

WHEAT LIFE

The official publication of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

AUGUST/SEPTEMBER | 2026



FOOD AND FARM TOUR 2026

State legislators and staff hear directly from producers

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE:

Q&A with Ecology's Casey Sixkiller

WAWG publishes CRP white paper

US Fish and Wildlife program offers financial aid for habitat establishment

Dr. Jim Cook reflects on soil research

Wheat Week celebrates 20 years

Low-till/no-till drill demonstration coming to Whitman County

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

WHEAT LIFE

Volume 69 • Number 08
wheatlife.org

The official publication of



109 East First Avenue
Ritzville, WA 99169-2394
(509) 659-0610

WAWG MEMBERSHIP

(509) 659-0610 • \$150 per year

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Wheat Life (ISSN 0043-4701) is published by the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG):
109 E. First Avenue • Ritzville, WA 99169-2394

Eleven issues per year with a combined August/September issue. Standard (A) postage paid at Ritzville, Wash., and additional entry offices.

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President's Perspective



Your membership facilitates our work

By Gil Crosby

President, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

This month, I'd like to talk about membership in the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), and why it is so important for wheat growers, landowners, and industry stakeholders. The decisions being made today will determine what the next generation inherits. As active members, we help shape the future of our industry, but it takes all of us working together and lending our voices to influence the direction of the wheat industry.

WAWG has always been a grower-driven organization. Its strength comes from the people who invest their time, ideas, and support to ensure that agriculture has a strong voice. Whether you're a wheat grower, a landowner, or someone whose livelihood depends on agriculture, your membership matters.

The issues we address and the paths we choose on transportation, trade, research, taxes, labor, and environmental regulations will shape the future of our industry. If we want our children and grandchildren to have the opportunity to continue farming, we have to be willing to stay engaged today. Sitting on the sidelines means allowing others to make decisions that directly affect our farms, our families, and our future.

As a member, you also have opportunities to grow personally and professionally. Through AMMO (Agricultural Marketing and Management Organization) seminars and workshops, producers gain valuable training to increase profitability, navigate market volatility, and make informed farm management decisions. Wheat College offers an immersive, hands-on learning experience featuring soil health demonstrations, field trials, and updates on the latest research and industry developments. You also receive the weekly "Greensheet" alert newsletter, which is designed to deliver time-sensitive industry news such as updates on farm policy, agronomic and crop alerts, market and infrastructure news, and association announcements.

Your membership also supports WAWG's ongoing work on issues that directly impact every wheat producer, including protecting the Snake River dams, advocating for a strong farm bill, and monitoring state transportation, tax, and regulatory policies. We also work with the National Association of Wheat Growers to track federal farm policy. None of this activity happens without the support of our members. Together, we are far more effective than any one of us could ever be alone, and by standing united, we can continue building a stronger future for Washington's wheat industry.

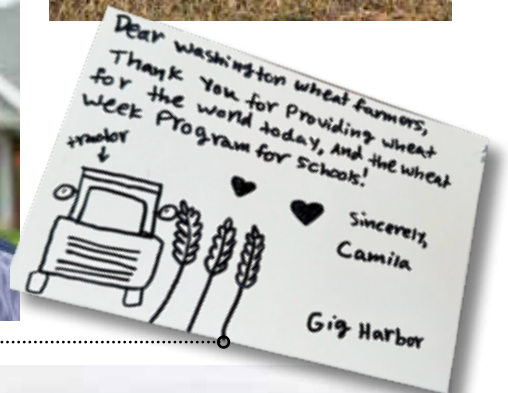
We will be rolling out a new and improved website (wawg.org) in the coming weeks. We hope you'll find it informative and make it easier to stay engaged with what WAWG is doing. We've also made it easier than ever to join WAWG by accepting payments online.

We sent out membership renewal notices last month. If you aren't a member please consider joining. If you are, thank you for your support. ■

Cover photo: In mid-July, legislators got down in the dirt to hear directly from producers about how bills passed in Olympia are affecting the state's agricultural industry. See page 26. All photos are Shutterstock images or taken by *Wheat Life* staff unless otherwise noted.

Inside This Issue

WAWG President's Perspective	2
Dialogue	6
Directly Speaking	8
WAWG at Work	12
Policy Matters	20
Washington Wheat Foundation	24
Food and Farm Tour	26
Elected officials see, hear impacts of legislation	
Ecology's Casey Sixkiller	34
Q&A with the director	
Conservation concerns	38
WAWG publishes CRP white paper	
Partners for Fish and Wildlife	44
Program offers financial aid for habitat projects	
WGC Chairman's Column	49
Disease decline	50
Dr. Cook revisits soil research	
Wheat Week Anniversary	54
School program celebrates 20 years	
Food aid fly-in	57
Industry advocates for program	
Wheat Watch	58
Low-till/no-till drill demo redo	60
Event coming to Whitman County	
Feeding the economy	62
How ag, grain industry contributed in 2025	
The Bottom Line	64
Your Wheat Life	66
Happenings	68
Advertiser Index	70



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WAWG MEMBERSHIP FORM

Please check level of membership

- ☐ Student \$90 ☐ Family \$250 (up to 2 members)
☐ Grower \$150 ☐ Partnership \$600 (up to 5 partners)
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County Affiliation (if none, write state) _____

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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
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Grower or Landlord \$150	X	X	X			X
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Partnership \$600 (1-5 family members)	X	X	X			X
Convention \$720 (2 individuals)	X	X	X		X	X
Lifetime \$3,000 (1 individual)	X	X	X	X		X
Non-Voting Membership						
Student \$90	X	X	X			
Industry Associate \$250	X	X	X			

WAWG's current top priorities are:

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

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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Dialogue

Looking for information

Dear Editor:

I am 84 years old and grew up in Lind. My father was Harry Kasper. I was very close to a Ritzville wheat farmer, William E. Scheel, and his wife, Olga. There is really no one alive who would remember them except my brother. William (Bill) was like a second father to me. He died on Sept. 1, 1974. I have lost any pictures. If there is anyone who may have family who remembers him or they remember Bill or have a picture, I would appreciate hearing from you. My email is kek70t@gmail.com.

Thanks,

Karen Kasper
Seattle, Wash.

Kudos for including articles

Dear Editor,

I always love reading the articles in *Wheat Life* as gathered by the editor. In the February 2026 issue there are two specific items which stand out to me. The first one is the "Dialogue" written by Andy Juris on "What is true Unity." I believe he is "spot-on" on the issue, and he as a farmer/leader shows intellect and social intelligence that is needed for a larger audience today. The other article of note was "Opinion: Food by Permission, Not Price" by Jake Liening showing the practical, not the theoretical side of providing food aid to conflicted areas. I have never seen it expressed so well. Many others have acknowledged conflict but glossed over the issue regarding how aid does or does not reach the intended people. My kudos to the editor for including those articles in *Wheat Life*.

Paul Schneider
Kenmore, Wash.



An open letter to Washington state lawmakers

Washington farmers lost nearly \$400 million in 2024, and by the USDA's own economic measurements, agriculture in our state is now the worst in the nation, and this crisis is not getting better.

Decisions made in Olympia are a primary reason farmers are struggling. Policies coming out of the Legislature have added crippling costs, unhelpful regulations, and created a serious competitive disadvantage for Washington farms.

I am joining farmers, farm families, and communities across this state who are deeply concerned about our food security, access to locally grown food, and the future of Washington's agricultural economy, which remains the second-largest economic driver in our state.

We are asking you to treat this devastating situation with the urgency and priority it deserves. Work now, together

with your colleagues in Olympia, to examine and confront the real costs that state laws and rules are piling onto our farmers and make the bold changes farms need to survive in Washington.

Please do not wait until the next legislative session. There is time now to start; to fully understand the true nature of this growing crisis, and create real, actionable plans to give our farming community the lifeline it's desperate for.

Keep us informed about the steps you're taking to create change. Tell us how we can help and support you in this critical effort. We won't be staying on the sidelines — and we expect our elected leaders won't be either.

Ben Tindall, Executive Director
Save Family Farming

Share your comments with us via email at editor@wawg.org or mail them to 109 East First Avenue, Ritzville, WA 99169-2394. Please keep your submissions less than 300 words. Past issues of *Wheat Life* can be downloaded at wheatlife.org/issues/

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Future of ‘traditional’ farm bill is uncertain

Harvest has begun, and at home, I can feel the urgency to move the crop from the field to the bin. It can seem frantic, but I am reminded that this is what we have been waiting for all year. Even with the stress of preparing, making sure equipment is ready, and keeping lunches and dinners on the table, harvest is the season when farmers finally see the results of their hard work. Nervousness does come into play, hoping and praying the crop will be bountiful. The industry needs an above-average yield of high quality grain to make up or at least help our high input costs and the low market price we receive for our wheat. So, I would say, farmers are more nervous than usual due to the pressures of the farm economy and if they can keep farming for another year or is this going to be it.

Over the past six months, the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) has worked diligently to share this message with leaders in both Olympia and Washington, D.C. Washington ranks 50th in the nation for farm profit, a fact legislators often ask us to explain. While I sometimes wonder how this reality is not already clear, our role is to educate them on the mounting pressures farmers face, such as heavy state regulatory burdens; high input costs including fuel, fertilizer, and transportation; rising labor costs; higher interest rates driven by inflation; and continued uncertainty in the farm economy.

We provide lawmakers with graphs, statistics, and research and encourage them to visit a family farm to understand operations and the value farms bring to our state and the world. BUT, to some, the message never seems to resonate. Others understand and work to find solutions. It's important for WAWG not to get discouraged in times like these and keep diligent and consistent with messaging and educating on behalf of our wheat farmers. We must stay persistent, and that is our goal.

A quote from John F. Kennedy seems to stick with me: “The farmer is the only person in our economy who buys everything at retail, sells everything at wholesale, and pays the freight both ways.”

The farm bill has been a major focus of our work over the past several years, and we have seen some progress



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

now that it has passed the House of Representatives and moved to the Senate. We continue to hear that the Senate wants to act quickly, but other issues keep pushing the farm bill aside and delaying action. How can support for farmers and our food supply be treated as secondary? In my view, the farm bill has too often been used as a political bargaining chip between parties, which is frustrating because it should be one of the most bipartisan issues in the country. Supporting a safe and secure food supply is a matter of national security.

We are navigating uncertain times with the current structure of the farm bill. WAWG has never supported splitting it apart, yet that is what has happened. A portion, which included some improvements,

was included in the One Big Beautiful Bill (OBBB), while the remaining provisions were left for Farm Bill 2.0. One program that was not included in the OBBB was the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). WAWG has done extensive work to demonstrate the changes needed to make CRP a feasible and economically viable option for farmers. WAWG developed a CRP subcommittee under the current Natural Resources Committee with farmers who are actively involved with the program. The committee developed a white paper that outlines key issues and recommends updates and changes. Our board approved the paper, and we shared it at both the national and state levels (see page 38).

When the House passed the farm bill, it left CRP unchanged, which is not the outcome we wanted. However, the Senate version includes several improvements, such as increasing the annual CRP payment limitation from \$50,000 to \$125,000, which is the first increase in history; reauthorizing the program through 2031 and capping enrollment at 27 million acres; updating rental rate calculations to better incentivize enrolling marginal land, rather than prime farmland; allowing cost-sharing for grazing and water infrastructure and ensuring cost-share support for midcontract management activities; and improving access to CRP acreage for haying and grazing during emergency responses to drought, flooding, and other disasters. There are many other improvements that

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need to be made to the program, and WAWG is working diligently at the national and state levels to provide the documentation to get some of these improvements done.

At the national level, WAWG works closely with the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG). Late last year, NAWG hired a new CEO, Sam Kieffer, and the organization has done significant internal work to strengthen its direction. That work included developing a strategic plan to guide the organization on a more productive path for U.S. wheat farmers, as well as updating its mission and vision statements. Since Sam joined the organization, I have seen meaningful progress, from hiring professional and effective staff to encouraging new states to become members. I look forward to seeing NAWG continue to grow and elevate the representation of wheat in national policy. NAWG remains an essential part of keeping wheat growers connected in Washington, D.C.

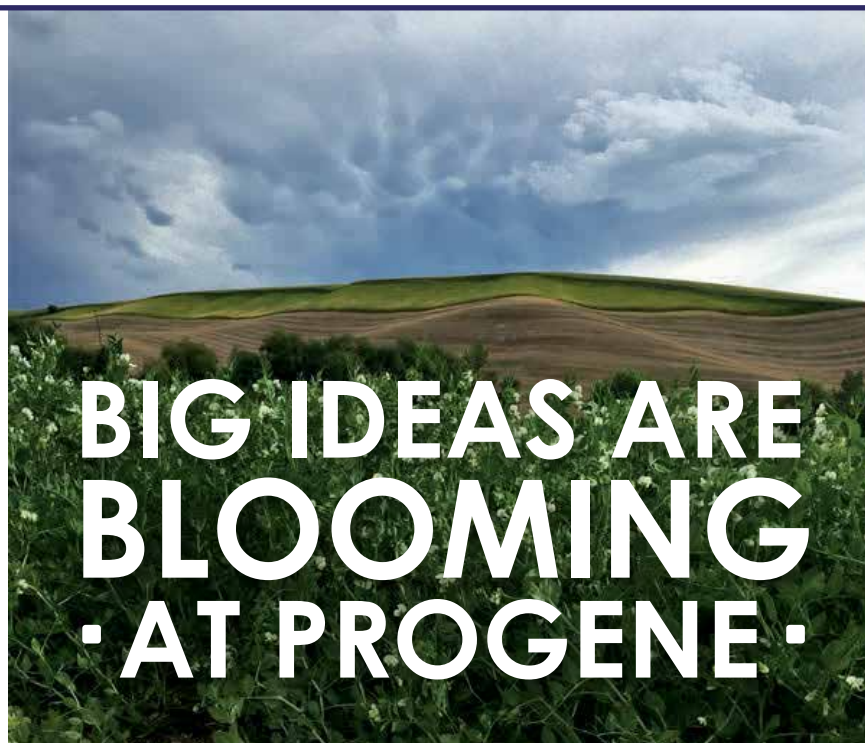
Transportation remains a major challenge. Even though the administration ended the Biden agreement with the states and sovereign Tribes earlier this year, the lower Snake River dams removal issue went back into the courts in Oregon. Judge Simon ordered additional spill, which is actually harmful to salmon and makes navigation challenging. The Inland Ports and Navigation Group — WAWG is a member — appealed the ruling. We are currently waiting on a court date, and all intervenor-defendants and the plaintiffs have submitted their reply briefs. A likely date for oral arguments will be in October or November.

WAWG continues to participate in the Washington State Department of Transportation's lower Snake River dams transporta-

tion study that is developing scenarios that remove the dams. In our view, none of these scenarios are feasible, cost-effective, or reliable, but we remain at the table to make those concerns clear.

In February, the "Dam Heros" took their annual trip to D.C. to educate members of Congress who sit on key committees, as well as federal agencies, about the importance of Marine Highway 84. It was a very successful trip and well worth the time and investment. We also took the opportunity to personally invite key staffers to attend our popular lower Snake River dams congressional tour later this month. Transportation is a significant cost for farmers, whether it's by river, rail, or road, and WAWG is working diligently to protect those modes and address rising costs.

I wish everyone a safe and bountiful harvest, and I thank our WAWG members for their continued support and investment in our organization as we provide Washington wheat growers with a unified voice. ■



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Forecast shows possible risks to Basin water

Changes in climate, agricultural practices, groundwater use, and growing populations are critical factors influencing water supplies in Washington's Columbia River Basin. Challenging trends in these areas are expected to create vulnerabilities in the region's water availability by the mid-2040s, according to a draft forecast from the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the State of Washington Water Research Center at Washington State University.

Every five years, Washington law requires Ecology to report on how changing water supply and demand could affect communities, farms, and fish over the following 20 years. The findings are intended to help elected officials and water managers identify current vulnerabilities and plan for long-term water supply needs.

Some of the factors studied in the report are the same that led Ecology to issue a statewide drought declaration in April this year, the fourth year in a row for the Yakima River Basin and other parts of Eastern Washington.

"We are already experiencing the increased pressures that come from consecutive droughts," said Melissa Downes, projects section manager for Ecology's Office of Columbia River. "These pressures will grow as back-to-back droughts happen more often and for longer periods of time. That makes it even more important to understand the science and what challenges are coming our way. We use this framework to guide our decisions and help communities become more climate resilient."

The 2026 forecast supports previous estimates that, by the 2040s, less water will be available in summer and early fall. As the region warms, more annual precipitation will fall as rain instead of snow, and what snowpack does build up in winter will run off earlier.

The forecast also finds that groundwater levels remain at risk of declining, particularly the deeper aquifer layers.

In some areas, this risk can be lowered by reducing future pumping or increasing recharge to the aquifer.

Other forecast highlights include:

- An increase in multiyear droughts, which could cause significant economic and environmental impacts.
- Benefits and tradeoffs of water conservation efforts.
- Emerging housing demands for water that are not included when assessing current needs.

This forecast is another indication of the widespread challenges facing water supplies statewide. Earlier this year, Washington Gov. Bob Ferguson launched the Washington's Water Future initiative to identify strategies to ensure clean, reliable water for people, fish, agriculture, and the economy. Although the water initiative is separate from the five-year Columbia Basin forecast, the issues are largely the same.

The draft report can be found at apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/summarypages/2612009.html?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery ■

Three counties designated as primary natural disaster areas

According to the U.S. Drought Monitor, Asotin, Garfield, and Whitman counties in Washington state suffered from a drought intensity value during the growing season of D2 Drought-Severe for eight or more consecutive weeks or D3 Drought-Extreme or D4 Drought-Exceptional.

This natural disaster designation allows the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Farm Service Agency (FSA) to extend much-needed emergency credit to producers recovering from natural disasters through emergency loans. Emergency loans can be used to meet various recovery needs including the replacement of essential items such as equipment or livestock, reorganization of a farming operation, or to refinance certain debts. FSA will review the loans based on the extent of the losses, security available, and repayment ability. Application deadline is 03/08/2027

Contiguous counties that are also eligible are Adams, Columbia, Franklin, Lincoln, and Spokane counties in

The next state board meeting of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers is scheduled for Tuesday, Sept. 29, beginning at 10 a.m. at the Wheat Foundation Building in Ritzville.

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On farmers.gov, the Disaster Assistance Discovery Tool, Disaster Assistance-at-a-Glance fact sheet, and Loan Assistance Tool can help producers determine program or loan options. To file a Notice of Loss or to ask questions about available programs, contact your local USDA Service Center. ■

Senate Ag Committee releases farm bill discussion draft

In late June, U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Chairman John Boozman (R-Ark.) unveiled the Agricultural Act of 2026, a farm bill discussion draft designed to strengthen the farm economy, modernize agricultural policy, and invest in the future of rural America.

The Agricultural Act of 2026 builds on improvements enacted through the Working Families Tax Cuts, which enhanced commodity programs, expanded access to affordable crop insurance, and strengthened farm safety net programs. Producers will begin seeing the benefits of those updates this fall.

The proposal also includes significant investments to support rural communities by expanding access to reliable drinking water, broadband connectivity, healthcare services, and affordable childcare, while strengthening local economies and improving quality of life across rural America.

Among its key provisions, the discussion draft:

- Builds upon the Working Families Tax Cuts farm safety net investments by further improving existing commodity, dairy, standing disaster and crop insurance programs while expanding opportunities tailored to the unique needs of specialty crop producers.
- Modernizes farm loan programs to provide the next generation with the capital and tools necessary to keep American agriculture strong and competitive on a global scale.
- Streamlines and strengthens conservation programs while creating two new broadly popular initiatives: the Forest Conservation Easement Program and the State Conservation Assistance Program.
- Invests in agricultural research and innovation to improve U.S. competitiveness and close the gap with foreign competitors.

- Responds to rising fertilizer costs and bolsters protections against foreign adversaries seeking to exploit America's agricultural industry.
- More than doubles funding for the Market Access Program and the Foreign Market Development Program using investments made available in the Working Families Tax Cuts.

"We are encouraged to see Chairman Boozman continue moving the farm bill process forward with the release of draft legislative text. Wheat farmers need certainty as they contend with stubbornly high input costs, commodity prices that barely break even, and ongoing volatility in global markets," said the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) CEO Sam Kieffer. "NAWG is reviewing the proposal to assess how it addresses wheat growers' needs, including crop insurance, the farm safety net, trade, research, conservation, and humanitarian programs that move U.S. grain. We look forward to working with Congress and the White House to get this legislation across the finish line this year." ■

US wheat acreage drops to new low at 42.7 million acres

The U.S. all-wheat planted area dropped to a record low of 42.74 million acres, 1.1 million acres below expectations according to the National Agricultural Statistics Service's (NASS) June 30 acreage report. This marks the lowest planted wheat acreage since 1919.

- All-wheat total was 42.74 million acres, reflecting a 6% drop from the previous year.
- Winter wheat clocked in at 31.52 million acres, with California and Nebraska hitting all-time lows for planted winter wheat.
- Spring wheat came in at 9.39 million acres.
- Durum wheat is estimated at 1.83 million acres (estimated).

A combination of factors contributed to the reduction in wheat acres. Farmers shifted significant acreage to more profitable crops, primarily corn and soybeans. Significant drought conditions across the Plains reduced planting and prompted abandonment in some hard red winter wheat regions. Large domestic and global supplies depressed market prices, which disincentivized new plantings.

In Washington state, producers planted 1,850,000 acres of winter wheat and expect to harvest 1,790,000 acres. Spring wheat was planted on 450,000 acres with 440,000 acres expected to be harvested. ■



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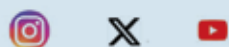
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Control Mean	3743	3399	2683	3128	4711	4403	Private trials			
Rubisco Seeds' Hybrids										
KICKER	4972	4701	4383	3505	5841	5394	KICKER	4678	6667	6828
MERCEDES	4419	4359	3756	3881	5393	4798	MERCEDES	4945	6569	6167
AKILAH					5876	5201	AKILAH	5686	5455	6094
PHOENIX CL	4611	4043	3398	3454	5093	4780	DRIFTER	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.**

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FSA online scheduling option now available to producers

The U.S. Department of Agriculture is putting farmers first by offering them a new option to schedule appointments online with their local Farm Service Agency (FSA) office. Following a successful pilot program, FSA is now using a digital appointment platform across the agency to allow producers to make farm program or farm loan appointments online at their convenience.

“Farmers and ranchers work around the clock and should be able to schedule appointments with their local offices at their convenience,” said FSA Administrator Bill Beam. “This new online scheduling option gives producers another way to connect with their local FSA office to access the programs and services they depend on. It’s one more step in our commitment to putting farmers first.”

Producers can schedule appointments through FSA’s digital platform, Microsoft Bookings, using a mobile device, tablet, laptop, or desktop computer. To assist producers in finding their local FSA office to make an appointment, FSA has also launched a new FSA county office locator that is searchable by state and by county. Each county office contact page has a unique link for producers to make an appointment online and shows contact information for the local FSA office and the farm loan team. Appointments may be in-person or virtual with the local FSA office depending on producer preference.

Producers can conveniently schedule appointments for a variety of services with both farm program and farm loan staff. The Bookings-based system will automatically send a confirmation email to the producer along with reminder emails for upcoming appointments. Producers still have the option to call or visit their local FSA office in person to make an appointment. ■

The Washington Association of Wheat Growers wishes producers a safe and abundant 2026 harvest.



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Chad Colby

Chad helps farmers, companies, and industry leaders understand how cutting-edge tools can transform their operations. He will be Tuesday's lunch keynote speaker.



Karen Eddington

Karen is a 20-year resilience researcher, keynote speaker, and author, who teaches connection skills based on her research in The Under Pressure Project. Karen will be our Wednesday breakfast keynote speaker.



Shawn Hackett

Shawn is an ag outlook expert, commodities specialist and weather trend speaker covering long-term cycles related to climate, currencies, geopolitics and global capital flows. He will speak at Wednesday's lunch.

Hotel Reservations

The Hilton Garden Inn Kennewick (701 N. Young St.) is a short walk from Three Rivers Convention Center and is recently renovated. Group room rates are \$159 per night. Call 509-735-4500 to make reservations. Parking is free. Room block release date is Oct. 31st. Call now to ensure rate and availability.

Dinner & AUCTION

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FULL REGISTRATION (includes meals)

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Regular Registration	_____ x \$ 250	\$ _____
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After 11/02/2026	_____ x \$ 300	\$ _____
Non-Member	_____ x \$ 350	\$ _____
Onsite Convention Full Registration	_____ x \$ 400	\$ _____

***Note: FULL Convention Registration includes Tuesday & Wednesday meetings and all meals.**

SINGLE DAY REGISTRATION

Circle one:

Member Single Day _____ x \$ 175 \$ _____ Tuesday/Wednesday (circle one)
Non-Member Single Day _____ x \$ 275 \$ _____ Tuesday/Wednesday (circle one)

TUESDAY DINNER & AUCTION - Heads & Tails **Auction Fundraiser**

_____ x \$ 10 per person = \$ _____

ADDITIONAL Meal Tickets *Available to purchase ONLY with a Full Registration

_____ Individual Breakfast	_____ x \$ 35	\$ _____
_____ Individual Lunch	_____ x \$ 45	\$ _____
_____ State Banquet	_____ x \$ 85	\$ _____
_____ Dinner & Auction	_____ x \$ 85	\$ _____

_____ **I will be attending all meals**

I will only be attending the following meals (Important for head count purposes):

_____ Tuesday Breakfast	_____ Opening Breakfast Wednesday)	_____ Washington Banquet (Wednesday)
_____ Tuesday Luncheon	_____ Luncheon (Wednesday)	
_____ Dinner & Auction (Tuesday)	_____ Oregon Banquet (Wednesday)	

Flags for your name tag describing your positions will be available at convention registration desk.

Registration cancellations will be accepted through Nov. 2, with a full refund. No refunds after Nov. 2.

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POLICY MATTERS

Races, measures making midterm state ballot more active

By Diana Carlen

Lobbyist, Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Washington state will be holding its primary election on Aug. 4. The August primary is used to narrow down the number of candidates for the November general election. The top two candidates in each race, regardless of party affiliation, will move on to the general election. Half of the state Senate is on the ballot this year, and the entire state House of Representatives is on the ballot. One notable trend emerging this election cycle is the growing number of incumbent Democrats facing primary challengers from their own party, particularly in safely Democrat districts. This dynamic reflects ongoing divisions within the Democrat caucus on issues including housing, public safety, and taxes. Most notably, Senate Majority Leader Jamie Pedersen has drawn a challenger. Several additional Democratic incumbents are also facing progressive challengers, particularly in urban districts.

Washington's State Supreme Court races have also drawn attention with five of the nine justices on the ballot. Those contests are formally nonpartisan, but both political parties are treating them as important statewide races. The court could play a major role in future disputes over major state policies, including a challenge to the recently adopted income tax on high earners.

Together, these races and measures could make Washington's 2026 ballot more active than a typical midterm ballot.



PHOTO BY NILS HUENERFUERST/WIKIPEDIA

Income tax repeal measure headed to November ballot

An initiative to repeal the income tax (IP26-645) has qualified for November's ballot. The initiative would repeal the state's recently approved 9.9% tax on adjusted gross income above \$1 million for Washington households. The 9.9% tax targets income above \$1 million, but would also affect many small and medium businesses structured as pass-through entities.

The tax is scheduled to take effect in 2028, with revenue collections beginning in 2029 if it remains in place. Lawmakers estimate the tax would generate between \$3 billion and \$4 billion annually to support the state operating budget.

Let's Go Washington turned in more than 500,000 signatures in early July to overturn Washington's new income tax on high-earners, nearly double the amount required to secure a spot on the November ballot.

The income tax proposal is also the subject of separate legal challenges filed by business owners who question its constitutionality under long-standing Washington Supreme Court precedent regarding income taxes. Those cases are expected to proceed independently of the ballot measure.

Washington's water future initiative launched

In May, Gov. Bob Ferguson and the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) announced a new statewide initiative to help Washington prepare for growing water challenges. The initiative is in response to four consecutive years of drought.

As part of the initiative, Ecology is hosting regional roundtables with Tribal governments, local governments, agricultural groups, industries, utilities, environmental organizations, and community groups. ►



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These conversations are designed to:

- Share local challenges.
- Identify what's getting in the way.
- Highlight practical ideas and solutions that work for different regions.

Washington Association of Wheat Growers staff has participated in a regional meeting in Spokane and a virtual meeting with agriculture and will continue to engage. Ecology will summarize key findings from all the meetings in a report, which will be published later this year.

Gov. Ferguson establishes an economic development council

On June 26, 2026, Gov. Bob Ferguson signed an executive order establishing a new economic development council to help craft a statewide economic strategy aimed at keeping Washington competitive. The announcement comes amid slow job growth, an unemployment rate higher than the national average, and a growing number of businesses planning growth outside of Washington state.

The 26-member council will include business, labor, education, and Tribal leaders. There is one representative from agriculture from Stemilt Growers.

The council will meet quarterly. The primary focus of the group will be to evaluate the competitiveness of the state economy relative to other states, review the state's regulatory environment, and recommend ways to attract out-of-state business. A plan is due by June 2027.

Washington gas taxes begin automatic annual increases

Washington's gas tax increased by 2% beginning in July, and for the first time, will now increase automatically every year into the future. This stems from a new law that added 6 cents to the gas tax and sets an automatic 2% increase every year.

This comes as revenue from the fuel tax has been heading downward in recent years. The Office of Financial Management projected transportation revenue to be down \$166 million and credited most of the change to the current biennium's forecast to a decline in expected revenue from the fuel tax. ■

NAWG applauds Chinese glyphosate tariff decision

On July 17, Ruveon announced it will withdraw its petition with the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) requesting countervailing duties on glyphosate products

imported from China following feedback from stakeholders across the U.S. agriculture industry.

"This is welcome news at a time when America's wheat farmers are already facing extreme financial pressures from factors beyond their control, including inflation and geopolitical disruptions that have driven up the cost of planting, growing, and harvesting wheat," said National Association of Wheat Growers CEO Sam Kieffer.

"We appreciate that Ruveon listened to farmers and made a course correction to pull back their request seeking trade barriers that would have likely increased farmers' costs while wheat farmers are already facing the fourth straight year of losing money on every acre of wheat.

"Farmers, more than most people, understand good years and bad years, but we urge Ruveon to remember the sharp response they received from farmers in the last few weeks and refrain from extreme, upward price swings in the future. We don't begrudge input providers for seeking a return on their investment, but we also expect fairness and transparency in the marketplace." ■

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The Grain Chain: Truckloads of trust

From the Skagit Valley and Okanogan to the Columbia Plateau and Palouse, every load of wheat harvested in Washington tells a unique story. Long before it reaches a flour mill or an overseas customer, that story begins in the field with the decisions farmers make throughout the growing season. Bushels measure yield, but quality is what creates value. And in Washington, consistent, reliable quality is what has earned the trust of our customers one truckload at a time.

When a truck arrives at a local grain cooperative, one of its first stops is the grading room. Before the wheat is unloaded, a representative sample is collected and tested. Moisture is checked to make sure the grain can be safely stored. Test weight measures kernel density and condition. Inspectors also look for foreign material, damaged kernels, and other factors that affect marketability. Depending on the class of wheat and the customer's needs, additional tests such as protein content or falling numbers may also be performed.

These measurements do more than help determine a price. They allow cooperatives to group wheat with similar characteristics so they can build uniform lots for domestic mills and export customers. Because wheat from many farms is blended together, every load plays a role in the quality of the final shipment.

Quality consistency is one of Washington wheat's greatest strengths. Nearly 90% of the state's crop is exported, much of it to customers throughout the Pacific Rim. Many of those buyers have purchased Washington wheat for generations because they know what they're getting. Whether it's flour for bread in the Philippines, noodles in Japan, or baked goods in South Korea, customers rely on Washington wheat to perform the same way every time.

Quality traits are what make that possible. Protein affects dough strength and baking performance. Falling numbers measure the grain's starch quality, which is critical for milling and food production. Test weight helps indicate milling yield and overall grain condition. Together, these measurements help match each load of wheat to the products it is best suited to make.

Washington's climate gives growers an advantage, too. Our warm, dry summers often provide excellent harvest



Samples are taken from every load of wheat that Eastern Washington farmers take to their local elevator or grain co-op.

conditions, helping preserve grain quality while reducing problems associated with excess moisture. Pair that with improved varieties developed through decades of research at Washington State University and the careful management of Washington growers, and it's easy to see why our wheat has earned such a strong reputation around the world.

Behind the scenes, organizations like the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) and the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) help keep that reputation strong. The WGC works to build demand and maintain relationships with customers around the world. WAWG focuses on the policies that help Washington farmers stay competitive. Together with growers, cooperatives, and grain handlers, they all help keep Washington wheat moving to customers who count on its quality year after year.

The grain chain is about more than moving wheat from the field to the marketplace. It's about producing a crop customers trust. Every truck that leaves the farm carries more than grain. It carries the reputation our wheat growers have spent generations building. ■

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Food and Farm Tour

LEGISLATORS PUT BOOTS ON THE GROUND AND HEAR DIRECTLY FROM PRODUCERS

By Trista Crossley
Editor, *Wheat Life*

In mid-July, legislators got down in the dirt to hear directly from producers about how bills passed in Olympia are affecting the state's agricultural industry.

Every year, ag stakeholders bring legislators and staff to visit the people and companies that raise and process the products grown in the state. This year's food and farm tour was held in Benton and Franklin counties and included stops at a wheat farm, a potato farm, an irrigated farm, Second Harvest, and a potato processor. The tour was sponsored by the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG), the Washington State Potato Commission, Second Harvest, and the South Columbia Basin Irrigation District.

Legislators were treated to a dinner cruise on the Columbia River the evening before the tour. Geordie Bryant Greene, director of government affairs for the potato commission, and Michelle Hennings, WAWG executive director, welcomed the group and briefly talked about the issues farmers are facing. Hennings addressed sustainability and the importance of having a choice of transportation methods, especially barging on the Columbia-Snake River System. Along with fuel and fertilizer, transpor-

tation costs are a major expense for wheat producers. Barging provides a low-emission alternative to rails and trucks for moving products through the region.

"There's 51 million tons of products that are shipped on the river system every year," she told the crowd. "Washington is looking at a good wheat crop this year. We will have lots of wheat to send out, but input costs are hurting us. We want to work with you on that."

The next day's tour began with wheat and ended with potato chips. At each stop, legislators heard about sustainability efforts, farm labor issues, technology, input costs, and conservation practices. See photos on pages 32-33.

Moon Family Farm. This 5th generation family farm is located atop the Horse Heaven Hills in Benton County. They are a no-till dryland grain farm that sells into both the commodity market and the specialty grains market. Owner Garrett Moon explained the reasons behind their fallow system, in which fields are only planted every other year to allow enough moisture to collect to support a crop. No-till is critical to the farm's success because the residue (or straw) protects the soil from blowing into the Tri-Cities. Legislators asked about the impacts of the state's Climate Commitment Act on his fuel costs. Moon explained that fuel "touches" everything, from field work to harvest, and



State legislators gathered in the Tri-Cities last month for a food and farm tour to hear directly from producers about the issues they are facing. The tour kicked off with a dinner cruise on the Columbia River.



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if a bad crop year aligns with a year of bad prices and high input costs, farmers get “clobbered.” Moon told the group that weather is his biggest challenge followed by input costs.

“There’s lots of places wheat can be grown in the world, but in the Horse Heaven Hills, there’s really nothing else we can grow. If prices go down, they can grow other things. We can’t,” he said.

Berg Partnership. Besides growing dryland wheat in the Horse Heaven Hills, the Berg family uses irrigation to produce red winter wheat, soft white spring wheat, field and sweet corn, peas, green beans, alfalfa, and grass seed. Nicole Berg, part of the fourth generation, said their family’s biggest challenge is also input costs, especially energy used to run their pumps and irrigation system. She explained that the current wheat price is about the same as it was in the 1980s, but input costs, which used to rise and fall with the price of wheat, have diverged and are rising regardless of commodity prices.

The Bergs, like many farms in the area, work with farm labor companies that bring in work crews to supplement the farm’s own employees. Becky Ochoa and her husband, Juan, own Labor Plus Solutions, and the Ochoas were on hand to talk to legislators about the impacts of the state’s overtime law. She explained that farmers still need the work done but they can’t afford to pay workers overtime. Technology is taking up the slack, which is eliminating the need for some farm labor. Ochoa said that the overtime law has stopped workers from being able to save up for the slow months, and a seasonal overtime exemption is needed.

“That’s the downfall of having laws and bills written in Olympia with no knowledge of how it actu-



At Bunger Farms in Franklin County, legislators arrived during the harvest of Ranger Russet potatoes, an early variety that is used to make french fries.

ally works,” Ochoa said, adding that some estimates say workers are getting an average of \$800 a month less than before the overtime law went into effect.

Second Harvest. Before lunch, the group toured Second Harvest’s Pasco Distribution Center. The organization offers a wide variety of innovative programs designed to nourish the community from all angles, addressing immediate hunger needs, long-term food security, and nutrition education. Second Harvest relies primarily on donations, not only for food from growers and processors, but boxes and bags and even space in neighboring warehouses.

“The first harvest makes the second harvest possible,” said Eric Williams, community partnerships director for Second Harvest.

Aaron Czyewski, director of advocacy and public policy at Food Lifeline, talked about a Washington State Department of Agriculture pilot program that provides financial support to producers to get food from the field into the hunger relief system.

“Donations are generous, but there are costs,” he said. Food Lifeline is based in Western Washington and, along with Second Harvest, is part of the national Feeding America network of food banks, food pantries, and local meal programs.

South Columbia Basin Irrigation District. During lunch, John O’Callaghan,



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manager of the South Columbia Basin Irrigation District, discussed the issues his district is dealing with, including the Columbia Basin Project, the Columbia River Treaty, state water rights, and the East Pasco Basin Groundwater Project, which could contain a million acre feet of unallocated water. He advised legislators to not overcomplicate irrigation matters and said the public needs help in understanding how water rights in the state work.

The South Columbia Basin Irrigation District is one of three major districts operating the massive Columbia Basin Project in central Washington. The district serves roughly 233,600 acres by delivering pumped Columbia River water through hundreds of miles of canals to support agricultural crops like potatoes, wheat, and wine grapes.

Bunger Farms. Owned by Josh and Jenn Bunger, the Franklin County farm covers 1,000 acres and grows crops like potatoes, sweet corn, peas, and bluegrass seed. Legislators arrived at the farm during the harvest of Ranger Russet potatoes, an early variety that is used to make french fries. Josh Bunger highlighted the cost of parts and equipment as well as labor as big issues he is facing. Like other farmers, he is investing heavily in technology and equipment to replace hired labor that is unaf-

fordable due to overtime laws, especially around harvest.

"Overtime killed work labor," he said, adding that he already pays more than minimum wage just to get hand crews to the fields.

He explained that he took a 6% decrease on potato contracts this year, but saw his fertilizer increase from \$410 to \$700 a ton, while parts are up 23% across the board.

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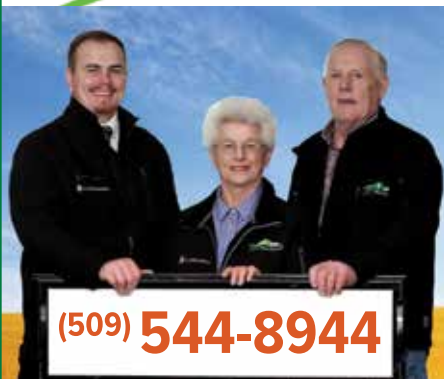
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export to destinations in Canada, Mexico, Asia, Southeast Asia, the Caribbean, Brazil, Central America, and Northern Africa. After a tour of their Pasco plant, growers got to snack on fresh potato chips while hearing about the issues the company faces.

Derek Davenport, one of the owners and director of Northwest operations, said the company is looking for efficiencies to help them cut labor costs, which have increased 80% over the last 10 years. Regenerative ag, such as solar power and cover cropping, is important to the company, but those practices have to have a practical benefit. ■



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Food and Farm Tour attendees examine a combine header at Moon Family Farm in the Horse Heaven Hills.



(Above) Legislators arrived at Bungler Farms just in time to see potatoes being harvested. Within a few hours, these potatoes will become French fries. (Below) Workers sort potatoes destined to become potato chips at Allied Potato in Pasco.



2026 Washington Wheat Ambassadors Luke Goetz and Isabella Huntley joined legislators on a trip of Benton and Franklin County farms and food processors.



Becky Ochoa (left) of Labor Plus Solutions explained how the state's overtime law has mostly hurt, not helped, farm laborers who depend on working long hours during harvest to help them get through slow months.

Food and Farm tour 2026



Babe Nyberg (in green), who is in charge of food sourcing for Second Harvest, explains how large quantities of food, in this case beans, is received and then repackaged into smaller amounts at Second Harvest's Pasco Distribution Center.



(Above) Workers weed an irrigated onion field at Berg Partnership in the Horse Heaven Hills. (Left) Derek Davenport of Allied Potato talks about the issues his company faces, while in the background a truckload of potatoes is unloaded.



(Above) A large load of zucchini will be repackaged into smaller boxes at Second Harvest. (Right) Garrett Moon (in yellow) explains how he uses no-till methods to protect his soil and stop it from blowing away.



Meet Casey Sixkiller

HIGH QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE, PRACTICAL SOLUTIONS ARE DIRECTOR'S LONG-TERM GOALS

Casey Sixkiller was appointed as the 14th director of the Washington State Department of Ecology in early December 2024 by then Governor-elect Bob Ferguson. As director, Sixkiller oversees a biennial budget of \$2.8 billion and a workforce of 2,200 employees dedicated to protecting Washington's air, land, and water. Prior to joining the department, he served as regional administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Region 10, which encompasses Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Alaska, and 271 Tribal nations. *Wheat Life* reached out to Director Sixkiller to ask about his priorities, Ecology actions on Hangman and Spring Flat creeks, and how to foster a better relationship between the department and growers.



What are your priorities for Ecology for the rest of this year?

At the Washington State Department of Ecology, we're committed to being responsive, accessible, efficient, and customer-focused, and I think one of the best ways to do that is to meet people in their communities. That's why I've made it a priority to meet with folks on the ground to learn how we can improve and partner to find success and common ground. This summer, I've spent a lot of time talking to people in Eastern Washington about our changing water supply, and those are conversations we need to continue.

What are your long-term goals for the department?

My vision — and Gov. Bob Ferguson's vision — is really focused on delivering high quality customer service and practical solutions. I know that if the primary way you interact with Ecology is through our regulatory role, "customer service" may sound like a strange term. I would argue, however, that regulations are where customer service is most important.

If you're waiting on a permitting decision, we owe you clarity about our timelines and requirements. If we've flagged a compliance issue at your farm or business, we should be explaining what we saw, what it means, and what options you have to address that issue. But customer service needs to mean more than simply being responsive.

We need to listen to feedback and input. We need to be a partner and work together to tackle the big challenges we have as a state.

Ecology's mission is to protect, restore, and maintain the places and people that make our state so special and to protect public health. Education, outreach, guidance, partnership, trust — those are the ingredients we need to successfully implement our state's environmental laws and regulations.

What have been some of the highlights leading the Department of Ecology?

As I was saying, by far the biggest highlight — and priority — for me has been getting out into communities, meeting with people across Washington. I've met with producers in Spring Flat Creek and sat down with folks at a pizza place in Chewelah. At the end of June, I was out in Spokane meeting with leaders from local governments, from farming communities and irrigation districts, to talk about how we can work together to secure the water we need for the long term.

Water is life. It's irreplaceable. This year, we declared a statewide drought because we could see how challenging water supplies were going to be this summer. It's the fourth year in a row for drought for parts or all of our state, so we know we need new ideas to deal with these long-term challenges.

One thing you should know about me is that my path to this job has been a little different than most of my predecessors. I'm not a lawyer, and I'm not a scientist, but I have worked at every level of government and built a career around bringing people together to solve complex problems. That's the approach I've tried to bring to this job from day one.

Over the past 18 months, I've spent a lot of time listening, meeting with industry groups and representatives, local and state leaders, and businesses. That's the approach we're following as we work on these water supply issues. Being able to sit down with people face-to-face and have those conversations and hear people's ideas and their concerns is the best way to get those ideas on the table.

How do you respond to growers who say Ecology's push for buffers could jeopardize farmers' ability to make a living?

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helps ensure both a strong agricultural economy and healthy waterways. This is why we've worked to incorporate feedback from the farmers we work with and to coordinate our efforts with conservation districts and other partners.

Through our partnerships with local conservation districts, we offer funding and technical assistance that can help landowners reduce pollution in ways that make sense on their farms.

One of the complaints about Spring Flat Creek in Whitman County is that Ecology is treating ephemeral and intermittent streams on the same level as perennial streams. How do you respond to that?

We recognize that a one-size-fits-all approach often doesn't work for every basin, which is why our regionally based staff use their knowledge of local streams so we can adapt our approach. Ephemeral, intermittent, and perennial streams each function differently and are treated differently. Our guidance provides different buffers or setback recommendations based on channel size and flow.

The Spring Flat Creek watershed has ephemeral sections. It has short intermittent, long intermittent, and perennial stream sections. Temperature issues are a concern on the long intermittent and perennial sections of the creek. Our staff will work with producers in Spring Flat Creek on site-specific plans that take into account the differences relevant to their site. We also take into consideration the field-specific upland practices. If tillage conservation practices are being used, like direct seed or no-till, then we can recommend a smaller setback from the streambank.

Ecology has also invested \$700,000 of state funds to farmers in Spring Flat Creek to offset the costs of riparian buffers. Under that program, farmers can receive between \$300-\$350 per acre with 15-year contracts, and all planting and maintenance activities are also covered by the program.

As I said, I met with producers on Spring Flat Creek last summer to hear their experiences and understand the best way to stay engaged with them. Our team is adjusting to make better, more productive connections with farms in that area.

On Hangman Creek in Spokane County, growers are frustrated and say Ecology keeps changing the goalposts, and they aren't getting credit for the work they are doing. How do you respond to that?

I want growers to know that we recognize the work many of them have already done in Hangman

Creek. Their efforts matter, and water quality has been improving.

It's really encouraging to see projects like direct seeding start to take off. We've been working with the Spokane Conservation District to set up tests of direct seeding so that farmers can try before they commit — seeing whether that approach works for them. We can provide up to \$30 per acre for as many as 250 acres per producer for up to three years.

In total, Ecology has provided nearly \$15 million since 2018 in taxpayer funding to farmers in the Hangman Creek watershed. That's not just projects like direct seeding. A significant portion of that funding has supported farmers through rental payments for implementing riparian buffers. At the same time, we need to acknowledge that Hangman Creek continues to have water quality challenges, with the majority of waterways still lacking buffers from agricultural production. We continue to work with the conservation district and local farmers to address these areas.

Our goal is to put together a combination of good conservation practices and minimum width buffers to protect stream banks, capture polluted runoff, and keep soil on farms. You need both conservation tillage practices and stream buffers to protect water quality.

Ecology recently released its nonpoint plan and clean water guidance for agriculture. Although the plan is labeled "voluntary," growers are concerned it points towards a future where these voluntary practices become mandatory. How do you respond to that?

The Clean Water Guidance for Agriculture was designed to support locally led approaches that help keep water clean. The guidance gives landowners flexibility, from livestock grazing management to tillage practices that reduce erosion. Producers can decide how they meet those goals.

Ecology does not have the option of doing nothing. Ecology is legally required to manage nonpoint pollution to meet state and federal clean water requirements. But we do have flexibility in how we improve water quality. We can make adjustments based on specific conditions and the practices an individual landowner uses.

The guidance itself doesn't change the law. It simply outlines what effective, science-based practices look like so everyone in the watershed can do their part to protect water quality and aquatic habitat.

The relationship between Ecology and growers can be a little tense, as both sides are under pressure

— **Ecology to fulfill its mission to protect the environment, and growers to farm their land and make a living. From your perspective, how can that relationship be improved?**

It takes all of us coming to the table and working together on solutions. I keep saying it because I truly believe it.

Over the past 25 years, I've worked in communities all across our state, from Yakima to Seattle, and in Washington, D.C., too. And time and time and time again, I've seen that we can get to better solutions by working together. A collaborative approach is always going to yield the best results, and I am committed to continuing these conversations.

You were asking about the questions we've heard in the Hangman Creek watershed. I recognize those questions are out there, but we have also found answers. Our Hangman Riparian Restoration and Conservation Program was developed through dozens of conversations with Hangman producers on what they would need to see in a riparian buffer program. The Spring Flat Creek program we were discussing was modeled on what we did in Hangman Creek. In both areas, we're providing \$300-\$350/acre rental payments over 15-year contracts for riparian buffers.

So far in Hangman Creek, we've enrolled more than 300 acres into the program, protecting more than 19 miles on Hangman Creek and seven miles along its tributaries. That matters. We listened, and we worked together on a solution, and that's paying off. ■

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CRP white paper published

Policy concerns and advocacy priorities from the Washington Association of Wheat Growers

Editor's note: This article is excerpted from a Washington Association of Wheat Growers white paper published in June 2026. The full white paper is available at wawg.org/wp-content/uploads/CRP-WA-Policy-Paper-05.26.26.pdf.

The Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) is one of the most important conservation tools available to Washington state farmers, not just for agriculture, but for public health, air quality, and environmental protection across the state's dryland farming regions. CRP is far from a program of niche interest. It is a critical economic and environmental pillar for the dryland farming communities of Central and Eastern Washington.

Washington State's CRP story spans diverse geography, from the high-rainfall Palouse hills to the bone-dry Columbia Basin. The program's most urgent environmental and public health role is in Washington's arid interior: the Columbia Basin, the Horse Heaven Hills, Douglas County, and the Tri-Cities region. Here, fragile soils, low rainfall (as little as 6-8 inches annually), and relentless southwest winds create one of the most severe wind-blown dust environments in the American West.

The Benton Clean Air Agency, in coordination with the Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), has documented that the Columbia Plateau's silty, fine-grained soils, once broken down by tillage, traffic, or drought, will not reform clods and are extremely susceptible to wind erosion. This is not an agricultural nuisance; it is a classified air quality emergency.

The Horse Heaven Hills: Ground zero for wind erosion

The Horse Heaven Hills, the rugged, semi-arid uplands of Benton and Yakima counties south of the Yakima River, are among the most wind-exposed dryland farming areas in the Pacific Northwest. Southwest winds regularly exceed 40 miles per hour, picking up soil from exposed fields and driving it into the



Conservation Reserve Program land in Eastern Washington. Photo courtesy of Melissa Greenwalt, resource conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service-Washington.

Tri-Cities metro area and the Wallula area downriver.

For farmers in this region, CRP is not a choice between farming and conservation. It is a choice between farming the fragile margins and facing regulatory enforcement action from Ecology for air quality violations. CRP enrollment of the most erodible parcels in the Horse Heaven Hills serves a dual purpose: it protects the farmer's economic interest by removing unproductive ground from farming costs, and it serves the broader public interest by reducing PM10 emissions that directly harm human health.

Farmers in this region have already implemented many best management practices — conservation tillage, cover crops, residue management — but some fields are simply too fragile, too steep, and too exposed to manage within conventional crop production. These are precisely the lands CRP was designed to protect.

The Columbia Basin and Douglas County: High enrollment, hard limits

Douglas County provides perhaps the clearest example of a region where the CRP program is both urgently needed and structurally limited. The county has historically had some of the highest CRP participation rates in Washington state, reflecting the large proportion of land that is conservation-priority by nature, including critical wildlife habitat as well as erodible dryland soils. Importantly, much of Douglas County is not mapped as Highly Erodible Land (HEL). It is the county's critical wildlife habitat — sagebrush steppe, native shrublands, and raptor habitat — that has made this ground eligible for CRP enrollment and makes protecting it so important. ►

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However, Douglas County has repeatedly bumped against the county-level acreage enrollment cap, a statutory limit set at 25% of a county's cropland. When CRP contracts expire and the county approaches or exceeds the cap, farmers with expiring land cannot re-enroll, even when their land is clearly eligible, whether for critical wildlife habitat values or for highly erodible soil conditions. This forces productive conservation land back into crop production, often on ground that serves irreplaceable ecological and air quality functions.

In 2020, when Douglas County producers were locked out of the CRP general sign-up, a temporary workaround was found using the Environmental Quality Incentives Program Sage Grouse Initiative, a program with very different objectives than soil conservation. This is not a solution. It is a symptom of a program that needs structural reform.

The Pearl Hill Fire of September 2020, which burned over 223,000 acres in Douglas County and destroyed significant CRP acreage, further highlighted the county's vulnerability and the importance of re-establishing conservation cover as quickly as possible. Fire-damaged CRP land must have a clear re-enrollment pathway.

The Palouse and transition counties: Where dry meets productive

The Palouse region, covering primarily Whitman and parts of Garfield, Asotin, and Columbia counties, is Washington's highest-productivity dryland wheat country. It is also where the most documented model correction work has occurred. For eight years, Palouse producers and the Washington Association of Wheat Growers fought to correct discrepancies in the National Commodity Crop Productivity Index (NCCPI) soil productivity model that were causing CRP Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) scores to dramatically undervalue steep-slope Palouse soils. That work, completed through a Farm Service Agency (FSA)/Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) collaboration, ultimately produced model corrections that benefited the entire state.

The Palouse matters in the CRP story not as the dominant narrative, but as the proof of concept: local producers with documented, on-the-ground knowledge, working with state agency partners, can correct national model errors. That precedent now belongs to every wheat-growing region in Washington.

Lincoln County occupies a particularly important transitional position. Situated between the arid Columbia Basin and the higher-rainfall Palouse, Lincoln County farmers often straddle multiple CRP program dynamics simultaneously: they face the Basin's wind erosion challenges in

their western portions while managing Palouse-type soils in the east. The county's five-year average published rate of \$54.59 and the 2025 proposed rate of \$69 reflect some improvement, but after the statutory 85% proration, the actual CRP payment is \$58.65/acre, and Lincoln County has historically been one of the counties most affected by National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) survey distortions. Crop-share arrangements are the norm, cash rent data is unreliable, and the actual payment of \$58.65 likely significantly understates what comparable crop-share ground is worth in Lincoln County's more productive eastern sections.

The broader Columbia Basin: Dry, fragile, and underserved

Counties like Adams, Grant, Franklin, Lincoln, and Benton share many of the same characteristics: low annual rainfall, highly erodible soils, significant proportions of land that barely pencil as cropland in average years, and communities that bear the public health costs of wind-blown dust. These are not areas well served by programs calibrated primarily for high-productivity agricultural land.

Only 2.1% of Washington state CRP acres are classified as prime farmland. This is the clearest possible evidence that CRP in Washington is doing exactly what it should, protecting fragile, nonprime land from erosion. Every barrier to enrollment in these regions undermines the program's core mission.

Key issues remain unresolved

- Rental rates that do not reflect the economic reality of dryland farming regions.
- NASS surveys that fail to capture crop-share rental agreements, skewing the rate baseline.
- Payment limitations frozen at \$50,000 since the 1980s, capping how much land can be enrolled.
- EBI scoring disruptions caused by the transition to RUSLE2/WEPS that have not been fully corrected for all affected regions.
- County acreage caps that have locked farmers out of enrollment in high-participation counties like Douglas — one of only about 13 such counties nationally — compounded by a waiver process that requires county commissioners to initiate, not the FSA county committee.
- Inadequate cost-share for mid-contract management, particularly during drought.
- No mechanism for local soil, climate, or land data to formally correct national model errors. ►

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WAWG priority advocacy positions

The 2026 House Farm Bill (the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026) largely extends the existing CRP program through fiscal year 2031 with a flat acreage cap and no major structural reforms. Congressional staff have confirmed that “scoring challenges” prevented the CRP modernization provisions proposed in the 2026 Farm Bill from advancing. This makes the conference process a critical opportunity to push for meaningful reform.

Based on the analysis in this paper (see wawg.org/wp-content/uploads/CRP-WA-Policy-Paper-05.26.26.pdf for the full paper), WAWG identifies the following as its priority CRP advocacy positions for the 2026 Farm Bill conference and ongoing administrative engagement:

Legislative priorities (farm bill conference) are:

- Increase the individual CRP payment limitation from \$50,000 to a level reflecting 40+ years of inflation and the economics of large-scale dryland farming operations.
- Restore the State Acres For Wildlife Enhancement program exemption from county CRP acreage caps or establish a formal statutory waiver process for counties near the 25% threshold.
- Require NASS to redesign cash rent surveys to capture and convert crop-share arrangements to cash-equivalent values for use in CRP rental rate calculations.
- Establish a formal, documented process for state FSA and NRCS offices to submit local soil, climate, and land data to correct national model errors in RUSLE2/WEPS/NCCPI.
- Require EBI baseline recalibration whenever a significant methodology change (such as the RUSLE2/WEPS transition) is implemented, to maintain comparable competitive access.



Conservation Reserve Program land in Eastern Washington. Photo courtesy of Melissa Greenwalt, resource conservationist, Natural Resources Conservation Service-Washington.

- Create a fire/disaster recovery re-enrollment pathway that does not count against county acreage caps during a defined post-disaster recovery period.

Administrative priorities (FSA/NRCS national) are:

- Complete the NCCPI model refinement for Asotin County as noted by NRCS scientist Robert Dobos and establish a regular review cycle for all Washington state soil map units.
- Implement drought-adjusted NRCS stand status review protocols that formally incorporate drought designation data and year-to-date precipitation when evaluating stand compliance, with FSA compliance determinations required to reflect those findings.
- Increase mid-contract management cost-share to levels that reflect actual costs for stand maintenance in arid climates, with automatic cost-share floor adjustments in D2/D3 drought-designated areas.
- Shift the NRCS stand status review schedule to include mid-contract evaluations at years three to four and six to seven, coordinating with FSA compliance determinations, so producers have time to remediate, not only in the final two years of the contract.
- Provide clear, advance communication to producers when EBI model changes will affect scoring, with sufficient lead time for enrollment strategy adjustment.
- Develop an expedited re-enrollment pathway for fire-damaged CRP land, with streamlined conservation plan updates that do not require full re-establishment documentation for stands that were compliant prior to the fire.

State-level administrative priorities are:

- Washington state FSA and NRCS should maintain the collaborative model established between the state offices and national technical staff for soil data validation, ensuring that future model discrepancies are identified and escalated quickly.
- FSA should work with the Washington Department of Ecology and the Benton

Clean Air Agency to formally document the air quality benefits of CRP enrollment in the Horse Heaven Hills and Tri-Cities region, creating a record that supports both federal conservation investment and state clean air compliance planning.

- FSA Washington should prioritize education and outreach for producers in the Columbia Basin, Horse Heaven Hills, and Douglas County on Highly Erodible Land eligibility changes under RUSLE2/WEPS, with county-specific guidance on Environmental Index impacts. ■

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Homes for wildlife

US Fish and Wildlife Service program offers financial aid for habitat establishment

By Trista Crossley

Editor, Wheat Life

Eastern Washington producers looking to bump up wildlife habitat on their farm might be able to find financial help from a little-known U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service program.

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife (PFW) program was established by Congress in 1987 and is accessible in all 50 states. With nearly 70% of all land in the U.S. privately owned, the PFW recognizes the importance of working collaboratively with landowners and that such relationships are critical for ensuring the health and sustainability of America's fish, wildlife, and plant species. The program offers free technical and financial assistance to landowners, land managers, Tribes, corporations, schools, and nonprofits who are interested in improving wildlife habitat on the land they own or manage. Projects focus on benefiting federal trust species including migratory birds and endangered, threatened, and at-risk species.

The program has been servicing Washington landowners since the early 2000s and has completed 15,000 acres of wetland and 25,000 acres of upland habitat enhancement.

"One of our major goals is to keep species off the endangered species list to alleviate regulatory burden on landowners. We understand the value of keeping working lands working, and that in many cases, loss of farming and ranching in our communities often leads to loss of species," said Nicholas George, state coordinator for the PFW program. "The program is voluntary by nature, which is something that I really want to emphasize. We focus on identifying shared goals and developing projects that are mutually beneficial to not just the wildlife and plants, but also the private landowners we serve."

Although the PFW program is designed to work closely with U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) programs, like the Conservation Reserve Program or the State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE) Initiative, there are some big differences. For example, there are no adjusted gross income requirements or rental rates. There are no practice



A partnership between private landowners, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, Spokane Conservation District, and The Lands Council re-establishing riparian forest along a stretch of Hangman Creek in Spokane County to reduce erosion and flooding, as well as promote wildlife habitat. Photo courtesy of Brian Walker, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

standards the program has to adhere to. Once approved for a project, producers sign a 10-year habitat retention contract. As George explained, each project is unique to the operation, the landscape, and the objectives and tends to focus on establishment rather than maintenance.

It's a little hard to pin down what the program can do because it has the ability to do a wide range of things. Some of the projects that have been funded by PFW include water efficiency projects, fuels reduction projects, stream or creek restoration, fencing, and seeding. In Douglas and Grant counties, projects might focus on sage-grouse or pygmy rabbit habitat. In Spokane or Whitman County, it might be Spalding's catchfly, which is an endangered plant. Other potential projects might cover habitat creation in remnant prairie "eyebrows" in the Palouse or in seeps that can provide late season water sources for wildlife. In irrigated farmland, the odd corners or outer edges of pivots could be utilized as wildlife habitat and help with connecting wildlife across a landscape.

"We're pretty flexible. If something is needed and we can show the need for the wildlife and the producer, that's



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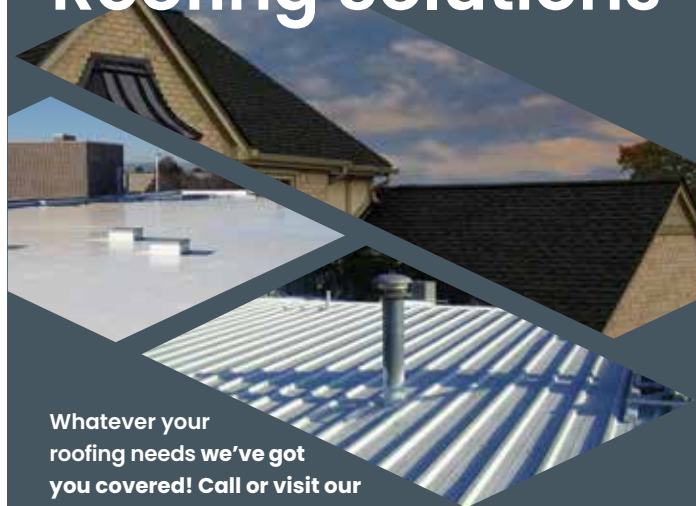


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something that we can discuss. Our goal in the program is not to take productive ground," George said. "It's worth a conversation to see what opportunities are there."

For producers who worry that creating habitat for a rare or endangered species may cause future headaches, George was quick to add that if a "rare critter" does show up, nothing beyond maintaining the habitat for the life of the contract will be expected.

"I think it's a good thing, that we should all be proud of, how ag and rare species can come together and coexist," he said. "Maybe the only reason that the habitat is still there is because of the agriculture, because as we're seeing, a lot of areas that aren't farmed anymore are not habitat anymore."

One thing to note is that the PFW program can't pay for practices that are already paid for by another USDA program. But as George pointed out, it can provide financial assistance to go above and beyond the requirements outlined in the producer's USDA contract. There could also be opportunities to help with a producer's midcontract management requirements.

There are no application deadlines for the PFW program. It runs on the government's fiscal year, so funding may not always be available. Producers who are interested in exploring PFW opportunities should contact George at (360) 522-0545 or email him at nicholas_george@fws.gov.

"Contact me, and we can start that conversation. I can then get producers in touch with the local biologist who services that area," he said. "We like to have those conversations early and then try to assist producers with finding the potential funding for their prospective projects, whether it be our own or through another partner or source." ■

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CHAIRMAN'S COLUMN



July features long days, longer to-do list as harvest approaches

By Kevin Klein
Chairman, Washington Grain Commission

In July, the days stretch longer than at any other time of year, and we, as farmers, try to utilize as many of those long daylight hours as possible. It can be tough to get up early with the sun and work late as the sun goes down. It can be tough to survive the heat all throughout the day. Those long, hot July hours are essential for harvest preparation and, in some parts of the state, harvest.

Pushing through the long work days is something I can do for a day or so, but for longer periods of time, I require a break during the heat of the day and maybe even a nap. I find that as I get older, getting enough rest is critical. Rest keeps us healthy, keeps the mind sharp and fresh, and, as a bonus, when I get enough rest, my family tells me I'm not as grumpy.

So even while there is a never-ending list of things to do on a farm that keeps growing, prioritizing rest is important. Keeping yourself healthy and well-rested is good farm management. That reminder to slow down and get enough rest becomes even more important as harvest approaches and the workload ramps up.

This year, my July was filled with spraying weeds, making hay, trying to spend time with the family, and a lot of fixing. Getting all the equipment ready for harvest is not an easy feat, and when you think it is all ready to go, it still breaks down. I'm reminded at the dinner table often, "Farmin is Fix'n!"

My 13-year-old John Deere S680 combine is the attention grabber this year. I wasn't expecting to find as many holes and worn-out pieces inside the feeding

and threshing area as I did. Parts are getting to be more expensive by the month, and I'm doing the majority of the mechanic work myself to help keep the repair costs down. Fuel and fertilizer prices have been high, but it seems everything else continues to increase as well.

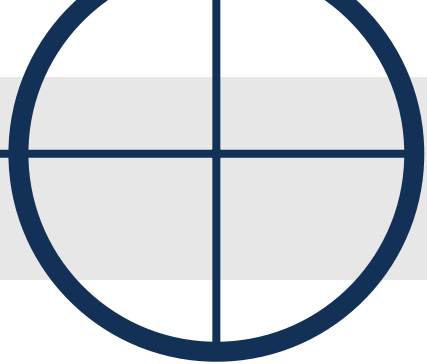
With as tough as the weeks of preparation before harvest are, I still always look forward to the harvest season. As dryland wheat farmers, this season only comes once a year. It may be long, hot hours, but when things are rolling smoothly along and the wheat is rolling nicely, it is a rewarding time of year.

This year, harvest started right after the 4th of July for those in the south-central part of the state. In Edwall, where I farm, we started harvest right around the third week of July.

While we are out harvesting, our staff at the Washington Grain Commission is busy hosting trade teams. I want to take the opportunity to thank our staff for the time and energy spent coordinating and hosting the trade teams that pass through our state each year. This continues to be a highly important part of our overseas soft white wheat market outreach and promotion.

Mid-July, I had the opportunity to welcome a team to my farm for a visit. Many of our friends from overseas don't get to spend much time on an actual farm, so seeing them walk around the farm, view the equipment up close, and learn about harvest in person is always so rewarding. It's a reminder that what we do during these long, hard days is important. ■





REPORTS

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Research rooted out cause of disease decline

By Maddison Dayton

Communications and Content Manager, Washington Grain Commission

When Dr. James Cook and his wife, Beverly, visited the Palouse last year, he was struck by the rolling, wheat-covered hills. Watching the wheat sway in the wind near Pullman, Cook theorized that the region's robust crop might be benefiting from a process in the soil that growers may not realize is occurring, one he had studied decades earlier in his long career at Washington State University (WSU).

Research takes root

Cook's curiosity about root diseases of wheat, particularly Fusarium root rot, always led him to their practical implications for farmers. Early on, he focused on how the disease affected wheat growth and yield. In studying Fusarium, a disease that impacts wheat growth and yield, Cook found that excessive nitrogen use — intended to boost yields and control the disease — actually weakened wheat straw, depleted soil moisture too quickly, and stressed plants, making them more susceptible to Fusarium.

Cook's advice to growers was to back off on nitrogen application, and that advice led to soil testing and measured application of nitrogen. With appropriate nitrogen use, Fusarium was easier to control.

As his work helping farmers battle Fusarium began to wind down, Cook started looking for something new to study. It was, surprisingly, a paper he read out of the Netherlands that held the key to his next area of study. A paper in which the beginnings of a hypothesis began to take root.

After World War II, Dutch farmers repeatedly planted wheat in the same fields to increase food production and noticed that diseases such as take-all declined over time. Take-all, like Fusarium, negatively impacts wheat yield and growth and is caused by a fungal pathogen. Led by curiosity, Cook and British scientist Peter Shipton located a wheat field near Quincy, Wash., where wheat had been grown continuously for 12 years, to investigate whether



Jim and his wife, Beverly, outside of their home in Western Washington in 2026.

the effect had broader applications.

The two scientists collected soil in five-gallon pails from the continuous wheat field in Quincy and from a field across the way with no history of monoculture, sometimes referred to as continuous wheat. Studying the soil samples, take-all was not found in the monoculture wheat field, but it was found in the field just across the way. The scientists began devising a test.

Recounting the experience later, Cook stated, "This was the most important experiment that I've done in my career."

Determined to test the soil's natural resistance to take-all after several years of continuous wheat crops, a

WSU test plot was secured. The test plot's soil was fumigated to give the scientists a clean slate to start with. Fumigating the soil allowed whatever organisms were living in the soil from the Quincy field to have free access to the new habitat with little competition.

As recounted in his book, "Untold Stories: 40 Years of Field Research on Root Disease," "a simple, four-quadrant experimental design was used to test for both carryover-inoculum and suppression, if any, of the take-all pathogen. This involved fumigating half of each main plot with methyl bromide to eliminate carryover inoculum of the pathogen and render the soil fully conducive to take-all, while the other half was left natural."

Spring wheat was then planted across the subplots. Each year the soil was studied, and yields were measured.

Time and patience

Cook and his team carefully watched these plots for several years, testing the soil for take-all. As they tested each plot, year after year, a throughline became evident — growing continuous monoculture wheat led to natural take-all decline, just like Cook had hypothesized was happening in that first field in Quincy.

As explained by Dr. Sieg Snapp, associate dean of research for WSU's College of Agricultural, Human, and Natural Resource Sciences, "Many researchers I worked for as an undergraduate were inspired by Dr. Cook, who was the first to identify what became known as 'take-all decline.'"

"This is a unique phenomena where, over time, given the right conditions, a beneficial bacteria (a *Pseudomonas* species) could become dominant and produce an



Dr. Jim Cook explains his research on take-all decline at his home in June of 2026.

antibiotic that suppresses the fungus that causes take-all. This interaction of micro-organisms in the soil is foundational knowledge for the entire field of soil health, which has recently grown to a global movement through interest by growers and scientists in regenerative agricultural practices."

As the study continued, Cook and his team discovered that when crop rotation was implemented in a continuous wheat field, the soil lost its natural take-all suppressant, though Cook importantly noted that there was "evidence that a three-year grass mixture will similarly maintain some level of suppression to take-all."

Cook summarized in his book, "I always made the point that it was best to use crop rotation, but that growing continuous monoculture wheat did something as well that we still did not understand, other than the effect is biological and transferable. My primary message was that take-all suppression after 15 years of continuous wheat was almost as good as fumigating the soil in terms of take-all."

Cook, joined by his entire team, authored an article for the Proceedings

of the National Academy of Sciences (PNAS) on the role of antibiotic-producing bacteria and the suppression of take-all with continuous monoculture wheat.

The article was selected by Philip Abelson, renowned scientist and editor of *Science Magazine*, for an editorial on plant pathogens in soil, drawing on the PNAS paper by Cook to make a case for the importance of soilborne pathogens of food crops, what he described as “safeguarding plants against the biological warfare that rages in soil.”

Abelson went on to describe to *Science Magazine's* international readership the role of antibiotic-producing bacteria in the development of take-all suppressive soil within continuous wheat fields.

While crop rotation is a critical part of fostering healthy soils, it must be balanced with practices that assist with disease control. The right protocol will be different from farm to farm, from year to year. Knowing that take-all can be naturally suppressed by growing continuous wheat is another tool growers can use to best plan for their farms.



Same continuous wheat plot shown below but in its 15th consecutive year of wheat. Jack Waldher, a technician, is standing between a plot of fumigated and nonfumigated wheat. Photo courtesy of R.J. Cook.

A legacy beyond the fields

Dr. Cook's legacy expands well beyond his work on take-all, beyond his dissertation on *Fusarium*, beyond his work revealing the genetic potential of wheat.

Cook was awarded the Guggenheim Fellowship in 1973, and in 1993, Cook became an inducted member of the National Academy of Sciences. In 1998, the Washington Grain Commission endowed the R. James Cook Endowed Chair in Wheat Research in his honor, most recently held by Dr. Ian Burke.

Cook Agronomy Farm was named in his honor in 2000.

In 2011, Cook was awarded the highly prestigious Wolf Prize in Agriculture for “seminal discoveries in plant pathology and soil microbiology that impact crop productivity and disease management.” He is one of 41 Americans to have ever been awarded a Wolf Prize.

Among Cook's nearly innumerable achievements sit over 200 peer-reviewed articles, two books, several U.S. Department of Agriculture awards, thousands of hours spent mentoring,



On the left is winter wheat in the seventh year of continuous wheat with supplemental irrigation, showing severe stunting due to take-all compared with healthy wheat where the soil was fumigated prior to planting. On the right, take-all on an adult wheat plant, with diagnostic blackening of the subcrown internode and mainstem only. Photo courtesy of R.J. Cook.



Initiation of take-all decline in the second year of wheat monoculture by mixing to a depth of 6" at the beginning of year one, approximately .5% of soil from a field near Quincy, Wash., cropped 12 consecutive years to irrigated wheat compared with the same treatment but with the soil from a nearby noncropped site (center) and no added soil (left). Photo courtesy of R.J. Cook.

and thousands more spent researching in the field.

His work was tireless; his accomplishments vast.

But perhaps the most impactful part of Dr. Cook's incomparable legacy cannot be recognized by an award or a hall of fame induction.

Dr. Cook is widely known among peers and growers alike for being someone thoughtful in his approach and unfailingly generous with his information. Cook's scientific achievements changed the way researchers understand wheat diseases and soil biology. Yet those who knew him best often remember something less tangible: his willingness to share what he learned.

Growers trusted him because he translated science into practical solutions. Students sought him out because he made time for their questions. Colleagues remember a scientist who advanced his field while lifting others alongside him.

Beverly Cook noted that growers "always came out for Jim (at field days)," because Cook had a particular knack for sharing his research in applicable ways that directly benefited the grower he was talking to.

Yes, Dr. Cook's scientific advancements opened doors for future researchers. His research fundamentally changed the wheat world in more ways than one, and standing alongside every one of his accomplishments

is a story about a fellow researcher he went well out of his way to help, a grower whose questions he happily answered, a student he lent advice to.

"I was an undergraduate student at WSU in the early 1980s, where I had the opportunity to interact with Dr. Cook as an agronomy student," said Snapp. "He was always generous with his time and would talk with me about his research on topics like harnessing biology to tackle big challenges. His work on discoveries that protected wheat health inspired me to investigate seed coatings to protect against disease. I interviewed him about this in 1982, which led to an article that was highlighted by the American Society of Agronomy. I started to dream about becoming a scientist, which he encouraged me to pursue. His systems perspective has informed my entire research career, where he developed actionable management strategies based on the best science that armed farmers with knowledge to address real-world problems."

Today, Cook's legacy lives not only in research papers, awards, and institutions that bear his name, but also in the fields that continue to thrive because of his discoveries and in the researchers, growers, and students who carry his curiosity forward. Like the wheat stretching across the Palouse, the impact of his life's work continues to grow. ■

Wheat Week

PROGRAM CELEBRATES 20 YEARS OF EDUCATING WASHINGTON STUDENTS

By Maddison Dayton

Communications and Content Manager, Washington Grain Commission

At the Washington Grain Commission (WGC) office, there are stacks of postcards from students across the state. Covered in drawings and filled with new knowledge, these postcards come from students in Washington excited to share what they learned during Wheat Week.

This fall, Wheat Week will celebrate its 20th anniversary, two decades of impact and achievement. Run by the Franklin Conservation District and funded by the WGC and, recently, Dairy West, Wheat Week is a five-lesson program for students in Washington state. At its inception, Wheat Week was designed to thoughtfully engage with fourth and fifth grade students, especially those who may not have firsthand experience with wheat, agriculture, and conservation.

“Wheat Week educators travel to schools all over Washington state delivering five fun and engaging one-hour lessons over the course of a week,” said Liz Scully, a Wheat Week educator. “These standard-aligned, hands-on lessons all focus on wheat and conservation, helping students learn about the importance of agriculture in Washington. Each day has a different focus, including systems, water and soil conservation, DNA, and energy.”

Throughout the 2025-26 school year, Wheat Week reached 25,097 Washington students in person and through the online Wheat Week program. The program was utilized by over 1,200 teachers in 23 counties across the state. More than 68% of the students reached by Wheat Week live in Western Washington.

During Wheat Week’s first school year, 1,381 students were reached, and Western Washington was not included in the program. From that first year to the 2025-26 school year, there has been a 1,717.3% increase in reach.

Origin of Wheat Week

Driven by a desire to share her appreciation for ag and to teach good stewardship, Kara Kaelber — now the district manager at the Franklin Conservation District — began creating a curriculum that bridged the gap between field and classroom.

Meghan Stewart, who joined Wheat Week as an educator in 2010 and is now the education director for the Franklin Conservation District, explained, “Wheat Week was created to teach students about conserving natural resources while connecting them to where their food comes from. Kara Kaelber wrote the curriculum after seeing a disconnect in the



classroom to food and farmers.”

Kaelber had been running a program called Water on Wheels, which had lost its funding, and she was looking for a way to keep programs like Water on Wheels in classrooms. Recognizing a connection between the water science and conservation lessons she’d been teaching and wheat, Kaelber pitched a new program to the WGC.

Shifting the focus to wheat, Wheat Week was born.

By partnering with wheat, a crop deeply ingrained in Washington's heritage and economy, Kaelber created a program that brings ag education to life while helping fourth and fifth grade students connect social studies, science, agriculture, and environmental stewardship.

Under Kaelber's careful guidance, Wheat Week began to grow and expand across the state. What began as a single person's effort to increase ag and conservation visibility in the classroom has expanded into a statewide educational experience that now serves tens of thousands of students in 23 counties in Washington every year.

Wheat Week today

The Wheat Week curriculum is skillfully designed to invite active participation and engagement from students throughout the course. Students build their own terrarium, plant wheat seeds, learn about the water cycle through hands-on activities, and explore different soil particle sizes. Students are also invited to thresh a head of wheat, make wheat gum, and extract wheat DNA, a favorite activity among teachers and students alike.

"Wheat Week is an invaluable opportunity for students to engage in environmental literacy," said Riley Gillan, a Wheat Week teacher. "Whether they get interested in our DNA extraction lesson and decide they want to be an agronomist — yes, it happens weekly — or they really enjoy getting their hands dirty and want to become a farmer, wheat is the vehicle for their learning."

Each activity serves a larger purpose. Building the terrarium and planting wheat allows students to see their hypotheses in action. By



Students extract wheat DNA and learn about the relationship between farmer and scientist during Wheat Week.

choosing how many seeds to plant and how much water to use, students get to see the real-time impact of their choices.

As they study the water cycle, learning how water moves from the soil to the wheat plant, the games students play help tangibly illustrate the never-ending water cycle. Learning through play, students better understand how water conservation benefits all living things.

Studying soil particles gives students an understanding of erosion, and extracting wheat DNA helps illustrate the connection between growers and scientists who work in tandem to create great wheat. Threshing a head of wheat helps illuminate the path that a stalk of wheat takes to become the food that Washington children eat daily.

With every element of this multifaceted approach working together to expand students' worldview, wheat goes from something students know of to something students know about. Their understanding of the wheat foods they consume daily increases, and a new respect for Washington wheat farmers grows.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when classrooms shut down, Wheat Week had to pivot. With classrooms closed and schools participating in online learning, Kaelber knew that Wheat Week needed to move online too.

Reflecting on that time, Kaelber explained, "My team and I got creative! We took a lot of online training on how to teach students online, and we created a do-it-yourself version of Wheat Week that we could deliver to teachers, and they could teach themselves during COVID. We created online instructional videos to accompany the supplies we would send or deliver to the teachers so they could give students a modified, slimmed-down version of our in-person Wheat Week program."

The hope was to reach 5,000 students during lockdown. Instead, the Franklin Conservation District sent out over 26,000 kits to teachers and students across the state. ▶

Today, the DIY Wheat Week program is still available online. This program offers a flexible approach to learning for students who are home-schooled, in a hybrid-learning situation, or teachers who are unable to sign up for Wheat Week in person.

The DIY program, though condensed, still shares critical information and an activity kit filled with all the materials needed to explore wheat, agriculture, and conservation. To sign up for the online Wheat Week program, visit the Franklin Conservation District website at franklincd.org.

Why Wheat Week?

Education has always been a pillar of the WGC's mission, and that mission includes providing the rising generation with accurate, accessible information about wheat and agriculture in Washington.

When you introduce a child to wheat through education, especially a child who may not have agricultural knowledge or background, you open the door to how their food is made, illuminate the food systems in progress all around them, and highlight the critical role that agriculture plays in Washington. Wheat education goes beyond highlighting wheat nutrition and health benefits; it's about contextualizing crops in a way that expands student knowledge of agriculture's role in society.

Washington state produces over 300 crops, and agriculture is a multibillion-dollar economic driver here, but as a society, we are increasingly removed from agriculture.

Wheat Week seeks to remedy that problem at the source. Julie Fredrickson, a teacher at Shoreline Elementary, shared the impact of the Wheat Week program on her students.

"Our school district shares a border with the Seattle School District, and we are right on Puget Sound, so our kids don't have firsthand knowledge of farming and the importance of the farms in our state. Watching the videos of the kids being interviewed about their family farms, the equipment used, the processes, and what



Postcards from students who participate in Wheat Week are sent to the Washington Grain Commission. These postcards share updates on what students have learned during their five-lesson Wheat Week course.

they produce is all pretty foreign to our 'city kids,' but such great learning," she explained.

Fredrickson reiterated that the Wheat Week Program, especially with the added partnership of Dairy West, "has also helped students to better understand that food doesn't just 'appear' at the store or on their table. It gives them a better understanding of what they are eating and what it took to make it ready to eat."

"Wheat education is so valuable because it helps students to understand the journey their food takes from the farm to the table and the many players involved in that process," Scully said. "It helps them to develop an appreciation for the farmers and all of the other people who make it

possible to feed our communities. It also helps students understand some of the challenges involved in this process and the importance of conservation of our natural resources, which will help cultivate thoughtful decision-makers in the future."

The undertaking of Wheat Week requires a tremendous amount of time and effort from the Franklin Conservation District and Wheat Week educators, but that effort leads to understanding.

"I believe the long-term benefit of the program is exposing thousands of students and teachers each year to agriculture, farming, and wheat in Washington state," Kaelber said. "With Wheat Week, we put a wheat stalk and kernels in the hands of those students (and even teachers), and we see the light bulb go off in their heads! They begin to understand that flour used to make their food is a wheat kernel first, grown on a large field somewhere by a farmer who invests their blood, sweat, and tears into bringing a successful crop to market each year. They understand farmers feed the world, and their food doesn't just come from a grocery store."

The WGC offers its heartfelt congratulations to the Wheat Week program for reaching this significant 20-year milestone. ■

WGC attends food aid fly-in

Grain industry leaders look to gain insights into future of Food for Peace program

By Jessica Pupo

Market Development Specialist, Washington Grain Commission

The future of American food aid was the singular focus of a recent Washington, D.C., trip I took in partnership with U.S. Wheat Associates (USW). Over two days, I joined Dalton Henry, USW vice president of policy, and Ryan Ellis, North Dakota Grain Growers Association (NDGGA) president, to meet with congressional staff, the World Food Program (WFP), and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials to gather insight on the future of the Food for Peace program.

For decades, Food for Peace (FFP), established under Public Law 480 in 1954, has been the primary vehicle for shipping American-grown commodities overseas as humanitarian aid. For more than 60 years, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) administered the program under the State Department. That changed in early 2025, when the Trump administration dismantled USAID as part of a broader “America First” restructuring of foreign assistance.

On Dec. 24, 2025, an Interagency Agreement (IAA) was signed allowing USDA to run FFP’s Title II program on an interim basis through fiscal years 2025 and 2026. But the arrangement is temporary, and the State Department retains meaningful oversight. A permanent transfer to USDA requires an act of Congress, which is a piece of what the current farm bill negotiations are attempting to deliver.

In April, the House passed its first version of the farm bill, led by Agriculture Committee Chairman Rep. G.T. Thompson (R-Pa.). The bill included language permanently codifying FFP’s move to USDA. The Senate Agriculture Committee, chaired by Sen. John Boozman (R-Ark.), released its own version on June 23, but notably left out any FFP transfer language, even though many members are supportive or at least not opposed to it. The Senate bill has not yet been marked up or voted on by the full chamber. Until both chambers pass their versions and reconcile them in conference, the IAA remains the only legal basis for USDA’s role.

Across nearly every meeting, consistent concerns centered on three themes were raised: whether USDA’s farm-focused expertise translates to crisis-zone logistics, whether tying aid to American commodity purchases creates a conflict of interest with humanitarian aid, and

whether USDA can rebuild the coordination infrastructure USAID once provided.

For Washington wheat farmers, food aid might not be the first market they look to, but its impact is measurable. In marketing year 2024-25, one of Washington’s top 10 export markets was a food aid recipient that received over 106,000 metric tons (3.9 million bushels) of wheat. This year, that recipient has received no wheat after being dropped from the list of countries eligible for food aid.

That shift is devastating to a country whose population’s ability to produce or access food is already constrained by ongoing conflict. Disputes over water and land access are frequently intertwined with the instability driving food insecurity in the first place.

After the dismantling of USAID, the Food for Peace program supports only seven countries, down from 18 in 2023, and excludes countries with some of the most critical humanitarian aid needs, like Sudan, South Sudan, Yemen, and Somalia.

For Washington growers, the FFP conversation may appear to come down to a single question: does the food aid list include the countries that rely on Washington’s soft white wheat? But the stakes extend beyond market access to whether a family in a fragile country has food to eat tonight. This connection was a focus in meetings, telling staffers that reinstating countries like Yemen to the FFP list would serve both people in need of food and Washington wheat growers. Making that case also means addressing the concerns staffers raised directly.

On USDA’s capacity, it’s important to point out that commodity purchasing, storage, and transport — the work of moving wheat from a Washington farm to a ship — is something USDA already manages at scale. Concerning on-the-ground delivery, distribution has long been handled by partners like WFP rather than USAID exclusively, and those partnerships remain part of FFP today. When a country’s need for aid is rooted in conflict limiting their ability to grow or access food, for those facing hunger, the source of the food matters less than the nutrition it provides.

As the House and Senate work to reconcile their farm bills, the final shape of Food for Peace remains unsettled. WGC, USW, and NDGGA will keep pressing to codify the transfer of FFP from State oversight to USDA and for alignment on the country list as the process moves forward. ■

WHEAT WATCH

WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION

Wheat market has something to believe in



By Allison Thompson
Owner, The Money Farm

For much of this year, wheat producers have been asking the same question: If there are so many bullish headlines, why hasn't wheat rallied ... more? It is a fair question. U.S. wheat acreage fell to the lowest level in more than a century. Canada's seeded area came in below expectations. Dry weather developed across portions of Western Europe, while the war between Russia and Ukraine continued to create uncertainty across one of the world's most important grain exporting regions. Individually, each of those headlines seemed supportive. Collectively, they looked like the beginning of a much more bullish story. Yet wheat futures are just now starting to respond after a steep two-month pullback. Why?

The answer has always come back to one simple idea. Markets don't trade headlines, they trade balance sheets. Traders can acknowledge weather concerns, geopolitical risk, and smaller acreage, but until those events begin changing production estimates or tightening available supplies, they often struggle to sustain a rally. Wheat is also unique because it is one of the world's most globally traded crops. A smaller harvest in one country doesn't automatically create a shortage if another major exporter can fill the gap. That is why traders spend just as much time watching Russia, Europe, Canada, Australia, and Argentina as they do the U.S. crop. The market wasn't ignoring the headlines, it simply wasn't convinced they would tighten the global supply picture enough to justify significantly higher prices.

That is why the latest U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report may prove more important than the immediate price reaction itself. For the first time in several months, USDA began validating some of the concerns producers have been talking about since spring. The agency lowered U.S. wheat production to 1.536 billion bushels, the smallest crop since the 1970-71 marketing year, reduced ending stocks, and trimmed world wheat ending stocks as well. Those aren't dramatic changes by themselves, but they represent an important shift. The conversation is beginning to move away from what could happen and toward what has happened.

That doesn't mean the market suddenly has all the answers. In fact, the report may have raised as many questions as it answered. While USDA acknowledged a smaller U.S. crop and reduced Canadian production, it also increased production estimates for both Russia and Ukraine while leaving European Union wheat production unchanged. That decision stood out because it comes after several weeks of headlines surrounding intense heat and dryness across parts of France and Western Europe. Many in the trade expected at least a modest reduction in European wheat production. USDA wasn't ready to make that move.

That doesn't necessarily mean European wheat escaped damage. It simply reflects the difference between weather stories and measurable production losses. USDA has historically been conservative when making production adjustments, preferring evidence over speculation. Traders often begin pricing weather risk well before it appears in an official government balance sheet. Sometimes those expectations prove correct, and USDA eventually follows with lower production estimates. Other times, timely rainfall or better-than-expected yields prevent those losses from materializing. That constant tug-of-war between expectations and confirmation is one of the reasons grain markets can become so volatile during the growing season.

Interestingly, the agency did reduce European corn production because of the very same weather pattern, citing lower yield prospects in France and Hungary. In other words, USDA believes the heat has already damaged the corn crop, but it is not yet convinced the wheat crop warrants the same conclusion. That distinction is worth watching because if hot and dry conditions persist, wheat production estimates could still come under pressure in future reports. The weather story in Europe isn't over. It simply hasn't been reflected in the wheat balance sheet yet.

The Black Sea presents a similar challenge. Every year, the conversation seems to center on how large the Russian crop will be and understandably so. Russia remains the world's largest wheat exporter, and another large harvest limits how aggressively buyers are willing to bid for wheat from competing origins. But production is only part of the story. Getting that wheat to export customers is equally important. USDA's report assumes



Russian and Ukrainian wheat continues flowing into world markets, but recent events have reminded traders that that assumption cannot be taken for granted. The ongoing conflict demonstrates how quickly export logistics can change. Ports, railways, storage facilities, and shipping lanes all become part of the supply chain. A large crop does little good if moving it becomes increasingly difficult or expensive.

Importers understand that reliability can be just as valuable as price. Even the possibility of disruptions in the Black Sea can encourage buyers to diversify where they source wheat. That doesn't necessarily eliminate Russian wheat from the export market, but it can shift incremental demand towards other exporting countries. Those changes often happen quietly, yet they can have a meaningful impact on futures prices over time. Markets don't simply trade how much wheat is produced, they trade how much wheat is actually available to the world.

That is one reason wheat has become such a frustrating market to trade over the past several years. Supply risks no longer come only from weather. They can also come from politics, transportation, military conflict, or government policy. The market is constantly weighing how much of that risk deserves to be reflected in futures prices. Sometimes those concerns prove temporary.

Other times they reshape global trade flows for months or even years. The challenge for traders is determining the difference before everyone else does.

Another piece of the puzzle is speculative money. Investment funds have carried sizeable short positions in wheat for much of the past year because global supplies have remained comfortable and export competition has been fierce. Those positions have been profitable, but large short positions can also become fuel for sharp rallies if the underlying story begins to change. A tightening U.S. balance sheet alone may not be enough to force funds out of those positions. However, if European production begins slipping, Black Sea exports become less certain, or import demand improves, speculative money could quickly change direction. Wheat markets have a long history of moving much faster once funds begin covering short positions. Those rallies don't last forever, but they often create some of the best pricing opportunities producers see all year.

None of this guarantees substantially higher wheat prices. Russia is still expected to produce a large crop. Global wheat stocks remain historically comfortable despite this month's reduction, and world buyers continue to have choices. However, the latest USDA report has moved the conversation away from "what if" and toward "what is." Lower U.S. production is no longer a possibility, it is part of the balance sheet. Smaller Canadian production is no longer speculation, it is reflected in the numbers. The next question is whether Europe and the Black Sea eventually begin telling the same story.

For producers, the marketing strategy remains remarkably similar. Markets rarely move in a straight line, and wheat has reminded us of that time and time again. Rather than trying to predict the exact high, use rallies to reward the market. Have target prices and working orders in place before emotions take over. If this report marks the beginning of a tightening global balance sheet, there will likely be opportunities to improve sales. If it doesn't, disciplined marketing will still outperform emotional decision-making.

The wheat market finally has something to believe in. Whether this becomes the beginning of a larger trend or simply another short-lived rally will depend on what happens next. Weather still matters. The Black Sea still matters. Demand still matters. But for the first time in several months, the balance sheet is beginning to tell the same story as the headlines. That is a meaningful shift, and one worth watching closely. ■

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.

Drilling for success

FARMERS WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE EQUIPMENT DESIGNED FOR CONSERVATION TILLAGE

By Trista Crossley
Editor, *Wheat Life*

Building on the success of last year's low-till/no-till drill demo in Franklin County, organizers are planning a similar event near Pullman, Wash., on Sept. 15.

"Last year's event was extremely well attended, and we heard from a number of producers that they'd like to have a similar event in Whitman County," explained Andrea Cox, conservation coordinator for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG). "The variety of drills that we are expecting to have should provide a wide range of options for producers to examine and see in action."

The event will be held at Clark Farms from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. with a panel discussion on the benefits and challenges of low-till/no-till practices. Lunch and refreshments will be provided, and there is no cost to attend. Registration

is required by Tuesday, Sept. 8. Growers can register at palousecd.org/post/no-till-drill-demo-day-09-15-26.

Working with Cox to organize the event are the Natural Resources Conservation Service's state office, Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association, and the following Washington conservation districts: Palouse, Whitman, Rock Lake, and Pine Creek. The event will be sponsored by the Bank of Eastern Oregon, AgWest Farm Credit, North Pine Ag Equipment, Almota Elevator, and B2B LLC/Booker2Bid.com.

While details are still being worked out, organizers hope to have four or five machines, including:

- A Cross Slot drill.
- A John Deere N543F provided by Papé.
- A Case 550T provided by Jones Truck and Implement.
- A drill provided by St. John Hardware.



- An AGPRO drill.

Wheat grower and long-time no-till practitioner Neil Appel has been lending his experience to organizers. He explained that being able to see a drill in action and speak with company representatives is very useful when a producer is considering implementing no-till or low-till practices or for producers who want to upgrade their equipment.

“The most difficult decision in farming is to figure out what to seed, when to seed, and how deep to seed,” he explained. “There’s no perfect drill for every situation. As farmers, we look at our residue on the ground and how do we deal with it? The idea behind it is to break up the straw, so you can get seeds through it. This would be a great opportunity for people to ask questions to their heart’s desire.”

Ian Clark, whose farm will be hosting the event, said even if a drill works in other locations, that’s no guarantee it will work in the Palouse.

“That’s one big reason we are happy to host this event. Rather than have to buy a whole new drill to test it, it is pretty nice to see it in conditions that we know are slightly challenging,” he explained. Clark’s family uses mostly minimum tillage practices on their farm. ■



One of the drills at last year’s event in Franklin County.

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Feeding the economy

REPORTS HIGHLIGHT ROLE US AG, GRAIN INDUSTRIES PLAYED IN 2025

Two reports are highlighting the valuable role U.S. agriculture and, more specifically, the U.S. grain and feed industry, plays in the national economy.

Feeding the Economy

In early March, 35 food and ag groups released the annual “Feeding the Economy” report, which analyzes the direct and indirect economic contributions of the entire agricultural supply chain to U.S. jobs, wages, economic output, and taxes.

According to the report, the ag sector supports nearly 49 million jobs and generates more than \$10.4 trillion in economic activity, accounting for nearly 20% of total U.S. output. Other facts outlined in the report include:

- Food and agriculture generate more than \$3 trillion in wages for American workers, with wages rising 4% year-over-year and 13% over the past decade, generally outpacing inflation.
- Food manufacturing remains the largest manufacturing sector in the U.S., employing more than 2.28 million workers.
- U.S. food and agriculture exports totaled more than \$177.3 billion, though exports declined by roughly \$5.4 billion year-over-year, underscoring the importance of maintaining strong trade agreements and expanding market access for American producers.
- The food and agriculture sector generates \$1.35 trillion in tax revenue for federal, state, and local governments, a 7% increase year-over-year.

The report also takes aim at the



ag economic impact by state. Total direct economic output in the Evergreen state is more than \$40 billion (that number includes agriculture, manufacturing, wholesaling, and retailing), with \$2.89 billion coming from just agriculture. The total economic output for the state, both direct and indirect, is more than \$98.74 billion.

In Washington state, total number of jobs associated with the ag supply chain tops 1.1 million with more than 553,000 positions directly in ag. Total wages associated with the supply chain are \$75.89 billion with direct wages at \$26.49 billion. More than \$38 billion were paid in business taxes associated with agriculture.

The National Association of Wheat Growers was one of the sponsors of the report. The report can be found at feedingtheeconomy.com.

Grains report

In September 2025, the National Grain and Feed Association released “The Harvest Economy: 2025 Economic Impact of the U.S. Grain and Feed Industry.” According to the report, in 2025, the U.S. grain and feed industry contributed:

- 1.16 million jobs.
- \$85.9 billion in wages.
- \$32.7 billion is paid in federal, state, and local taxes.
- \$401.7 billion in total economic impact.

The study defines the grain and feed industry as any business that engages in services related to the production, processing, distribution, and industrial use of grain and feed products.

In Washington state, the industry directly employs 2,168 people; indirectly, the industry employs more than 18,000. Those workers contribute more than \$90 million in state taxes. The direct economic output for the state is more than \$1.4 billion with a total output of more than \$4.85 billion.

The report is available at ngfa.org/industry-impact/. ■

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THE BOTTOM LINE

The cost of waiting: Lessons in failing fast

By Dr. David M. Kohl
Professor Emeritus, Virginia Tech

The business and economics of agriculture are not getting any easier. Many sectors of the agricultural industry are experiencing cyclical changes driven by shifts in the supply and demand for both outputs and inputs. Geopolitics, weather, consumer and societal trends, and the occasional Black Swan event or other unusual occurrence create extreme economic volatility and can throw a proverbial wrench into an otherwise smooth-running business model. Structural shifts resulting from increased global competition can quickly alter profitability, cash flow, and the ability to build and preserve wealth on the balance sheet, ultimately affecting the long-term sustainability of a business and the quality of life it provides.

AQ (Adaptability Quotient)

A management term emerging in this challenging, but opportunistic environment is AQ, short for



Adaptability Quotient. AQ is the ability to assess, adapt, and, more importantly, execute and monitor decisions. Success, both in the short and long term, requires making critical decisions, some of which will inevitably lead to failure. The key is to “fail fast,” learn from the experience, and avoid repeating the same mistakes. Observing and studying the experiences of others can also be instrumental in avoiding common failure traps.

Let us examine some of the most common failure traps observed over the decades through my experiences as an educator, business owner, and speaker. While this list is not all-inclusive, it provides a valuable perspective on the trials and tribulations of effective decision-making.

Leaving money on the table

The top of an economic cycle can often be the time when some of the most critical management mistakes occur. One that has been observed over the decades is that producers seeking the absolute peak in prices often have a fear of leaving money on the table. However, prices can fall very quickly and, in some cases, drop below the cost of production, resulting in losses. The proverbial “swing for the fences” or the pursuit of the home run can ultimately lead to a strikeout or failure.

A valuable tool in making these decisions is knowing the cost of production for your farm or ranch and understanding your breakeven price. If your business has multiple enterprises, enterprise budgets can be extremely useful in determining how to allocate capital resources, time, and energy. Financial sensitivity analysis that tests production, price, and cost assumptions can help establish guardrails, allowing for more objective, rather than emotional, decision-making. Historically, identifying marketing windows throughout the year for selling outputs or purchasing inputs can produce a series of base hits or successes rather than waiting for the perfect home run. Consistently making these sound decisions often results in positive entries in the profit ledger at the end of the year.

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Failing fast: The metric

One simple metric is often used in business enterprise analysis when deciding whether to continue or shut down an enterprise. Simply put, if an enterprise cannot cover its variable costs over multiple years (typically two to three years), then a tough decision must be made to shut down the enterprise.

Begin by outlining your variable and fixed (overhead) costs. Ideally, the enterprise should cover all costs and generate a positive profit margin. In the short run, covering variable costs while generating some revenue to offset fixed costs, although not ideal, may justify a “wait-and-see” approach. However, if revenues fail to cover even the variable costs, it is time to fail fast and move on!

Tight Economic Times

Over the years, positive economic times have often led businesses to expand their acreage or overall size. In turn, this expansion can result in placing marginal land and other less-productive resources into operation.

A grain farm in a prairie province in Canada illustrates this concept. After analyzing their operation, the owners decided to reduce the amount of rented acreage on several satellite farms that were only marginally productive and had become a logistical nightmare. Their cash flow and enterprise budget analyses clearly supported the decision.

Two years later, when I visited the business, the owners said it was one of the best decisions they had ever made. They wished they had failed faster or, as they put it, pulled the trigger sooner. By focusing on their core assets, they improved profitability, simplified their operation, and ultimately achieved a better quality of life.

The 96-4-50 rule

There is an old saying about employees and customers: 96% will perform well and create few, if any, issues. However, the remaining 4% often create the majority of the hassles. If you are not careful, you will spend 50% of your time dealing with that 4%, leaving less time and attention for your top performers and best customers.

Here are a few situations where failing fast may be the best course of action:

- Family members whose poor performance and lack of accountability reduce productivity and negatively affect the morale of other employees. These individuals are often value detractors rather than value creators.
- High-maintenance landlords who are constantly seeking rent increases or repeatedly changing the terms of an agreement, creating unnecessary time, expense, and frustration.
- Slow-paying customers who consistently delay pay-

ment for custom work, products, or services provided.

The key is to be firm but fair and to establish clear expectations and accountability from the outset. Doing so can prevent many of these situations. When expectations are consistently unmet despite reasonable efforts to resolve the issue, it is often best to fail fast and move on.

Fair and equal

A common failure in family business transitions is treating all family members equally rather than equitably. This has become an increasingly significant issue as more nonfarm heirs demand their share of the estate and often want it immediately. This places tremendous financial pressure on the family members who are actively operating the business and attempting to purchase it and carry on the legacy while dealing with tight profit margins and inflated asset values.

In these situations, difficult conversations must occur early. In other words, fail fast rather than allowing unrealistic expectations to persist.

A \$100,000 inheritance is often spent within 17 months, leaving little to show for it. Meanwhile, the family member who has successfully operated and managed the business should not be expected to buy the business twice, once through years of hard work and again through an inequitable estate settlement.

The control freak

One of the most common issues in transition management is the senior generation's reluctance to give up ownership, management, or control. Unfortunately, this often leads to long-term failure. There is an old saying: “To keep control, you must first give up control.” In other words, you either teach and share or ultimately destroy the business.

Sometimes the younger generation waits too long for the opportunity to lead. When it becomes apparent that meaningful responsibility and decision-making authority will never be transferred, they may need to move on quickly.

These are just a few of the common failure traps observed in businesses over the years. Adaptability Quotient, the ability to quickly assess, adapt, and, more importantly, execute and monitor decisions, can be a critical success factor in navigating both cyclical and structural change. ■

Dr. David Kohl is an academic hall-of-famer in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Va. Dr. Kohl is a sought-after educator of lenders, producers and stakeholders with his keen insight into the agriculture industry gained through extensive travel, research and involvement in ag businesses.

This content was provided by  AgWest FARM CREDIT



Don "The Eagle" Pierson waiting for a load of wheat in Kahlotus during harvest 2025. Photo by Travis Matthews.



Reagan Appel (9) helping her grandfather, Jim Hughes, haul wheat. Photo by Jim Hughes.



Taylor, Renzie (1), and Mitchell Powers at Powers Ranches in Dot. Photo by Lance Powers.

Your wheat life...

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reader-submitted photos!

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editor@wawg.org. Include location
of picture, names of all people
appearing in the picture and ages
of all children.



Mackenzie Doneen (16 months old) supervising harvest at Doneen Farms in Farmington. Her parents are Brandon and Shelby Doneen.
Photo by Brandon Doneen.



Connor McKinney (4.5) waiting on a truck at McKinney Farms in Walla Walla. Photo by Bret McKinney.

HAPPENINGS

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

AUGUST 2026

1 SCOTTISH HIGHLAND GAMES.

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

5-8 YAKIMA VALLEY FAIR AND RODEO.

PRCA rodeo, cowboy market, car show, beer garden. County Fair Park in Grandview, Wash. yvfair-rodeo.com

6-8 MOXEE HOP FESTIVAL. Parade, beer garden, live entertainment, food and crafts, games, BBQ cookoff. Moxee, Wash. evcea.org

8 WATERVILLE FARM & CRAFT

MARKET. Vendors offering homegrown/homemade items. historicwativillewa.org/farmers-market

13-16 OMAK STAMPEDE. Pow Wow, carnival, art show, rodeo, dances, and vendors. Omak, Wash. omakstampede.org

18-22 GRANT COUNTY FAIR. Ag exhibits, livestock competitions, carnival, arts and crafts, entertainment, food. Moses Lake, Wash. gcfair.fun

20-22 LINCOLN COUNTY FAIR. Rodeo, livestock, exhibits, food and games. Davenport, Wash. lincolncountywa.com/497/Fair-Rodeo

21-30 NORTH IDAHO FAIR AND

RODEO. Fireworks, rodeo, petting zoo, entertainment, carnival. Kootenai County Fairgrounds in Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. northidahostatefair.com

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

25-29 BENTON FRANKLIN FAIR AND

RODEO. Demolition derby, parade, live entertainment. Kennewick, Wash. bentonfranklinfair.com

26-30 NCW FAIR. Live entertainment, carnival, livestock sale, and rodeo. Waterville, Wash. ncwfair.org

29 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 or (509) 553-1014.

SEPTEMBER 2026

3-6 WHEAT LAND COMMUNITIES' FAIR. Rodeo, exhibits, entertainment, vendors. Ritzville Rodeo Grounds. wheatlandfair.com

3-7 ELLENSBURG RODEO AND KITTITAS COUNTY FAIR. Carnival, midway, hoedown, pancake breakfast, parade. Ellensburg, Wash. ellensburgrodeo.com

4-6 METHOW VALLEY RODEO. Saddle bronc, bareback, bulls, barrel racing, team roping and junior events. Held at the rodeo grounds, about halfway between Twisp and Winthrop beginning at 1 p.m. methowvalleyrodeo.com

11-20 SPOKANE COUNTY INTERSTATE FAIR. Livestock exhibits, rides, food booths, rodeo and entertainment. Fair and Expo Center, Spokane Valley. spokanecounty.org/fair/sif/

12 WATERVILLE FARM & CRAFT MARKET. Vendors offering homegrown/homemade items. historicwativillewa.org/farmers-market

12 CONNELL FALL FESTIVAL. Parade, food, vendors, car show. connellwa.com/fallfestival/

15 LOW-TILL/NO-TILL DRILL DEMO. Panel discussion starts at 10 a.m., followed by lunch and the drill demo. Clark Farms in Whitman County. Register at palousecd.org/post/no-till-drill-demo-day-09-15-26 by Sept. 8.

15-16 WASHINGTON GRAIN COMMISSION BOARD MEETING. Meeting begins at 10 a.m. on Tuesday and 8:0 a.m. on Wednesday at the commission building at 2702 W. Sunset Boulevard,

Spokane, Wash. Contact wgc@wagrains.org for more information or access to the virtual meeting.

16-19 OTHELLO FAIR. Adams County Fairgrounds in Othello, Wash. othellofair.org

17-20 DEUTSCHESFEST. German music, food and crafts. Parade. Biergarten, fun run. Odessa, Wash. deutschesfest.com

18-20 GARFIELD COUNTY FAIR AND RODEO. Livestock show, arts and crafts, games, live music, and more. Pomeroy, Wash. facebook.com/garcowafair/

20 PIONEER FALL FESTIVAL. Tour the Bruce Mansion, see pioneer craft demonstrations, antique farm equipment and tools, and horse-drawn carriage rides. Food and vendors. 11 am-4 pm. Bruce Mansion, Waitsburg, Wash. waitsburgmuseum.org/fall-festival

25-27 SE SPOKANE COUNTY FAIR. Cornhole tournament, soapbox derby, parade, fun run, truck pulls. Rockford, Wash. sespokanecountyfair.org

25-27 VALLEYFEST. Pancake breakfast, carshow, entertainment. Centerplace Regional Event Center and Mirabeau Point Park in Spokane Valley, Wash. valleyfest.org

25-27 GREAT PROSSER BALLOON RALLY. Sunrise balloon launches from the Prosser airport. Weekend also includes a harvest festival and farmers market. Prosser, Wash. prosserballoonrally.org

29 WAWG BOARD MEETING. Meeting starts at 10 a.m. at Washington Wheat Foundation Building, Ritzville, Wash. (509) 659-0610, wawg.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. Include date, time and location of event, plus contact info and a short description.

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Advertiser Index

Adams Tractor	37	Gateway Materials & Trailers	39	Tessenderlo Kerley	5
AgraSyst	11, 17	Great Plains Equipment	48	The McGregor Company	72
AgWest Farm Credit	69	Helena Agri	9	Valley Wide Cooperative	70
Albaugh	7	HighLine Grain Growers	45	WestBred	21
Austin Drone Solutions	45	J & M Fabrication	41	Western Insurance	63
Bank of Eastern Washington	43	Jones Truck & Implement	43	Western Reclamation	35
Barber Engineering	21	Land & Wildlife Real Estate	31	Wheatland Bank	71
Barr-Tech Compost	39	Limagrain Cereal Seeds	13	Washington Crop Improvement Association	45
Booker2Bid.com	61	McKay Seed	27	Yunker Brothers	23
Butch Booker	61	Microna Agriculture	47		
Byrnes Oil	27	North Pine Ag Equipment	35		
Class 8 Trucks	21, 39	Northwest First Realtors	23		
CO Energy	63	Odessa Trading Company	29		
Coldwell Banker Tomlinson	46	PNW Farmers Cooperative	63		
Coleman Oil	70	Pomeroy Grain Growers	30		
Country Financial	61	ProGene	10		
Custom Seed Conditioning	43	Romafa Metal Works	27		
Edward Jones	31	Rubisco Seed	15		
Eljay Oil	30	Scales Unlimited	23		
Farm & Home Supply	69	Spectrum Crop Development ...	47		
Farmhouse Fraternity	22	State Bank NW	46		
Farmland Company	41	T & S Sales	41		
Fluid Roofing	45	Terraplex Pacific NW	29		

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