

Top economist addresses prices, Farm Bill impact

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Washington State University small grains agricultural economist Randy Fortenbery will discuss export markets, wheat prices, the impacts of the 2014 Farm Bill on the acreage allocation of different crops, farmland prices and lease rates during his upcoming presentation at the Pacific Northwest Farm Forum.

Fortenbery is small grains endowed chair at WSU in Pullman. He and weatherman Art Douglas are the featured speakers at 9 a.m. Tuesday, Feb. 3, in the DoubleTree Hotel.

Some of the most important factors for wheat farmers in 2015 will be Japan's gross domestic product and the value of the dollar relative to the



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
Washington State University small grains economist Randy Fortenbery will discuss the impacts of the 2014 Farm Bill during the Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum.

yen and other major currencies, Fortenbery said. Japan has been struggling to emerge from a years-long recession, and the dollar has been strengthening compared with most currencies,

including the yen. Japan is a major importer of the soft white wheat grown in the Northwest.

"At this point I believe both of these (factors) will have a negative impact on farmer wheat prices in the coming year," Fortenbery said.

The year 2014 wasn't as good for farmers as 2013 because of significantly lower prices, Fortenbery said. Wheat prices on a national basis may end up averaging below the costs of production, he said.

"I think wheat prices may have bottomed out, at least in the short run, but I do not see a major rally in the next few months," Fortenbery said.

He hopes the audience at the Forum leaves "with a little broader understanding" of farm bill impacts.

Drier winters in store for region, weatherman predicts

Uncommon two-year El Niño could mean shift in patterns

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The Pacific Northwest could be in for dry winters and wet springs as a long-term El Niño pattern develops, a weather expert says.

Art Douglas is the professor emeritus of atmospheric sciences at Creighton University in Omaha, Neb., and the featured speaker at this year's Pacific Northwest Farm Forum, which takes place during the 2015 Spokane Ag Expo.

Douglas has called for dry winter weather both this year and next.

However, entering the spring, the jet stream will begin pumping warm, moist air northward toward the Pacific Northwest.

"I'm expecting, with a bleak winter, spring will turn around and we'll really start seeing some moisture, which is not typical of an El Niño," he said.

El Niño is created by a prolonged warming of the Pacific Ocean's surface temperatures. Most El Niños have a cold water pool north of Hawaii, limiting the amount of moisture for storms, but this one



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Creighton University emeritus professor Art Douglas delivers his forecast at last year's Spokane Ag Expo and Pacific Northwest Farm Forum. Douglas returns to the Expo in 2015, and says farmers may need to prepare themselves for drier winters moving forward.

has a lot of moisture and energy potential, he said.

The current El Niño is about two to three months behind the normal time frame, he said.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and European models indicate the "misbehaving" El Niño, which will peak late, could create continuous El Niño conditions. By the end of this summer, water temperatures at the equator will approach 1.5 to 2 degrees above normal.

"We're looking at prob-

ably a two-year El Niño event," Douglas said. "Two-year El Niños are not common. ... But this El Niño has just not quite developed like it should."

Most El Niños mean a dry winter and spring in the Northwest, he said. But with the extreme warmth of the Pacific Ocean, Douglas expects a wet spring in the Northwest.

Similar El Niños also occurred in 1976-1979 and 1993-1994. Multiyear El Niños only occur 20 to 25 percent of the time, he said.



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