

Grain industry looks for falling number solutions

Growers concerned about test variability

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

COLFAX, Wash. — Washington grain industry representatives are exploring ways to deal with wheat that has low falling numbers, including asking federal government food aid programs to buy it and donate it to impoverished nations.

They also say a more accurate and faster test needs to be developed.

Grain elevators use the Hagberg-Perten falling number test to measure starch damage due to sprouting. A low falling number indicates a high level of alpha amylase, an enzyme that degrades starch and diminishes the quality of wheat. Grain with a falling number below 300 typically receives a discount in the Pacific Northwest. Rain and temperature



Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash., listens during an industry meeting on the impacts of falling number discounts on wheat farmers Sept. 2 in Colfax, Wash.

fluctuations are the primary cause.

Roughly 37 to 39 percent of this year's Washington soft white wheat crop has a falling number below 300, said Don Potts, regional manager of the Washington State Department of Agriculture grain inspection program. The average for the crop is about 310.

"In Eastern Washington, I think every location got hit," Potts said. "There's pockets that are worse than others,



Don Potts, regional manager of the Washington State Department of Agriculture grain inspection program, center, addresses industry members Sept. 2 during a meeting to discuss falling number concerns and solutions in Colfax, Wash. Potts estimates 37 to 39 percent of the state's soft white wheat crop has a falling number below the industry standard, resulting in a variety of price discounts for growers.

certainly, but the temperature extreme hit everyone at some point in time. Every grain elevator has now experienced some issues with low falling numbers."

Asking the government to purchase the wheat was one short-term solution mentioned during an industry meeting with Rep. Cathy Mc-

Photos by Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Morris Rodgers at McGregor Co. headquarters.

"There's a lot of customers that can use this kind of wheat, because they're just making flatbreads and different breads, so the quality is still good, just not to make sponge cakes and things like that," said Damon Filan, industry representative on the

Washington Grain Commission and manager of Tri-Cities Grain.

A tender from the U.S. government would help get rid of the wheat. The U.S. government could donate the wheat to impoverished Third World countries.

Food aid programs have bought wheat in the past, but that doesn't happen often, said Glen Squires, CEO of the commission.

"One of the challenges is there's an effort nationally to just give money to countries and let them buy the wheat from a closer source," Squires said. "We believe there should be food in food aid."

Many overseas buyers require a falling number above 300, Squire said, but some might be convinced to reduce their requirements.

Judy Olson, state director of the USDA Farm Service Agency, said current insurance programs are set up to address yield more than quality issues.

A disaster designation would not be much help, Ol-

son said. The agency would have access to a "small amount" of emergency loans for individual producers.

"That's probably not going to meet the industry needs as a whole," Olson said. "It would be difficult to meet the bar of 30 percent economic loss for a county or a region, especially with the high yields I understand that we've had."

Longer term, they all agreed a better test would help. The current test has wide variability, with some growers reporting differences of more than 50 seconds when retests are taken.

McMorris Rodgers called the meeting "a first step" toward identifying short- and long-term options.

"Certainly the 2018 Farm Bill will be very important, how we address crop insurance as well as the potential for disaster-type programs," she said. "Another long-term (solution) is ... the importance of an accurate test. Clearly these disparities raise a lot of questions about the test itself."



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WASHINGTON FFA KICKS OFF NEW SCHOOL YEAR WITH LEADERSHIP TOUR



Photos courtesy Washington FFA

Washington FFA state officers visit with members from each district during the Evergreen Tour in 2015. This year, officers will visit each district again in five days. Washington State FFA executive director Abbie DeMeerleer says the tour kicks off the new school year and new membership year for FFA.



Washington FFA state officers and staff will visit all nine FFA districts in five days. The annual Evergreen Leadership Tour, running Sept. 19-23, is designed to kick off the new membership year and new school year, said Abbie DeMeerleer, executive director of the Washington State FFA. "The state officers use it as a way to help chapters and members get excited about opportunities that are going to be available this coming year, and really get things started on a high note," DeMeerleer said. State officers tailor separate workshops for 9th- and 10th-grade students, and for 11th- and 12th-grade students. Each stop includes a three-hour program with leadership workshops, a keynote speech and adviser updates. The audience ranges from 100 to more than 300 FFA members. State officers' goals include actively engaging members, DeMeerleer said. Also during the tour, the officers will kick off an item and letter drive for Operation Gratitude, which sends care packages to members of the military and to first responders. "This year's team just felt very compelled to give back to that particular group of individuals, because Washington FFA has been affected by fires and mudslides," DeMeerleer said. "Those first responders - those firefighters, the active military that have been called in, they've been right there to help and support agriculture, and the state officers wanted to give back."

Attending the tour helps members find out about upcoming events and opportunities, as well as potential members learn more about what the organization offers, DeMeerleer said. Washington national officer candidate Apolinar Blanco and past national FFA officer Caleb Gustin will join the state officers on the tour.

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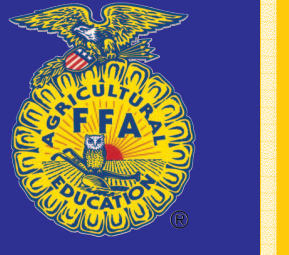


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