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Against the Grain

Strength in numbers

I want to thank those of you reading this article who are members of the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers. We appreciate you taking the interest in being involved with our mission, which is primarily advocacy for our members and the education of our members.

The benefits from your membership dues include free educational programming, which I believe is second-to-none. I have personally found the Prairie Grains Conference to be one event that has been incredibly valuable to my operation. The On-Farm Research Summit, usually held the day prior, has continued to grow in attendance as well. We try to offer speakers on topics that are relevant and timely to our grower-members. The Marketing Seminar, held each year in the fall, continues to offer crucial information on a critical issue. The Small Grains Update and the Best of the Best in Wheat and Soybean Research are additional programs that have

been offered each year, free of charge to members. Just think of what all is included for one yearly fee.



Lobbying and advocacy on both the state and national level is another primary focus of our mission. Our lobbyist in St. Paul is currently Bruce Kleven, and he was very instrumental, along with lobbyists from other commodity groups, in finalizing Section 179 conformity in Minnesota. He is our eyes and ears in St. Paul.

As a member of MAWG, you are also a member in the National Association of Wheat Growers, which provides strength in numbers. The lobbying efforts of several individuals provide representation at the U.S. Capitol for nearly all states that grow wheat. We as a state organization could never do this on our own. In the recent past, the Market Facilitation Program (MFP) provided many financial benefits to our members. More recently, WHIP+ and CFAP 1 and

2 have been enacted, in no small part due to the efforts of NAWG lobbyists.

If you are not a member of the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers, I ask that you become one. For \$100 per year, you can help Minnesota's voice be stronger. My aim is to enable you to see everything which the organization is doing on the members' behalf. Become a member today; join online at mnwheat.org/growers/membership-info.

For those of you who are current members, my hope is that all of you will continue to renew your membership, and possibly convince some of your friends and neighbors to join our organization as well.

Be safe in your field operations this spring. 🌾

Gary Anderson
President, MAWG

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Anderson".

RATINGS SYSTEM

By Drew Lyon
Ag Management Solutions

Opinions can slightly vary on the optimal seeding rate for spring wheat varieties in the Upper Midwest.

“It depends on who you talk to,” joked J Stanley, an agronomist with Syngenta, “but it appears to be more variety-specific, and some of that is driven by genetic factors of a variety.”

Agronomists generally agree on seeding rates. According to Minnesota Wheat Vice President of Research Melissa Carlson, hard red spring wheat growers should employ University Extension recommendations: about 1.3-1.4 million live seeds per acre based off the seed tag, not based on bushels.

“You want to calculate your seeding rates based off of how many seeds per-pound each seed lot is, because there’s a lot of variation,” she said.

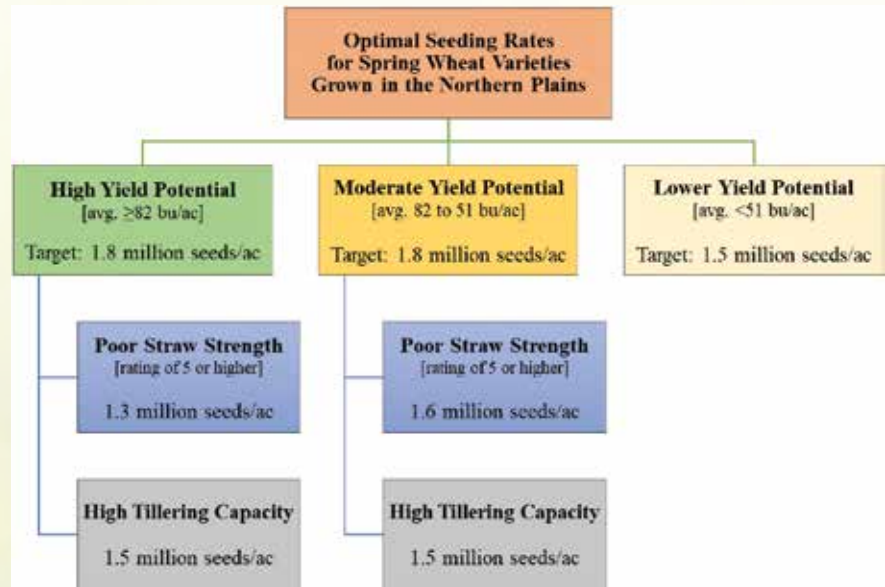
Through checkoff-funded research, Carlson said that although each variety is different, studies show that higher seeding rates won’t necessarily result in greater yields.

“We’ve seen just as good yields with lower rates,” she said, “and it’s generally better to pull your seeding rates back than it is to push them higher.”

Carlson said farmers should make sure they’re using enough nitrogen to promote tillering and early growth.

“That will help you set your potential yield a little bit higher,” she said.

Because of the early planting start, Stanley has also been



Graph courtesy of J Stanley.

recommending that growers split up their nitrogen applications.

“We don’t know what kind of rain we’re going to get coming up,” he said, “and you’d hate to throw it all in the ground and see it get washed away.”

Grant Mehring, wheat technical production manager with Bayer, says wheat farmers should have a well-rounded grasp of their seeding rates by knowing their percent germination, seed weight, and target population.

“Have an understanding of where you need get to based on how early – or late – you’re planting, or the productivity of your field,” he said. “Be responsive, and know the targets based on those things.”

According to University of Minnesota Extension Agronomist Jochum Wiersma, the average desired stand should increase by about 1% per day for each day planting is delayed, with a maximum rate of 1.6 million

seeds per acre.

“This increase in seeding rate will partially compensate for the decrease in grain yield, and the reduction in the number of tillers,” he reported. “For winter wheat, seeding rates should also be increased if planting is delayed to compensate for a potential higher risk of winterkill.”

Stanley, who said he shoots for between 1.3 and 1.5 million seeds per acre, said growers should also factor in the early spring planting conditions when considering seed rates.

“It looks like everyone will be pushing to get in the field earlier,” he said, “so go at a lesser seeding rate because we’ll have a greater amount of time to tiller,” he said. 🌾

TAMING THE BULLS



BY BETSY JENSEN



& BEARS

Long Term Plans

We will never produce enough corn and soybeans this year. That is the market outlook today. The market is aggressively trying to convince you to plant more acres. Wheat is losing the acreage battle, but we have enough of those bushels. It is corn and soybeans that need more acres.

It is unusual to start such an aggressive acreage war this early in the year. In 2019, slow planting progress caused corn to rally right into June. "Keep those planters going," the market was screaming, and farmers listened and kept the planters going, even though the calendar said to stop.

Today, high prices for 2021 crops are trying to encourage us to plant more corn and soybeans. Good demand and South American crop problems have left us with tight old crop stocks. USDA released its Prospective Plantings report on March 31, and it showed the market is not doing a good enough job. We



need record acres of corn and soybeans, but the report did not show that. We need even more acres than farmers are planning today. The market's job is never over.

All I can say is take deep breaths and focus on the big picture. Your farm is a long-term investment, not a get-rich quick scheme. Profits are not supposed to come easy, and right now profits are easy, assuming average yields. Mother Nature still has a role in our profitability, but our role in risk management is also important.

Since farming is a long-term investment, I often think about questions my future grandkids will ask me. "Grandma, why didn't you buy that land when it came up for sale?" "Grandma, why weren't \$12 soybeans high enough to contract?" "Grandma, why aren't we farming anymore?" What mistakes will I make today that will impact future generations of Jensen Farms?

We can reverse that question and think about generations past. Can I justify to my grandparents and great grandparents that I didn't sell beans for \$12? I can hear my grandma say, "Oh Betsy, you knothead." Grandpa would just quietly look down and shake his head. His silence would speak volumes.

We do not have profit opportunities every year. The University of Minnesota

hosts a database of farm finances called FINBIN, and there are many years when the average farm loses money. More often, farms will make small profits, but not enough to support a family and make debt payments.

in case my wish does not come true, let's sell some bushels at these decent levels and then we can sell the rest of our record production for even more. Let's make 2021 one of those rare profitable years in our FINBIN database. Make sales today, and hope for higher prices in the fall.



Maybe that is why we are uncomfortable making profitable sales. We are just not used to it. There must be a catch. We focus on what can go wrong with the sale, instead of focusing on what can go right.

My wish for you, and me, is even higher prices this fall. Wait a minute. Let's make that record yields and higher prices. Those two usually don't go together, but we need to dream big. Just

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ON-POINT

*Get to know
Minnesota Wheat's
vice president
of research*

By Drew Lyon
Ag Management Solutions

Overseeing Minnesota Wheat's On-Farm Research Network is a year-round job. Just ask Melissa Carlson.

Melissa Carlson, Minnesota Wheat's vice president of research, studies agriculture day in and day out. When she's not compiling data for the On-Farm Research Network, Carlson is working toward earning her PhD in plant sciences at North Dakota State University.

"It can be difficult trying to get everything done," said Carlson, who plans to graduate next winter and lives in Warren, Minnesota, with her husband, Steven.

In early March, she joined Prairie Grains Magazine for a virtual interview from her office, where she discussed her position at Minnesota Wheat, lessons learned from a year-long mission trip to South America, her off-farm hobbies, and how the wheat checkoff pays off for Minnesota farmers.

How she arrived at Minnesota Wheat:

This will be my fourth summer working with the On-farm Network. I got involved with Minnesota Wheat in a roundabout way. I did my undergrad at (the University of Minnesota) Crookston in agronomy, and I worked one summer at the NWROC in Crookston taking care of wheat breeding nurseries for the summer. I got to know (now-retired University of Minnesota Extension Educator) Russ Severson, who worked a lot together with Dave Torgerson. Russ connected me to Dave, who was trying to get the On-Farm Research Network going. In August 2014 I came onboard to help as a temp to help to get the on-farm research trials harvested. So, I was here for a little bit, and then came back a few years later in 2018 after finishing my master's degree at NDSU to work with Lauren Proulx coordinating on-farm research trials for the On-



Farm Research Network. Currently, we are down to just myself coordinating the trials with farmers and agronomists, but it's a great job, I love it.

On her role at Minnesota Wheat:

Right now, I'm busy coordinating trials for the (OFRN). I'm calling growers, getting trials together and working with our advisory committee and lining up maps. When we put in trials, we try to go there for planting to make sure everything goes in correctly and help the farmer where we can. Farmers are busy and have a lot of ground to cover, so having an extra pair of hands to help get the trial in is the key to success. After planting, we collect stand counts, soil samples, tissues samples and other data. Then, we help the farmer harvest the trials to measure yield and sample grain quality. After that, we put all the data together to share with farmers.

Our big way of sharing the data is through our On-Farm Research Summit in December, which is normally held the day before Prairie Grains conference in Grand Forks, N.D. In the past, we've tried to host the Summit with more of an informal, conversational tone to combine a discussion about the data with producer testimonies about their experiences and operations on their farm. Farmers are interested in more than just the data – they also want to hear from other farmers about the nuts and bolts of what is happening in the field from a practical management perspective too. Attendance at the On-Farm Research Summit has grown. This year using Zoom, it was hard to implement and preserve the conversational-style meeting that the Summit is used to.

On working through a pandemic:

As with most other meetings this winter, the On-Farm Research Summit was held virtually this past January. Overall, it went well. We didn't run into any technical problems, but we missed not having people in the room. That wasn't as desirable. I really like talking to people, so to be staring at a screen for three hours made it less fun and enjoyable. Next year, we'll shoot for an in-person or hybrid meeting if we can. We're all looking forward to that.

On the outlook for the 2021 growing season:

I think everyone's ready to get out into the field. Every year has its own problems, but it will be nice if we can get in early – the earlier we can get it in, generally the better the yields will be. There's concern about it being dry, but I think it's going to be a good season across the region.

A day in the life at Minnesota Wheat:

Each day is all over the board, and ebbs and flows with the seasons. There are a lot of moving parts. Minnesota Wheat's on-farm trials covers a lot of territory, from Baudette and Roseau all the way down to Fargo, Elbow Lake and Fergus Falls. It can be a lot of driving in the summer. If it's not planting or putting in trials, then I'm in contact with farmers or collecting in-season data, or coordinating meetings, or dealing with other random

Continued on Page 10



Minnesota Wheat VP of Research Melissa Carlson spends the growing season visiting with farmers and agronomists throughout the Upper Midwest.



Data from Minnesota Wheat's On-Farm Research Network (OFRN) can be found at mnwheat.org/council/farm-research-network/.



Melissa Carlson (left) is studying to earn a PhD in plant sciences from North Dakota State University, and hopes to graduate next winter.

As part of her studies with NDSU Agronomist Joel Ransom, Melissa Carlson (left, second row) traveled to Zimbabwe and Ecuador.

issues that pop up. Harvest always comes quickly, and then we're coordinating with farmers to figure out when they're going to harvest so we can be ready at the field when they get to the test plot. In the winter we are putting together research reports and presentations, planning grower meetings, and planning for the next season's trials. I also coordinate the meetings for the Minnesota Wheat Council's Research Committee, which directs the checkoff dollars that fund university and small-plot research.

On working with Minnesota Wheat directors:

I love working with our board of directors. (Area 1 Director) Tony Brateng, for example, he's been chair of Minnesota Wheat's Research Committee and he's been on the On-Farm Research Network's Advisory Committee from the beginning. The Council board members and On-Farm Research Advisory Committee members have been integral to getting the On-Farm Research Network off the ground.

The OFRN helps farmers test new practices on their farms and validate what university researchers are finding in a field-scale setting.

Her favorite part of working with Minnesota Wheat:

I enjoy talking to people, meeting farmers, talking about research and production and how wheat works. Not seeing and interacting with people this winter because COVID has turned in-person meetings into Zoom meetings has been tough. I'm really looking forward to meeting producers in the field again.

On her hobbies outside of work:

I used to go fishing a lot, but between school and work, I haven't had much time for that in the past five years. Instead, I've started running and I also took up knitting recently — that's been fun to make gifts for people.

On spending a year performing missionary work in South America:

As the experience related to farming, I came away thankful for our ag research and extension program. My trip wasn't based



Melissa Carlson (front left) gets to work during an NDSU researcher trip to Zimbabwe in 2017.



on agriculture, but you could tell there just wasn't the level of production research and farmer education about best management practices that we have here. Most farming knowledge on a subsistence farm is passed down from generation to generation, for better or for worse. We're blessed to have extension and research services through our university system to improve production management practices.

I also learned that, generally, the world is very kind. Most people are kind and the world isn't as scary as the news makes it out to be.

People are like us everywhere you go: They want to make a living and raise a healthy family. But when you visit other less developed countries, you realize

how blessed we are here to have even simple amenities that we take for granted – like clean, running water. Despite our struggles and hardships here in this country, we're very blessed with what we do have.

On the value of the wheat checkoff:

The wheat checkoff is incredibly valuable because it funds research to increase the efficiency and profitability of wheat production. The OFRN is partially funded by the wheat checkoff dollars

that became available when farmers voted to increase the checkoff from 1 cent to 2 cents in 2012. We wouldn't have an On-Farm Research Network if it wasn't for our wheat farmers and the checkoff, so our mission is the serve MN wheat farmers to improve the efficiency and profitability of wheat production on their farm. 🌾

This interview has been edited and condensed for clarity.



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Great Scott!

Wheat Council Chair sees all sides of row cropping

By **Shane Frederick**
Ag Management Solutions

Scott Swenson raises soybeans and corn on his fourth-generation farm near Elbow Lake, Minnesota.

But he also raises wheat, an important crop that he doesn't want to see diminished.

"I would love to raise more wheat," he said. "We're at the southern end of the main wheat-growing region of Minnesota. When I was a kid, there was a lot of wheat, not much corn. That has shifted. There aren't many farmers left that have a wheat drill."

When he moved back home after college to begin farming with his dad in 1984, Swenson said, the farm was two-thirds wheat and one-third soybeans. In 1991, after his dad retired, Swenson decided to start planting corn. It came at the expense of wheat, but he made sure to keep wheat in the rotation.

"I wish I could have more," he said.



While soybeans and corn remain the primary crops on his Grant County land, it's his passion for – and work with – wheat that has made him a farmer-leader at the state and national level over the years.

Currently, Swenson is chair of the Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council. He moved into that role on the

board of directors last summer (although he has yet to chair an in-person meeting due to the COVID pandemic). He also sits on the board of directors of the National Wheat Foundation.

"I thought maybe by getting active I could help make wheat a little more profitable," he said. "I thought it needed the most help."

Swenson previously served 11 years advocating with the Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers. His tenure at MAWG included two years as vice-president and two years as president, which meant four years on the board of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

While with the national association, he worked to promote wheat in farm bills and disaster bills, "educating elected officials repeatedly" to try to make a difference. He also served on the Research Committee and chaired that team for two years.

"I sat on the sidelines for about four

“ When I was a kid, there was a lot of wheat, not much corn. That has shifted. There aren't many farmers left that have a wheat drill. ”

years [after his MAWG terms ended],” he said. “Then I happened to get elected to the Wheat Council. That tied into being on research side with the National Wheat Growers.”

Minnesota Wheat CEO Charlie Vogel said Swenson is a quiet but effective leader who takes time to understand issues wheat farmers are facing.

“He’s an incredibly well-rounded board member,” Vogel said. “He gets the policy side. He has a deep understanding of policy and what it entails. ... He’s a progressive and forward-looking farmer who is willing to think outside the box.”

That includes supporting research that could go a long way in helping reverse declining wheat acres and improve overall productivity, such as finding the right fungicides to ward off scab. Swenson said he’s proud of the work he’s done on research committees.

‘A numbers game’

During his time with the National Association of Wheat Growers, Swenson spent time on and chaired the Joint Biotech Committee between the NAWG and U.S. Wheat Associates.

Wheat has advanced slowly in the area of biotechnology, but the desire to push ahead remains. Swenson was part of a negotiation between the United States, Canada and Australia, three of the world’s largest producers and exporters of wheat. In 2009, the countries put out a trilateral statement affirming their joint support of commercialization of biotech traits in wheat and aligning together against any potential backlash.

“Right after Monsanto shelved Roundup Ready wheat, we thought, ‘We don’t want to put the kibosh on everything,’” he said. “We split off and sent farmers to the major biotech companies and said, ‘We still want to work with you on wheat and biotech wheat.’”

In the meantime, Swenson endorses

research in gene-editing and, of course, efforts in breeding. The Minnesota Wheat Research & Promotion Council supports the work of Dr. James Anderson, professor of wheat breeding and genetics at the University of Minnesota.

“He’s had some nice wheats lately and is doing a great job,” Swenson said. “Wheat breeding is a numbers game, and maybe you’ll find a gem in there.”

Swenson has been on the National Wheat Foundation board for four years and finds the outreach that organization does interesting, as well.

“They wanted a spring wheat grower and looked to me,” he said.

The Foundation’s work includes a Soil Health Partnership, a National Wheat Yield Contest that also includes a quality component, as well as leadership training and education.

Swenson sees several benefits from growing wheat. He has his own tiling

equipment, and he’s able to do some tiling in August after the wheat harvest. Wheat also brings income to his farm in August, which is helpful. Since 2012 he has planted a cover crop in the wheat stubble.

“I think there are quite a few intangibles that you can’t put a number on,” he said. “I always follow soybeans (in the rotation) after wheat, and every year you can see those soybeans do better than soybeans after corn. You have to put that extra income toward wheat. If your soybeans do better, that revenue goes toward what wheat can do for you.”

Swenson hopes more farmers follow suit.

“I would like to see more wheat acres,” he said. “It’s declining across the U.S. but millers, bakers and food makers don’t want to see it go much lower. They have an interest in seeing it do well and keeping the acres there.” 🌾



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Minnesota farmer spreads the news with his conservation practices

After enrolling in the Minnesota Agricultural Water Quality Certification Program (MAWQCP), dozens of Bill Zurn's distant relatives came out of the woodwork to congratulate the longtime Minnesota farmer after his conservation practices were profiled in the local paper.

"We've seen very positive feedback from our landlords and family members," Zurn says. "Some of my long-lost cousins have come back and congratulated us. They were tickled pink, and we really didn't expect that."

Zurn was an original board member during the MAWQCP's inception, and he officially enrolled in summer 2020. He said he's glad the program recognizes the diverse farming practices of Minnesota and factors in how weather and growing patterns differ throughout the state.

"From Rochester to Roseau, there's a big difference here, and it's important we understand that," he says. "It varies so much across our state, and it's important to stress that."

Zurn farms in Becker and Mahnomon counties with his wife, Karolyn, and their sons, Eric and Nick. Together, the Zurns grow corn, soybeans, alfalfa and wheat. Though they had already been practicing cover crops, pest management and conservation tillage, Zurn credits his local National Resource Conservation Service with helping improve his family's production practices to become certified.

"They were excellent to us and showed us what we needed to do what we could change," says Zurn, who's also a director with the Minnesota Soybean Research & Promotion Council.

"They are great to work with. We as farmers have gotten a lot more out of this than we put in."

Farmers can contact their local Soil & Water Conservation



District to apply for MAWQCP certification and then complete a series of steps with local certifiers using a 100 percent site-specific risk-assessment process. By law, all data is kept private and only by signing a formal release can a farmer's name be released publicly.

After becoming certified, farmers like the Zurns receive a 10-year contract ensuring they will be deemed in compliance with any new water quality laws, an official MAWQCP sign to display on

their farm and other benefits developed by local MAWQCP providers.

"We applaud Bill for his dedication to conservation and for continuing to promote best management practices in Minnesota," says Brad Redlin, MAWQCP project manager. "Bill has been a champion of this program since the beginning, and we are thankful for his full-throated endorsement."

More than 1,000 producers are currently certified in the MAWQCP, covering more than 725,000 certified acres, and implementing more than 2,075 new conservation practices. Gov. Tim Walz has set a goal of enrolling 1 million acres in the MAWQCP by 2022.

"We appreciate what they're doing with this program," Zurn says. "Farming has changed. We're not perfect, but we've always tried to do the best we can – with technology and precision ag – and meet the standards."

Zurn says he's eager to spread the word about the benefits of the MAWQCP to not just family and friends, but the agriculture community – and beyond.

"For the time and effort, it's very worthwhile," he says. "We're proving to the United States that we're doing good sustainable and renewable practices here in Minnesota." 🌾

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Salt of the Earth

NDSU Extension agronomist left deep impression on growers, students
By Drew Lyon, Ag Management Solutions





Dr. Joel Ransom (middle) spent two decades 20 years as a wheat and maize agronomist for the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT). All photos courtesy of North Dakota State University/Chad Deplazes.

For many of Joel Ransom's pupils, the recently retired North Dakota State University Extension agronomist is far more than simply a teacher and agronomy expert. The relationships run deeper.

"Joel is amazing," said J Stanley, a former student and current Syngenta technical development lead. "He has a commitment to passing his knowledge onto others."

Ransom's research understudy, Chad Deplazes, described the gentle, understated agronomist from southern Idaho as akin to a father figure.

"I looked at him more like a father, to be honest – and I had a great father," Deplazes said. "But I've never found a guy who was more kind than Dr. Ransom. He was always invested in me,

invested in the program."

In February, Ransom retired from NDSU after nearly 20 years at the Fargo, N.D., university where he built the agronomy department into a world-renowned, modern agriculture research hub.

"It was a good fit at NDSU," Ransom said.

A world traveler, Ransom's vision and passion for agriculture extended far beyond the Upper Midwest, said his former protégé, Grant Mehring, who traveled to Nepal with Ransom and other NDSU faculty and students.

"His job was to support agriculture in North Dakota," said Mehring, Bayer's wheat technical production manager, "but he had a broader view of how farming works all over the world, and

that helped him do his job better locally. It was all about learning agriculture through a different lens and applying that back home."

Faraway places

Ransom already harvested a distinguished resume when he arrived at NDSU in 2002. After graduating in agronomy from Brigham Young University, he earned a master's and doctoral degrees – along with a plant pathology degree – from the University of Minnesota.

From there, he began a 20-year run as a wheat and maize agronomist for the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT),

Continued on page 18

which took him around the world. Ransom moved to northern Mexico, where he worked on collaborative research with the breeding program and trained emerging international scientists from 15 countries in on-farm research techniques. From there, Ransom moved to Nairobi, the capital city of Kenya, and continued supporting on-farm research activities. His research focused on best management practices, finding the right varieties and populations and ensuring the fertilizer programs met the needs of the soil and the resources.

Later, while at NDSU, Ransom regaled students with his international experiences working in agriculture. In Deplazes' eyes, Ransom's wisdom and traveling made him a figure resembling agriculture's version of The World's Most Interesting Man.

"Every day when I went in the field with him, he'd have a different story about places he'd been, things he'd seen," said Deplazes, an NDSU research specialist. "He was able to take me to these places. He truly understands other cultures. He's been to most countries in the world, it seems."

Throughout his NDSU tenure, Ransom offered graduate students the chance to see the world through different lenses by offering international trips to many of the same countries he visited. Only COVID-19 could bring a (hopefully temporary) halt to his travels with the students.

"You just didn't sign up for a grad student position with Joel," Stanley said. "He had a lot of traveling opportunities and wanted to share that."

Ransom and his wife, Patty, stayed in Kenya for 14 years. It holds a special place in their hearts – two of the couple's four children were born in the East African country.

"It was a fantastic experience," Ransom said.

The Ransom family then packed up and moved to Nepal. New



Joel Ransom earned NDSU's George Washington Award for his contribution to agriculture.



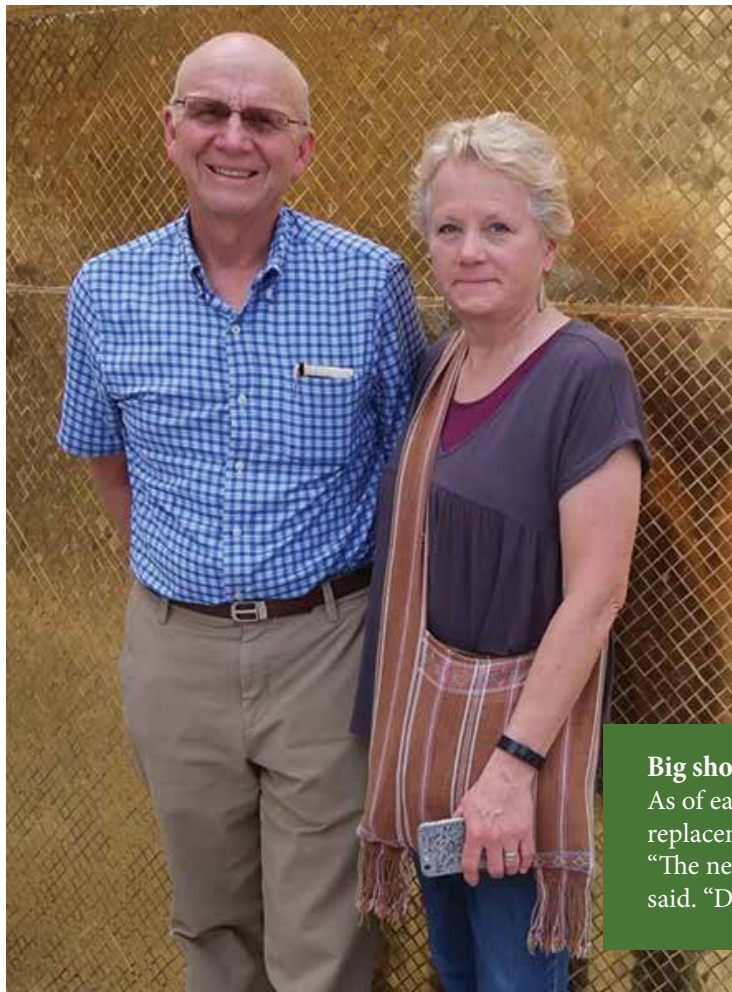
Pictured here during a trip to Chile and Mexico, Ransom was awarded the U.S. President's Council on Service and Civic Participation Volunteer Service Award in 2017 for his work in Senegal, Africa.



Joel Ransom accompanying his pupils and colleagues on an agricultural trip to Puerto Rico in 2015.



Joel Ransom helped make the annual Best of the Best Conference into a marquee event for growers and researchers in Minnesota and North Dakota.



Joel and Patty Ransom take a break in Thailand in 2019.

continent, similar research mission – this time, Ransom was a member of the national research program helping to develop new corn varieties and community-based seed production.

“It wasn’t easy doing that in the remote hills, but it was a lot of fun,” he said.

Finally, after two decades, the Ransom family landed in North Dakota.

“Three of my four kids were in college and we decided to venture back,” he said. “It was time.”

Building a program

When Ransom arrived on campus in the early 2000s, the technology supporting NDSU’s agronomy department still had a foot stuck in the last century. After borrowing combines and planters, Ransom methodically brought new equipment and concepts to the department.

“One of the things I did was procure more equipment so we could be more efficient,” he said. “We upgraded – those were the first steps – and with the new equipment, we

Continued on page 20

Big shoes to fill

As of early April, NDSU was continuing its search for Ransom’s replacement, but the department is well-positioned for the future. “The next agronomist is going to hit the ground running,” Deplazes said. “Dr. Ransom made sure there was no hiccup.”

Research scholar

Ransom's research – ranging from cover crops management to in-season nitrogen application – was published in more than 90 guides, including 70 journal articles, nine book chapters and 10 Extension publications.

could now compete for research dollars.”

NDSU's research was partially funded by the U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative and checkoff groups from North Dakota and Minnesota. Those funds helped the department look into how new varieties interacted with fertilizer nitrogen management and cover crops, among many other endeavors. It required a team effort, but under Ransom's tutelage, NDSU transformed into a first-class agronomy program by embracing new technologies: auto-steer tractors, drones, precision planting and sensors.

“He built this program up, from when he started to almost nothing in terms of research – and he built it up and enabled a top-notch research program in cereal, wheat, barley and corn,” Mehring said. “His program could do so much, and it was so helpful and important to so many people.”

Ransom could grow antsy sitting in his faculty office. He felt he'd best serve students and farmers by getting out in the field.

“Joel had an Extension job, but he did extension through



research,” Mehring said. “He didn’t stay in his office and take calls – he had an incredibly large research program. It was monstrous.”

Never one to micromanage or embrace the spotlight, Ransom shared his success with students.

“He’s so humble, he’d give all the credits to his students,” Stanley said. “He was always ready to get his hands dirty, but he’d always say (of students), ‘They’re the ones doing the work.’”

During his NDSU career, Ransom further solidified his legacy when he helped launch the Best of the Best Conference, a joint-venture research symposium with the University of Minnesota that’s become a go-to event for growers in northwest Minnesota and North Dakota.

“That has grown into a big, popular meeting,” Ransom said. “I’m pretty pleased to see it’s still ongoing.”

Growers and colleagues trusted Ransom because he delivered research results and insights without favor or agenda.

“Joel provided great value to farmers, and they looked at him as an unbiased source,” Deplazes said. “He was very careful to not give absolutes. The one word he used in his talks was ‘typically.’ When he said ‘typically,’ growers could take it to the bank that it was: ‘most probably.’”

Although in retirement, Ransom stays in touch with former students,

remains connected to NDSU and hopes to help with spring wheat and corn planting. He and Patty are involved with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and founded a nonprofit, Join Hands, that supports agricultural efforts in Ecuador.

“Joel’s everything you want in a mentor,” Mehring said. “He adapts to who you are and helps you be the best version of yourself.” 🌾



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A YEAR FOR CHANGE

BUILDING CONNECTIONS THROUGH DIFFERENT AVENUES

BY KAELYN PLATZ, AG MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS



As everyone is itchy to get back to some normalcy, Minnesota Wheat used COVID-19 as an opportunity to expand their horizons.

Each year, Minnesota Wheat holds its annual Minnesota Wheat Open for industry and members to connect and raise awareness for the organization's mission. However, this year they are trying something new.

"We are changing it up this year," says Coreen Berdahl, vice president of operations at Minnesota Wheat. "We are not doing a tournament in one location. We are doing two locations and we are doing two-man scrambles instead."

With numbers changing from year to year, Minnesota Wheat board members wanted to engage Minnesota Wheat farmers from across the wheat growing region in a new way.

Therefore, they chose two locations and eliminated the competition of the tournament.

"If you aren't an avid golfer, the word 'tournament' might scare you and deter you from golfing versus if you are a grower that golfs one or two rounds a year. A fun day with no tournament pressure is something you probably would enjoy," Berdahl says. "It's nine holes and you aren't looking at a one-day commitment – you are only looking at a

couple hours."

Besides golfing, Minnesota Wheat's Open provides the opportunity to network.

"It's a chance for Minnesota Wheat to say 'thank you' to our industry partners and our members," Berdahl says. "It gets growers and industry to come together and hopefully do some networking while they are enjoying a round of golf."

The first Minnesota Wheat Open is set to be at the Hawley Golf Club on July 7 from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m.

A second Minnesota Wheat Open will be held later in the month at a location to be determined.

Farmfest debut

If changing up its Minnesota Wheat Open wasn't enough, Minnesota Wheat decided to branch out and try something new for the return of in-person Farmfest Aug. 3-5 in Morgan, Minnesota. Minnesota Wheat will make its inaugural appearance at one of the Midwest's largest agriculture trade shows.

"We have not gone to Farmfest before," Berdahl says. "Minnesota Wheat has

SAVE THE DATES

**Minnesota Wheat Open
Hawley Golf Club
July 7, 2021**

**Minnesota Wheat Open
Location and date TBD**

**More details to follow at
mnwheat.org.**

not had a booth or anything at Farmfest, so this would be a new opportunity for us to meet with growers in southern Minnesota."

Minnesota Wheat plans to have a booth in collaboration with the Agricultural Utilization Research Institute (AURI).

"There are not a lot of wheat growers

in southern Minnesota,” Berdahl says. “However, our focus is to let growers know what Minnesota Wheat does and can do for growers down there.”

Aside from connecting with farmers in southern Minnesota, a goal of Minnesota Wheat is to provide information and dispel myths about implementing wheat into crop rotations.

“A lot of people say wheat itself isn’t profitable,” Berdahl says, “but if you put it into a cropping system, wheat has benefits that it can offer the other crops that it follows or precedes that can benefit the farm as a whole.”

With many changes on the horizon, Minnesota Wheat is excited to be able to better connect with growers as gathering restrictions ease this summer.

“We are excited to get back in-person and meeting with growers,” Berdahl says. “We are an organization that is very connected with our growers, so to get back and talk to them face to face is very important to us.” 🌾



Minnesota Wheat is hosting a pair of golf events in July in anticipation of a full return of in-person events.



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- ND17009GT Soybean
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TACKLING TRANSPORTATION

SHIPPING'S IMPACT ON AGRICULTURE COMING TO THE FOREFRONT



BY SHANE FREDERICK, AG MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

When the grain gets to the elevator, terminal, what happens next? Should that really matter to the grower?

It absolutely should, say experts who follow agricultural transportation, which has had plenty of challenges – if not, full-blown crises – especially in the time of COVID.

Whether the grains are transported by truck or train, bulk loaded or containerized, shipped domestically or overseas, there are many challenges and opportunities that everyone along the supply chain should be paying attention to.

“We tend to be very grower-focused,” said Charlie Vogel, Minnesota Wheat’s CEO. “So we need to be conscious of the grain to the terminal – but also from the terminal and, ultimately to, the consumers. We have a very good understanding of the terminal. You can see it. It’s consistent. From the terminal

on, it’s complicated. We’re not exposed to it as much, and we need to take transportation into consideration.”

There has been more exposure of late. A massive ocean carrier, the Ever Given, gets stuck in the Suez Canal. Dozens of ships are bottlenecked outside the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, waiting for their imports from Asia to be unloaded. Shippers in the Midwest are struggling to find containers for their specialty crops, while commodity exporters are concerned about rising rail rates.

Suddenly, shipping and transportation – and their impact on the world of agriculture – are starting to make national and international headlines.

“These can have huge impacts down the road,” said Peter Friedmann, executive director of the Agriculture Transportation Coalition (AgTC), a group that represents the concerns of

U.S. ag exporters.

A major concern of the AgTC currently is the container shipping crisis, as some ocean carriers have refused to take on ag exports. Instead of sending containers inland for Midwest processors to fill with their orders, the boxes are sent back to Asia empty for faster turnaround of higher-priced consumer goods. Those practices are being investigated by the Federal Maritime Commission.

This crisis, first brought to light by the Minnesota-based Specialty Soya and Grains Alliance, has delayed delivery of U.S.-grown and processed ingredients to foreign food manufacturers and has caused key West Coast ports to become overly congested with the inflow of import cargo.

According to data from Panjiva, a global trade data company, containerized wheat exports peaked at nearly 3,000 TEUs (20-foot equivalent units)

in August 2020 but have dropped considerably since October, falling from about 2,000 TEUs that month to a little more than 500 in March.

“For all agriculture and forest products, there’s nothing that can’t be sourced somewhere else in the world,” Friedmann said. “So if we don’t deliver affordably and dependably – even if our products are superior – those foreign buyers have plenty of other place to go. ...

“If it gets bad enough, if it goes on long enough, even if the customer understands what’s happening, they still need the product.”

A reliable container shipping situation could help Minnesota wheat growers in the future, Vogel said.

“There are opportunities there if we have options to grow and develop specialty markets for wheat,” he said.

Riding the rails

There are challenges in rail, a crucial part of the supply chain, as well.

In August, U.S. Wheat Associates’ Transportation Working Group filed public comments to the Surface Transportation Board, supporting proposed changes in rail rate review in response to rapid rate increases.


Many eyes are also on the proposed merger of two major railroads, as Canadian Pacific plans to acquire Kansas City Southern. That will create the first single railroad network spanning the United States, Canada and Mexico.

Making sure that U.S. grains and other crops can be shipped efficiently is also an infrastructure issue. That includes improving roads, bridges and dams – after all, 70% of Minnesota wheat is for domestic use in the U.S. – as well as modernizing channels for export. The Mississippi River system, which has locks and flood controls, is in need of updating and deepening. The Port of Duluth, from which 15% of Minnesota wheat is moved and which is the gateway for North Dakota durum to Europe, continues to

be developed.

“There has to be awareness because transportation directly affects basis,” Vogel said. “Issues at the (Pacific Northwest ports) affect us. ... So building relationships, developing relationships are important, so when there is a hot-button issue, they know us.”

With an active membership base being key to effective advocacy and policy making, wheat producers in Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Montana are encouraged to be active members of their state commissions and councils and their grower organizations. Both U.S. Wheat Associates and the National Association of Wheat Growers actively track transportation issues and advocate on behalf of producers, and that work also impacts individual growers at the state levels. 🌾



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CAPITOL COMPROMISES

In the session's final stretch, bipartisan concessions may win out

By Drew Lyon, Ag Management Solutions

In the final weeks of Minnesota's 2021 Legislative Session, bipartisan negotiations surrounding Gov. Walz's biennial budget will be the talk of the town in St. Paul, with the ramifications reverberating throughout Greater Minnesota.

Though both parties' budget proposals are roughly in the "same ballpark," according to Minnesota Association of Wheat Growers lobbyist Bruce Kleven, key differences remain, particularly on taxes and the governor's pandemic emergency powers.

"I expect the Senate GOP will try to weave some limitations on the governor's emergency powers into the budget process," he said.

In late February, Minnesota Management and Budget released the February Forecast, projecting a \$1.6 billion surplus, a much rosier financial outlook than once feared. The surplus was credited to a higher revenue forecast, lower state spending and an increased surplus for the current fiscal year. Additionally, the state is set to receive \$2.6 billion in federal stimulus funds, with local governments eligible for \$2.2 billion.

"This budget forecast is good news for Minnesota," the governor said. "It proves that the measures we took during the pandemic have both saved lives and protected the economy."

Earlier in the session, the governor unveiled a \$52 billion biennial (two-year) budget proposal to state lawmakers, later amending it to reduce tax increases on cigarettes, investments and large estates. House Democrats responded with a \$52.52 billion budget proposal, including \$11.5 million for agriculture and \$323 million in health and human services. Senate Republicans countered the governor with their own \$51.9 billion proposal, highlighted by \$591 million in Paycheck Protection Program (PPP) tax relief and \$40 million in rural broadband investments.

"We are focused on keeping the budget in control considering all the one-time money coming into the state from federal funds and stimulus checks," GOP Senate Majority Leader Paul Gazelka (East Gull Lake) said. "We are helping our businesses recover and get the economy moving again after the prolonged closures to mitigate COVID. And, we are giving families the support

they need to prosper in our state."

PPP tax conformity, which would aid small businesses, has been a top policy priority for MAWG this session. The Senate passed a bill by a 55-12 margin that would bring Minnesota into PPP federal conformity. The vast majority of legislators voting against the bill came from metro Democrats; the bill is currently languishing in the House.

"The Senate vote was bipartisan, so we're still hoping to see the PPP loan forgiveness aligned with the federal tax code," Kleven said.

MAWG postponed its Hill Visits this year, but Kleven has been in regular contact with farmer-leaders. In early March, he joined the ag community in testifying on behalf of MAWG in support of continued funding of the Northern Crops Institute,

which wasn't included in the governor's original ag finance bill. However, \$47,000 in NCI funding was later included in the administration's supplemental ag finance bill.

The regular session is set to end by May 17. But as the budget discussions heat up this spring during conference committee process, a standoff over the governor's emergency powers – which Walz has refused to relinquish and Republicans are attempting to curb – could become a pivotal

“As legislative sessions near the end, the stakes always become higher,” Kleven said. “Everything is on the table moving forward.”

annual Hill Visits.

“(Legislators) were very interested in sustainable ag, no till, cover crops and carbon credits,” Vogel said.

“That is where I think we’re going to have potential influence.”

Wheat advocates met with Sen. Tina Smith, Rep. Angie Craig and Rep. Michelle Fischbach. Fischbach, who serves on the House Ag Committee, met with Minnesota Wheat for the first time since winning the Seventh Congressional District election last November.

Anderson said the visits underscored the impact MAWG members can have when their voices are heard by lawmakers. With negotiations for the next Farm Bill to begin in earnest, membership in MAWG is more crucial than ever.

“It’s going to be important for our members to be active through the next year in Minnesota,” Anderson said. “Involvement is so important.” 🌾



Minnesota Wheat farmer-leaders talk policy priorities with Rep. Angie Craig.

factor in negotiations.

“The GOP wants a seat at the table in these discussions around government responses to the pandemic,” Kleven said.

To politicos observing the daily operations in St. Paul, there’s no such thing as small matters.

Virtual Visits

In mid-March, farmer-leaders, led by MAWG President Gary Anderson, met with a bipartisan group of legislators to discuss priorities for the nation’s wheat farmers. Topics included: supporting the farm economy, trade and market access, and climate and sustainability policy.

Minnesota Wheat Executive Director Charlie Vogel and VP of Operations Coreen Berdahl joined farmer-leaders during the calls, which were held virtually in conjunction with the National Association of Wheat Growers’



FULL COOPERATION

South Dakota Wheat groups work together to improve farmer profitability

By Bailey Grubish, Ag Management Solutions

“Collaboration” is the word South Dakota Wheat Commission, (SDWC) Executive Director Reid Christopherson uses to describe his organization’s relationship with South Dakota Wheat Inc. (SDWI).

“It’s very difficult for any single state to make a significant impact on changing attitudes or marketing,” Christopherson said, “so anytime that you can collaborate efforts, it’s certainly an investment in the future.

South Dakota Wheat is comprised of two organizations – SDWC and SDWI – that work together while also supporting separate, unique causes.

“The South Dakota Wheat Commission is totally focused on the contributing the wheat producers and investing their checkoff investments for the future of the industry,” Christopherson said. “The wheat commission is about process dollars managed and produced by producers.”

Celebrating 60 years, the SDWC has worked to foster the health, prosperity and general welfare of state residents by protecting and stabilizing the wheat industry and areas producing wheat. The 1961 South Dakota Wheat Resources Act established this requirement.

“It kind of represents an era when

checkoff programs became popular and were implemented,” Christopherson said of the milestone year. “So (after) 60 years, some (programs) are a little older and some a little younger and traces back to the concept of when that reinvestment was created.”

The Wheat Commission focuses on three areas: export market development, domestic promotion and research using checkoff dollars. The SDWC has two employees and contracts out the rest of the work.

“We don’t do research on our own or market development on our own,” Christopherson said. “Most of our efforts are in collaboration with other organizations.”

‘Looking ahead’

SDWC works in conjunction with the U.S. Wheat Associates National Wheat Foundation to connect with the other 17 states with wheat checkoff funds. Other funds come from the United States Department of Agriculture to partner with the state commission funds.

“Always wish we had more that we could invest, but you work within the constraints of your billfold,” Christopherson said.

The various funds allow the SDWC

to work with organizations throughout the world for promotion of wheat exports and the baking instruction and development of wheat. There are branches of U.S. wheat associations throughout Africa, Asia, Australia, South America, Europe and other various locations where representatives are promoting the advantages of U.S.-grown wheat.

“The big thing there, that we continue to push, is there are a lot of places that grow wheat in the world, but that doesn’t make all wheat the same,” Christopherson said. “We create programs to produce the best wheat and the best quality. The best isn’t always the cheapest.”

The relationship with USDA helps maintain stringent standards and minimum contamination in the wheat production for quality wheat product exports.

Consumer education is another part of SDWC, which is predominantly done through collaboration.

The Wheat Foods Council, Home Baking Association, Mitchell Technical College culinary science department and Northern Crops Institute are a few of the partners, along with flour mills, bakers, wheat commissions and growers that

SDWC works with.

“(We’re) looking for how we can partner with other organizations in telling the story of wheat as a food and the value of it, not only domestically, but globally as well,” Christopherson said.

The field-to-table approach is used to tell the story, and the wheat commission also works to debunk myths about gluten and share information on whole grain diets and the significance of maintaining a good diet.

Research done by the wheat commission focuses on higher yields, improving disease-resistant varieties and higher wheat quality.

“We’re constantly looking ahead trying to anticipate what disease pressures are on the horizon and trying to develop a new variety with disease protection and the yield being there,” Christopherson said.

Rural representation

About a third or more of expenditures go to South Dakota State University for wheat research, specifically on spring and winter wheat. Some of the funding is used for laboratory equipment and field equipment that is needed to conduct

research.

“Our goals really don’t change, again set forward by the state statutes,” Christopherson said. “Building on what was accomplished previously, but still pretty true to the checkoff. The fundamentals remain the same, but the tactics and the year-to-year issues can vary.”

SDWI is the membership association providing its members with strategies, thoughtful perspectives and global opportunities on all aspects of agriculture production and rural life. SDWI is also a member of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

“We’re the lobby arm of the wheat industry for South Dakota, and we focus on representation, communication and education,” said Executive Director of South Dakota Wheat Inc. Caren Assman. “We represent our people in Washington D.C. and at the capital at the local level.”

SDWI worked on the Farm Bill at the federal level and property taxes at the local level, for example.

Other focuses are on market development, risk management and education.

Market development and legislation

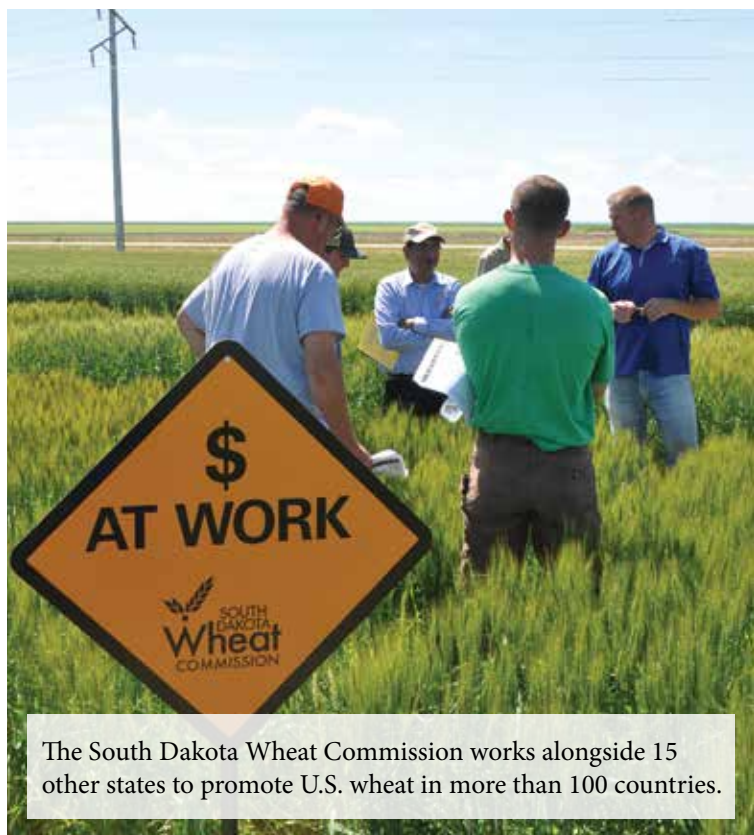
work include funding research, conservation projects, crop insurance, transportation and other challenges the wheat industry experiences.

Risk management done by SDWI aims to provide farmers with confidence in rapidly changing agriculture, focusing on production, marketing, finances, legal issues and human resources. For education, SDWI provides 25-30 in-person and online seminars annually for members and nonmembers, as well as continuous education course credits.

The organization also provides communication through eight pages six times a year in the Prairie Grains Magazine.

SDWI depends on memberships for funding, advocacy and visibility on the hill. There’s safety in numbers, Assman said.

“South Dakota legislators will respond if they hear from 10 constituents in their district, so any time that we can send our message multiples times we can influence policy,” Assman said. “If legislators don’t hear from you, they assume nothing is wrong, so if we want to make change you have to be active.” 🌾



The South Dakota Wheat Commission works alongside 15 other states to promote U.S. wheat in more than 100 countries.



AROUND THE PRAIRIE

By Prairie Grains Magazine staff

USDA estimates wheat production to rise in 2021

The USDA estimates that all wheat planted acres in 2021 will be 46.4 million acres, up 5% (18.8 million hectares) compared to 2020. Winter wheat acres are estimated at 33.1 million acres (13.4 million hectares), up 9 percent year-on-year. According to the March 31 USDA 2021 Prospective Plantings report, total U.S. total spring wheat planted area is expected to fall to 11.7 million acres (4.34 million hectares), down 4% from 2020. This estimate includes 10.9 million acres (4.41 million hectares) of hard red spring (HRS), down 5% from last year and down 6% from the 5-year average.

Corn acres are estimated at 91.1 million acres (36.9 million hectares), up less than 1% from 2020. Soybean acres are expected to be 87.6 million acres (35.4 million hectares) up 5% compared to last year and the third largest planted acreage on record.

USDA announces additional COVID-19 relief

In late March, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced implementation of COVID relief provisions recently authorized by Congress and through utilizing existing resources. The new Pandemic Assistance for Producers initiative entails significant assistance to address past and ongoing impacts of COVID-19 and includes an additional \$20 per acre payment for row crop producers.

USDA is dedicating at least \$6 billion toward the new programs. The Department will also develop rules for new programs that will put a greater emphasis on outreach to small and socially disadvantaged producers, specialty crop and organic producers, timber harvesters, as well as provide support for the food supply chain and producers of renewable fuel, among others. Existing programs like the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) will fall within the new initiative and, where statutory authority allows, will be refined to better

address the needs of producers. USDA also expects to begin investing approximately \$500 million in expedited assistance through several existing programs this spring, with most by April 30.

USDA Pandemic Assistance for Producers

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced that USDA is establishing new programs and efforts to bring financial assistance to farmers, ranchers and producers who felt the impact of COVID-19 market disruptions.

USDA is dedicating at least \$6 billion toward the new programs. The Department will also develop rules for new programs that will put a greater emphasis on outreach to small and socially disadvantaged producers, specialty crop and organic producers, timber harvesters, as well as provide support for the food supply chain and producers of renewable fuel, among others. Existing programs like the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program (CFAP) will fall within the new initiative and, where statutory authority allows, will be refined to better address the needs of producers.

For more information visit farmers.gov/pandemic-assistance.

Reopening CFAP 2

USDA will re-open sign-up for of CFAP 2 for at least 60 days beginning on April 5, 2021.

FSA has committed at least \$2.5 million to establish partnerships and direct outreach efforts intended to improve outreach for CFAP 2 and will cooperate with grassroots organizations with strong connections to socially disadvantaged communities to ensure they are informed and aware of the application process.

National wheat groups applaud break in US-EU dispute

U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) and the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) welcome the announcement from the Biden administration that the European Union and the United States have mutually agreed to a four-month suspension of tariffs related to the World Trade Organization (WTO) Aircraft disputes. This break removes the tariff barrier on U.S. hard red spring wheat imports by EU countries.

Senate confirms new EPA administrator

In March, Michael S. Regan was sworn in as the 16th Administrator of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Administrator Regan said he's committed to working closely with and supporting EPA's dedicated career public servants, restoring the role of science and transparency, addressing climate change, and prioritizing environmental justice. Administrator Regan is the first Black man and the second person of color to lead the U.S. EPA.

Prior to his nomination as EPA Administrator, Michael Regan served as the secretary of the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ). Before his Senate confirmation, Regan met with leading farm groups, including the National Association of Wheat Growers.



EPA Administrator Michael Regan.

“Every day, American farmers, ranchers, and laborers work tirelessly for the food on our tables, clothes on our backs, and fuel to power our daily lives,” Regan said. “I look forward to working with our agricultural community on ways to achieve sustainable agriculture while creating healthy, clean and safe environments for all Americans.” 🌾

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