constraints

Yemen's food crisis cannot be separated from the fact that the country's most important supply lines run through a contested maritime chokepoint. Yemen is heavily import-dependent for staple foods, which means access to ports and shipping lanes matters as much as production or price. Over the past year, that access has been shaped by a sustained maritime interdiction campaign carried out by the Houthi movement, whose ability to threaten vessels in the Red Sea — and at the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the narrow gateway between the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden — has changed how shipping operates in the region. Since Nov. 1, 2023, the U.S. Maritime Administration has assessed at least 113 separate Houthi attacks on commercial vessels, including mariner fatalities and a vessel seizure, enough to push risk calculus well beyond normal commercial tolerance.

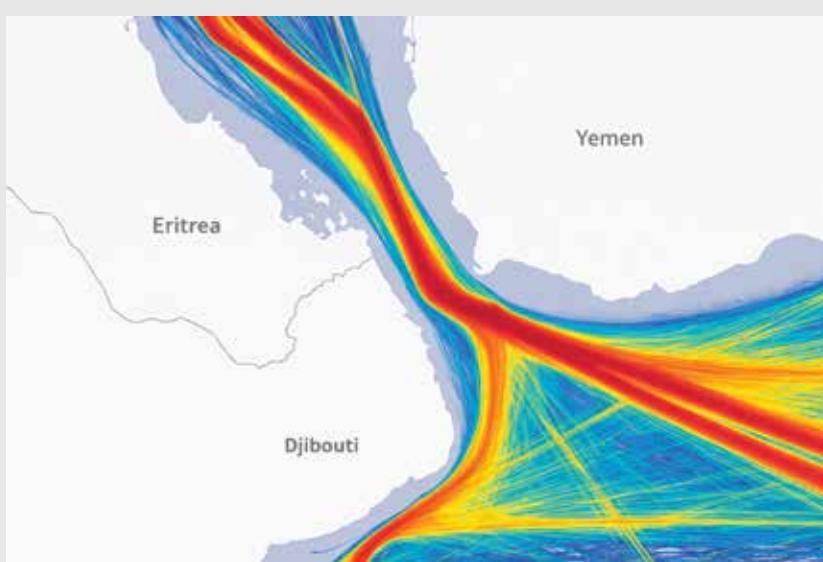
The relevant variable is not only the total volume of food eventually delivered, but the reliability of delivery over time. Shipping has responded the way it usually does when risk becomes persistent: it routes around it. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) notes that shipping has continued to avoid the Suez Canal, with tonnage transit



Yemen sits at the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the narrow maritime gateway linking the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden.

levels by early May 2025 still around 70% below the 2023 average. The most common workaround is to send vessels around the Cape of Good Hope, the southwestern tip of South Africa near Cape Town, rather than transiting the Red Sea and Suez. That route trades security for time, as one assessment of the disruption notes it adds 10 to 12 days of sailing time. In a humanitarian system that depends on predictable arrival windows, that added time and uncertainty matter as much as price.

A sustained threat environment raises costs, narrows available tonnage, and degrades schedule reliability. The result is not necessarily a complete stoppage of food aid, but an uneven cadence. Gaps are followed by playing catch-up, which creates mismatches in port scheduling, staging capacity, and convoy timing inland. Yemen's port system has little slack to absorb that volatility; after recent hostilities, a UN official said operations at Hodeidah, a critical Red Sea entry point for aid and commercial imports, fell to about 25% of capacity. That volatility is the mechanism by which maritime insecurity translates directly into food insecurity in Yemen, well before any bag of wheat reaches a distribution point. ▶

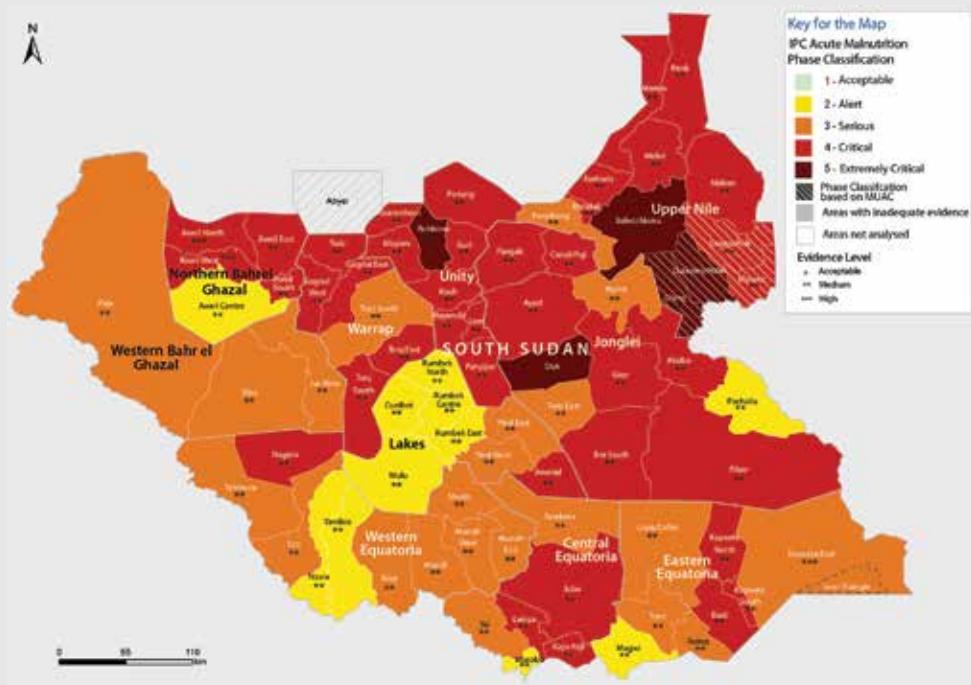


Conceptual rendering based on aggregated AIS vessel-density patterns showing concentrated commercial shipping through the Bab el-Mandeb approaches.

## Sudan: Internal fragmentation and territorial control

Sudan presents a fundamentally different threat environment for food movement. Where Yemen's constraint is maritime and external, Sudan's is internal and territorial. Since open conflict erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), control over food movement inside the country has fractured along front lines that cut directly through agricultural areas, transport corridors, and major urban consumption centers. More than 12 million people have been displaced, making Sudan the world's largest displacement crisis. According to UN estimates, 33.7 million people — roughly two-thirds of the population — now require humanitarian assistance. At least 19 million people face crisis-level food insecurity or worse, with pockets of famine already confirmed in parts of Darfur.

In this environment, food does not move because markets clear or contracts are honored; it moves because



Severe and extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition are concentrated across conflict-affected regions, reflecting displacement, access constraints, and market collapse.

armed actors allow it to move. Unlike Yemen, where insecurity delays arrival, Sudan's conflict constrains movement after food is already inside the country. The result is a system where food aid can exist in aggregate but remain immobilized in practice, trapped behind front lines, checkpoints, or shifting bureaucratic controls that determine who eats, where, and when.

What makes Sudan especially difficult for humanitarian food aid is that access is not denied once but negotiated repeatedly. Even when food is already inside the country, humanitarian agencies report that roughly one-third of planned food movements are delayed, rerouted, or blocked outright by access controls imposed by armed actors, while over 635,000 people are already experiencing famine conditions. Permissions must be secured at checkpoints, border crossings, warehouses, and distribution sites, often from different authorities whose incentives are ambiguous and ever-changing. Airstrikes, shelling, and drone attacks have damaged storage facilities and fuel infrastructure, while displacement has severed the link between where food is available and where people are located. In this context, internal geography and bureaucracy function less as logistical challenges than as instruments of leverage.



Source: Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute (28 Oct 2025) BBC

Areas of control held by the Sudanese Armed Forces, Rapid Support Forces (RSF), and other armed groups show how conflict constrains food movement across the country.

## The UN system, donors, leverage, and neutrality

Humanitarian food aid in Yemen and Sudan is often described as “UN-led,” but that phrase hides the wiring. The UN system is not a single wallet, but a collection of agencies and programs, some funded by assessed dues (obligatory payments tied to membership), and many funded by voluntary contributions (discretionary money aimed at specific programs). The U.S. sits on both sides of that ledger. On the assessed side, the U.S. assessment has been capped at 22% of the UN regular budget for decades, and peacekeeping assessments have been in the high-20% range in recent scale periods.

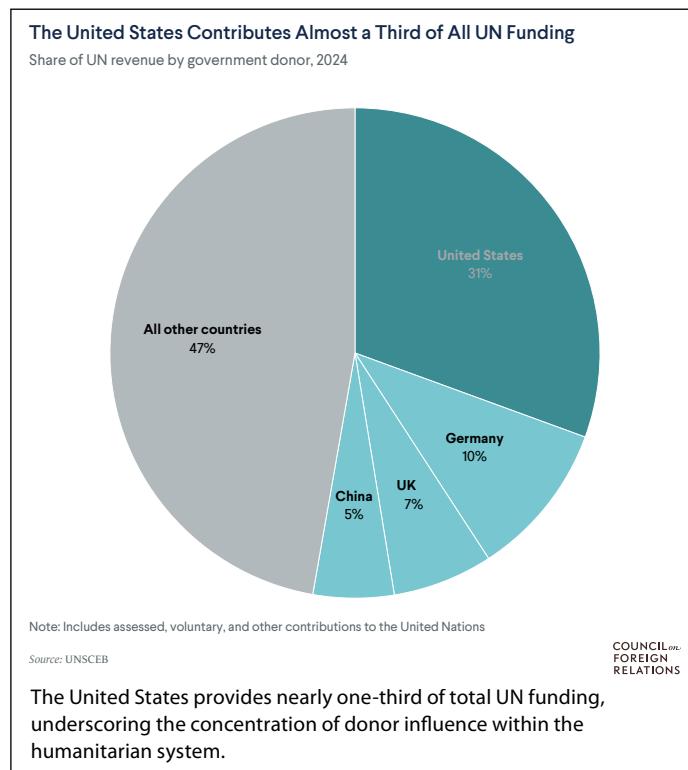
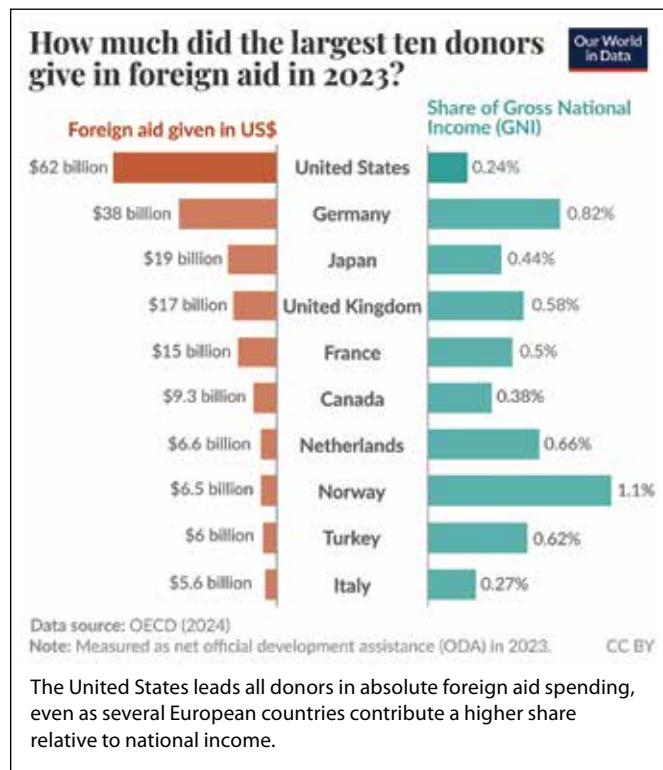
On the voluntary side, where most humanitarian operations actually live, the U.S. has been the dominant actor. In the 2024 fiscal year, the U.S. was the single largest financial contributor to the UN system overall and within that, the largest donor to the WFP. U.S. contributions totaled more than \$14 billion across the UN system, including roughly \$4.4 billion to WFP alone.

The next-largest contributor, Germany, provided about \$4.8 billion in total UN funding that same year, including roughly \$1 billion to WFP. At that scale, it is fair to ask: when one country supplies several multiples of the resources of the next donor, how much influence should it reasonably expect over how those resources are used?

Those numbers matter because donor money is leverage. While it cannot force armed actors in Yemen or

Sudan to behave a certain way, this leverage can determine how much capacity exists inside the humanitarian system before that system collides with the threat environment. In the last year, the U.S. has demonstrated that this leverage is enforceable. In early 2025, the Trump administration issued an executive order directing a review of U.S. support to all international intergovernmental organizations, while specifically ending U.S. participation in the UN Human Rights Council, prohibiting U.S. funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), and initiating a membership review of the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). At the State Department level, that posture became explicit policy language: an “America First” rationale for narrowing participation to organizations not judged to advance U.S. interests, including a formal notice of U.S. withdrawal from UNESCO (effective Dec. 31, 2026).

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) shockwave fits into the same frame. One assessment notes that the administration terminated over 5,300 foreign aid projects, including an estimated 211 awards to UN agencies, and cut 49 programs classified as lifesaving, totaling at least \$529 million. The immediate effect was a sharp drop in funding to the organizations that deliver food aid. U.S. payment records show how quickly





Yemeni forces during training to confront the Houthis.

capacity shrank: World Food Programme obligations fell from \$4.4 billion (FY2024) to \$325 million (FY2025-to-date), and UNICEF from \$1.1 billion to \$168 million.

This is where neutrality and measurable outcomes come into direct tension. The U.S. can reasonably argue that it has the sovereign right to stop funding institutions it considers misaligned, ineffective, or compromised, and the record shows it has both the tools and the political will to do so. But the trade-off is built into the system. Cutting funding can expose waste and impose discipline, yet it also shrinks capacity and limits what a donor can shape once funds are committed, and operations move into multilateral channels governed by neutrality and one-country-one-vote rules. In Yemen and Sudan, U.S. funding does not determine who controls checkpoints, ports,

or shipping lanes. It influences how much food exists in the system before those constraints take effect, and how large, resilient, and conditioned the aid system is when it enters contested environments. That is the leverage donors actually hold; not control over outcomes on the ground, but influence over the scale, structure, and operating constraints of the system they choose to fund.

What this analysis leaves me with is not a conclusion, but a set of trade-offs that are difficult to avoid and even

harder to resolve. In Yemen and Sudan, humanitarian food aid is necessary because markets have collapsed, and conflict has severed normal supply chains. Yet that same aid is forced to operate inside systems where access is contested, neutrality limits leverage, and doing the “right thing” does not guarantee good outcomes.

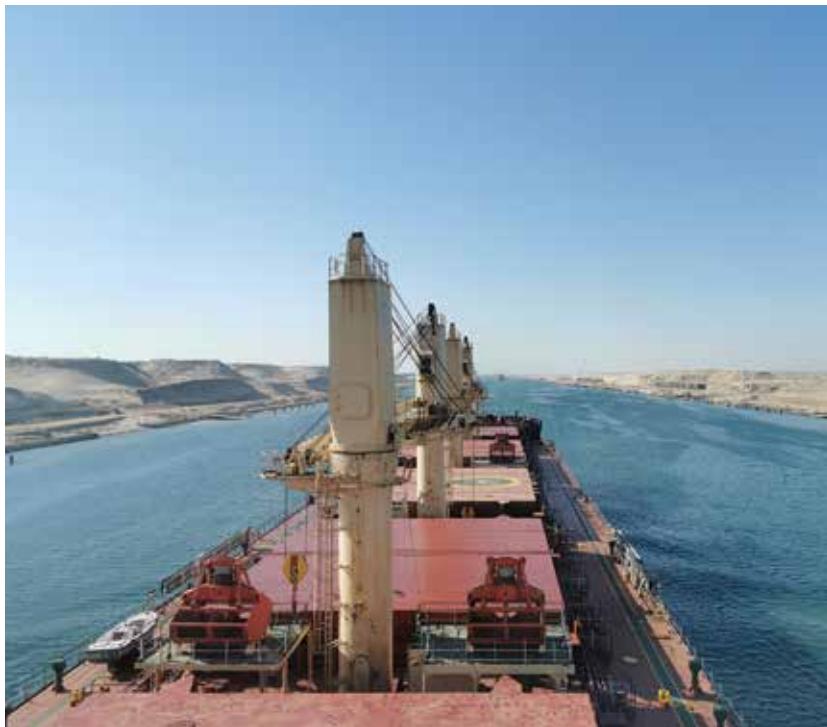
The U.S. sits at



A Sudanese refugee girl in a boat with a crowd of people.

the center of this system as its largest financial backer, but with deliberately constrained authority once food enters conflict-affected space. Cutting funding can impose discipline, expose waste, and reassert accountability to taxpayers and, in some cases, to producers whose commodities underpin these programs. It also means less food moving into regions where people are already living on the edge of survival. Sustaining funding keeps food moving and systems intact, but it requires accepting outcomes that are messy, incomplete, and largely beyond donor control. That is the tension at the heart of humanitarian food aid today: actions that strengthen the system's accountability can reduce the amount of food reaching people who need it most, while actions that save lives in the short term can weaken markets and deepen long-term dependence on aid.

In Part 2, I want to narrow the lens — from humanitarian systems to wheat as a commodity, to the thresholds borne by producers and taxpayers, and to the uncomfortable questions about diversion, quality, misuse, and accountability that arise when food aid substitutes for markets over long periods of time. ■



A cargo ship transiting through the Suez Canal.

## Sources

All analysis and interpretations are the author's own, based on publicly available reporting and official government and United Nations documentation.

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# WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

## Wheat enters 2026 with time, not urgency



By Allison Thompson  
*Owner, The Money Farm*

On Jan. 12, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) released the Final Crop Production Survey, Quarterly Grain Stocks, Winter Wheat Seedings, and Monthly World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE). These reports didn't just move the market for a day, they quietly reset expectations for the year ahead. On the surface, the wheat numbers looked familiar: higher stocks, steady acreage, plenty of global supply. The market's knee-jerk reaction made sense. Prices leaned lower, confidence drained out of the bull case, and the conversation quickly turned defensive. But the real value of the data isn't in what it did to nearby prices, it's in what it tells us about how wheat enters 2026, and what kind of environment producers and end users should be preparing for.

If there's one takeaway that matters more than all the individual line items, it's this: wheat does not start 2026 tight. That doesn't mean it can't become tight. It doesn't mean prices can't rally. But it does mean the market is not under immediate pressure to bid for supply, and that changes the entire tone of the price outlook.

The USDA raised U.S. wheat ending stocks for the 2025-26 marketing year to 926 million bushels, a move driven primarily by a sharp reduction in feed and residual use. Exports were left unchanged, which tells us USDA is not yet convinced global buyers will need to chase U.S. wheat aggressively. When feed demand is cut

this hard, it's a signal that wheat is no longer competitive enough to clear excess supply through the feed channel. That matters because feed demand is often the release valve when wheat supplies feel burdensome. When that valve is closed, the market has fewer ways to work through surplus.

The Grain Stocks report reinforced that message. As of Dec. 1, all wheat stocks totaled 1.68 billion bushels, up 7% from a year ago. That number alone isn't shocking. What matters more is where those bushels are sitting. On-farm wheat stocks declined, while off-farm stocks increased sharply. In practical terms, wheat has moved into commercial hands — and it's sitting there. Elevators are holding inventory, not scrambling to source it. That's not the posture of a market that's worried about running out of wheat anytime soon.

Some will point out that wheat disappearance during the September–November period actually increased year over year. That's true, and it's important. Demand hasn't vanished, but the market isn't trading disappearance right now, it's trading inventory. When supplies are visible and accessible, the bar for sustained price appreciation rises significantly. Buyers can afford to wait, while sellers feel pressure. That dynamic shapes price behavior more than any single demand statistic.

Then there's acreage. Winter wheat seedings for the 2026 crop are estimated at 33 million acres, down less than 1% from 2025 and down 2% from 2024. In other words, acreage is effectively flat. Hard red winter came in at 23.5 million acres, slightly lower year over year. Soft



red winter ticked up marginally to 6.14 million acres. White winter acreage dropped 5% to 3.36 million acres, with the largest reductions concentrated in the Pacific Northwest.

That white winter decline is worth noting, particularly for regional basis dynamics and class-specific spreads. But nationally, it's not enough to materially tighten the balance sheet. This was not a "surprise acreage cut" report. It was a confirmation that producers largely stayed the course. When acreage holds steady and stocks are already comfortable, the market has little incentive to price in scarcity.

Right now, weather is a nonissue, and that matters. Wheat has a reputation for having nine lives, and this report may have added one more. The crop has life to lose, literally, before weather becomes a true pricing issue. It wouldn't be surprising to see weather risk emerge at some point, because it almost always does. But early in the calendar year, wheat typically carries a premium tied to uncertainty, and this report stripped much of that away. For now, the market sees little reason to price in weather risk.

Globally, the story remains heavy. Major exporting regions continue to carry ample supplies, and global buyers have options. That matters immensely for U.S. wheat pricing in 2026. Wheat is not a domestic-only market. It lives and dies by export competitiveness. When global supplies are readily available, U.S. wheat must fight for demand, and that typically shows up through price concessions, not rallies.

So what does all of this mean for the 2026 price outlook?

First, it suggests that the baseline for 2026 is a range-bound market, not a trending one. Without a tightening signal in stocks or acreage, wheat prices are more likely to move in response to headlines — weather scares, geopolitical disruptions, currency moves — than sustained shifts in supply and demand. That kind of market can still be volatile, but volatility does not automatically equal higher prices.

Second, it means rallies will need a catalyst. Wheat does not have the luxury of drifting higher on optimism alone. For prices to sustain upside in 2026, one of three things needs to happen: export demand must accelerate meaningfully, wheat must regain competitiveness in feed channels, or weather must threaten production in a major exporting region. As of this writing, none of those conditions are in place.

Third, it shifts the burden of proof squarely onto demand. When supplies are tight, the market assumes

demand will show up. When supplies are ample, demand has to prove itself. That's the environment wheat is entering. Every rally will be questioned. Every breakout attempt will be tested. Until buyers are forced to act, the market will remain skeptical.

For producers, that has important implications. This is not an environment that rewards waiting for a single "home run" price. It's an environment that rewards discipline. Incremental sales on strength, protecting downside risk, and maintaining flexibility matter more when the market lacks urgency. For end users, the message is different but equally clear: supply availability reduces risk, but it doesn't eliminate it. Waiting too long can still be costly if weather or geopolitics suddenly reprices the market.

There's also a psychological element to consider. Reports like this tend to drain enthusiasm from the wheat market. When optimism fades, it often sets the stage for complacency. That's where risk quietly builds. Wheat has a long history of looking benign — until it doesn't. This report sends a clear message: the market won't pay for risk ahead of time. It will wait until it has to.

In that sense, the biggest takeaway from these reports may be what they did not do. They did not create panic. They did not force rationing. They did not signal tightening inventories. Instead, they reinforced stability, and stability can be deceptive. It encourages both sides of the market to get comfortable, which is often when conditions begin to change.

As we look toward 2026, the wheat market is telling us to manage expectations. Prices are not poised to collapse, but they are also not set up for an easy rally. The path forward will likely be choppy, emotional, and driven by events rather than trends. That puts a premium on preparation rather than prediction.

The door to higher wheat prices in 2026 is still there, but the key is no longer hanging by the handle. The market is going to make participants work to find it, demanding clear evidence of tightening supplies, stronger demand, or unavoidable risk before it rewards higher prices. Until then, wheat remains a market that rewards patience and preparation more than optimism, setting a clear framework for how price is likely to behave in the year ahead.

Wheat will have its moment. It just isn't on a schedule anyone controls. ■

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

# The Catch (Part 1)

By Daniel Moore

"Slow down, son. We want to get there in one piece," John said to his grandson.

"But Gramps, I'm barely going the speed limit," replied Tommy, the driver of the old Buick.

"We are getting close, and I don't want to miss any of the sights," John replied.

"Johnny, nothing has changed here in 60 years. You probably have every draw and hill memorized. After all, you went around them hundreds of times," said his wife, Mary.

"Grammy, are you okay back there? How's the temperature? Cool enough or too cool?" Tommy asked.

"Just right, my boy. No need to fuss with me. I grew up in a time when we didn't have AC, and dad would open the windows to keep us kids cool," she replied.

"That's not why he did that. He just wanted you ornery children to quit horsing around so much and figured a blast of air might stop you," John declared.

"Good grief, Johnny, and your family was just the prim and proper group, right?" Mary replied.

"Okay, you two. Knock it off. You're talking about my family now, and that's not going to sit well with me! You two are still so competitive, just like your dads were. Haven't you learned anything in the 60 years you've been together? Think back to all the good things that began on your wedding

day," said the grandson from behind the steering wheel.

"Oh, we do, honey. Even though we've been on the same team since then, we still love the competition. That's what keeps it interesting," grandma giggled as she gave John a wink.

"Oh, there it is! Pull over and stop in the driveway of the pasture. I can't believe it is still here. Cheatgrass all around it and the metal is all bent up — kind of like me," John humorously declared.

"What are you talking about grandpa? You mean the old combine parked by the road or the rusty auger sitting next to it?" asked Tommy.

Grandpa replied, "No, no, look farther out towards the corner of the field to the old gray metal frame with the chain-link fencing. I'm talking about the center of the story of our life. My dad proudly made it so long ago. It's the blessed backstop. Drive over closer, right next to it."

An apprehensive Tommy said, "Gee, I hope the car doesn't start a fire out here with all the dried-up weeds."

Grandpa John assured him, "We've sat long enough to cool the exhaust down. It'll be okay."

They parked near the backstop, and John opened his door and proceeded to get out, cane first. Tommy got his grandmother's wheelchair out of the trunk and placed it right beside the open rear door where she sat.



"I'm never going to be able to push you over there through this tall grass," Tommy declared.

"Well, pull me backwards," she suggested. He got her over to where the right-hand batter's box would have been and spun the chair around to face the imaginary home plate. Grandpa John was already in place behind the base, since back then, he was catcher for the Johnson family.

"Can you please grab the catcher's mitt with the ball and get her the wooden bat and her 'Wilson Farms' hat from the trunk?" John asked.

Tommy walked back to the car to get what grandpa wanted and then another time to get his camera, since he had been given a special job to accomplish for his beloved grandparents. They wanted a unique photo for their 60th wedding anniversary party.

"Where did the time go, Mary? It seems just like yesterday when that harvest was over, and the game began," John mused.

"You're not getting all mushy on me now," she replied. "We've got more innings to play before our game is over, Mr. Johnson! Now, I need to concentrate on getting that competitive feeling back before we take the picture, or it just won't be right." She put on her hat, adjusting its

curved bill down low, right above her eyebrows.

"Okay, son, I'm going to kneel, and I want the camera placed on top of my right shoulder. Don't get her wheelchair in the picture, just closely focus on the ball in the mitt, her hat, and her beautiful but stunned eyes looking at me," John instructed.

With the scene set and Tommy ready at the camera, John stretched out his left arm and placed his open mitt, with the ball inside, on top of Mary's hat. At that moment, she turned and looked at John with that same 'you just saved me from getting hit on the head from a foul ball' look she had some 60 years ago. Tommy's camera clicked as he took the picture, but the sound inside of John's head was "Click, click, click, ..." as the old reel-to-reel projector of his mind began to replay the scene from his late teenage years. As if in a trance, he began to recount this story to his grandson:

"Foul ball," cried the part-time umpire and full-time preacher, Pastor Brown. John's eyes switched from staring into Mary's eyes to the ball as it fell off his glove onto the dirt below.

"Good grief, Johnny, get your head into the game," his dad, Buck, declared. The next pitch came, and Mary hit a slow-moving grounder out towards the second baseman,

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encouraging the runner on third base to head to home. John's brother, the second baseman, ran for the ball and fired it home. Mary's brother was a fast runner, and the slide was on to home plate. When the dust settled, the umpire declared, "You're out!" Both benches emptied towards the home plate to dispute the call, but the preacher held his ground. As the crews were leaving, he shouted, "Tomorrow is Sunday, and you two families had better be there because the entire sermon will be directed toward you, and it won't be one of those 'feel good' messages either!"

The rivalry between the Johnson and Wilson families began when Buck Johnson and Mac Wilson were in high school. They competed against each other in every activity that their little country school offered, even academics, although neither were what you would call "scholars." They both married their sweethearts and took to farming and raising large families. They probably competed in that area as well. But when Mary was born, the Wilson family seemed complete and, strangely enough, the Johnson family quit expanding about the same time with the arrival of little John. However, neither family stopped acquiring more property, buying larger equipment, and hiring more employees. Year after year, potential landlords were courted, and custom farming jobs yielded leases from those who had no heirs to take over their property. Competition between the families raged even in church, as the Johnson family sat on the left side and the Wilson family sat on the right side. Pastor Brown could see this disunity every Sunday. Even people in the community started lining up with one family or the other. Thinking that a ball game might help the two families put an end to their prideful struggle, he declared one Sunday, "There is going to be a



The illustrations used in this article were generated by AI.

baseball game between the Johnson and Wilson crews at the conclusion of harvest, and this wooden cross will be the trophy. I've decided that Buck will make the backstop, and Mac will make the baseball diamond in the grassy area on the border of your fields," he said as Buck and Mac glanced at each other with that familiar fire in their eyes. The game was on! ■

*Editor's note: Look for part 2 of "The Catch" in the March 2026 issue of Wheat Life.*

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# THE BOTTOM LINE

## Premium subsidies increase on SCO, ECO plans

By Curtis Evanenko

*McGregor Risk Management Services*

Glad tidings and Happy New Year!

We're going to review a subject matter I last covered in July 2021, the Enhanced Coverage Option (ECO), due to recent, increased premium subsidies for the coming year for both ECO and the Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO).

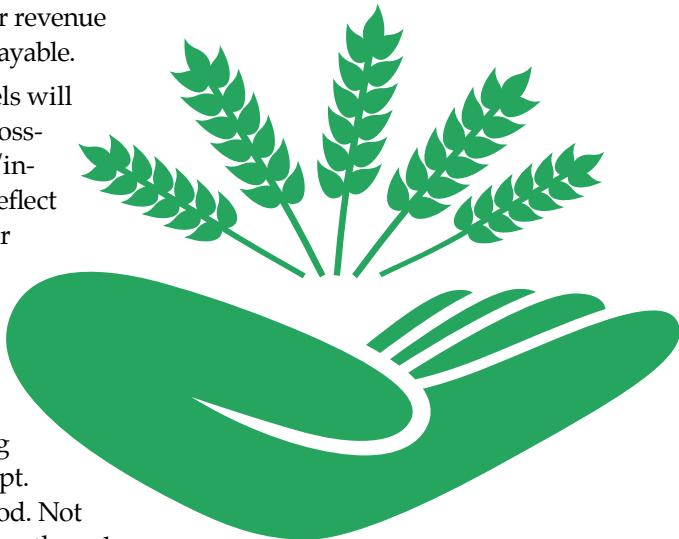
SCO and ECO are coverage options that provide the insured with "shallow loss" coverage on a county-wide basis. Both coverage options can provide additional coverage for the portion of your underlying crop insurance deductible, which is based upon each county's expected wheat revenue and the expected wheat yield as established by the Risk Management Agency (RMA). Additionally, both SCO and ECO plans mirror the underlying multi-

peril crop insurance (MPCI) coverage, i.e. revenue protection or yield protection.

SCO provides coverage on top of the underlying MPCI coverage to a maximum of 86%. For example, if an insured chooses 80% revenue protection, an SCO policy would provide coverage from 80% to 86%.

ECO offers coverage up to 90% or 95% trigger levels from 86%. An insured could choose coverage to 90% or 95%, the percentage of expected yield or revenue when a loss becomes payable.

Higher coverage levels will trigger more frequent losses; naturally, producer/insured premiums will reflect such. The premiums for SCO and ECO are directly related to the Projected Harvest Price Volatility Factor determined and set by RMA during the Aug. 15 through Sept. 15 price discovery period. Not coincidentally, the higher the volatility factor, the higher the premium costs for both the underlying revenue protection and SCO/ECO policies. Remember that the harvest price discovery period is the August-September preceding harvest of the following summer.



SCO subsidies have increased from 65% to 80% for the 2026 crop year. ECO premium subsidies have nearly doubled in the last two years, 44% in 2024, and are now set at an 80% premium subsidy for all coverage levels by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). For this very reason, I believe this will be the means of providing future, shallow loss coverage by USDA, eliminating the need for ad-hoc monies to growers.

For those who've desired to have higher coverage levels made available, this is it! Remember, this is not individual coverage per se, rather coverage that is based upon your individual policy liability but is an area coverage plan and only triggers if the revenue or yield for the county falls below 95%. Please feel free to contact me regarding any additional questions you may have. ■

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



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

Please join our efforts by supporting the Washington Wheat PAC. Your contribution will strengthen the network of elected officials who understand the wheat industry's goals and objectives by fighting for what is critical to the livelihood of our members.

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Filling up the truck in Odessa during Harvest 2025. Photo by Kodey Lobe.



Andy and Jen Juris' grandkids, Riley (3) and Rhett (1.5) Groeneweg, came to visit the Juris family farm in Bickleton during Harvest 2025. Photo by Jen Juris.

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Timber takes in a  
late summer sunset in  
Lancaster. Photo by  
Nicole Jones.



# Your wheat life...



Tanneberg and Son wheat harvest west of Mansfield. Photo by Jared Henton.



Lincoln (22 months) driving combine with dad, Logan Hoeft, at Hoeft farms in Walla Walla. Photo by Christal Hoeft.



Dan Dormaier (left) and Jay Eckhart make a plan for the day during harvest at D & R Dormaier Farms north of Hartline. Photo by Robin Dormaier.

# HAPPENINGS

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

## 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](http://agshow.org)

**10 AG POLICY OUTLOOK.** AMMO webinar with Jim Wiesemeyer, a D.C. policy analyst, to hear the latest insights on ag, energy, trade, and economic policy. 11:30 a.m. Go to [wawg.org/ammo-workshops/](http://wawg.org/ammo-workshops/) to join webinar.

### 11 USING OPTIONS IN GRAIN MARKETING AND A GRAIN MARKET OUTLOOK: KEY DRIVERS FOR 2026.

AMMO seminar with Alison Thompson, owner of The Money Farm. Registration begins at 9 a.m. at the Hampton by Hilton, 2010 South Assembly Road in Spokane, Wash. Lunch is provided. No charge for WAWG members; cost for nonmembers is \$25. Preregister by calling (509) 659-0610 or print and mail form at [wawg.org/ammo-workshops/](http://wawg.org/ammo-workshops/)

**18 TOOLS AND STRATEGIES FOR MANAGING HERBICIDE ROTATIONS IN WHEAT CROPPING SYSTEMS.** Global and Local Wheat Markets. AMMO seminar with Aaron Esser and Karl Effertz. Two pesticide credits have been applied for. Registration begins at 9 a.m. at the

Washington Wheat Foundation Building in Ritzville, Wash. Lunch is provided. No charge for WAWG members; cost for nonmembers is \$25. Preregister by calling (509) 659-0610 or print and mail form at [wawg.org/ammo-workshops/](http://wawg.org/ammo-workshops/)

**19 RESEARCH REVIEW.** Pullman, Wash. Please contact the Washington Grain Commission at [wgc@wagrains.org](mailto:wgc@wagrains.org) to register.

**20 WAWG BOARD MEETING.** Meeting starts at 10 a.m. at Washington Wheat Foundation Building, Ritzville, Wash. (509) 659-0610, [wawg.org](http://wawg.org)

**25 ESTATE PLANNING.** AMMO seminar with Tara Wiswall, Jared King, and Corey Brock. Registration begins at 9 a.m. at Sonny's Tavern in Washtucna, Wash. Lunch is provided. No charge for WAWG members; cost for nonmembers is \$25. Preregister by calling (509) 659-0610 or print and mail the registration form at [wawg.org/ammo-workshops/](http://wawg.org/ammo-workshops/)

**27 PESTICIDE RECERTIFICATION.** AMMO seminar with Dr. Henry Wetzel. Two pesticide credits have been applied for. Registration begins at 9 a.m. at the Washington Wheat Foundation Building in Ritzville, Wash. Lunch is provided. No charge for WAWG members; cost for nonmembers is \$25. Preregister by calling (509) 659-0610 or print and mail form at [wawg.org/ammo-workshops/](http://wawg.org/ammo-workshops/)

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### 6-8 SPRING ARTS AND CRAFTS SHOW.

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### 17-18 WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION BOARD MEETING.

Meeting begins at 10 a.m. on Tuesday and 8:30 a.m. on Wednesday at the commission building at 2702 W. Sunset Boulevard, Spokane, Wash. Contact [wgc@wagrains.org](mailto:wgc@wagrains.org) for more information or access to the virtual meeting.

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