

Wheat

WAWG president looks to preserve tax exemptions

Klein wants to stop hits on farmers' bottom line

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

Preserving tax exemptions for Washington farmers is the top priority for the new Washington Association of Wheat Growers president.

Edwall, Wash., dryland wheat farmer Kevin Klein recently took over the reins of the organization during the Tri-State Grain Growers Conference in Spokane. The presidency is a one-year term. Officers typically move through different leadership positions. Klein replaces Colfax, Wash., farmer Larry Cochran, who moves into the past president position.

Online

<http://www.wawg.org/>

Washington sales tax exemptions for farmers expire in the next year.

"We want to keep what we've had," Klein said. "A sales tax on fuel and parts for a small farmer, it's more taxes that you pay. It's going to hit our bottom line as we are already going in to low wheat prices."

WAWG is concerned about the possibility of a carbon tax or increased regulations or stricter fuel standards on air quality.

"Washington is already cleaner than a lot of other states," Klein said.

Klein said WAWG also wants to make sure that state fuel tax increases are being used for

rail or river traffic improvements.

"We want to make sure the money gets put back into rail for transporting our wheat down to Portland or Vancouver, getting our wheat to market," he said.

Other priorities include discussions about the next farm bill and keeping crop insurance at its present level, Klein said.

"Not taking a big hit in the Farm Bill again," he said.

Klein hopes to keep the tax exemptions in place and not have additional regulations on water or pesticides.

Klein said he welcomes feedback from his fellow farmers.

"A phone call or heads up if they see any issue that might be of concern coming up that we can get prepared for," he said.



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Edwall, Wash., dryland wheat farmer Kevin Klein, pictured Nov. 12 at the Tri-State Grain Growers Convention in Spokane, is the new president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers.

Dry wheat conditions raise winterkill worries

More moisture needed, commission members say

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

SPOKANE — Wheat fields are so dry in Eastern Washington that sudden colder temperatures could kill the crop, Washington Grain Commission board members say.

Several members painted worried picture during county reports at the commission board meeting Nov. 18 in Spokane. The commission met without electricity due to high wind storms through Eastern Washington the day before.

The wheat plants might look good from the road, said board member Dana Herron, co-owner of Tri-State Seed in Connell, Wash., and representing Benton, Franklin, Kittitas, Klickitat and Yakima counties on the commission board. But "drought-induced mortality" would be "tremendous," Herron said.

"It's dry and cold at the



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires and chairman Steve Classen listen as board member Mike Miller makes a point Nov. 18 during the commission board meeting, held without electricity due to high wind storms the day before. Commission members are concerned that expected cold temperatures will cause winterkill in winter wheat fields already stressed by dry conditions.

same time," he said. "If plants have adequate hydration, it'll take a lot of cold weather. If it's a little bit dry, it won't. We could have more winterkill with less cold weather this way

than normal."

Eddie Johnson, a Wilbur, Wash., area farmer representing barley farmers on the commission, said the wheat doesn't have any reserve moisture. If

weather forecasts about single-digit temperatures prove true, it could affect the wheat's ability to survive.

The wheat hasn't had an opportunity to adjust to colder

nights. Johnson said there have only been a few nights with temperatures around 20 degrees, which serve to help the plant gradually enter dormancy to survive colder weather.

"If the weather turns to single digits overnight, the wheat can't stand that sudden blast of arctic cold," he said.

Weather extremes are the biggest concern, said Mike Miller, a Ritzville, Wash., farmer representing Adams, Chelan, Douglas, Grant and Okanogan counties. One of his neighbors reported peak winds of 97 mph, he said.

"It's not just windy, it's hurricane-force winds," he said.

Mike Eagle, an Almira, Wash., area, farmer representing Spokane, Lincoln, Ferry, Stevens and Pend Oreille counties, said the wheat plant is already stressed, and more cold would add even more.

"That plant's pretty small, and then to get hit with the cold, I think it's going to be pretty hard on it," Eagle told the commission. "There was just no moisture for it to come out of the ground."

Washington wheat industry explores fall-planted spring wheat

Research raises concerns about potential harm to market

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

The Washington wheat industry wants to see if spring wheat can be planted earlier to give farmers more bushels of a market class that trades at a premium to winter wheat.

Washington State University spring wheat breeder Mike Pumphrey is developing spring wheats with cold tolerance that could grow as winter wheats.

The Washington Grain Commission provided \$20,000 to Pumphrey's program to research the matter. Commission board member Dana Herron called the work "transformational," saying it could mean fall-planted dark northern spring wheat could replace some hard red winter and soft white winter acres in some areas, because it would be more valuable to the farmer.

In the marketplace, hard red spring wheats and hard red winter wheats are kept separate. Hard red spring wheats typically trade at a premium to winter wheats.

Many acres in Washington are spring wheats planted in the middle of winter or

early spring, Pumphrey said. Such varieties are common in Canada or California, where wheats have a moderate vernalization requirement.

"As long as it's managed where protein content is acceptable and the quality of the wheat is good, it's going to be the same wheat," he said. "It just gives the grower some flexibility in rotation options."

Dark northern spring wheat coming out of the Pacific Northwest has desirable milling and baking quality.

"We don't want to compromise that," Herron said. "We just want to make the growers a little more money."

But the research is raising some concerns in the industry. Oregon State University

winter wheat breeder Bob Zemetra said hard red winter, hard red spring and dark northern spring wheat classes all come with different quality expectations.

"You'd limit or potentially reduce the return to the farmers by having people question whether we have a true hard red spring wheat class, and then they'd just buy hard red wheat," Zemetra said.

Zemetra is concerned about potential misrepresentation to customers and reduced return to farmers because the market no longer trusts the classes. He advises breeders to steer towards varieties that stay true to their market class.

Herron doesn't agree with concerns about loss of class-

es and markets as long as the wheat performs in mills and bakeries and is graded by the FGIS.

Pumphrey said the biggest concern would be if a variety is grown that is of poor quality and damages the market. But if a wheat performs like the better hard red spring wheats, he doesn't see its planting date being a big deal.

"If we have a really good quality wheat, then it's a good quality wheat, period," he said. "I think our customers would be very pleased with the product if we have a nice, strong, high-protein, good baking, good milling, facultative spring wheat, true spring wheat or winter wheat, period."

Market concerns harm demand for Sprinter

Grain commissioner: Idea still valid

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

It's not the first time a Washington wheat variety has blurred lines between market classes.

In 2014, Washington State University winter wheat breeder Arron Carter released Sprinter, a winter wheat with kernels and quality that acted more like a spring wheat.

The variety raised concerns in the industry about potential confusion and whether it would be classified as a winter or spring wheat or potential grading as a mixed class, which carries a lower price.

Demand for the variety has dropped off. Carter isn't surprised.

"It happens," he said. "Sprinter was a different type of cultivar that had to be treated differently. People take notice of that."

The benefits of a variety have to outweigh concerns, Carter said. He also cited concerns in the industry over hard white wheat lines, partial waxy wheat lines and durum wheat lines.

Carter believes different groups within the classification system need to communicate more with each other. The Washington State Crop Improvement Association classifies vernalization requirements, while the Federal Grain Inspection Service grades on kernel morphology.

"Two different systems trying to make all cultivars fall into line," Carter said.



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