

Washington



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
Washington State University researchers Diter von Wettstein and Sachin Rustgi provide an update on their project to develop wheat for patients with celiac disease July 11, 2013, during the Spillman Field Day in Pullman, Wash. Von Wettstein and Rustgi recently received additional funding for their project.

Gluten-free wheat in sight, researchers say

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Within a decade wheat farmers may be able to grow gluten-free wheat that’s safe for celiac disease patients to eat, researchers say.

The Life Sciences Discovery Fund recently gave a \$152,000 grant to Washington State University professor Diter von Wettstein, who is working to develop new varieties of wheat to produce grain that patients with celiac disease could safely eat. The fund originally provided von Wettstein with a \$1.09 million grant in 2009.

The second grant will help continue the project, said Mark Hertle, senior program officer.

Von Wettstein and his team have eliminated 75 percent of the gluten proteins from wheat grains that cause various immunological and allergic reactions in susceptible individuals, said collaborator Sachin Rustgi, assistant research professor at WSU. The goal is to remove all major immunoreactive gluten proteins.

The wheat would be considered genetically modified, Rustgi said.

“This unique design of silencing two regulatory genes will provide double surety that all immunoreactive gluten proteins will be eliminated from grains,” he said.

Preliminary tests suggest no change in baking properties, Rustgi said.

The new grant helps the researchers move forward with eliminating all major pathogenic gluten proteins from wheat grains, and retaining ones that are vital. High-molecular weight glutenins were shown to be largely non-inflammatory

for sensitive patients, but would maintain the technical properties of wheat while keeping it safe for gluten-sensitive and intolerant individuals, Rustgi said.

The research fund doesn’t typically get involved with agricultural research, Hertle said, but von Wettstein’s project fits its mission to provide a health and economic impact.

“There’s a pretty significant potential economic impact,” he said. “This would be a higher-value grain than normal grain.”

Removing those genes that cause problems for patients with celiac disease provides a side benefit by increasing the health value of the resulting wheat, Hertle said.

“It would make healthier wheat for anybody to eat,” he said.

The supplemental funding will help von Wettstein produce the desired plant, Hertle said. The board is ironing out the final details of the grant agreement, he said.

The researchers will next test the wheats on mice and human T-cells taken from bioposy samples of celiac patients, Rustgi said. They will test the wheat’s end-use quality and the agronomic performance in baking and field trials.

Rustgi expects the desired wheats within the next two years, but field testing and regulatory approval would take five to seven years. The celiac-safe wheat would likely be available to growers within seven to nine years, he said.

Hertle praised von Wettstein’s long history and expertise with biotechnology.

“They’ve tackled an incredibly difficult task,” he said.

Golladay to co-chair Ecology committee

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Warden, Wash., farmer and rancher Aaron Golladay is the new co-chair of the Washington Department of Ecology’s agriculture and water quality advisory committee.

Golladay raises hay and corn and runs 100 head of cattle on about 4,000 acres and is first vice president of the Washington Farm Bureau. He replaces Twisp, Wash., rancher Vic Stokes as co-chair alongside Ecology director Maia Bellon.

“My main goal is to keep working with Ecology to help them work with ag in a more friendly way,” Golladay said. “I understand they have a job, but their tactics are not always

the best for the ag community.”

But the department has improved in the 16 months since its inception. Golladay credited Stokes and Bellon for their work so far.

Ecology will soon send 30 letters to producers in southeast Washington following watershed assessments, Golladay said.

“Of those, 10 of them are going to be thank yous for doing a great job,” Golladay said. “Of the remaining 20, some of them are going to be ‘Hey, we know you’re working with conservation districts or (USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service) to fix your problems, keep going’ and some are going to be,

‘Hey, you need to get in contact with somebody, you’ve got a problem and you need to start working on it.’”

That’s quite a different approach from when the department sent letters informing landowners that they had seen signs of problems, Golladay said. Those letters didn’t identify the problem and the agriculture industry criticized the department for vagueness and coming across as threatening.

“It was a bad process,” Golladay said. “It’s still going to take some tweaking, but I believe it’s gotten better.”

The advisory committee will turn its attention to dryland wheat and tree fruit producers worried about the impact of federal laws, he said.

The committee also plans to examine Ecology’s complaint process.

“It pits neighbor against neighbor at times,” Golladay said. “It’s very anonymous. They’re treating people guilty until proven innocent, and that doesn’t fly in ag.”

The committee advised Ecology on ways to improve interactions with farmers, Golladay said.

“The director still can do as she sees fit, but the beauty of the committee is there’s a lot of straight talkers in there, and they’ll tell it like it is,” he said. “She knows what she’s getting into when she makes her decisions.”

The committee next meets in September.

Ecology: Handle cows around water with care

Livestock producers criticize new guidelines

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press



Don Jenkins/Capital Press
Cows graze in southwest Washington. The Washington Department of Ecology has finalized a guidance document to help producers know how to keep cows from polluting water.

OLYMPIA, Wash. — The “best way” for ranchers to ensure they won’t run afoul of water pollution laws is to keep their cows away from streams, according to new guidelines from the Washington Department of Ecology.

The seven-page document, expected to be posted on the agency’s website Monday, outlines what alarms on-the-ground ecology inspectors.

The guidelines don’t signal a change in enforcement practices, but they clarify what the agency expects from ranchers, said Kelly Susewind, special assistant to DOE Director Maia Bellon.

The mere presence of livestock along a stream doesn’t automatically violate the law, but cows must be kept from polluting the water, according to the document.

“We’re not telling people to keep their cows out of the stream, we’re telling people to keep their pollution out. The best way to do that is to keep their cows out of the area,” Susewind said.

DOE started working last year on the guidelines, the first of their kind, after intense conflicts with ranchers over potential pollution sources.

The document received a negative reaction from two ranchers who have seen the

guidelines.

The guidelines are unrealistic, intrusive and potentially counterproductive by suggesting fences effectively manage cattle, said Stevens County rancher Scott Nielsen, who serves on a DOE advisory committee that reviewed drafts as the guidelines took shape.

Nielsen said fences may lead to riparian damage as cows push through them and congregate or become trapped along streams.

An earlier draft stated that barring cows from approaching streams was the “only way” — instead of the best way — to ensure compliance.

“They tried taking the bite out of it, but at the end of the day, they’re telling us to ex-

clude our cows from creeks,” Nielsen said.

Nielsen agreed the guidelines will help ranchers understand what DOE considers acceptable and unacceptable. But the document shows the agency is too focused on fencing off streams, he said. “I don’t know how else you would exclude livestock.”

Susewind agreed excluding cows from streams “almost certainly includes a fence.” But ranchers don’t have to put up fences if they manage their cows around waterways to minimize pollution, he said. “It takes more work.”

An environmentalist on the advisory committee said he preferred the earlier draft. “Our view is that the only way to safeguard water is to use exclusionary fencing,” said

Bruce Wishart of the Puget Soundkeeper Alliance.

“We wish it were stronger, but the message is still delivered,” he said. “I don’t see how anything can be excluded from the stream without fencing.”

Stevens County rancher Ted Wishon, who along with Nielsen represents the Cattle Producers of Washington on DOE’s advisory committee, said ranchers would be in a “great struggle” to be profitable and productive if forced to put up miles of fences.

He called the issue even more important than the return of wolves to northeast Washington. At stake is whether ranchers will be able to operate as they have for generations, he said.

“If we lose this one, we don’t get it back,” he said.

WSU president takes leave to battle cancer

Washington State University President Elson Floyd is taking a leave of absence to get treatment for cancer.

According to a WSU press release, the university’s board of regents approved Floyd’s request for family medical leave June 5 effective immediately.

“These have been incredibly challenging times for me, and it is with great regret I ask to take a leave of absence to address this personal battle with cancer,” Floyd stated. “While I do so, I ask you to appoint Dr. Dan Bernardo to assume day-to-day duties of the presidency.”

Bernardo is the provost and executive vice president of the university. He previously was dean of the College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences.

Floyd took office as president in 2007. Over the years, he has often re-affirmed the university’s commitment to agricultural research.

“There is no place on earth like WSU, and I cannot wait to return to the office and all the great work we are doing once my health allows,” he stated in the press release.

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