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Soft white wheat from last year's crop with excess protein is bringing lower prices at some elevators.

Elevators dock for too much protein in wheat

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Farmers in the Pacific Northwest could receive a lower price for their wheat if it has too much protein.

Connell, Wash., wheat farmer Chris Herron said he recently saw an unusual sight at local grain elevators. They are discounting 5 cents per bushel for white wheat that has more than 10.5 to 11 percent protein.

"Anything over 10.5 to 11 percent, you lose a nickel," Herron said. "Eleven to 11.5 percent, you lose another nickel. First time I've ever seen it in 50 years."

"It's not typical, but we've had so much high-protein wheat the last couple of years," said Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission. "Very untypical."

Many overseas buyers have a 10.5 percent protein maximum specification.

It's unknown how high protein levels are in the this year's wheat crop, as harvest has not yet begun, Squires said.

"We've had better moisture this year, which would lend itself to a reduction in protein levels," he said. "There could be some areas that have a higher protein."

Some farmers could begin harvesting in the drier areas of Washington the week of June 20. Squires believes many will begin the week of June 27, a week earlier than usual.

Farmers could store their wheat until the discount is removed or the market allows higher protein levels. A farm-

er can store grain for "quite a while," Squires said. Many still have most of last year's crop on hand, he said.

Squires said he has no idea how long the discount could last.

"In the past, there has always been enough low-protein generated we could always blend off or the exporters could make the higher-protein stuff work, they could make the specifications the customer wanted," said Dan Steiner, Morrow County Grain Growers grain merchant. "But with the drought the last few years, it's been tougher and tougher to find low-protein premiums."

Steiner's company is not discounting for higher protein wheat or imposing other discounts. It is only purchasing 11 percent protein wheat from commercial companies, he said.

A company's cash bid might include a lower protein requirement, which won't be apparent until later on, Steiner said. He advises farmers to pay attention beyond the cash bid.

"This is not a normal thing, it is not a regular occurrence for soft white wheat," Steiner said. "They could find out they inadvertently sold to the wrong elevator or got a different price than they intended."

The discount affects a farmer's plans for marketing his wheat, Herron said. A farmer can't do anything to change protein levels in his wheat.

"I can't go spray something or pull something to make it go away," Herron said. "It just is what it is."

Berry production in California gaining ground after slow start

By **TIM HEARDEN**
Capital Press

DAVIS, Calif. — Favorable spring weather has helped berry production in California gain ground after winter storms led to a slow start for the crops in 2016.

Strawberry farms have produced nearly 91.5 million flats statewide as of June 14, still off last year's pace of 111.6 million trays in the same period, according to the National Berry Report.

But production has been nearly equal to or higher than last year since April 30, when just 42.3 million crates had been picked compared to 61.5 million in the first four months of 2015, the California Strawberry Commission reports.

"The volume has definitely picked up," said commission spokeswoman Carolyn O'Donnell, noting that she sees berries being moved into coolers even in the early evening hours in the Monterey Bay region.

"The weather has been beautiful here" in the past month, O'Donnell said. "We've had good warm days and cool nights for strawberries and this is the peak season, so they're pretty much doing what we



Tim Hearden/Capital Press

Toni Ensz and Terri Mason sell blueberries for Caruthers, Calif.-based Triple Delight Blueberries at a farmers' market in Davis, Calif. The farm is having a "bumper crop" this year, Ensz said, although blueberry production statewide is lagging behind last year's pace.

would expect them to do this time of year."

The Santa Maria area has nearly caught up to last year's production, having turned out 31.5 million flats as of June 14 compared to 35.8 million to date in 2016.

Other berries have made similar gains. According to the

National Berry Report:

- Raspberry growers have produced nearly 9.9 million flats so far this year, below the 11.3 million picked as of this point last year. In mid-April, growers had only picked a little more than half the 4 million cartons produced at that point in 2015.

- Blackberries in California are ahead of last year's pace. Producers have put out 501,219 flats as of June 14, compared to 497,447 at the same point a year ago.

- Blueberry production is still lagging behind, as 4.7 million flats were picked as of June 14 compared to 7.6 million by mid-June of 2015. But some farms, including Triple Delight Blueberries in Caruthers, Calif., are having a good year.

"It's been a bumper crop," said Toni Ensz, who was selling blueberries from the farm recently at a farmers' market in Davis, Calif. "I think the weather has just been right for it in the Central Valley."

O'Donnell has said the industry will have a better idea by October whether the season will be on par with previous years. Growers are trying to get by with fewer acres — an estimated 32,515 acres in 2016, down from the 37,438 estimated acres last year and continuing a trend of annual declines from the 40,816 acres planted in 2013.

"It's always about the weather, and last year we got a really early start because we didn't have any rain," O'Donnell said.



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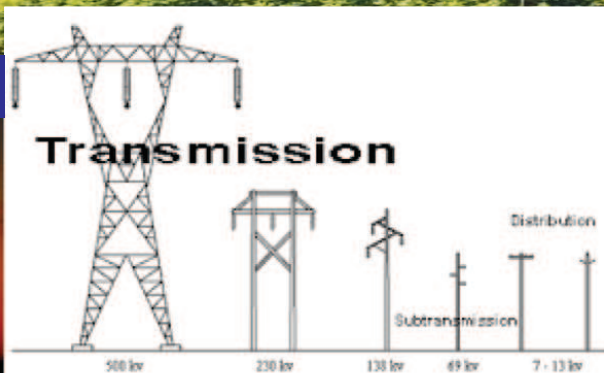
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