

# WSU wheat breeders share Vogel chair

Carter, Pumphrey lauded for 'pristine' support for growers

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

LIND, Wash. — Washington State University's winter wheat breeder and spring wheat breeder will share an endowed chair position to improve wheat breeding and genetics.

Arron Carter and Mike Pumphrey were named co-recipients of the Orville A. Vogel Endowed Chair during a field day at the dryland research station June 16 in Lind, Wash.

Funded by the Washington Grain Commission, the joint endowment supports Carter's and Pumphrey's work to solve emerging issues and breed better wheat for the state's growers. The commission established the endowment in 1998 to advance Vogel's legacy.

Carter and Pumphrey ex-



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Kim Kidwell, executive associate dean of Washington State University's College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences, announces that winter wheat breeder Arron Carter and spring wheat breeder Mike Pumphrey will share the university's Orville A. Vogel Endowed Chair in Wheat Breeding and Genetics position June 16 during the field day at the dryland research station in Lind, Wash.

pect to hire research associates to help use new technology in the winter and spring breeding programs.

"There's a lot of this new technology that's coming

along," Carter said. "A lot of effort needs to go into making sure it will be viable in a breeding program for selection over what we currently do."

"Basically just do more and better of what we've already been doing," Pumphrey said. "It will allow us to work with a lot of things we and others have discovered over

the last several years, and implement those in a way we weren't able to before."

Vogel, a USDA wheat breeder and agronomist from 1931 to 1972, dedicated his career to developing wheat varieties.

He led development at WSU of the first commercially successful semi-dwarf wheat varieties, which paved the way for the "Green Revolution" of increased global wheat production in the mid-20th century, according to WSU.

"They changed the way we grew wheat in the region, because you could actually apply fertilizer to those plants and they didn't get so tall that they fell over," said Kim Kidwell, executive associate dean of the College of Agricultural, Human and Natural Resource Sciences. "That became a world phenomenon."

The endowment requires its chair to continue Vogel's legacy — enhancing the university's wheat variety development program through the latest techniques in cultivar

development and training students in wheat breeding and genetics.

"It's completely important that the individuals named to this chair are accomplished scientists, wheat breeders, leaders and outstanding collaborators with their college," Kidwell said. "In the spirit of Dr. Vogel, who worked every day tirelessly to serve farmers, these two gentlemen do that every day as well. Their interest, intention and support for this industry is just pristine. They do the things Vogel would have done. The sky's the limit in what will happen next."

"We're pleased WSU made the decision to designate them as co-chairs," said Glen Squires, CEO of the grain commission. "They've contributed a lot to the industry so far. Those funds and that designation will reap great benefits for the wheat industry into the future."

Kulvinder Gill, professor in crop and soil sciences, was named the first chair in 2002 and held the position until 2014.

## Despite a better wheat outlook this year, issues cloud the horizon

By ERIC MORTENSON  
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Wheat yields and protein levels should return to normal in the Pacific Northwest this summer after a couple dry, hot years, the Oregon Wheat Commission chief executive told international buyers.

Speaking at the Latin American and Caribbean Wheat Buyers Conference, hosted by U.S. Wheat Associates, Blake Rowe explained the region's standards for the soft white wheat it exports to the world.

Rowe said soft white varieties have to attain good yields, mill well, stand up to weather stress and resist diseases and pests.

"A good wheat variety has to have all of them or it doesn't pass our test for what constitutes a good variety," he said during a presentation last month.

More than 70 buyers and milling and bakery representatives attended the conference in Portland. Attendees came from Mexico, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Guatemala, Venezuela, Peru and elsewhere throughout Central and South America, plus Haiti and Trinidad and Tobago.

Pacific Northwest growers primarily export wheat to Asia, but hope to expand sales in Latin America. To that end, Northwest and U.S. wheat officials escorted the international buyers on tours of the Wheat Marketing Center in Portland, which provides product testing and development, to an export grain elevator and a seed plant, and to the Columbia Basin wheat farm of Darren Padgett, chair of the Oregon Wheat Commission.

The body of the conference, held in downtown Portland, included multiple presentations on topics ranging from transportation and pricing issues to wheat breeding and blending trends.

Rowe, the Oregon Wheat Commission CEO, described the process by which new



Capital Press file

Wheat buyers from South America and the Caribbean region received a briefing on all things wheat during a visit last month in Portland.

soft white wheat varieties are introduced in the region. He said the benchmark is the Stevens variety which, although not widely grown now, is well known in the region. It's grown in test plots alongside new varieties to eliminate field differences, and new varieties are given a score based on grain, milling and baking quality compared to Stevens.

Those scores are used to rank varieties as most desirable, desirable, acceptable or least desirable, Rowe said. The scores are published each year so growers can choose what to plant.

A high percentage of Pacific Northwest growers use certified seed, Rowe said. Growers aim to produce wheat that will be acceptable to the most sensitive markets. "For us, those are Japan, Korea and Taiwan," Rowe said. "They have the toughest standards to meet."

Rowe said regional grain elevators test wheat on arrival from growers and separate it by protein levels. Generally, Pacific Rim customers want low protein levels in the soft white wheat they

mill for crackers, cookies, noodles and other products.

Ryan Statz, a merchant with Columbia Grain Inc. in Portland, told the buyers how wheat and other crops move through the company's export facility. The company has about 60 elevators throughout the Pacific Northwest, Midwest and into Montana, and has a combined storage capacity of 1.3 million metric tons.

In addition to wheat, Columbia Grain exports corn, soybeans, peas, canola and other crops, Statz said.

"We service some of the most quality driven buyers on the planet," he said.

Most products bound for the export market arrive in Portland by rail, Statz said, but two-thirds of the soft white wheat arrives by barge. The up-river elevator and barge system on the Columbia and Snake rivers is cheaper and more reliable than rail, he said.

"Following up-river loading, we can estimate almost to the hour when it will be in Portland," Statz said.

Statz said the Columbia and Snake system will be

## Heat hurries wheat

By GEORGE PLAVEN  
EO Media Group

Wheat harvest is starting uncharacteristically early across parts of Eastern Oregon.

Don Wysocki, a soil scientist with Oregon State University Extension Service in Umatilla County, said farmers are already cutting wheat in fields west of Pendleton, which is about two weeks earlier than normal.

In years past, Wysocki said it was unusual to see anyone harvest winter wheat before the Fourth of July. But following a particularly mild winter, he said this year's crop matured well ahead of schedule. Three straight years of drought haven't helped, either.

"It's really the heat that drives maturity," Wysocki said. "Things are just early because of the winter we've had."

Temperatures around Pendleton averaged about 5 degrees higher than usual in February and 3 degrees higher than usual in March, according to the National Weather Service. Another major heat wave arrived at the beginning in June, with temperatures in the high 80s to 100 degrees that turned wheat from green to gold.

Wysocki said it's too early to predict what yields will look like, and it will depend on where exactly the field is located. Areas west of Pendleton — with less annual rainfall and shallower soils — might come in below

average, while farms farther north and east appear to be doing much better.

"I think some people will cut an above-average crop this year," Wysocki said.

Larry Lutchter, who works with OSU Extension Service in Morrow County, said harvest is running about 10 days ahead of schedule near Ione and north of Lexington. He expected more farmers will fire up their combines after July 4.

"It was the heat earlier in the growing season," he said. "That, and four years of less-than-average rainfall."

The county did, however, receive an inch and a half of rain in May, which Lutchter said has gone a long way toward saving this year's wheat. Without it, he said yields could have been as low as they were a year ago, when some farms struggled to cut even half their usual crop.

As it is, Lutchter said it appears they'll have anywhere between 28 and 35 bushels per acre, which is close to average for local growers.

"I think it will be better than last year," Lutchter said.

The concern now is that there's little moisture left stored in the soil for next year, Lutchter said. In order to buck the trend, they need ample winter precipitation and timely May and June rains.

"That just hasn't happened in recent years," he said. "That's why we're struggling."

shut down from Dec. 12 to March 20 for 14 weeks of lock repairs and upgrades. There will be no barge traffic during that time, meaning supplies will be hampered and prices likely will be higher, he acknowledged. But he said the repairs are "absolutely necessary" and

represent a "short term loss and a long term gain."

Overall, Statz said many in the business expect a much larger wheat crop this year with a good range of protein levels due to nearly ideal planting and growing conditions. Experts forecast lower prices, which could

help U.S. exports compete. But he said Australia, Canada and Russia also appear to have good crops this year.

Other speakers included Glen Weaver, a research fellow with Ardent Mills. The company formed in 2013 as a joint venture of Cargill, ConAgra Foods and CHS Inc.

Weaver walked the audience through a food security "reality check" of the next 34 years, with the world population projected to reach 9.6 billion by 2050.

Water, land, chemical use, food safety and a distrust of big science and big ag are all geopolitical issues, he said.

"You're in a very complex business," Weaver reminded the international buyers.

Trust and transparency are crucial to agricultural businesses, he said. Consumers are being led by activists, he said, and there's "certainly a lot of chatter going on out there that every company has to be considerate of."

"If you want to have a positive impact on how people view you, why not help out the organic sector," Weaver said. If 10 to 15 percent of the population chooses to buy organic products, "it's too big to ignore," he said.

Weaver predicted industry will have to "belly up" more to help fund crop research, and government support for such work will decline. That will require an evolving public-private relationship. While the current focus of most crop breeding work is productivity, there will be more emphasis on functional and health traits, he said.

Biotech wheat is likely, he said. "Every 10 years I hear it's 10 years out," he said. "As technology evolves, you're going to see that technology make some changes, definitely in the grain industry."

"You have to ask yourself, what is the plan you have to strive for over the next decade or so," Weaver said. "What's next? What's coming around the corner?"

## New Limagrain wheat breeder seeks to benefit farmers

By MATTHEW WEAVER  
Capital Press

Jay Kalous recently took over as the Limagrain cereal seeds breeder in Waitsburg, Wash.

He replaces Jean-Bruno Beaufume, who leaves in July to be head of research for Limagrain Asia in Bangkok, Thailand.

"(Limagrain said) 'Our job is really to make sure that we're putting more money in the producer's pocket,' and that resonated with me, for sure," Kalous said.

Kalous will lead winter and spring wheat breeding efforts in soft white and hard

red market classes.

"There's just maybe a few holes we're looking to shore up," he said.

Kalous planned to highlight Limagrain varieties at a field day in Waitsburg last week, including Jet, a hard red wheat, and soft white wheat Norwest Duet, for dryland regions.

He hopes to provide more options for low-rainfall zones, and is interested in working on wheat coleoptile length for farmers who use a deep-furrow drill. The coleoptile is the protective sheath around the shoot tip and embryonic leaves of grain.

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