



University of Idaho

Stripe rust infects wheat in this photo. Pockets of active stripe rust in Oregon, Washington and Idaho have raised researchers' concerns.

## Early stripe rust raises researchers' concerns

### Experts recommend growers scout fields next spring

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Pockets of active stripe rust in Oregon, Idaho and Washington have researchers recommending farmers check their fields before applying herbicide in the spring.

"The earlier you see stripe rust, it's cause for concern because it means potentially going into the next year, we might see an early flare-up," said Mike Flowers, Oregon State University Extension cereals specialist. "We normally don't get enough to actually see large patches in the fall."

Xianming Chen, plant research geneticist with USDA Agricultural Research Service in Pullman, Wash., said winter conditions this year are similar to 2010. In 2011, farmers experienced a severe stripe rust outbreak. This year could be different, he said, due to lower temperatures in recent weeks, which should kill some rust.

But widespread snow cover across the region could allow some rust to survive, he said.

Wheat planted early in September is "very likely infected," Chen said. Stripe rust is a concern for the entire Pacific Northwest, he said.

Chen will check fields in early March to assess how much stripe rust survived.

Due to high rust pressure, Chen recommends growers plant resistant spring wheat cultivars, with resistance ratings of 1 through 3 being the best choice. Cultivars with a resistance rating of 5 to 9 should not be planted, Chen said.

Flowers said most farmers are planting resistant varieties, but some susceptible options, including SY Ovation and ORCF-102, are still present. Some newer varieties, such as UI Magic, have some susceptibility.

# State officials say they are confident of falling number test adjustments

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Washington State Department of Agriculture officials say they are confident they followed the correct procedures in testing wheat quality despite two farmers' claim that the test was flawed.

"WSDA is confident the methods it uses in the falling numbers tests are in compliance with USDA requirements," agency director Derek Sandison said in a statement. "WSDA does deviate from certain criteria, but that is done in order to obtain a more accurate result and is in accordance with USDA directives."

Beyond that, the department may not file a formal response to the tort claim filed by Wilbur, Wash.-based Glacier Grains Inc., said WSDA communications director Hector Castro.

Spokane attorney Benjamin Wyborney filed the tort claim Oct. 28 on behalf of Glacier Grains. Wyborney's father and brother, Robert and Pete Wyborney, are listed as company presidents in the claim.

The company claims \$7,869.55 in damages due to alleged inaccuracies in the falling number tests WSDA performed.

In the claim Wyborney questioned the altitude adjustment at the Spokane office, which he said is at 1,920 feet.

Contacted this week, Benjamin Wyborney declined to comment until he received



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Spokane attorney Benjamin Wyborney talks about the falling number wheat quality test in his office Nov. 17. The Washington State Department of Agriculture says it will wait to see if he files a lawsuit after a tort claim questioning the state's procedures expires.

official word from the department.

The USDA Federal Grain Inspection Service in October 2015 required the Spokane WSDA office to adjust for altitude when conducting falling number tests, according to a letter from deputy administrator Randall D. Jones that was provided by WSDA.

The USDA requires altitude adjustments in labs at or above an elevation of 2,000 feet. The falling number value is affected by the boiling temperature, which is impacted by atmospheric pressure, according to WSDA.

Jones said the Federal Grain Inspection Service re-

quired the state inspection service offices in Spokane and Colfax, Wash., to apply the elevation adjustment "because of those locations' near proximity to 2,000 feet" and continues to require the adjustment. The requirement was not issued in writing, Jones said in response to a request from Wyborney.

The test the agency uses was first designed in the 1960s, Sandison said.

"We believe newer technology would help mitigate the current problem, specifically by allowing better segregation of low falling number wheat from high falling number wheat," Sandison

stated. "We continue to work towards finding a solution to this ongoing problem, recognizing the economic harm low falling numbers have caused to the wheat industry and we will not stop in our efforts to resolve this."

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 products.

Discounts for falling number vary depending on the elevator, according to the Washington Grain Commission.

## Water Project allocation increased to 45 percent after storms

By **TIM HEARDEN**  
Capital Press

SACRAMENTO — A steady stream of rain and snow in Northern California so far this season has prompted California to more than double its State Water Project allocations.

The Department of Water Resources estimated on Dec. 21 it will deliver 45 percent of requested deliveries to the 29 water agencies it serves, up from a 20 percent initial allocation in late November.

The boost comes as Northern California has already received three of the five to seven "atmospheric river" mega-storms it typically receives in a normal water year.

"We always adjust to the hydrologic conditions," DWR spokesman Ted Thomas said. "If it's dry, it goes down; if it's wet, it goes up; and if it's really wet, it goes way up."

The DWR usually makes its initial estimate of delivery capacity in December and periodically adjusts it — usually upward — as the rainy season goes along.

Under the current allocation, State Water Project con-



Courtesy California Department of Water Resources

Aerial file photo of the "intertie" between the Delta-Mendota Canal and the Aqueduct near Tracy, Calif. The state Department of Water Resources estimated on Dec. 21 it will deliver 45 percent of requested deliveries to the 29 water agencies it serves, up from a 20 percent initial allocation in late November.

tractors would receive nearly 1.9 million acre-feet of the 4.17 million acre-feet they collectively sought. An acre-foot is enough water to supply two typical households for a year.

The upgrade follows a persistent parade of rain clouds since mid-autumn that has put

many areas in Northern California above their minimal seasonal rainfall totals.

Redding, for instance, has received 17.8 inches of rain for the season as of Dec. 21, well above its average of 10.47 inches, according to the National Weather Service.

Uncertainty remains, however. Lake Oroville, the state project's chief reservoir, was still at only 54 percent of capacity and 88 percent of normal for this time of year as of Dec. 21, the DWR reported.

California's statewide snow water content is still only 64 percent of normal for this time of year, according to the DWR's California Data Exchange Center.

Agency director Mark Cowin said in a statement that

"the faucet can shut off suddenly and leave us dry for a sixth year in a row," so the state must use water wisely.

The initial allocation for 2016 was 10 percent of the requested 4.1 million acre-feet, but deliveries were increased to 60 percent as late-season storms improved reservoir storage, the agency noted.

The last 100 percent allocation — difficult to achieve even in wet years because of Sacramento-San Joaquin River Delta pumping restrictions to protect imperiled fish — was in 2006, the DWR said.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation typically makes its first allocation of Central Valley Project water in mid-February, though last season's was on April 1. Shasta Lake, the CVP's main reservoir, was at 73 percent of its 4.5 million acre-foot capacity and 120 percent of its historical average as of Dec. 21, according to the DWR.



Courtesy Washington State University  
A Western Washington raspberry grower plans to appeal fines he recently received from the state Department of Ecology.

## Ecology says farm illegally irrigated raspberries

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

A Whatcom County berry grower has been fined \$90,000 for illegally irrigating raspberries and \$12,000 for not submitting metering records, the Washington Department of Ecology announced Tuesday.

Gurjant "George" Sandhu said through his attorney that he plans to appeal the penalties.

Ecology alleges that most of a 220-acre raspberry farm in Bellingham that Sandhu irrigated in 2016 does not have a water right. He has rights to irrigate 35 acres, according to Ecology.

Ecology estimates Sandhu had to irrigate his Crystalview Raspberry Farm at least 90 days.

Because of past violations by Sandhu and the seriousness of this one, Ecology said it would have been justified in fining Sandhu up to \$5,000 per day, but used its discretion to fine him \$1,000 a day.

He also is accused of not supplying 24 reports on the water he used over 12 weeks at a 120-acre blueberry farm in Ferndale in 2015.

Ecology fined him \$1,000 per week, but said it could have penalized Sandhu \$5,000 for each missing report.

Sandhu's attorney, Lesa Starckenburg-Kroontje, said in a statement that the berry farmer has tried to work with Ecology.

"Mr. Sandhu has invested significant resources to work with the Department of Ecology to farm agricultural land in Whatcom County, and he is frustrated that his efforts have resulted in a penalty notice received by mail," she stated.

Starckenburg-Kroontje said an Ecology press release contained "several statements of new information that differ from Mr. Sandhu's facts."

She did not elaborate.

The Ecology press release said Sandhu irrigated his raspberry farm for at least two years without water rights for most of the property.

Sandhu declined Ecology's offer to help bring him into compliance after the 2015 irrigation season, according to Ecology.

According to the penalty notice, Ecology learned over the winter that Sandhu planned to convert 14.5 acres of trees to crops. Ecology ordered Sandhu in March not to irrigate beyond his water rights. The department says it documented illegal watering over the following summer.

Sandhu's farms are in the Nooksack River watershed. Ecology said it has received complaints from water-right holders about Sandhu's irrigating.

The penalties were finalized Dec. 16. Sandhu has 30 days to file an appeal to the Pollution Control Hearings Board.

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