

# WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

JUNE | 2026

## THE BIG SQUEEZE

Fertilizer costs, CVDs hitting farmers' bottom line

Washington Association of Wheat Growers  
109 East First Avenue, Ritzville, WA 99169

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### IN THIS ISSUE:

What is regenerative ag?

Meet Patrick Bell, FSA's new SED

811: One call to rule them all

Update on falling number efforts

Expanding weed control options by breeding herbicide tolerance into winter wheat

# WHEAT LIFE

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# President's Perspective



## Safety shouldn't be an afterthought

By Gil Crosby

President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Growing up on a farm, all of us heard our parents yell from a distance, "Be careful!" Being around farm equipment, I'm sure we've all had close calls — and sometimes not-so-close calls. When we are younger, farm safety is mostly just a warning to keep us from getting hurt. As we get older, though, safety becomes even more important because injuries happen more easily. We're not as athletic as we once were, and we start thinking twice about jumping off a piece of equipment or taking shortcuts just to save a couple of minutes.

We all need to stay cautious. I've fallen off a drill by not paying attention and thinking I could make the jump, only to come up short. I've even thought I could stand on a shaft and that it wouldn't spin; the next thing I knew, I was looking up at the sky. The funny thing is that farmers are both the safest and least safe people alive. We can back a 40-foot drill into a shed with an inch to spare, but somehow still trip over the dog walking to the shop or spill coffee in the truck before the day even starts.

With all humor aside, farming is one of the toughest and most dangerous jobs there is. Long hours, fatigue, equipment, weather, and stress all have a way of catching up with people. Sometimes the best safety tool is simply slowing down and thinking before doing something. Ironically, the safest days usually come after something goes wrong. Suddenly we start asking ourselves, "Did I set the brake?" "Is that baling wire really going to hold?" and the all-time favorite, "It'll probably be fine."

Agriculture as a whole ranks fourth in the U.S. for work-related deaths. Because of that, it's important to take farm safety seriously and use the resources available. There are several good places to find information on making farms safer, including the National Association of Wheat Growers' safety brochure at [wheatworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NAWG-Farm-Safety-Brochure\\_July-2020.pdf](http://wheatworld.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/NAWG-Farm-Safety-Brochure_July-2020.pdf) and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture at [nifa.usda.gov/topics/agricultural-farm-safety](http://nifa.usda.gov/topics/agricultural-farm-safety).

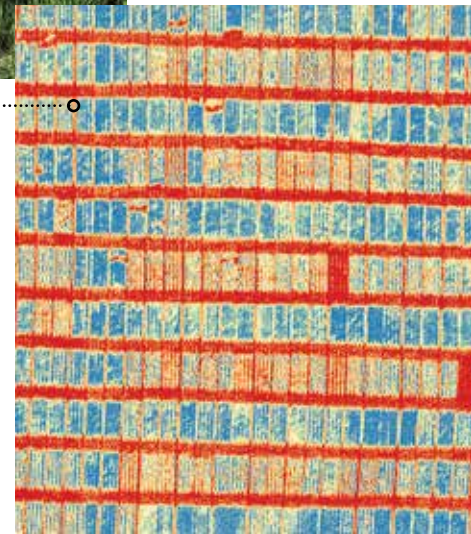
In this issue, we cover another area of farm safety that tends to fly beneath the radar: buried utility pipelines. Much of this infrastructure was installed in our parents' or grandparents' time, and although signage is required, that doesn't always mean it's there. It can be a bit of a hassle, but anytime digging beyond normal farm activity occurs, a call to 811 can prevent a world of headache later. See more on page 30.

At the end of the day, no crop, repair, or shortcut is worth risking your life or someone else's. Farming will always involve hard work and risk, but taking an extra minute to slow down, pay attention, and think things through can make all the difference. We all know someone who has lost a loved one or friend to a farm accident, and those accidents can happen at any age and at any time. Farming has a way of making people comfortable around danger because it becomes part of everyday life. A tractor, an auger, a PTO shaft, or even the drive home after a long day on a piece of equipment can feel routine right up until the moment something goes wrong. The best thing any farmer can do is make it home safely at the end of the day. ■

**Cover photo:** Fertilizer is a critical part of farmers' operation, but increasing prices, the Iran war, and countervailing duties are taking their toll. See article on page 20. All photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

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# WAWG MEMBERSHIP FORM

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- Student \$90                       Family \$250 (up to 2 members)  
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# Thank you to our current members

We fight every day to ensure that life on the family farm continues to prosper and grow.

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT.

If you are not a member, please consider joining today.

## LEVELS OF MEMBERSHIP

	Greensheet Newsletter	Wheat Life Magazine	National Wheat Grower Newsletter	Annual Harvest Prints	WAWG Convention Free Registration	One Vote per Member
<b>Producer/Landowners (Voting Membership)</b>						
<b>Grower or Landlord \$150</b>	X	X	X			X
<b>Family \$250</b> (2 family members)	X	X	X			X
<b>Partnership \$600</b> (1-5 family members)	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.*

## More member benefits:

- Greensheet ALERTS • WAWG updates
- Voice to WAWG through opinion surveys
- National Wheat Grower updates
- State and national legislative updates



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## Growers report good winter wheat stands

While much of the rest of U.S. wheat country is struggling with a poor wheat crop, Eastern Washington growers are reporting good winter wheat stands thanks to a mild winter and adequate moisture. Some areas are dealing with heavy stripe rust pressure, and, overall, the crop appears to be two to three weeks ahead of schedule. The crop update was part of the May state board meeting of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG).

Ben Thiel, director of the Risk Management Agency's (RMA) Spokane regional office, said irrigators will probably be challenged this year due to a very small snowpack. The Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (SDRP) deadline has been extended to Aug. 12, 2026, but some producers are running into eligibility issues. Thiel said those problems are likely happening when the Farm Service Agency pulls RMA data into its database. Producers who run into this problem

should contact the RMA office at (509) 228-6320.

Aubrey Hoxie, the East area conservationist for the Washington state office of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), said the state has finished pre-approval for the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Stewardship Program. Staffing is still an issue for the state.

In other agency news, Andy Pittenger, the agriculture program manager for the Washington State Department of Natural Resources, introduced Becky Kennedy as the new natural resource specialist for the Southeast Region.

Kara Kaelber, district manager for the Franklin Conservation District, talked to the board about Sustainable Farms and Fields, a grant program that makes it easier and more affordable for producers to implement climate-smart practices and projects. She is looking for additional funds to help maximize the number of farmers and acres that can be enrolled. She asked for a letter of support, which the board approved.

In state legislation, wheat lobbyists Diana Carlen and Mark Strueli told the board that the court ruled against a referendum to the voters on the millionaire's tax. Opponents of the tax will likely file an initiative, which needs more voters than a referendum would and generally contains less favorable voter language. It is unclear when that initiative might be on the ballot.

Election season has begun. There



**SPOKANE FARM FAIR.** Washington Association of Wheat Growers' vice president, Laurie Roecks, shares wheat's story with Spokane area fourth graders at the Spokane Farm Fair in late April. The Washington wheat industry also had a booth at the Bloomsday trade show. See page 18.

# Get **more** from your wheat acres



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tolerance



**Very early**  
maturity



## LCS Jefe



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under diverse  
conditions



**Excellent**  
stripe rust  
resistance



**Heavy**  
test weight



## LCS Scorpion AX



**Medium height**  
similar to LCS Hulk



**Excellent**  
stripe rust  
tolerance



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are five state Supreme Court seats up for grabs. Normally, these races tend to run under the radar, but Carlen said she thinks the public will be paying attention to them this year. Neither Carlen nor Strueli expect to see Democrats lose control of the state House or Senate, and in fact, a number of moderate, business-friendly Democrats are being challenged by more progressive Democrats or are not running for re-election. The lobbyists are hearing rumors that the state is in another budget shortfall for next year, so they are expecting to see more tax legislation introduced.

Following the fourth year in a row of a statewide drought, Gov. Ferguson and the Washington State Department of Ecology are launching a statewide initiative to discuss water supply issues and solutions in a series of regional roundtables with water users and utilities. Strueli emphasized the importance of having agriculture represented. Strueli also said the ag lobbies are still discussing riparian buffers. Proponents of the buffers want to see a regulatory backstop, which ag is opposed to.

Trade team season has started for the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) with the first ever aquaculture team from Chile and Ecuador visiting Eastern Washington. The team is exploring using soft white wheat as salmon and shrimp feed. See article on page 38.

Several WGC commissioners and staff recently returned from a trip to Taiwan and Japan to celebrate 60 and 70 years, respectively, of partnership. Casey Chumrau, WGC CEO, said in Taiwan, a woman told U.S. producers that in mid-1900s, not only was Taiwan fed by U.S. wheat, they were also clothed by U.S. wheat, as the population turned wheat sacks into clothing.

As the 2025-26 marketing year comes to a close at the end of May, Chumrau said all wheat exports are up 16%, mostly in hard red wheat. Soft white is down slightly at 4%, mostly due to decreased business from South Korea, which imported a significant amount of soft white as feed last year.

In national legislation, the Make America Healthy Again (MAHA) coalition is still trying to get glyphosate banned despite Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) efforts to prove it is safe. Michelle Hennings, WAWG executive director, said the farm bill is at the U.S. Senate's Ag Committee after the House passed the legislation on April 30. The board agreed to provide a letter of support to Rep. Michael Baumgartner (R-Wash.) for an amendment in the farm bill to finish the Columbia Basin Project as a food security priority.

Hennings recently took part in the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association's Mission to D.C., where stakeholders met with the region's congressional delegation. While

she was in D.C., Hennings was able to meet with EPA officials to talk about regulatory issues on Spring Flat Creek in Whitman County and Hangman Creek in Spokane County. She also discussed revising the total maximum daily load requirements to incorporate new and missing data that show dams may, at times, contribute to cooling rather than warming of water.

Jim Moyer, chair of the WAWG Research Committee, gave a report on the Research Advisory Subcommittee after its first Research Review. He said the committee is doing well and generating ideas about research and grower involvement going forward. Washington State University is working through some issues with the Variety Testing Program. This year, the program will be run by spring wheat breeder Mike Pumphrey and club wheat breeder Kimberly Garland-Campbell.

The board also heard a presentation from Rainmaker, a cloud-seeding company, about a proposed project in the Horse Heaven Hills, and reviewed the proposed WAWG budget for next year. The next WAWG state board meeting is scheduled for June 9 in Ritzville, Wash. ■



Brooklynn Appleford and Stone Ausman with Asotin County Wheat Growers President Leif Claassen.

## Asotin County wheat growers award scholarships to seniors

The Asotin County wheat growers have awarded scholarships to two area high school seniors who are planning to pursue ag-related careers. Brooklynn Appleford and Stone Ausman each received \$1,000.

### Brooklynn Appleford

Appleford is the daughter of Brandi and Kelsey Crawford. The Asotin High School senior is active in FFA, played varsity volleyball, and has shown steers at the Asotin County Fair since third grade. Outside of her job

PAID ADVERTORIAL

# Rethinking Combine Productivity

What combine is the right fit for you when you look at overall efficiency and productivity, instead of starting with horsepower and class size?

When wheat growers and custom harvesters start shopping for a combine, horsepower and class size tend to dominate the conversation. But according to Greg Frenzel, combine product manager for CLAAS of America, those numbers don't tell the full story.

“What matters at the end of the day is throughput — specifically, how much grain you're moving through the machine per hour and how clean it is in the tank,” Frenzel says. Two combines with the same horsepower rating can deliver very different results depending on driveline efficiency, the threshing and separating system, and overall combine automation.

## CLAAS combine technology

A key differentiator in a CLAAS combine is the APS SYNFLOW HYBRID threshing system. It combines an Accelerated Pre-Separation (APS) system in front of twin-rotors that handle the final threshing and separation. While most combines have a system where threshing and separation are directly connected, the CLAAS APS and rotors are controlled independently to protect grain quality even when separation requires greater aggressiveness.

CEMOS AUTOMATIC, the CLAAS Electronic Machine Optimization System, drives LEXION combine performance further. CEMOS AUTOMATIC evaluates the combine's full operating range autonomously and automatically adjusts as conditions change, no preset upper and lower limits required.

In a CLAAS combine, both the operator and CEMOS AUTOMATIC can optimize each stage for the crop type and unique conditions. This leads to better grain quality, less grain loss, greater throughput and the flexibility to



handle tough threshing conditions that would slow down other machines.

## Going beyond class size

For many wheat operations, Frenzel sees the LEXION 8600 as a strong fit. Delivering what he describes as Class 9 performance in a Class 8 frame, the machine pairs the hybrid threshing system with CEMOS automation to maximize output. Growers who default to a larger class size without the horsepower demands to justify it end up paying more at purchase, burning more fuel and depreciating a larger asset without a proportional gain in productivity.

Frenzel's advice to operators weighing their next purchase? Really consider if max horsepower is the determinant of combine throughput. In some crops and conditions, it may be. If it's not, keep an open mind and don't let class size dictate the right machine for you. Ask your local dealer for a field demo and see the proof for yourself.



Scan QR code to learn more.

working at a veterinarian clinic, she likes to ride horses and be out in the mountains. Appleford grew up spending time on her grandparents' cattle, wheat, and hay farm. She is planning to attend the College of Southern Idaho's vet tech program.

"I'm super grateful to the wheat growers for this scholarship. It will definitely help with my college expenses," Appleford said.

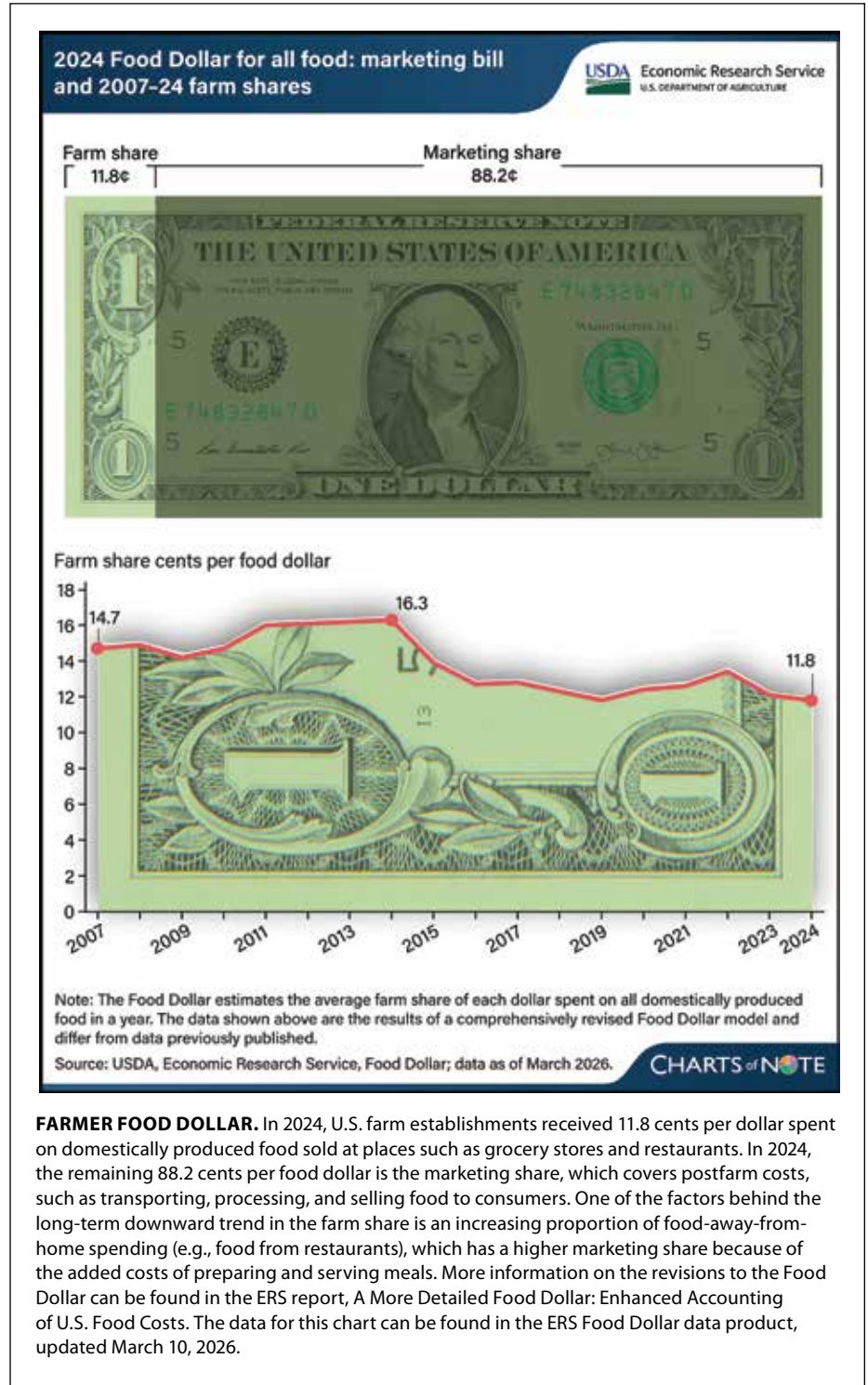
**Stone Ausman**

Ausman is the son of Brit and Debra Ausman and hopes to be the seventh generation to farm his family's land in Anatone. During his time at Asotin High School, he played basketball, football, and soccer and was active in FFA, serving as an officer for the past three years. While he is still deciding between colleges, he is planning to graduate with a degree in mechanical engineering.

"I'd like to personally thank wheat growers and everybody involved for putting this scholarship together," he said. "It's really awesome to put money back into the ag community and give us the chance to make our ag community better." ■

## USDA approves additional SDRP payment

On April 24, U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke L. Rollins announced the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is maximizing disaster assistance support for producers by issuing a second Supplemental Disaster Relief Program (SDRP) payment to eligible producers who have approved program applications for losses due to natural disasters in calendar years 2023 and 2024. USDA's Farm Service



**FARMER FOOD DOLLAR.** In 2024, U.S. farm establishments received 11.8 cents per dollar spent on domestically produced food sold at places such as grocery stores and restaurants. In 2024, the remaining 88.2 cents per food dollar is the marketing share, which covers postfarm costs, such as transporting, processing, and selling food to consumers. One of the factors behind the long-term downward trend in the farm share is an increasing proportion of food-away-from-home spending (e.g., food from restaurants), which has a higher marketing share because of the added costs of preparing and serving meals. More information on the revisions to the Food Dollar can be found in the ERS report, *A More Detailed Food Dollar: Enhanced Accounting of U.S. Food Costs*. The data for this chart can be found in the ERS Food Dollar data product, updated March 10, 2026.

Agency (FSA) has already provided \$6.7 billion in SDRP payments to eligible producers. Additionally, USDA is extending the program deadline to give producers and the Farm Service Agency (FSA) more time to address any program application changes that could impact payments.

Initial SDRP payments were factored at 35%, but after further analysis, USDA is increasing the payment factor to 70%, meaning producers with approved applications will receive an additional 35% of their calculated SDRP payment. ►



# RUBISCO SEEDS

## Hybrid Canola

### Winter Canola Hybrids: AKILAH, DRIFTER, KICKER, MERCEDES, PHOENIX CL, CARLSSON CL, COLIN CL

**AKILAH:** NEW conventional hybrid stacked with Turnip Yellow Virus (TuYV) resistance and extremely robust blackleg resistance, conferring the next level in plant health, and yield potential, coupled with excellent winter hardiness.

**KICKER:** Top yielding conventional hybrid, 2020 to 2025 PNW Winter Canola Trials. Excellent winter hardiness and resilience to pod shattering. Good drought tolerance. Medium maturity.

**MERCEDES:** Top yielding conventional hybrid, 2012 to 2024 PNW Winter Canola Trials. Vigorous fall establishment and early season cold tolerance. Responds to lower seeding rates relative to OP canola. Medium maturity.

**\*PHOENIX CL:** Two-gene Clearfield hybrid with proven performance in the PNW. Superior cold tolerance. Vigorous fall growth helps overcome insect feeding. Early maturity. Enhanced pod shattering resiliency. High yield potential.

**\*CARLSSON CL:** New Two-gene Clearfield hybrid with high fall vigor. Medium-early maturity. Excellent plant health with stay green characteristics. Enhanced resistance to blackleg and pod shatter. Good lodging resistance. Very high yield and oil potential

**\*COLIN CL:** hybrid with medium maturity. High cold tolerance. Excellent root development. Good drought tolerance and plant health. Superior tolerance to pod shattering compared to Plurax CL. Multi-gene Blackleg resistance. High yield and oil content potential.

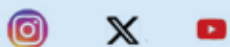
PNWVT	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	PNW	2023	2024	2025
LBS PER ACRE							LBS PER ACRE			
Control Mean	3743	3399	2683	3128	4711	4403	Private trials			
<b>Rubisco Seeds' Hybrids</b>										
<b>KICKER</b>	4972	4701	4383	3505	5841	5394	<b>KICKER</b>	4678	6667	6828
<b>MERCEDES</b>	4419	4359	3756	3881	5393	4798	<b>MERCEDES</b>	4945	6569	6167
<b>AKILAH</b>					5876	5201	<b>AKILAH</b>	5686	5455	6094
<b>PHOENIX CL</b>	4611	4043	3398	3454	5093	4780	<b>DRIFTER</b>	4856	6795	6449

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

**\*Phoenix CL, Colin CL & Carlsson CL compatible within Clearfield wheat rotations.**

Strong cross tolerance to Imi / SU herbicides. Can be sprayed post emergence with Beyond herbicide. SU or SURT Canola cultivars are not viable in a Clearfield rotation. (50% yield reduction in soils containing IMI residues, independent research Caldbeck Consulting.)

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Future SDRP payments will also be made using a 70% payment factor. To date, USDA has provided over \$6.7 billion in SDRP payments, \$9.3 billion through the Emergency Commodity Assistance Program and nearly \$1.9 billion through the Emergency Livestock Relief Program.

Additionally, FSA has made over \$10 billion in payments, to date, through the Farmers Bridge Assistance program with more assistance on the way for specialty crop producers. Since 2025, through permanent programs, FSA has provided over \$2 billion in disaster assistance, \$5.3 billion in commodity price support, \$3.1 billion in safety net assistance, and \$685 million through conservation programs.

The first SDRP stage, announced in July 2025, remains available to producers who received an indemnity under crop insurance or the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) for eligible crop losses due to qualifying 2023 and 2024 natural disaster events.

Stage 2 of SDRP covers eligible crop, tree, bush, and vine losses that were not covered under Stage 1 program provisions, including nonindemnified (shallow loss), uncovered, and quality losses.

Eligible losses must be the result of natural disasters occurring in calendar years 2023 and/or 2024. These disasters include wildfires, hurricanes, floods, derechos, excessive heat, tornadoes, winter storms, freeze (including a polar vortex), smoke exposure, excessive moisture, qualifying drought, and related conditions.

To qualify for drought-related losses, the loss must have occurred in a county rated by the U.S. Drought Monitor as having a D2 (severe drought) for eight consecutive weeks, D3 (extreme drought), or

greater intensity level during the applicable calendar year.

For more information on SDRP, please visit [fsa.usda.gov/sdrp](https://fsa.usda.gov/sdrp). ■

## Smallest wheat crop predicted since 1972

On May 12, the U.S. Department of Agriculture released its first outlook for the 2026-27 all-wheat production. At 1.56 billion bushels, the projected crop is the lowest since 1972, down 424 million from last year on reduced harvested area and yield. The all-wheat yield, projected at 47.5 bushels per acre, is 5.8 bushels lower than last year's record yield. Winter wheat is predicted to decline by 25% from last year to 1.04 billion bushels, mostly due to sharply reduced hard red winter production.

"Unfortunately, U.S. wheat growers are not surprised by this report. Across the country, farmers continue to face stubbornly high input costs, ongoing uncertainty in global markets, and the continual challenge of achieving profitability on the farm. As a result, many farmers are making the difficult decision to plant fewer wheat acres. In addition, much of wheat country is experiencing significant drought," said Sam Kieffer, CEO of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

"That is why it is essential for Congress to advance the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026. This legislation would provide much-needed certainty for America's farmers, expand market opportunities, invest in critical research to combat pests and diseases, and support innovation across the wheat industry. We also call on Congress and the Trump Administration to examine every opportunity to control and reduce rising farm input costs, particularly fertilizer and fuel."

The global wheat outlook for 2026-27 is for lower supplies, marginally lower consumption, reduced trade, and decreased ending stocks compared with 2025-26. Global production is forecast at 819.1 million tons, down from last year's record 843.8 million. A large share of the lower production is from all the major wheat exporting countries. The largest reductions are for the U.S., the EU, Argentina, and Australia. ■

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# POLICY MATTERS

## Energy panel discusses importance of dams

Last month, Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), discussed the importance of the lower Snake River dams with other stakeholders at a Central Washington Energy Summit hosted by Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.) in Moses Lake, Wash.

“We’ve got to get this information out. The general public who does not directly live around the waterways doesn’t seem to understand what moves on the system,” Hennings said in her opening remarks.

Hennings touched on the value of working with stakeholders from other U.S. river systems and the need for building national coalitions. She was asked about the real-world impacts to wheat growers if the dams were breached.

“Farmers will go out of business,” she stated. “Agriculture is struggling. Transportation is one of our biggest costs, and we need rail, river, and road to survive. Rail currently is not ideal for reliability, and there’s a shortage of truck drivers.”

Besides being one of the most reliable modes of moving wheat downriver and other goods, such as fertil-

izer, upriver, barging also helps keep road and rail costs competitive. Hennings pointed out that with nearly 90% of Washington wheat exported, being a reliable exporter is critical. If overseas customers can’t rely on getting shipments in a timely manner, they’ll buy their wheat elsewhere. Losing the dams would also increase energy costs, which would devastate rural economies.

“Legislators don’t realize how their policies impact the farmer,” she said. “Washington is 50th in take-home pay. We need to get our wheat to customers or we will lose farmers, and prices will go up.”

Joining Hennings on the stage were Clark Mather, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners; Neil Maunu, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association; and Scott Simms, CEO and executive director of the Public Power Council. The panel was moderated by Katie Paxon, a legislative assistant for Newhouse. Other topics that the panelists touched on included the status of lower Snake River dam litigation; the impact of increased spill through the dams; how the dams enable recreation and irrigation opportunities; generate renewable power; and provide flood control. ▶



Michelle Hennings, executive director of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, spoke on the importance of the lower Snake River dams at a Central Washington Energy Summit hosted by Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Wash.) in Moses Lake. Joining Hennings on the stage were (from left) moderator Katie Paxon, a legislative assistant for Newhouse; Neil Maunu, executive director of the Pacific Northwest Waterways Association; Clark Mather, executive director of Northwest RiverPartners; and Scott Simms, CEO and executive director of the Public Power Council. Photo courtesy of Rep. Dan Newhouse’s office.



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“People in the Pacific Northwest generally support hydropower. Twenty-five percent or less support removing the dams,” said Mather. “It’s not a controversial issue. Every day, people want what the federal system provides.”

In his role as executive director of Pacific Northwest Waterways Association (PNWA), Maunu also oversees the Inland Ports and Navigation Group, a subset of PNWA that is a defendant-intervenor in the dam litigation. Maunu said the court’s recent decision to increase spill and decrease minimum operating pool levels has created a potentially unsafe navigation situation for barges and cruise ships. The defendants have filed an appeal.

Simms touched on the role the lower Snake River dams plays in grid reliability. He estimated that the value of the water spilling over the dams is \$1 to \$2 million per day during the spring. His organization plans to track the increased spill through the summer and see how it impacts consumers. He also predicted the potential for brownouts and blackouts during extreme weather events if the state is forced to rely less on hydropower and more on other, less reliable sources of energy, such as wind and solar.

The goal of the energy summit was to talk about power production challenges and solutions now and in the future. The audience was made up of industry representatives, government officials, and power generation stakeholders. Other panels during the event discussed the impact of Washington state’s Climate Commitment Act, the future of nuclear in the state, the importance of the Columbia River System, and the need for more energy in cities like Moses Lake. ■

## House passes farm bill

From the National Association of Wheat Growers

On April 30, the U.S. House of Representatives passed the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 (H.R. 7567). In response, National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) President Jamie Kress issued the following statement:

“NAWG appreciates Chairman Thompson’s leadership in advancing this critical legislation. The Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 delivers meaningful improvements that will provide certainty for farmers, expand market opportunities, and reinforce the vital role our nation’s farmers play in both food security and national security.

“This bill reflects many of wheat farmers’ top priorities, from modernizing farm credit and safeguarding international food aid programs to enhancing export competitive-

ness. These provisions will help ensure America’s wheat farmers can remain resilient and globally competitive. We urge the Senate to act quickly to advance this legislation and deliver a strong, bipartisan farm bill to the president’s desk.”

The Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 includes several key NAWG priorities, including:

- Modernizing the Farm Credit Title to ensure continued access to affordable, reliable financing.
- Permanently transferring Food for Peace to the U.S. Department of Agriculture to protect in-kind food aid and strengthen long-term demand for U.S. commodities.
- Integrating the Supplemental Agricultural Trade Promotion Program into the Market Access Program (MAP) and Foreign Market Development Program (FMD) to bolster export market development and global competitiveness.
- Reauthorizing the U.S. Grain Standards Act to ensure fair pricing and maintain international market confidence.
- Reauthorizing the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) to preserve critical conservation tools while helping stabilize farm income.
- Directing the Natural Resources Conservation Service to study and report on the use of winter wheat as a cover crop, supporting innovation, soil health, and resource conservation. ■

## Ecology releases updated plan for ag clean water guidance

In late April, the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) announced the completion of their Voluntary Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture. According to Ecology’s webpage, the guidance “is designed to reflect the diversity of Washington’s agricultural industry and offer best management practice (BMP) options that can be tailored to site-specific needs while protecting water quality.”

Draft chapters of the guidance were released throughout the summer and fall of 2025 and opened for comment. Ecology made a number of updates and published their responses to comments. The plan has been submitted to the Environmental Protection Agency.

The document can be downloaded at [apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/2610045.html](https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/2610045.html) ■

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## Helping consumers understand story behind Washington wheat

Earlier this spring, the Washington grain industry hosted a booth at Spokane’s Bloomsday trade show, where hundreds of attendees stopped to learn more about wheat and barley farming in the state. The conversations were encouraging, but they also reinforced something many of us in agriculture already know — most consumers are several steps removed from the farms that grow their food.

As farmers, we often focus on the work itself, planting, harvesting, managing weather risks, and producing a quality crop. What we don’t always think about is how little the average consumer understands about modern wheat farming, flour production, or even where their favorite foods begin. And honestly, that disconnect makes sense.

For most people, wheat exists primarily on grocery store shelves in the form of flour, bread, pastries, crackers, pasta, or cookies. That’s their connection to what we grow. While Washington wheat reaches markets around the world, the products consumers use in their own kitchens are often the only direct bridge between our farms and their daily lives. That bridge matters now more than ever.

Across Washington state, many wheat growers are navigating rising production costs, volatile export markets, transportation challenges, and tightening margins that continue to place enormous pressure on family farms. At the same time,



Washington Grain Commission employees, Maddison Dayton, communications and content manager, and Alyssa Bentz, finance and compliance manager, take their turn at the wheat industry booth during Bloomsday.

fewer consumers have direct ties to agriculture than ever before. Building understanding between farmers and the public is no longer simply good outreach, it is becoming essential to the long-term future of rural communities and domestic food production.

Today’s consumers are asking more questions about food than ever before. They want to understand ingredients, nutrition, processing, sustainability, and how products are made. Questions about gut health, enriched flour, whole grains, and food production have become increasingly common. We even had people wait in line at Bloomsday to ask us about our use of RoundUp.

For wheat farmers, those conversations create an opportunity. We may not be millers, scientists, breeders, or nutritionists, but understanding the basics of how wheat becomes flour helps us answer questions and build trust with people who genuinely want to learn more about the foods they eat. In Washington, about 80% of the wheat grown is soft white wheat, a class prized for products like cookies, crackers, pastries, cakes, and Asian noodles and sponge cakes. The mild flavor and low protein content make it ideal for these delicate baked goods.

These details may seem small to those of us in production agriculture, but for consumers, they help answer bigger questions about how food is grown, processed, and used. The connection between farm and finished product is often surprising to consumers, and it helps personalize what we do. Those conversa-

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tions also help reconnect consumers with the realities of modern farming. Many people do not realize how dependent rural communities are on wheat production, export markets, and the infrastructure that supports them. Helping consumers understand where food comes from also helps them understand what is at stake when family farms struggle.

Not every conversation needs to begin with trade policy or farm economics. Sometimes it starts with flour, a loaf of bread, or a cookie shared around a kitchen table. But those small conversations can lead to something bigger — a greater appreciation for the people who grow our food and the challenges facing the farms working to remain viable for the next generation. ■

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# Countervailing duties harm growers

## WHEAT FARMERS FACE SECOND HIGHEST FERTILIZER COSTS OF MAJOR FIELD CROPS

By Betty Resnick

For the National Association of Wheat Growers

Fertilizer costs are one among many rising input costs for farmers. While fertilizer is a key budget item for all farmers, fertilizer costs are especially critical for wheat growers. According to U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) cost-of-production projections for the 2026-27 marketing year, published in December before the current conflict in the Middle East skyrocketed fertilizer prices, wheat farmers face the second highest fertilizer costs of major field crops as a percentage of both operating (38%) and total (15%) costs.

Fertilizer is a global market, and there are many contributing factors as to why fertilizer costs have remained elevated over the last several years. One reason that phosphate has become more expensive in the U.S. market is the countervailing duties (CVD) that were applied in 2021 on imported phosphate fertilizers from Russia, and, most influentially, Morocco. CVD are tariffs on U.S. imports that aim to neutralize specific types of government subsidies given to foreign exporters that materially harm domestic industry.

### Phosphate market

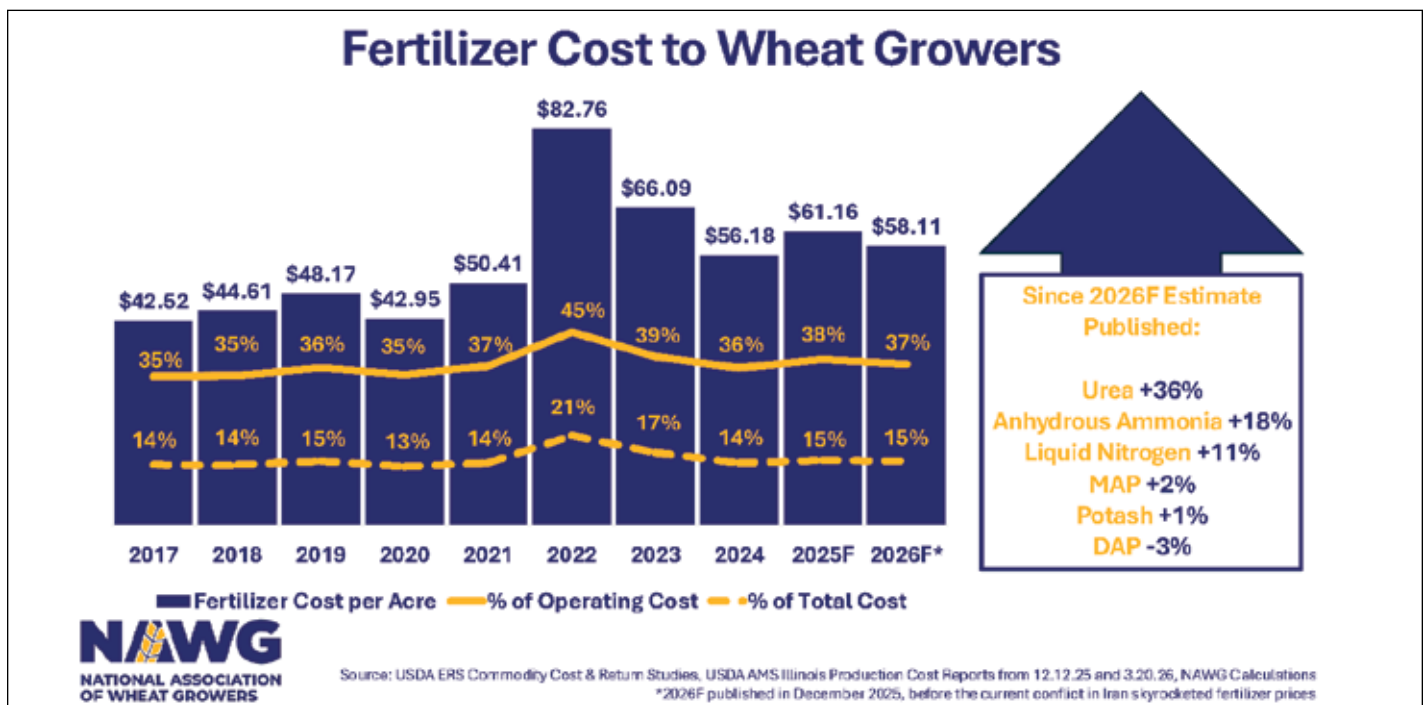
Phosphate fertilizers are manufactured using mined

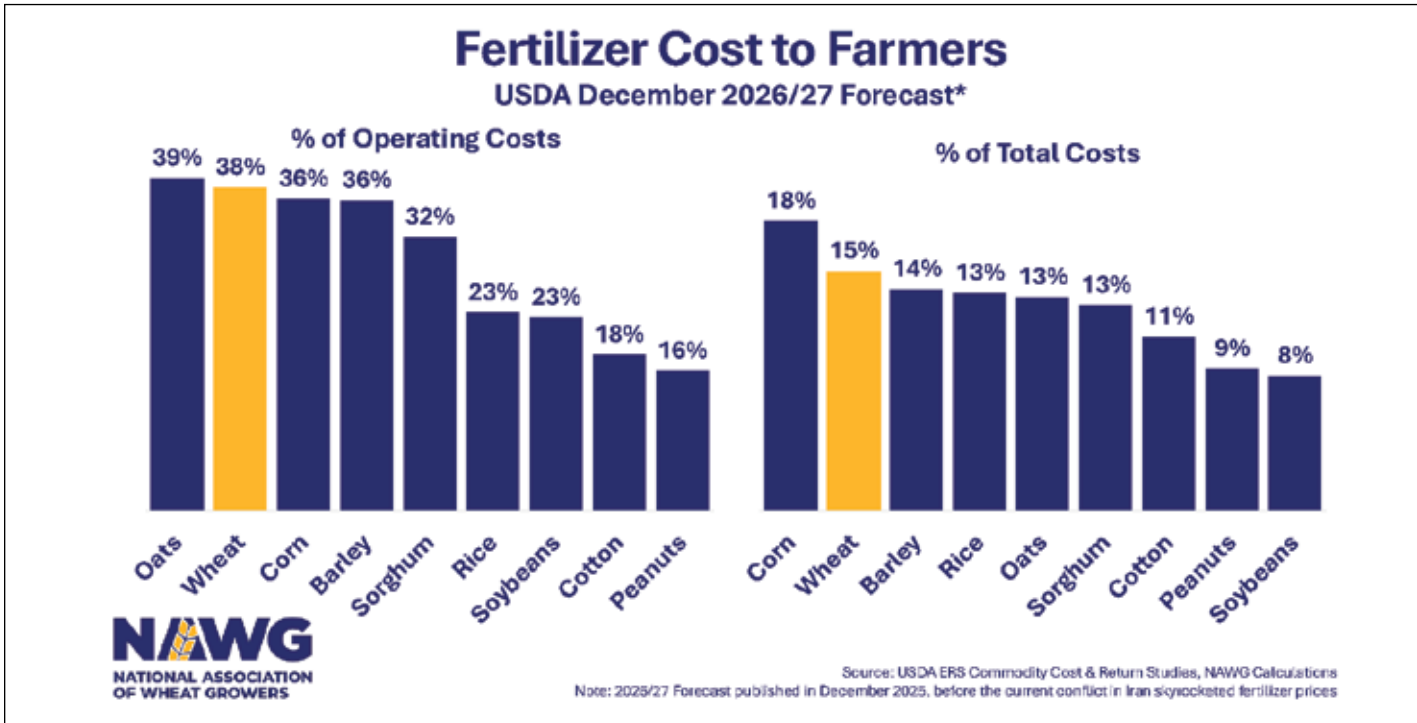
phosphate rock. Phosphorous is one of the three primary nutrients needed to grow crops. While the majority of phosphate rock used in the U.S. is domestically produced, demand outstrips supply by approximately 3 million metric tons as of 2024, requiring imports. Over 95% of phosphate rock mined in the U.S. goes to wet-process phosphoric acid for fertilizers and animal feed supplements.

Globally, the top phosphate rock producers are China and Morocco. China severely restricts the export of phosphate, including a current ban on exports of all phosphate fertilizers, limiting their role in the traded market. Morocco has nearly 70% of global phosphate reserves and is the world's top exporter of phosphate rock. In the five years preceding the imposition of CVD on phosphate fertilizer, imports from Morocco made up over half of U.S. phosphate fertilizer imports in most years. Since implementation of the CVD, Moroccan phosphate fertilizer imports to the U.S. have fallen, from a total of 3.8 million P2O5 equivalent tons between 2016-2020, to only 0.2 million tons between 2021-2025 and zero imports in 2025.

### Cost to farmers of countervailing duties on phosphate fertilizers

Research from the Agricultural and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M estimates that the CVD on Moroccan

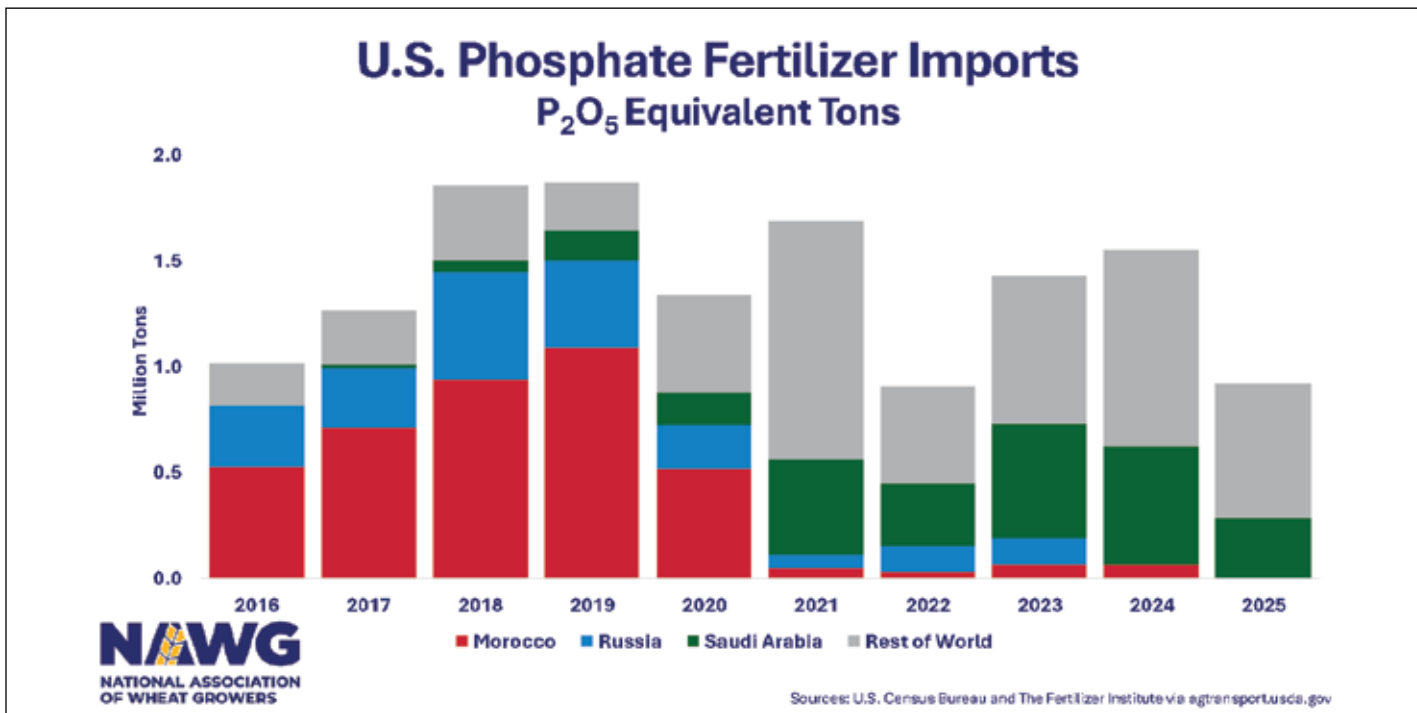


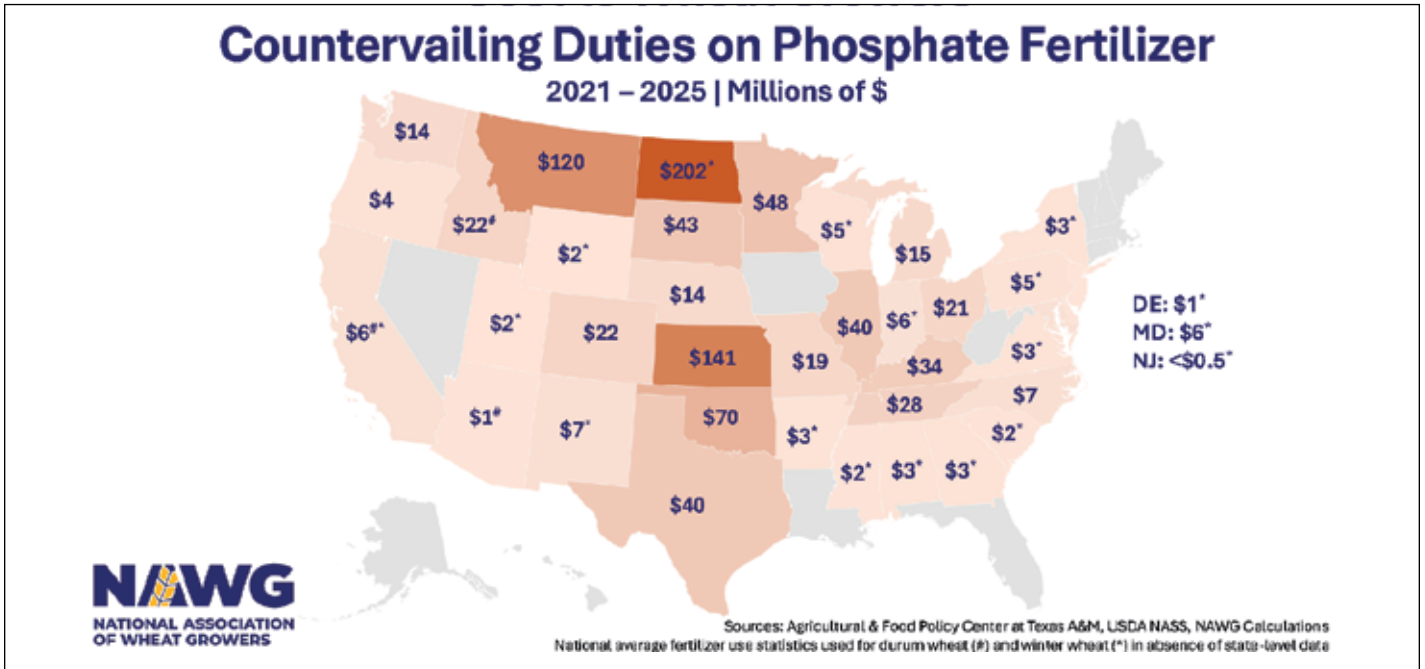


phosphate fertilizers cost the producers of major U.S. crops (corn, soybeans, wheat, rice, sorghum, and cotton) a combined \$6.9 billion across the 2021 through 2025 growing seasons through increased fertilizer costs. Wheat growers bore just under \$1 billion in additional costs during the studied time frame. The costs derived from an increase in the cost of diammonium phosphate and other phosphate fertilizers.

When the CVD on Moroccan imports was at its full initial level of 19.97% between April 2021 and the end of 2023, the study found the tariffs led to a 28.6% increase in the price of diammonium phosphate (DAP) for American consumers.

The National Association of Wheat Growers has further broken down Texas A&M's national estimates to capture cost borne by wheat growers by state. We calculated state-





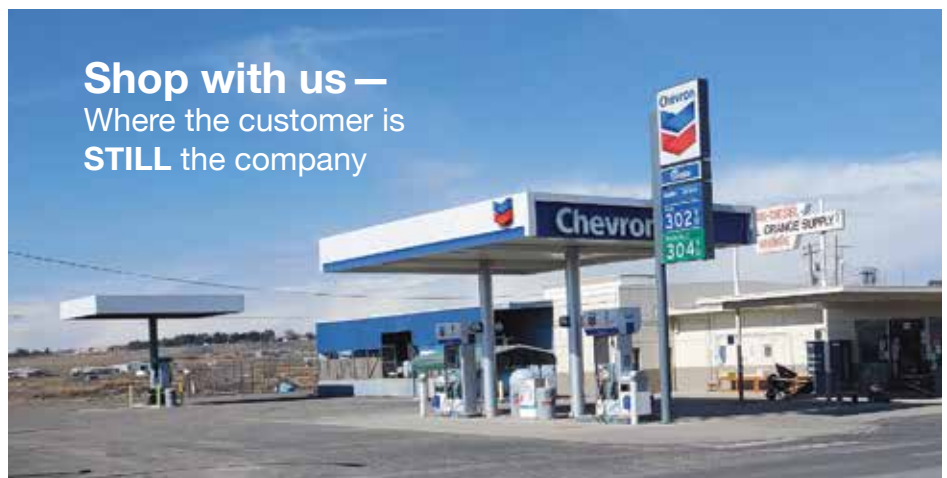
level costs utilizing average applied pounds of phosphate per acre and application percentages from the 2024 Chemical Use Survey and USDA annual acreage data.

Unsurprisingly, the states bearing the brunt of the cost from increased fertilizer prices are those with the largest wheat acreage: North Dakota, Kansas, and Montana. However, the state-level costs are also heavily driven by different levels of phosphate fertilizer application across the country, reflecting the fact that farming is an inherently local endeavor with the same crop facing different nutrient needs based on local conditions.

For example, a similar number of winter wheat acres are grown in South Dakota and Oregon, an average of 838,000 acres and 738,000 acres annually between 2021 and 2025 respectively. However, while the USDA Chemical Use Survey finds that 94% of winter wheat acres in South Dakota are treated with an average of 23 pounds per acre of phosphate, only 20% of Oregon's acres are treated with an average

of 29 pounds per acre of phosphate. Thus, while South Dakota's winter wheat farmers faced additional CVD-derived costs of \$17 million, Oregon's winter wheat farmers faced a smaller bill of \$4 million in increased costs.

In all, North Dakota wheat growers faced the highest CVD-related cost increases to the tune of \$202 million, followed by Kansas (\$141 million) and Montana (\$120 million). The agriculture industry has struggled mightily in recent years, and wheat growers have not been immune to these overarching trends. Many recent cost drivers of fertilizer prices and farming inputs generally are not in farmers' or U.S. policymakers' control. However, removing CVD tariffs on phosphate fertilizer imports is and could provide much needed relief to farmers nationwide. ■



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# Headaches ahead?

## ARE GROWERS HEADED TOWARDS A SQUEEZE ON NITROGEN, SULFUR?

By Trista Crossley  
Editor, *Wheat Life*

According to the National Association of Wheat Growers, countervailing duties on phosphate fertilizer cost Washington wheat farmers about \$14 million from 2021-25, but Andy Juris predicts nitrogen and sulfur are shaping up to be bigger headaches for the state's wheat growers.

Juris, a farmer from Bickleton, Wash., and chair of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers' (WAWG) Marketing Committee, has been tracking events in the Middle East, and how they might impact grower inputs. WAWG has used his research during advocacy visits to Washington, D.C., and he was set to testify in front of the federal Ways and Means Committee earlier this year, although that trip was cancelled. Juris said growers are headed towards a squeeze on base nitrogen and sulfur.

"Wheat uses phosphate, obviously, but it is not a high user of it. We're seeing guys curb phosphate use. You probably do take some nominal yield hits as a result, but you're balancing that economic threshold of it buying you two extra bushels of yield but costing five bushels to use it," he explained. "Where I think we're headed is a squeeze on base nitrogen and sulfur. Wheat loves sulfur; it's probably one of the more important nutrients."

Sulfuric acid is primarily produced when petroleum is refined or during natural gas processing and is essential for manufacturing ammonium sulfate, which provides nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, and sulfur. Nitrogen is manufactured primarily through the Haber-Bosch process, which combines nitrogen from the air with hydrogen, usually sourced from natural gas.

Since Feb. 28, when the Iran war began, Juris said many of the oil fields in the Middle East have been damaged, reducing fuel extraction and thereby petroleum byproducts, such as natural gas, which fires the Haber-Bosch process.

"That's why they have a whole bunch of fertilizer processing in that

area," Juris said. "A lot of those oil fields got damaged. Some of the fertilizer production, especially in the UAE and Qatar, they're looking at five to seven years to bring those back online after the damage."

Of course, the Strait of Hormuz blockade is also a huge factor in fertilizer shortages, but even if it were to open, companies can't afford insurance on their ships making the transit.

"The U.S. probably controls the water in a broad sense, but you don't need to control the water to shut it down. The big legitimate shippers, like Maersk, have to operate within the bounds of international law, and they have to insure their ships. They're not going to risk a ship worth hundreds of millions of dollars in cargo hitting a mine or getting a drone flown into it," Juris explained.

Wheat growers are price takers, meaning they can't set the market price for their grain and have to absorb any increases in the cost of production. How long growers can continue under these conditions is anybody's guess. Variable rate technology will likely become more important, and some farmers may even simply reduce the amount of fertilizer they apply, which will reduce yields.

"If pricing gets to be so unsustainable that you have to start cutting, you've already baked a yield hit into the pie. Now you're trying to figure out how to balance yield versus input. That's a really hard thing to do, at least in our area where you just cannot bank on the rains coming at reasonable moments," Juris said, adding that he thinks 2026 is the calm before the storm.

"If you're solely a spring wheat producer that bought your fertilizer in the current environment, you're feeling the pain. But since the majority of the wheat in Washington state is winter wheat, short of any top dressing or anything like that, you're kind of locked in at prewar pricing in terms of those inputs. We've yet to see the full effect of this war on any of the crop protection products. Crop year 2027 is going to be the one that is going to thin the herd significantly." ■





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# What is regenerative ag?

New NRCS program will bundle practices into single application through EQIP, CSP

By Andrea Cox

*Conservation Coordinator, Washington Association of Wheat Growers*

Regenerative agriculture is a conservation management approach that emphasizes natural resources through improved soil health, water management, and overall farm vitality.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service's (NRCS) Regenerative Pilot Program is investing \$700 million to support regenerative agriculture — \$400 million through the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and \$300 million through the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP). For growers, this means bundled practices are integrated into a single application, making programs easier to access and more impactful overall. All resource concerns are addressed together, and whole farm, holistic conservation planning is the focus of the program. Producer goals and conservation planning drive the process. Both new and beginning farmers and experienced growers may apply. Results are carefully monitored so growers receive credit. Contract length is a minimum of five years.

The Regenerative Pilot Program has three requirements:

**Whole Farm Assessment.** An extensive assessment of all resource concerns is required, with the goal of establishing a whole farm plan before the end of the contract. Whole farm plans must meet NRCS planning criteria in the soil and water resource categories. These plans may be developed by NRCS staff, partners, or technical service providers.

**Primary Practices.** At least one primary regenerative management practice must be observed or applied by the end of the contract. Additional NRCS practices may support regenerative agriculture objectives when used in the appropriate context. Practices identified in the conservation plan will be eligible for financial assistance, however, producers may choose which practices to include in the financial assistance application based on their goals and objectives. Primary practices include:

- Conservation crop rotation
- Contour farming
- Contour orchard and other perennial crop
- Cover crop
- Drainage water management
- Forage harvest management
- Forest stand improvement
- Irrigation water management
- Mulching
- Nutrient management
- Pest management conservation system
- Grazing management
- Residue and tillage management, no-till
- Residue and tillage management (reduced)
- Stripcropping

A farm may implement conservation crop rotation, cover crop, and nutrient management as primary management practices but also identify the need for soil amendments using Practice 333 (Amending Soil Properties with Gypsum Products) or Practice 336 (Soil Carbon Amendment) to implement its conservation plan. These practices would be eligible for inclusion under the Regenerative Pilot Program.

**Soil Health Testing.** Growers must complete soil health testing in both the first and last year of the contract. The goal is to determine a baseline and track results over time. Financial assistance for soil testing is available to growers who have not completed testing previously, as well as those already testing their soil.

Growers interested in the Regenerative Pilot Program should contact their local NRCS office. ■



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# View from the inside

New FSA state executive director determined to put Washington farmers first

By Trista Crossley  
Editor, *Wheat Life*

Patrick Bell, the recently appointed Farm Service Agency (FSA) state executive director, is no stranger to the state's agricultural industry, but the scale of it took him a little bit by surprise.

"I always knew the importance of commodities and the row crops, especially being based in Spokane, growing up in Springdale for part of my life, and growing up in livestock. I was very active in 4-H and FFA," he said. "But now, being out on the ground, it's just the scale that people are operating at. These aren't 20- or 40-acre tracks.

These are several thousand-acre tracks. I think all farming and ranching comes with risk, but it's really given me an appreciation for their concerns and the day-to-day of why the programs that we administer at FSA are so important."

Before landing at FSA in January, Bell held leadership positions at Spokane County and with former Congresswoman, Cathy McMorris Rodgers, and worked in higher education.

He is a 5th generation farmer and rancher. The family has a livestock operation in Springdale, and they raise alfalfa, triticale, oats, and barley. Bell helps out on the operation, mainly as the guy "that runs and gets parts" and has helped the family establish a direct-to-consumer beef brand.

In his previous roles, Bell has interacted with FSA and the U.S. Department of Agriculture, but seeing it from the inside has given him a healthy appreciation for the dedication of the FSA staff and the lengths they go to in helping producers. He is determined to put producers first and make sure his office is responsive to producers' concerns.

"It's all about customer service. When the president and the secretary say they're putting the farmer first, we make that real on a day-to-day basis," he explained. "The secretary has a goal for producers to hear back within hours, not days and weeks. I've said before, responsiveness, to

me, is next to godliness. People appreciate an answer, even if it's not good news."

Since January, Bell has been meeting with producers and industry groups, including a meeting with wheat growers in March about the Conservation Reserve Program. He said some of the concerns producers have are with the complexity and eligibility of programs. He is concerned that if producers are having trouble understanding the programs, they might decide they aren't worth their time. That's where his staff comes in.

"I want our folks to help translate the information, and, to the extent we're able to, help them with an application and understanding the types of documentation we need," he said. "We've been doing some statewide webinars and trainings on our latest program, SDRP (the Supplemental Disaster Relief Program), to help certain sectors get access to our specialists. We've got some really smart people. I'm glad to have them."

Staffing is still an issue in the state and county offices, but Bell said they've been given the go ahead to backfill some positions and to get ready for upcoming retirements. He added that he's been impressed with USDA's rollout of login.gov, which has helped streamline and simplify applications.

Besides improving customer service and response times, another of Bell's goals is to raise awareness of FSA programs through continued outreach. He's open to invitations from producer groups or just meeting producers at a local coffee shop who want to hear the latest FSA updates. He plans to share feedback with FSA leadership so they can get a sense of what's happening on the ground and what kind of questions producers have.

"I think I can be an advocate in this role. Certainly, when it comes to concerns or needs that aren't being met, people want that feedback elevated to USDA leadership. I have the channels to do that," he said. "If (producers) ever run into trouble or want to make me aware of something, I'll make myself available, if that means coming out for coffee or farm visits or tours. I'm planning to be doing a lot of that this summer. I really want to get out, meet people, and get the story from the ground."

Bell can be contacted at (509) 323-3000 or by email at [Patrick.Bell2@usda.gov](mailto:Patrick.Bell2@usda.gov). ■



**Patrick Bell**

Washington State Executive Director, Farm Service Agency

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# One call to rule them all

Eastern Washington growers urged to dial 811 before they do any digging

By Trista Crossley  
 Editor, *Wheat Life*

Do you know what’s buried beneath that field of wheat on the back 40? It could be nothing, or it could be a large pipe full of pressurized natural gas, and the only way to be sure is to call 811 before you do any digging.

“There’s a lot of pipeline up in Eastern Washington. The Northwest Pipeline was originally built in 1956. It was the first natural gas supply line into the Pacific Northwest and delivers the majority of the natural gas consumed in the Pacific Northwest,” said Tyson Hacking, a technical specialist III with Williams’ Pacific Division. Williams is an energy company that owns more than 32,000 miles of pipeline across the U.S., including the Northwest Pipeline. “Up in the Spokane area, we still have a lot of rural pipeline. It’s just out in the middle of the field. Most of these farmers, their parents have been farming and then they took over the farm, and the pipeline’s been in there longer than that. It doesn’t even register to them.”

Most of the pipeline was originally buried 5 to 6 feet deep, but over time, due to erosion and farming activities, that may have changed. Hacking said these pipes aren’t the small gas pipes that go into a house. They are large diameter — 30 inches in some cases — highly pressurized pipes carrying a large volume of potentially flammable

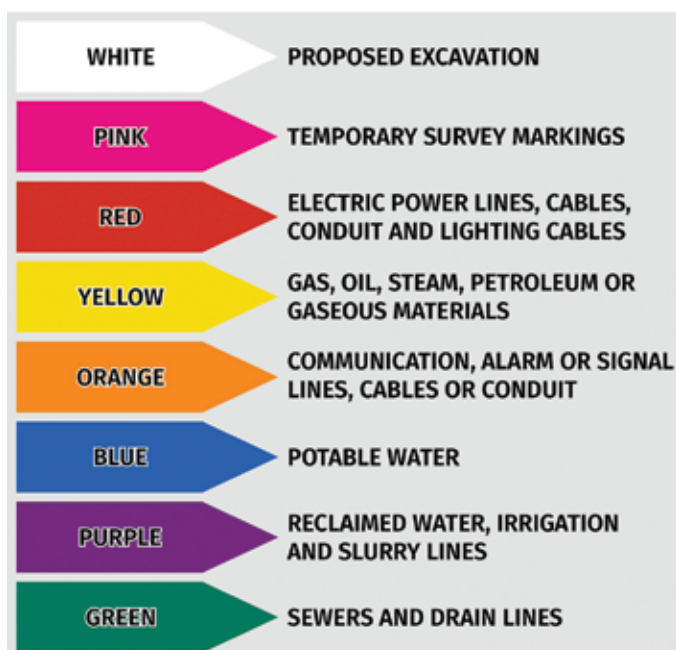


natural gas. Moving natural gas via pipeline is the safest way to transport the gas.

“Anytime farmers are disturbing the soil other than planting, such as tilling, deep ripping, drain tiling, etc., we want to make sure that they’re doing a one call (or calling 811),” he said. “We have really good relationships with a lot of the farmers up there in the Pacific Northwest because we’ve worked together for years. We just want everyone to be safe and to be able to go home at night. We want to work together and keep our pipe safe.”

Washington residents can call 811 or visit [811beforeyoudig.com/811-states/state-washington/](http://811beforeyoudig.com/811-states/state-washington/) to submit a request for an underground utility locate. The service is paid for by gas and other utility companies and is free to the public. Once the request is made and the dig location identified, the one call center will notify anybody who has utilities in that area. Those companies will send out representatives to mark the location of any buried infrastructure.

“We have to analyze and determine whether that one call is encroaching on us or not. If it is, we’ll go out and we’ll mark it,” Hacking said, adding that if the digging is going to be within their right of way, a Williams repre-



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sentative is required to be onsite when it happens.

Most buried pipelines are required to have signage along the route. Hacking said you are supposed to be able to stand at one sign and see at least two more signs, one in front and behind, but sometimes, farmers will remove signs that are in the middle of a field. If it keeps the line of sight, Williams may move a sign to the edge of the field.

Most states have an exemption to the one call, but there's usually an exception to that exemption — when the excavating happens on a known utility right of way. In Washington, farmers are exempt from calling 811 if the tilling of soil for agricultural purposes is less than 12 inches in depth within a utility easement and 20 inches in depth outside of a utility easement.

"Most of the time, the farmer will read that first part and they'll be like, 'oh, I have an exemption.' They don't read the second part," Hacking explained "Even though the state might exempt you from calling, it doesn't exempt you from the liability if you were to hit a pipeline. Anytime you're disturbing the ground, you should do the one call."

If a person damages a pipeline, the liability could be enormous. In a typical case, Williams will generally send the person responsible for the damage the repair bill. But that person could also be on the hook for damages outside the actual repair, such as lost revenue from businesses affected by any outage and the cost to restore power to a utility's customers.

In 2023, a farmer outside Pullman



was installing a drain tile in a leased field when they hit one of Williams' pipelines and ruptured it. Fortunately, no one was injured, and Williams was able to repair the pipe in 24 hours at a cost of over \$100,000. However, the incident caused 37,000 Avista customers to lose service for nearly a week. Hacking said damages, including lost business and wages, were estimated to be close to \$10 million.

"There was no one call made. Had (the farmer) called one call, he would have known where we were," Hacking said. "We want to work with farmers. We want to be good neighbors, so please work with us and please call 811." ■

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## Former wheat ambassador provides global supply chain risk intelligence

Matthew Warren, Z2Data

By Kevin Gaffney  
*Special to Wheat Life*

Most folks raised in Washington wheat country live their entire lives without becoming seasoned world travelers. Matthew Warren, born and raised in Dayton, Wash., exemplifies the polar opposite of that.

Warren graduated from Dayton High School in 2014 and wasted no time in moving across the U.S. to Columbia, S.C. Since that time, Warren has lived in China and has visited over 20 foreign nations.

When Warren finished high school, he originally envisioned a career in agriculture commodities trading but soon decided that global supply chain management might offer him better opportunities for a successful career. Ironically, playing the saxophone turned out to be one of the deciding factors in choosing the university he would attend.

“I was offered a generous marching band scholarship at the University of South Carolina (USC),” recalled Warren. “They also had an excellent study program in global supply chain operations management. I was able to complete my B.S. degree in three years.”

Playing in the USC marching band at football games and other events required many hours of practice time, while Warren was carrying a heavy academic load at the same time.

“My grades suffered a little during football season, so I would make up for it during the rest of the year,” said Warren. “I will never forget my very first performance at a Southeastern Conference game. With over 80,000 fans in the stands, the noise was deafening. I was so nervous during the first halftime show, I didn’t play a note. It was all I could do to concentrate on executing all the elaborate steps, turns, and movements in unison with my bandmates. It was an experience I will never forget.”

Warren served as a wheat ambassador for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) during his senior year at Dayton High School.



Former Washington Wheat Ambassador Matthew Warren, and his wife, Gabbi, now live in Dallas.

“I had spent years of my youth riding in tractors and combines on my uncle’s wheat farm and also worked on our family fruit orchard, but my year as wheat ambassador really showed me the business side of farming,” he said. “I gained a much better understanding of the marketing and selling of the products grown from the soil. I learned about farm operations, financing, and how tax implications can affect agricultural businesses. Especially eye-opening to me was how much lobbying was necessary to help keep wheat farming and the entire agriculture industry profitable.”

During the summer of 2018, following graduation from USC, Warren worked for Lamb Weston as an intern. While performing his duties, he assisted with reducing a demurrage bill that would have cost millions of dollars.

Warren was resolute on finding a way to live and work in China. His employment at Lamb Weston helped to make that dream possible. He moved to the country without full time employment and was able to connect with a Lamb Weston colleague he had met on a previous business trip to China who referred him to work opportunities. Warren enrolled in Shanghai University and began studies while working part time teaching English to students. He eventually began working as an international buyer for a Chinese company.

Warren speaks Mandarin Chinese competently. He can read and understand written Chinese better. Because there are many different dialects in China, understanding the spoken word can be difficult. Warren thoroughly enjoyed his time in China. He spent considerable time in both Shanghai and Hong Kong. His experiences included living with roommates from Italy and Russia. He and some friends were featured in a television advertisement for a Polish pierogi restaurant. They were paid for their appearance in the commercial with Polish pierogis and vodka.

Warren has always loved hiking and experiencing nature. As a youth, he enjoyed skiing, hiking, and pick-

ing huckleberries in the Blue Mountains near Dayton. He reveres the hiking opportunities in China and considers Hong Kong one of his favorite places in the world.

“I believe Hong Kong is the only place on earth where you can be hiking in the middle of nowhere on well-developed mountain trails and then catch a bus for a 40-minute ride and enjoy dinner at a Michelin Star restaurant. It is truly unique.

“Many people have this conception of Communist China as a huge monolith that reaches down and controls everything with an iron fist,” said Warren. “The reality is, with a billion people to manage, they have more important things to do than to micromanage peoples’ lives. China is still a communist nation, but it has significantly advanced from the more restrictive atmosphere from several decades ago. I never felt uncomfortable dealing with government officials in China.

“My goal was to build a career in China working in agricultural product marketing. Unfortunately, the timing of my arrival turned out to be detrimental to the implementation of those goals. Massive trade tariffs were imposed on China by the U.S. and vice versa, which forced me to change my plans.”

Warren was working to complete a master’s degree at Shanghai University when COVID-19 hit. He was required to move back to the U.S. in January of 2020. He later completed an MBA degree from Eastern Washington University through an online program.

Back in the states, Warren found employment as an intern with Schweitzer Engineering Laboratories (SEL) in Pullman, Wash. He worked his way up to a procurement buyer position before leaving in 2022. The next move was to Wisconsin, where he was employed by a startup company that produced dry egg powder products. Unfortunately, the company failed and he was laid off. On a positive note, Warren met his future wife, Gabbi, while he was working in Wisconsin. They were married in 2025. She works as an emergency medicine pharmacist in Dallas where they now live.

Warren’s career path has been successful both by design and by fortunate circumstances.

“The way my career has progressed was planned, but I’d also have to say there was some happenstance involved,” he said. “Part of what makes a successful career is precise planning that puts you in the position of being able to take advantage of timely opportunities as they present themselves.

“For instance, serving as wheat ambassador for WAWG helped me develop my public speaking skills. Having the opportunity to experience lobbying with state legislators

opened my eyes to how government works and helped me to realize how important it is for all farmers to get involved to help promote their industry.

“I recall being very impressed with how well-organized the WAWG team was in preparation for meeting with legislators. We went over the facts and talking points we wanted to hit with specific legislators. Often the messaging depended upon which side of the state a particular legislator was representing.

“Later, I used my time at SEL as a stepping-stone position. I learned as much as possible while employed there. That experience has paid some excellent dividends in my current work with Z2Data.”

Warren enjoys his work with Z2Data and cherishes being able to work from home. His company provides access to information on billions of products available from millions of companies worldwide.

Product packages offered by Z2Data might concentrate on supply chain risk management including financial, geopolitical, or cybersecurity issues. Knowing which companies are using proper environmental standards and are not using forced labor are other factors. Warren serves as the bridge between customers and his product development team that produces the databases needed by the companies they serve. Some notable Z2Data clients include Qualcomm, Teradyne, NetApp, and Palo Alto Networks. Most Z2Data clients are involved in industries that manufacture electronics, medical devices, automotive, aerospace, and defense products.

“One day might be quite different from the next day for me,” explained Warren. “I’ll be going over the regulations regarding a particular product. The next day I will be working directly with clients on building a digital database that suits their needs and provides actionable insights.

“Our software development team is located in Cairo, Egypt. I routinely work with them to put actionable changes and filters in place so our data products effectively produce the results that our client companies are looking for.”

Being happily married and ensconced in his career with Z2Data, Warren doubts that he would ever consider moving back to China again.

“It is an enjoyable, dynamic, and wild place to live, but at this point in my life, I don’t believe I’m missing out on anything by living here in Dallas,” said Warren. “That doesn’t mean I wouldn’t travel there for visits. My job is challenging and rewarding, and my wife and I have a great life right here in the U.S. At this stage of my life, I don’t think I’d move abroad again until retirement.” ■



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# CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



## No two farming years are the same

By Kevin Klein  
*Chairman, Washington Grain Commission*

While the general process remains the same, weather ultimately drives many of our decisions. This season began with cooler temperatures and several days of freezing conditions, followed by warmer periods.

March and April brought timely rain showers, which were greatly appreciated. Since May arrived, conditions have shifted to warmer and drier. As always, we'll see how summer unfolds, and we continue to hope for additional moisture to help support yield potential.

Where I grow in Edwall, we have not experienced significant rust pressure. However, reports from western and southern regions indicate widespread rust issues. Some growers say it is the worst they've ever seen, leading to additional fungicide applications. Dr. Xianming Chen, a U.S. Department of Agriculture research plant pathologist, whose Washington State University (WSU) program is partially funded by the Washington Grain Commission (WGC), has once again provided timely rust updates at [striperust.wsu.edu](http://striperust.wsu.edu) that help growers make informed decisions.

### Research plot tours

Summer is nearly here, and with it, our variety trial research plots are up and growing. The PNW crop tour schedule is now available for upcoming plot tours and field days. This is a great opportunity for growers to walk the fields, hear directly from breeders, receive research updates, and ask questions. Plot tours provide valuable face-to-face interaction with breeders and give growers a chance to better understand how new varieties are performing under current conditions. Maybe this year we will pay a little more attention to the rust resistance rating.

Variety testing is just one of the many research programs funded annually by the WGC, but it remains one of our highest priorities. The reason is simple. Year after year, we get consistent, high-quality data generated from these plots. Variety trials take place across all three rainfall zones, allowing comparisons under diverse conditions. I strongly encourage growers to attend a tour or field day in their area. Although the number of active farmers continues to decline and schedules grow busier, our breeders and researchers value hearing directly from growers about what we're seeing and experiencing in our fields.

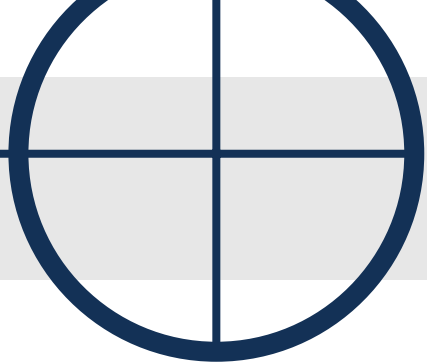
### Commission research goals

The two programs mentioned here represent only part of the research supported by the WGC. Each year, roughly one-third of the budget is invested in about 30 WSU research projects that each deliver practical, applicable results. Deciding which projects to continue to fund and which new ideas to support remains a challenge, but ongoing research is essential.

Research today sets us up for a better crop tomorrow. And, when unusual issues appear in our fields, having experienced researchers to help us diagnose and solve problems is invaluable. ■



While stripe rust may not be as prevalent in Edwall, Wash., where Washington Grain Commission Chairman Kevin Klein farms, it doesn't mean it isn't there, as evidenced by Klein's boots. Growers in other regions of Eastern Washington are facing significant stripe rust pressure this year. Many farmers are finding the need for multiple herbicide applications. For more information on rust, visit [striperust.wsu.edu](http://striperust.wsu.edu).



# REPORTS

## WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

## Hosting trade teams is part of WGC strategy

In April, the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) had the privilege of hosting its first aquaculture trade team. Industry professionals from both Chile and Ecuador traveled with U.S. Wheat Associates to Washington state to learn more about the state's wheat as a potential ingredient in salmon and shrimp feed. Aquaculture is a growing industry with the potential to increase Washington exports. Salmon and shrimp feed requires high-quality wheat to meet their formula specifications.

While the trade team was in Washington, they met with aquafeed industry professionals, visited a grain elevator, and toured the Washington State University greenhouse with wheat breeders and researchers. They shared meals with commissioners and local growers and spent time at Diamond-S Farms with WGC Commissioner Art Schultheis. Each of these experiences was geared toward helping individual trade team members receive answers to questions and build confidence in the Washington wheat industry.

This aquaculture trade team was the first of several that will visit Washington during the 2026 season.

### What is a trade team?

Because we use grower funds to support our trade team initiatives, it's important to define exactly what a trade team is.

A trade team is a group of international customers and industry professionals invited to visit the U.S. by U.S. Wheat Associates. As hosts, the Washington Grain Commission provides trade teams with the opportunity to experience our wheat supply chain firsthand. From farms and research labs to export facilities and visits with industry professionals, trade teams see how Washington wheat is grown, tested, and delivered.

Hosting a trade team builds lasting relationships and show, in real terms, the quality, reliability, and value behind every single shipment of Washington wheat. Trade teams are part of a long-term strategy focused on building lasting partnerships.



Aquaculture trade team members visited WGC Commissioner Art Schultheis (in red) at his Colton, Wash., operation, Diamond-S Farms, in April.

## Where do trade teams come from?

U.S. Wheat organizes trade teams from all around the world. The trade teams that visit Washington, though, are most often specifically interested in soft white wheat. Because Washington grows world-class soft white wheat, countries with high-quality standards and strong baking industries visit Washington when U.S. Wheat organizes the event. This includes countries like Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines — three countries in Washington's top five for exports.

In 2025, the Washington Grain Commission hosted participants from Ecuador, Colombia, Chile, Brazil, Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Japan, and South Korea.

## Hosting a trade team

From a WGC standpoint, planning a trade team itinerary starts months in advance. The specific needs and goals of the trade team are evaluated, and an itinerary begins to take shape around those needs. Each trade team is different, so each itinerary is different, though the overall goal remains the same.

Working in tandem with U.S. Wheat Associates, the WGC's goal is always to create a meaningful, lasting impact that reinforces the international value of Washington-grown wheat.

Trade teams not only support and sustain current industries but also open new ones, providing more revenue sources for Washington growers. As new industries emerge and old ones evolve, it is critical to keep the line of connection open between Washington wheat and the world.

## Want to participate?

In 2026, one of our goals is to further diversify the trade team experience here in Washington, allowing more growers from across the state to get involved.

Follow along on social media and subscribe to our newsletter to learn about opportunities for you to get involved with trade teams. ■



(Above) Washington State University (WSU) winter wheat breeder Arron Carter (left) gives a tour of the WSU greenhouses to the aquaculture trade team. (Below) Members of the trade team visit HighLine Grain Growers' Four Lakes facility outside of Cheney, Wash.



# Getting a head start

Streamlining, integrating testing approaches to help growers stay ahead of low falling numbers

By Amber L. Hauvermale

*Associate Research Professor, Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, Washington State University*

By Alison L. Thompson

*Research Biologist, USDA-ARS Wheat Health, Genetics, and Quality Unit, Washington State University*

Across the Pacific Northwest (PNW), wheat growers face a recurring and costly challenge: low falling numbers. The falling number (FN) method has been the industry standard to estimate grain soundness since the 1960s and is used as a predictor of end-use quality for baked goods.

There are four causes of low falling numbers including green kernels, late-maturity alpha-amylase (LMA), preharvest sprouting (PHS), and nonalpha-amylase induced low falling numbers (NAIL). Each cause occurs at separate times in grain development and differs in severity, yet all have the potential to reduce market value. Growing varieties that are tolerant to the causes of low falling numbers is considered the best management option to avoid costly discounts. However, due to time, coordination, and cost challenges associated with the FN test, it is not routinely used during variety development. The lack of testing has set up a common scenario where

varieties susceptible to low falling numbers are not identified until they have been commercially released and are grown across large geographical areas. This scenario means that the growers and elevator operators are responsible for trying to manage the risks associated with susceptible varieties.

Variety trial (VT) testing programs have long been a valuable tool used to evaluate traits of agronomic and economic importance as new varieties are developed for commercial release. Due to the time, labor, and capital investment, implementation of routine FN testing within VT programs has been difficult. However, integration of FN testing with VT trials remains a long-standing goal to identify low falling numbers events and susceptible entries.

Targeted interviews with breeders and VT managers were conducted in 2023-24 to identify specific needs for routine FN testing in variety trials. In these interviews, repeated emphasis was placed on the need for a more efficient and reliable testing process, along with timely (real-time) reporting and frequent communication to inform decision-making (i.e., selection). Additional needs identified were balanced and complete datasets, along with consistent and repeatable results. Simplifying data



Falling number grower outreach at Mayview, Wash., in 2025 in collaboration with Washington State University Cereal Variety Trials. From left are Amber Hauvermale, Alison Thompson, Karl Effertz, and Kim Garland-Campbell. Photo courtesy of Mike Pumphrey.

collection and reporting were also seen as priorities.

For the past three years, as part of a larger effort supported by the Foundation for Food and Agriculture Research to develop the new quick test for FN (Total Target for Sprout Damage; [smallgrains.wsu.edu/ffar/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/ffar/)), breeders and industry partners have been teaming up to refine how low falling numbers events are detected; utilizing integrated approaches for faster and earlier detection with real-time reporting; and across a broader landscape. Leveraging these partnerships allowed for the natural re-imagining of FN testing in both public and private variety trials with an emphasis on repeatable, consistent, and timely results.

### A new approach to screen for falling numbers

To address the needs communicated by the breeders and VT managers, four steps were implemented to improve FN testing in VT programs. Instead of testing every sample at every location, a costly and time-consuming process, a targeted approach was used. The steps of the new approach are:

- Prescreen checks at all locations.
- All varieties from “hot spot” locations sent to the Washington State Department of Agriculture (WSDA) for FN testing.
- FN data reported out, usually within 48-72 hours after sample submission.
- Track and report “hot spots” over the years.

The prescreening step was conducted at all locations on a small set of “check” varieties inhouse, looking for low falling numbers “hot spots.” Check varieties are known to be susceptible or tolerant to differing causes of low falling numbers after many years of testing. The deviation in testing approach was based on previous research showing that the only way to accurately identify susceptibility is to test in low falling numbers environments. Moving to the WSDA, an agency with the infrastructure to handle screening thousands of samples each season, reduced overall costs and increased the number of samples that can be tested every year.

### Outcomes from the new approach

The new streamlined approach served as proof-of-



Amber Hauvermale (left) and Alison Thompson talking about falling number management at the 2024 Lind Dryland Research Station Field Day in Lind, Wash.

concept that testing for low falling numbers could be integrated into public and private VT programs. Additionally, this process demonstrated that testing results could be disseminated in real time to our stakeholders. From this approach, we know that the information is actively being used by breeders for selection and release of tolerant varieties and by seed dealers to make tolerant varieties available to farmers in their area. By decentralizing FN testing and outsourcing to the WSDA, more comprehensive diagnostic tests were performed in parallel by Washington State University (WSU) and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). The additional testing, which included the new quick test and an alternative quality test (Rapid Visco Analyzer), enabled discovery of a new cause of low falling numbers (NAIL) and further investigations into FN variation. We have also been able to provide more targeted and specific information on variety performance at field days through expanded education and outreach. Come see us at the WSU field days ([smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)) for your FN handouts!

### More insights, better decisions, lasting impacts

The strength in this effort lies in the scale (testing footprint) and partnerships across public and private testing

groups. Variety trial programs are critical resources for testing performance, evaluating regional suitability, and providing comprehensive information to stakeholders. Screening check varieties across a large footprint provides a clearer picture of how low falling number issues develop across different environments and management practices. Early feedback about the new approach indicates that it has challenged previous assumptions about FN, and the information being provided is important and impactful.

Researchers are gaining a better understanding of where and when low falling numbers occurs, the extent of impact on management and end-use quality, and insights into how management, environment, and genetics influence plant responses. Breeders are gaining a better understanding of how new varieties respond to low falling number causes and select for tolerance.

Understanding low falling number risks translates to better management decisions, reduced risks, and minimizes financial losses for seed handlers and growers.

As low falling numbers continues to challenge PNW wheat production, integrated testing and coordinated efforts between public and private production and grain testing sectors is essential. By combining rapid testing innovation with efficient testing platforms, the PNW wheat industry is taking proactive steps toward protecting one of its most valued crops and providing a model for comprehensive wheat VT testing everywhere. ■

*We are grateful for the many on-farm cooperators and variety trial managers we partner with to conduct these trials including those with Washington State University, Oregon State University, University of Idaho, HighLine Grain Growers, The McGregor Company, and McKay Seed Company. This effort would not be possible without their support.*



Test plots at the Spillman Agronomy Farm in Pullman, Wash.

# Expanding weed control options

WINTER WHEAT PROGRAM BREEDS VARIETIES ADAPTED FOR HERBICIDE TOLERANCE

By Melinda Zubrod

*Graduate Research Assistant, Washington State University*

By Arron Carter

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

Weeds are among the most significant yield-limiting factors in winter wheat production in the Pacific Northwest, competing with the crop for water, nutrients, light, and space. The winter wheat–fallow and spring crop–legume–winter wheat cropping systems that have been adapted to different wheat-producing regions of Washington state are contributing to the development of herbicide-tolerant weed populations. In-season applications of Group 2 herbicides have been used for decades in the Pacific Northwest to control weeds in both wheat and legumes, and the overuse of this technology has led to the emergence of weed populations resistant to Group 2 herbicides.

As resistance spreads, growers face yield losses and narrowing options for effective, in-season control. To mitigate the formation of herbicide-resistant weed populations, alternative modes of action must be incorporated into Pacific Northwest wheat production systems. The incorporation of multiple herbicide modes of action in a crop rotation has been shown to result in better weed suppression than using only one herbicide mode of action, and many studies have found that diversifying crop rotations reduces the number of herbicide-tolerant weed populations (Anderson, 2005; Benaragama et al., 2016; Ulber et al., 2009). Putting these strategies into practice depends on the availability of regionally adapted wheat varieties carrying tolerance to a diverse set of herbicide chemistries. The Washington State University (WSU) winter wheat breeding program is addressing this need by developing varieties with tolerance to herbicides representing multiple modes of action, including Group 1 (quazalofop), Group 2 (imazamox), and Group 5 (metribuzin) chemistries, giving Washington growers the tools needed to rotate effectively among modes of action, manage existing resistant weed populations, and slow the development of new ones.

Imazamox is an imidazolinone herbicide used to control problem grass weeds in winter wheat, but its use is limited to Clearfield (imidazolinone-resistant) varieties. It works by inhibiting an enzyme called acetolactate synthase, or ALS, which plants need to produce essential



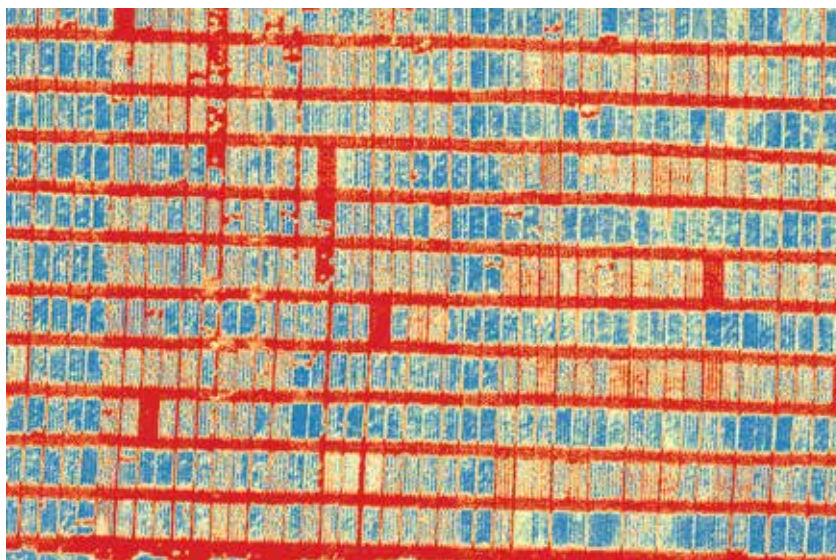
The typical field design for herbicide-tolerant trials has plots split in half: one side is not sprayed, and the other is sprayed. This allows visual observations of crop injury by comparing the sprayed to the nonsprayed plots.

amino acids. Without those amino acids, susceptible weeds cannot grow. Clearfield wheat carries a small genetic change that allows its ALS enzyme to continue functioning in the presence of the herbicide so the crop is unharmed while target weeds are controlled. This resistance trait was originally developed in the early 1990s and has since been incorporated into varieties adapted to regional growing conditions. Imazamox provides control of several economically important grass weeds, and application timing and rate are critical to success. Spraying too early may allow late-germinating weeds to escape control, whereas spraying too late may permit yield-damaging weed competition. Producers should also avoid exceeding labeled rates. The resistance conferred to Clearfield wheat is partial; only about two-thirds of the crop's ALS enzyme is protected from the herbicide, so excessive rates can cause crop injury even in tolerant varieties. Some of the released cultivars from WSU

include Stingray CL+, Sockeye CL+, and Piranha CL+.

Quizalofop, sold under the trade name Aggressor, is the herbicide developed for use within the CoAXium wheat production system. Like imazamox, it is used to control grass weeds in winter wheat, but it operates through a different biochemical pathway. This difference makes it a valuable complement to Group 2 chemistry, particularly for resistance management. Quizalofop inhibits acetyl-CoA carboxylase, or ACCase, the enzyme responsible for fatty acid and lipid synthesis. When ACCase activity is blocked, cell membranes in susceptible grass weeds lose integrity, leak their contents, and the plant dies. CoAXium wheat varieties carry a mutation in the ACCase gene that protects the crop's enzyme from the herbicide. Symptoms of quizalofop injury on nontolerant wheat include reduced plant height, yield loss, and characteristic streaky chlorosis on young leaves. Like Clearfield tolerance, growers must pay attention to application timing and rate and ensure temperatures are above the minimum listed on the label to prevent excessive injury. WSU released cultivars include Nova AX and an upcoming release numbered WA8444 AX.

Metribuzin is a Group 5 herbicide that controls weeds by inhibiting photosynthesis at photosystem II, effectively preventing the plant from converting sunlight into energy. Tolerance to metribuzin is a naturally occurring trait that varies among wheat varieties. Application to a sensitive variety can result in crop injury, with symptoms including stunted growth, reduced tillering, leaf chlorosis, and reduced grain yield. The severity of injury depends strongly on application



(Above) This figure shows CoAXium breeding trials in Ritzville, Wash., in 2025. The camera is capturing a plant health index called NDVI. The more blue the plot, the healthier it is. NDVI data can be used to better estimate crop injury and final grain yield above that which can be detected visually. (Below) This figure shows the same CoAXium breeding trials from 2025, but in an RGB image. It shows the difference in paired plots, with the first plot being unsprayed, and the second plot being sprayed.



rate and environmental conditions at the time of treatment. Despite these limitations, metribuzin offers two important advantages. First, it provides an alternative mode of action to Group 1 and Group 2 herbicides, which is increasingly valuable as resistance to those chemistries spreads. Second, research conducted in Washington demonstrated that Italian ryegrass populations were more susceptible to metribuzin than to the Group 1 and Group 2 herbicides tested, suggesting that metribuzin can effectively control grass weeds that have escaped other products (Rauch et al., 2010). Because tolerance already exists in some released wheat lines, conventional selective breeding is being used to develop metribuzin-tolerant varieties. Rydrych MZ, released from WSU, can tolerate the highest label rates of metribuzin, allowing for effective weed control with limited crop injury.

In partnership with the University of Idaho, a Brundage mutation population of over 10,000 lines is being grown to increase seed quantity. Once seed is harvested, it will undergo selection for tolerance to many different modes of action that would be effective in Washington cropping systems. This method is similar to how the Clearfield and CoAXium wheat systems were identified, using mutations in enzymes to provide tolerance. With the limited introduction of new herbicides into the market, finding mutations that allow wheat to survive current herbicides will be an effective way to control weeds, use different modes of action, and slow the development of herbicide-tolerant weeds.

Although the discussion in this article has been around the use of herbicides to control weeds, this should not be the only method. Growers need to continue to control weeds through cultural practices, crop rotations, tillage (when necessary), and planting weed-free seed. Using these practices, along with a good rotation of herbicide mode of action, will reduce the probability of weeds developing herbicide tolerance.

The WSU winter wheat program is also exploring the use of a drone-mounted sensor to measure herbicide injury in winter wheat breeding plots. This technology is currently being used to measure herbicide injury in breeding lines for metribuzin and quizalofop resistance. Traditionally, herbicide injury is assessed through visual



A typical flight setup needed to capture drone images in a winter wheat field.

ratings, which can be individually biased, and injury ratings do not always correlate with grain yield at harvest. The drone-mounted sensor overcomes these limitations by capturing wavelengths of light invisible to the human eye, allowing it to detect plant stress before symptoms become visually apparent. These projects have revealed that flying plots at multiple time points after herbicide application can be used to quantify injury severity and identify tolerant lines earlier in the breeding cycle, providing breeders with objective, repeatable measurements that can better capture the grain yield penalty after application.

Herbicide-resistant weed populations represent one of the most pressing challenges facing winter wheat producers in the Pacific Northwest, and no single herbicide or wheat variety will solve the problem. By developing winter wheat varieties tolerant to herbicides representing three distinct modes of action, Group 1 (quizalofop), Group 2 (imazamox), and Group 5 (metribuzin), the WSU winter wheat breeding program is equipping growers with the diversity of tools needed to rotate chemistries, manage existing resistant weed populations, and slow the emergence of new ones. Coupled with advances in drone-based phenotyping, which allow herbicide tolerance to be measured more objectively and earlier in the breeding cycle, these efforts will help ensure that effective, sustainable weed control remains within reach for wheat producers for years to come. ■



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# WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

## Wheat is entering the 'prove-it' phase



By Allison Thompson  
*Owner, The Money Farm*

The wheat market is shifting gears. After spending the better part of the past couple of months building in weather risk and geopolitical premium, the tone is starting to change. This is no longer a market trading pure uncertainty. It is transitioning into something more demanding, a prove-it phase. That distinction matters.

Markets behave very differently when they are pricing risk versus when they are asking for confirmation. Risk can be bought quickly, often aggressively, as funds chase headlines and momentum. But confirmation is slower, more deliberate, and often more unforgiving. It requires evidence. It requires follow-through. And right now, the wheat market is starting to ask for both.

The challenge is that, at least in the near term, the incoming evidence is not entirely supportive. Several inputs are beginning to lean bearish. Crude oil has backed off from recent highs, removing a layer of inflationary pressure and softening the broader commodity tone. That matters more than it might seem at first glance. Wheat does not trade in isolation, it trades within a complex of macro relationships. When energy loses momentum, it often pulls speculative enthusiasm out of the entire commodity space.

At the same time, crop conditions have shown slight improvement. Not dramatic, not trend-changing, but enough to shift perception. In a market that had been leaning heavily on deteriorating conditions to justify a weather premium, even a modest improvement can begin to chip away at that narrative.

Then there is the weather itself. Rains have moved through parts of the Plains, offering relief in areas that needed it. Again, this is not a drought-breaking pattern, but it introduces doubt, and doubt is enough to slow bullish momentum. Add to that a slightly softer geopo-

litical tone, with reduced intensity in rhetoric between Russia and Ukraine, and the market suddenly finds itself with fewer reasons to aggressively price in risk.

Individually, none of these developments are decisive. Together, they begin to shift the balance. This is how markets transition. Not with a single headline, but through a steady accumulation of "less bullish" inputs.

Despite that shift, it is far too early to declare the bullish story dead. The underlying issues that built this rally



have not been resolved. They have only been challenged.

Crop conditions across key hard red winter wheat states remain historically poor. Even with some recent improvement, ratings are still sitting near the bottom of long-term ranges. That is not a comfortable starting point. Once yield potential is compromised, it rarely recovers fully. The market understands this, and it is why buyers have been willing to step in on weakness.

More importantly, the weather outlook remains uncertain. While rains have provided short-term relief, the broader forecast still leans dry, particularly across portions of the western Plains. And at this stage of the growing season, timing matters more than totals. A

timely rain can stabilize a crop. A delayed rain simply confirms the damage that has already been done. That distinction is critical.

The market is not just watching how much rain falls, it is watching when it falls, where it falls, and whether it arrives in time to matter. That keeps a layer of risk embedded in the market, even as near-term conditions appear to improve. In other words, the bullish narrative has not disappeared. It has simply lost its uncontested status.

What we are seeing now is a classic shift in market psychology. Earlier in the rally, wheat was pricing potential. The market was reacting to what could go wrong — drought expansion, frost threats, geopolitical escalation. It did not need confirmation to move higher. It only needed the possibility. Now, that has changed.

The market has already priced in a degree of risk. At current price levels, it is no longer enough to suggest that problems might exist. The trade wants to know whether those problems are real, and whether they are large enough to justify the premium that has already been built into the market. That is where the “prove-it” phase begins.

If crop conditions stabilize and weather continues to improve, the existing premium becomes difficult to defend. Prices do not need bearish news to move lower. They simply need the absence of bullish confirmation. On the other hand, if dryness reasserts itself or yield estimates begin to slip meaningfully, the market will have to reprice higher, not because it is discovering risk for the first time, but because it underestimated the severity of that risk. This creates a more volatile environment. Because the question is no longer “what could happen?” It is “is it actually happening?” And that is a much harder question to answer.

As the market moves into this phase, fund positioning becomes increasingly important. Speculative money has played a role in supporting wheat during the recent rally, particularly as weather and macro risk created momentum. But the funds are not loyal to a narrative. They are responsive to price action and confirmation.

If the story begins to weaken, the funds will step back. That does not require a mass liquidation. It only requires a reduction in urgency. But if the story strengthens, the funds can quickly re-engage. That dynamic creates asymmetry.

Markets tend to move faster when uncertainty increases than when it decreases. That means upside moves can still be sharp if the bullish case is validated. But it also means downside pressure can develop quietly, as premium is gradually removed. In a prove-it market, the

absence of confirmation can be just as powerful as negative news.

While U.S. weather and conditions are the primary focus right now, the global backdrop has not gone away. Larger Russian export projections and improving expectations out of Europe continue to act as a ceiling on the market. Wheat is not trading in a vacuum. Even if U.S. production faces challenges, the global balance sheet still matters.

That is part of what makes this environment so complex. The market is balancing localized production risk against broader global supply availability. That tension limits how aggressively prices can move in either direction, unless one side of the equation becomes decisively dominant. For now, it has not.

For producers, this phase of the market is uncomfortable, but it is also where opportunity exists. The rally that has taken place over the past several weeks was driven by uncertainty. It rewarded those who were willing to act before confirmation. Now that the market is shifting toward proof, the risk profile is changing.

Wheat futures across multiple classes have moved significantly off their winter lows. In many cases, the market has offered pricing opportunities that did not exist just a few months ago. The question is not whether prices can go higher. They can. The question is whether waiting for confirmation improves the opportunity or reduces it. Historically, markets do not reward certainty. They move ahead of it. That does not mean selling everything at once. It means recognizing the environment. It means understanding that a prove-it market is one where both upside and downside risks are elevated, and where incremental decisions often outperform all-or-nothing ones. Using strength, especially strength driven by uncertainty, to add sales while maintaining flexibility for additional upside becomes a more balanced approach.

Right now, headlines may be leaning slightly bearish, but the underlying story is not resolved. That is what defines a prove-it market. It is not one-sided. It is not settled. It is a market in transition, one that requires confirmation before committing to its next major move. Until that confirmation arrives, volatility is likely to remain.

Because in wheat, as in all commodities, the biggest moves do not come from what we know. They come from the moment the market decides whether it was right — or wrong — to believe the story in the first place. ■

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**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.

# Cookies opened conversations

OLYMPIA DAYS REFLECTIONS | BY ISABELLA HUNTLEY, WASHINGTON WHEAT AMBASSADOR

Traveling to the state's capital for Olympia Days was a truly incredible experience, and I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to engage with so many different people and be a voice for Washington wheat growers. Although I enjoyed my entire trip to Olympia, what stood out the most to me were the unscheduled opportunities that I had to talk to both government officials and other individuals who were simply visiting the Capital for various reasons. It was these spontaneous conversations that were truly eye-opening and allowed me to engage with individuals from differing agricultural backgrounds.

One of the most enjoyable experiences during Olympia Days was when the other wheat ambassador, Luke Goetz, and I handed out cookies and other items in the Capitol Building rotunda to people walking by. Although it may seem simple, it was here that I was able to truly educate others about the wheat industry, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), and agriculture



in general. There were countless people, ranging from little kids who were visiting with their parents to other individuals who were genuinely curious about ag, that stopped by our booth and were eager to ask questions. It was an amazing experience to be able to answer these questions for them and share a little piece of my own story growing up as a sixth-generation wheat farmer in Whitman County. It was during these few hours that I also learned firsthand the importance of ag literacy and education. Many people who we had the opportunity to talk to had little to no idea that wheat was even grown in Washington, let alone that it is one of the state's top commodities. Educating the public, particularly those who are in a position to make and/or influence legislative decisions, on what agriculture truly entails was one of the main goals for WAWG during Olympia Days, and I am grateful to have been a part of such an amazing organization.

After working the booth for a few hours and spending



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the rest of the day in and out of meetings with various legislators, it was time for the event that proved to be my favorite: the legislative reception at Anthony's. During the reception, I had the opportunity to talk to as many different legislators as I wanted for as long as the conversations lasted. Being able to discuss what issues were most important to myself and the industry in a more casual setting was truly an amazing experience. Particularly, I enjoyed talking to those with differing views compared to myself as I was able to inform them on my own stances on varying issues that are plaguing the wheat industry today. Additionally, by adding in some surprising facts and stories into the conversation, I was hopefully able to influence their future decisions regarding the issues discussed. Furthermore, I was able to educate them on some of the hardships involved with our industry, and how certain legislation that may seem irrelevant to agriculture for policymakers truly worsens farmers' conditions and makes it increasingly more difficult to stay in business. By telling them stories from my own personal experience while also listening to their own perspectives on the issues, I was able to see where there is often a gap between legisla-

tion and the actual farmer that merely requires a simple conversation to fill. After taking the time to have these meaningful conversations, I not only felt as though they had learned something about agriculture, but I felt that I had learned more about their own views on the issues and various other factors that go into crafting legislation.

Overall, Olympia Days taught me countless new things about government policies, legislative processes, and how different laws impact agriculture throughout the state. However, the lesson that left the largest impression on me was the ability to engage in a conversation with individuals with the same views, similar views, or completely opposite views from myself. I was able to see firsthand the amount of progress that can be made when you simply listen to an opposing side's claim and truly consider it before stating your own ideas on the issue. I plan to take this, along with the many other lessons learned over my time in Olympia, and apply them as I approach college and my future. Again, I am very grateful for this opportunity to travel to Olympia with WAWG, and I hope that in the future, I have another chance to educate the public on agriculture and be a voice for Washington wheat growers! ■



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# THE BOTTOM LINE

## Commodity wages: Purpose, IRS treatment, risks

By Alex Reimer

CPA, Leffel, Otis & Warwick, P.S.

In agriculture, cash isn't always the most practical way to pay employees. Many farm operations are asset-rich but cash-tight at certain points in the year. That is where commodity wages come in — a unique compensation method that can offer tax advantages when done correctly but also brings risks if not handled properly.

### Understanding commodity wages

Commodity wages are noncash payments made to employees in the form of farm products, such as crops or livestock. For example, rather than paying a farm employee \$10,000 in cash, an employer could instead transfer a set number of bushels of wheat or head of cattle with an equivalent fair market value. One major advantage is that commodity wages are not subject to FICA taxes, meaning no Social Security or Medicare tax withholding for either party. This creates tax savings on both sides. To illustrate, FICA taxes total 15.3%, split evenly at 7.65% each for employer and employee. On a \$10,000 cash wage, the employee would typically pay \$765, and the employer would pay \$765, for a combined total of \$1,530. Because of this benefit, commodity wages are often used in family-run farms or to compensate owners where there is more flexibility in structuring pay.

However, this does not mean commodity wages escape taxation entirely. While they may avoid FICA taxes, they are still subject to certain state-level programs, including Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML), WA Cares, unemployment insurance, and Labor & Industries (L&I), all of which must be properly calculated and reported. In addition, the fair market value of the commodity at the time of transfer is still considered taxable income for federal income tax purposes and must be reported on the employee's W-2 Form, just like regular wages.

Timing is also important. After the employee receives the commodity, there should be a clear separation between the transfer and any sale. If the commodity is sold immediately

or under a prearranged agreement, the IRS may treat it as disguised cash wages. Allowing time to pass helps show the employee truly took ownership and bore the economic risk.

### Why the IRS allows commodity wages

At first glance, commodity wages may look like a tax loophole, but the IRS allows them because they reflect how agriculture actually operates. Farming income is seasonal and tied closely to production cycles, and cash flow can vary significantly throughout the year. Allowing wages to be paid in commodities helps reduce financial strain on farm operations when cash is limited but inventory is available.

That said, the IRS does not give a free pass. These arrangements must be well documented and reflect real economic substance. Employers should maintain detailed records of each commodity transfer, including the date, quantity, and the fair market value at the time of transfer. Strong documentation is critical if the arrangement is ever reviewed in an audit.

### Common pitfalls and risks

While commodity wages can be useful, they come with several key risks that must be carefully managed.

**Reduced Retirement Benefits.** Since commodity wages are not subject to FICA taxes, they do not count toward Social Security earnings. Over time, this can reduce an employee's future retirement benefits. While the immediate tax savings may be appealing, the long-term impact on retirement income should be considered, especially for employees who rely heavily on Social Security.

**Cash Equivalence Risk.** The IRS closely examines arrangements that resemble cash compensation. If an employer transfers commodities in amounts that directly match a dollar value, such as structuring grain to equal exactly \$10,000, it may appear to be a disguised cash wage. In that case, the IRS could reclassify the payment as standard wages and assess full payroll taxes and penalties. Using

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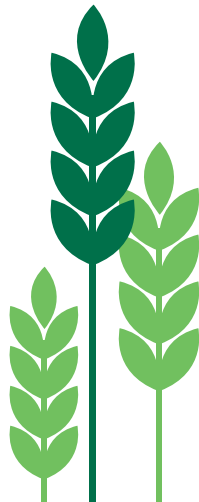
fixed quantities rather than dollar-pegged amounts helps support the legitimacy of the arrangement.

**Market Risk.** Once the employee receives the commodity, they assume the risk of price fluctuations. If market prices decline before sale, the employee may receive less value than what was reported as income on the W-2. If prices rise, they may benefit from gains. These fluctuations create variability in actual take-home value that does not exist with traditional cash wages.

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## Final thoughts

Commodity wages offer a practical and potentially tax-efficient way for agricultural businesses to compensate employees. The ability to reduce payroll taxes while maintaining flexibility in cash flow makes this strategy appealing. However, the benefits come with guidelines that must be met, with the arrangement reflecting a genuine transfer of property, not a disguised cash payment.

Proper timing, clear documentation, and careful structuring are essential to making this a useful strategy. Done wrong, they can quickly attract unwanted IRS attention and consequences. ■

**Alex Reimer** is a CPA at Leffel, Otis & Warwick, P.S. and works out of the firm's Davenport office. He works primarily with farmers and ag businesses. For more information visit [low.cpa](http://low.cpa).

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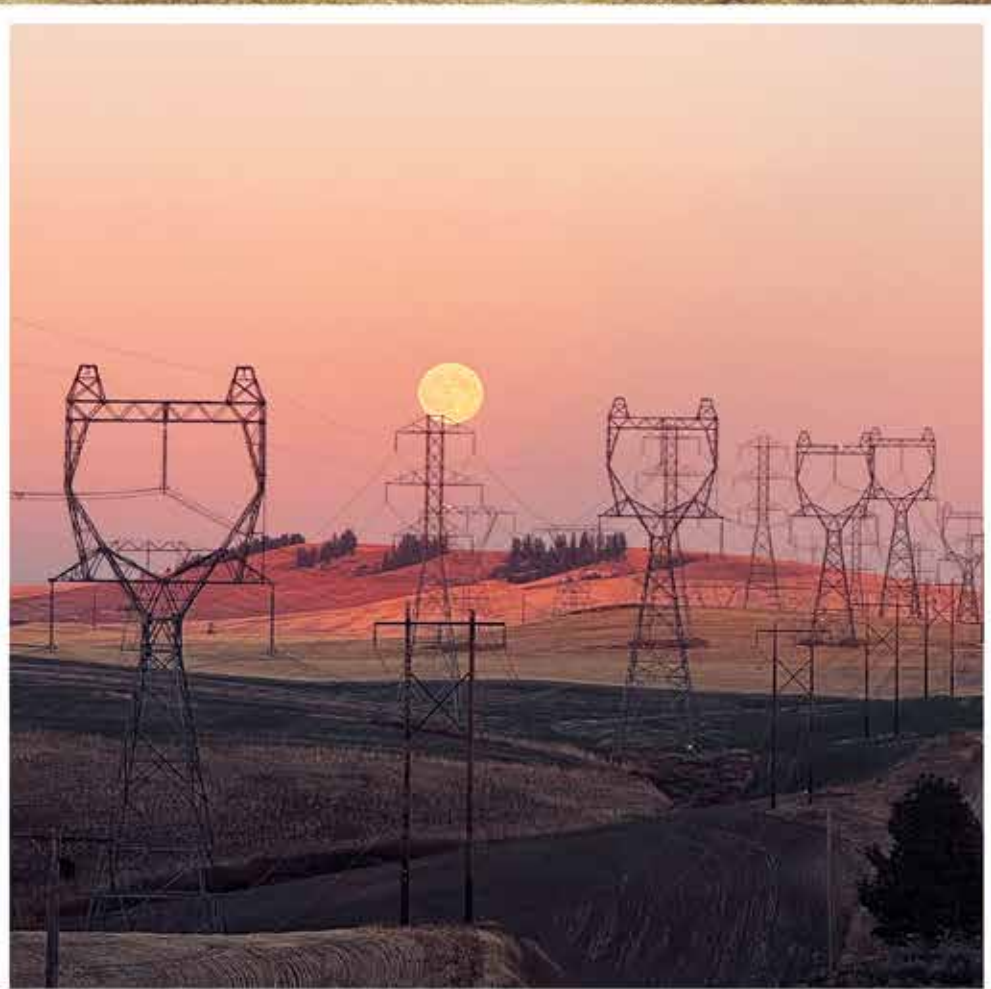
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Harvest moon near Mondovi. Photo by Tara Williams Blackford.



Cody Zellmer harvesting club wheat near Davenport. Photo by Dillon Haas.



(Above) September sunrise near Packard. Photo by Gina Weber. (Right) Chase Mead (12) making sure windows are clean first thing during harvest at Mead Ranch outside of Dayton. Chase is the son of Charlie and Whitney Mead and represents the family's 5th generation. Photo by Skip Mead.



Harvest at Seney Land and Livestock in Dayton. Photo by Tayven Seney.

# HAPPENINGS

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

## JUNE 2026

**2 WHEAT COLLEGE.** AMMO workshop featuring Dennis Pennington from Michigan State University. Registration starts at 9 a.m. Preregister by calling (509) 659-0610. No charge, and lunch will be provided. Palouse Empire Fairgrounds in Colfax, Wash.

**4 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Horse Heaven, Wash., at 8 a.m. For information call Mike Pumphrey at (509) 592-5234 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**5 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Walla Walla, Wash., at 10 a.m. For information call Rachel Wieme at (320) 250-7224 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**5 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Eureka, Wash., at 1:30 p.m. For information call Rachel Wieme at (320) 250-7224 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**6 REARDAN MULE DAYS.** Three on three basketball tournament, poker ride, car show, parade, vendors. Reardan, Wash. [reardanmuledays.com](http://reardanmuledays.com)

**6 ROSALIA BATTLE DAYS.** Community festival, parade, car show, vendors market, pin-up contest, fun run, kids activities, family games and more. Rosalia, Wash. [rosaliabattledays.info](http://rosaliabattledays.info)

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

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

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

**10 U OF I WEED SCIENCE FIELD DAY.** Event begins at 7:45 a.m. at Parker Farm in Moscow, Idaho. For information call Joan Campbell at (208) 885-7730.

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

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

**12-13 DEMOLITION DERBY EXTRAVAGANZA.** Combine demolition derby, parade, barbecue. Lind, Wash. [lindcombinederby.com](http://lindcombinederby.com)

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

**17 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Spring canola. Mayview, Wash., at 8:30 a.m. For info call Jesse Ford at (509) 990-6316 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**17 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Winter and spring cereals. Mayview, Wash., at 9:30 a.m. For information call Morgan Menaker at (704) 989-3752 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**18 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Dayton, Wash., at 9 a.m. For information call Rachel Wieme at (320) 250-7224 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**18 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Fairfield, Wash., at 7:30 a.m. For information call Ken Fuchs at (509) 220-0891 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**19-21 ALL WHEELS WEEKEND.** Car show, music, food. Dayton, Wash. [historicdayton.com/all-wheels-weekend](http://historicdayton.com/all-wheels-weekend)

**19-21 WENATCHEE RIVER BLUEGRASS FESTIVAL.** Adults/children workshops, food, vendors, live music. Chelan County Expo Center in Cashmere, Wash. [cashmereconcerts.com/festival/](http://cashmereconcerts.com/festival/)

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

**20-21 UNION GAP OLD TOWN DAYS.** Washington state's biggest civil war reenactment. Trading post, blacksmith shop, train rides, games and wagon tours. Fullbright Park in Union Gap, Wash. [centralwaagmuseum.org/old-town-days-union-gap.asp](http://centralwaagmuseum.org/old-town-days-union-gap.asp)

**20 SLIPPERY GULCH DAYS.** Chamber breakfast, fun run, tractor show, parade, music, vendors, fireworks. Tekoa, Wash. [slipperygulch.com](http://slipperygulch.com)

**22 SPILLMAN FARM FIELD DAY.** Event begins at 8:30 a.m. in Pullman, Wash. For information call Morgan Menaker at (704) 989-3752 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

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

**23 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Reardan, Wash., at 1:30 p.m. For information call Aaron Esser at (509) 659-3210 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**26-27 LACROSSE FARMERS' FEST.** Car Cruise & Park at 6:30 p.m. on Friday. Saturday parade starts at 10:30 with activities in the park all day. [facebook.com/groups/lacrossebusinessgroup](http://facebook.com/groups/lacrossebusinessgroup)

## JULY 2026

**3 WSU VARIETY TESTING CROP TOUR.** Bickleton, Wash., at 10 a.m. For information call Mike Pumphrey at (509) 592-5234 or [smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/](http://smallgrains.wsu.edu/variety/)

**4 GRAND OLD FOURTH.** Pancake breakfast, parade, fireworks, car show. Pasco, Wash. [www.pascogo4.com](http://www.pascogo4.com)

**4 FOURTH OF JULY CELEBRATION.** Entertainment, fireworks. Sunnyside Park in Pullman, Wash. [visit-pullman.com](http://visit-pullman.com)

**10-12 CHENEY RODEO.** Dances Friday and Saturday nights after rodeo. Saturday parade. Cheney, Wash. [cheneyrodeo.com](http://cheneyrodeo.com)

**11 WATERVILLE FARM & CRAFT MARKET.** Homegrown/homemade items. [historicwatervillewa.org/farmers-market](http://historicwatervillewa.org/farmers-market)

**17-19 PIONEER DAYS.** Parade, music, BBQ, chalk contest, vendors. Davenport, Wash. [davenportpioneerdays.org](http://davenportpioneerdays.org) ■

## Submissions


Listings must be received by the 10th of each month for the next month's *Wheat Life*. Email listings to [editor@wawg.org](mailto:editor@wawg.org). Include date, time and location of event, plus contact info and a short description.

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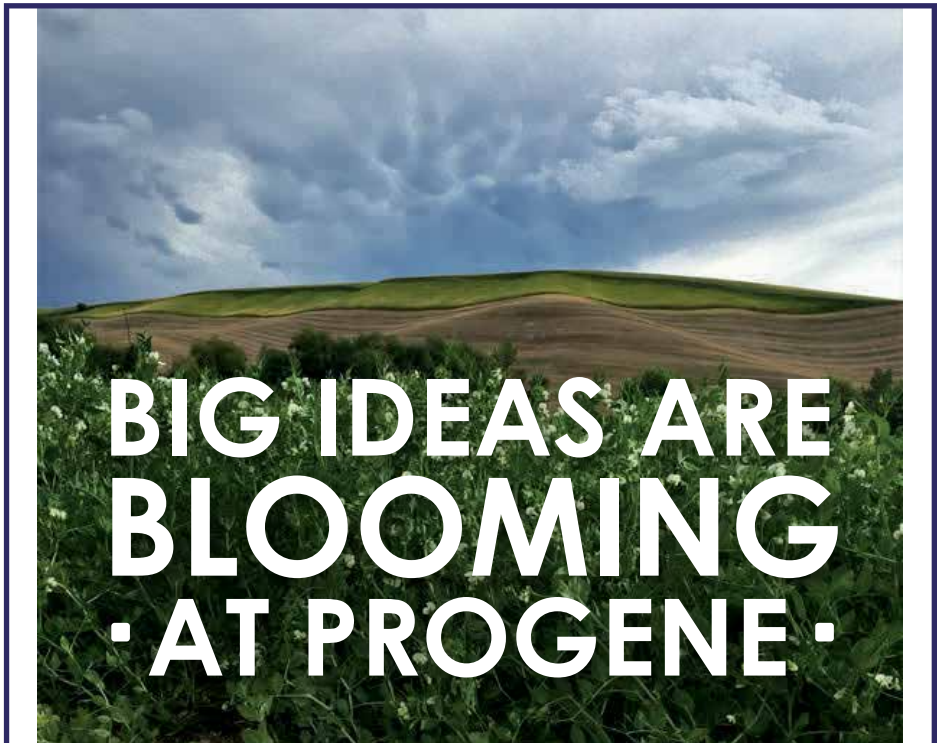
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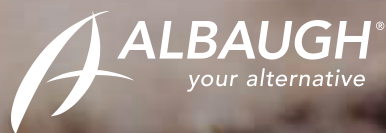
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