# NAWG leader urges progress in TPP talks

### Wheat growers to press importance of new free trade deal

By MATTHEW WEAVER Capital Press

The U.S. wheat industry will continue to impress upon Congress the importance of a new free trade agreement currently under negotiation, the president of the National Association of Wheat Growers says.

Trade promotion authority — popularly called fasttrack authority — recently approved by Congress gave the Obama administration "the strongest hand possible" to negotiate the Trans Pacific Partnership treaty, said Brett Blankenship, NAWG president and a Washtucna, Wash., wheat farmer.

He expects the 11 other nations involved in the TPP negotiations to now step forward. The high-stakes agreement would meld the nations' trade policies. Included are Australia, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore, Brunei Darussalam and Vietnam.



Another round of talks is

slated for the end of July in

Hawaii. Blankenship hopes

for a conclusion to TPP ne-

gotiations within the next several months, with congressional review beginning before the end of the year.

"Any trade vote in Congress will be spirited discussion and a close vote," he said.

NAWG will ask its member state organizations to tell their congressional delegations the importance of trade to the wheat industry, Blankenship said.

NAWG's role is to educate members of Congress and their constituents that votes in favor of TPP are best for the nation, the economy and the wheat industry, Blankenship said.

He praised the region's congressional delegation, particularly Oregon Sen. Ron Wyden and Washington Sens. Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, all Democrats, for their efforts to get fast track legislation through the

TPP would put 40 percent of the world's gross domestic product in a free trade zone, Blankenship said. It would mean "enormous growth potential" for U.S. wheat exports and the U.S. economy in general, he said.

"Now we just continue to urge the president to work towards lowering trade barriers for wheat in the TPP and remove any significant barriers to imports," he said.



Courtesy of Far West Agribusiness Association

A delegation that included Washington Department of Ecology Maia Bellon visits the Winfield Solutions warehouse on Sept. 18 in Pasco.

# Lawmakers drop pesticide tax

#### Warehouses predict surge in available crop-protection products

By DON JENKINS Capital Press

OLYMPIA — A tax has been eliminated that warehouse managers said discouraged chemical makers from storing pesticides in Washington, delaying deliveries to farmers battling unexpected pests or diseases.

The state's hazardous substance tax, paid by manufacturers, had applied to the wholesale value of crop-protection products stored in Washington but made and eventually used in another state.

The Far West Agribusiness Association argued that the tax — 7 cents per \$10 of product — when applied to expensive chemicals was enough to influence manufacturers' inventory decisions.

Far West surveyed warehouses and estimated that the tax contributed to a 30 percent reduction in the volume of pesticides kept on hand in Washington, according to the association's executive director, Jim Fitzgerald.

Far West and warehouse operators said that reduced in-

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state inventories put farmers at risk of waiting several days for pesticides to arrive from another state.

"The difference between a good farmer and bad farmer is two days," said Matt Ewers, a principal in the family owned Inland Empire Distribution Systems, which has warehouses in Pasco and Spokane.

The tax was eliminated in a larger revenue bill signed by Gov. Jay Inslee July 1. The tax still applies to farm chemicals made or used in Washington.

The hazardous substance tax funds the state's response to and prevention of toxic spills. The state Department of Revenue estimates eliminating the tax will reduce government revenues by \$300,000 a year.

Manufacturers store in Washington only the chemicals they historically sell in the state, but don't stock enough for unexpected outbreaks of pests and diseases, said Todd Jones, manager of a Pasco warehouse owned by Winfield Solutions, a subsidiary of Land O'Lakes.

"Product availability in this state is definitely going to go

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up," he said.

Jones said the company is considering building a new warehouse in Idaho. The tax cut will cause the company to take another look at building in Washington, he said.

Ewers said chemical makers have cited the tax as "the reason" for reducing in-state inventories over the past several

He said his family's company has filled warehouse space vacated by chemical manufacturers with new customers. If the pesticide inventory returns, the company will build a second Pasco warehouse, he said.

"I'm in the process of reaching out to my customers and letting them know (the tax elimination) has occurred," Ewers said. "I'm bullish we're going to see an increase in jobs and property taxes due to this."

Far West and warehouse operators also argued that farmers respond to reduced instate inventories by stockpiling pesticides in case of an emergency, keeping the chemicals in less-secure locations than warehouses.

## EPA chief calls for conservation partnerships

By MATTHEW WEAVER Capital Press

SPOKANE — The Environmental Protection Agency can be a partner for soil conservation organizations and farmers instead of an adversary, the agency's Pacific Northwest chief says.

EPA Region 10 Administrator Dennis McLerran spoke during a panel discussion at the National Association of Conservation Districts summer board meeting in Spokane.

"We sometimes take a bad rap at EPA — sometimes we deserve that, oftentimes it's a lot of rhetoric," he said. "Sometimes we use the hammer to bring people to the table, but we can use a 'velvet hammer' in some instances.'

EPA has to regulate with the idea that it wants the agricultural sector to be successful, McLerran said.

He said the EPA works with other agencies on the state and federal levels,

sources Conservation Service.

"My belief is that EPA should step back when the

> states have programs that working and making a difference,' McLerran said. "We all share a desire for the same

outcomes.

McLerran

which are a healthy and thriving industry, clean water, soil conservation and programs that actually work on the ground."

Such efforts are still works in progress, McLerran said. He cited groundwater problems related to Yakima Valley dairies. Some nearby drinking water wells showed higher nitrate concentrations than standards allow, McLerran said. McLerran said he chose to speak with key area dairies about working together without the traditional regulatory approach,

During a lawsuit brought by a citizens group, a judge found some dairies were not following their own farm management plans, McLerran said.

"The key to this is for people to actually work with their local NRCS program, their local conservation district and have practices that don't get them to that place in the first place," he said.

Partnerships between agencies and farmers were a common theme throughout the meeting.

In setting the agenda for the meeting, the Spokane Conservation District wanted to showcase the state's agriculture for national policy leaders, said district director Vicki Carter. The event included a day-long tour of agriculture on the Palouse region of Washington and Idaho.

Carter cited a "contentiousness" among some regulatory agencies. She hopes the conservation districts can be a bridge for those agencies to solve



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