

People & Places

Keeping an eye on the future

Dana Herron looks at the big picture for Washington's wheat growers

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

CONNELL, Wash. — Dana Herron sees a day in the not-so-distant future when demand may exceed supply for soft white winter wheat, the Pacific Northwest's premier wheat crop.

If Washington's wheat industry continues to successfully market soft white wheat to new and emerging markets, showing buyers how to make a higher-quality product for less money — "which gets the attention of a businessman real quick" — farmers may not be able to keep up with demand within the next five to 10 years, Herron predicted. "That would be wonderful," he said. "That means we have done our job well."

Herron has long been one to look at the big picture. He is co-owner of Tri-State Seed Co. in Connell, Wash., and a member of the Washington Grain Commission, a position he's held for the past decade.

Herron said the commission has a "fiduciary responsibility" to spend farmers' money wisely. They must be able to defend the organization's spending in public, plus the return on investment, he said.

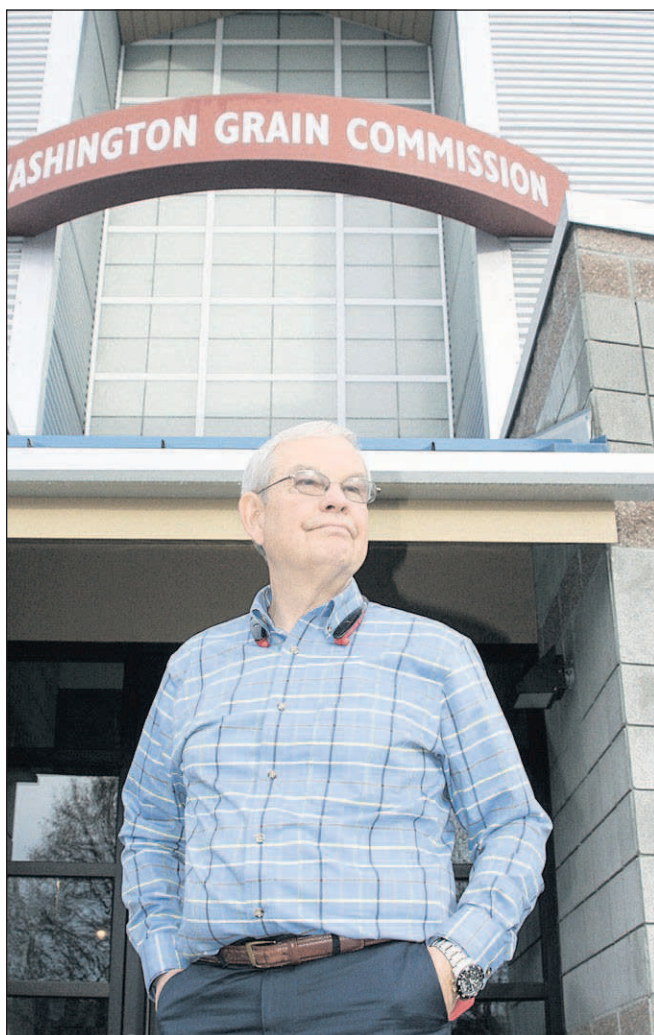
What will benefit "the long-term health of the industry?" he asked.

Building trust

In recent years, the commission has worked hard to build relationships with overseas buyers.

"How do we ingratiate ourselves and our product to them?" he said. "How do we make it more attractive than the next guy's and keep them paying a premium for the product?"

Herron worries about unanticipated events, such as



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Member Dana Herron stands outside the Washington Grain Commission building in Spokane. The commission has a "fiduciary responsibility" to spend farmers' money wisely, he says.

volunteer genetically modified wheat plants found in fields, but said the commission was proactive in building relationships and trust.

"The relationships we've built with our customers paid huge dividends because they trust us now," he said. "That's invaluable. We could have very easily lost this entire market, and it didn't happen."

Back home

Herron was born on a dry-land wheat farm in Kahlotus, Wash. His family moved to Connell in 1958. Herron's father died when Herron was a college sophomore, and the farm was split between Herron, his mother and Herron's uncle.

Herron returned home to farm with his mother for 16

years. Then his brother Chris wanted to farm, so Dana took over the small seed business they'd started on the farm to add value during "lean" years.

In 1994, Connell Grain Growers hired Dana to run their seed division. In 2005, he started Tri-State Seed with partner Craig Teel and handles marketing and sales.

Chairman Mike Miller asked Herron to remain on the commission during his tenure.

A visionary

"Dana is the historical book of what's gone on in the past, but he also probably has the most vision of what's coming forward and what we're facing of anybody I know, and I know a lot of people," Miller said. "He's got his thumb on the pulse. He knows



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

Tri-State Seed Co. co-owner Dana Herron sorts the seeds of a Slovakian hard red winter wheat variety, Mandala, in the company's Connell, Wash., offices. Herron is a member of the Washington Grain Commission.

Western Innovator

Dana Herron

Occupation: Co-owner, Tri-State Seed Co. in Connell, Wash.; represents Benton, Franklin, Kittitas, Klickitat and Yakima counties on the Washington Grain Commission

Age: 66

Hometown: Kahlotus, Wash.

Current location: Connell, Wash.

Education: Degree in political science and agricultural economics, Washington State University

Family: Wife Valerie, daughters Karma and Keva, three grandchildren

Website: <http://www.tristateseed.com/>



what ag's going to look like here for the next generation."

Rich Koenig, director of Washington State University Extension and interim chairman of the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences, says Herron has advocated for long-term research with "uncertain but potentially huge" returns for wheat farmers.

He also credits Herron with building stronger relationships between the commission, the university, state Department of Agriculture and Washington Association of Wheat Growers.

'Frank feedback'

"I have always appreciated his willingness to provide frank and open feedback and, at times, constructive criticisms of WSU and USDA,"

Koenig said. "We do not always do things right and he has respectfully pointed out faults and areas where we need to improve. Most often, he has pointed out that we should operate with a more business-oriented approach."

Herron expects to complete his term on the commission in December 2018. He's also begun preparing the succession plan for the seed company, expecting to begin working part-time in 2018.

"Half-time for me is 40 hours a week," he said.

But he won't vanish.

"You're gonna laugh, but I'm going to start another business," he said. He declined to give specifics, but said it would be agriculture-related.

Calendar

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Through Friday Feb. 17

Oregon Board of Agriculture meeting, 8:30 a.m. Oregon Department of Agriculture Hearing Room, 635 Capitol St. NE, Salem, Ore. Legislative developments, the Japanese beetle eradication program and other issues will be discussed during the two-day meeting. <http://bit.ly/2cKsbhX>

Friday, Feb. 17

Farm Bureau Women's Legislative Reception, 10 a.m.-3 p.m. Oregon State Capitol Galleria, 900 Court St. NE, Salem, Ore. Join the Oregon Farm Bureau Women's Advisory Council for coffee and cake to kick off the 2017 legislative session and recognize the important roles women play in Oregon agriculture. www.oregonfb.org

Rural Farmers' Market Workshops, 1-3:45 p.m. Adair Clubhouse, 6097 NE Ebony Lane, Corvallis, Ore. This interactive series of workshops and small group discussions will focus on topics particularly relevant to rural, small scale or resource limited farmers' markets. Travel scholarships available. Sponsored by the Oregon Farmers Markets Association. Free, RSVP required. Website: <http://bit.ly/2iatQ6Q>

Soil acidity workshop, 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Marcus Whitman Hotel, 6 W. Rose St., Walla Walla, Wash. Washington State University Extension educator Steve Van Vleet plans to show farmers how to manage nutrients and increase soil pH levels. \$50 by Feb. 10. <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/2736297>

Saturday, Feb. 18

Oregon State University Extension Service Small Farms Program, 9 a.m.-5:15 p.m. LaSells Stewart Center and CH2M Hill

Alumni Center, 875 SW 26th St., Corvallis, Ore. A day-long event geared toward farmers, agricultural professionals, food policy advocates, students and managers of farmers' markets. Twenty-seven educational sessions are offered on a variety of topics relevant to the Oregon small farmers and include a track in Spanish. Cost: \$150 at the door. <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/sfc>

Monday-Tuesday Feb. 20-21

Larry Branan Idaho Ag Summit. Red Lion Downtown Hotel, 1800 W Fairview Ave., Boise, Idaho. www.idahoagsummit.org

Wednesday, Feb. 22

Marion Soil and Water Conservation District annual meeting and celebration, 5:30-8:30 p.m. Macleay Conference and Retreat Center, 2887 74th Ave. SE, Salem, Ore. RSVP by Feb. 7 to janice.calkins@marionswcd.net or call 503-391-9927.

Oregon Ryegrass Commission meeting, 6-8 p.m. Cascade Grill restaurant, 110 Opal St. NE, Albany, Ore. www.ryegrass.com

Wednesday-Friday Feb. 22-24

2017 Family Farm Alliance Annual Meeting and Conference. Monte Carlo Resort and Casino, 3770 S. Las Vegas Blvd., Las Vegas, Nevada. www.familyfarmalliance.org

Saturday-Sunday Feb. 25-26

Second Annual Mid-Valley Winter Ag Fest, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Sunday. Polk County Fairgrounds and Event Center, 520 S Pacific Highway W, Rickreall, Ore. This event will promote all aspects of local ag commerce and provide a family friendly event that is fun and educational for kids. Proceeds will benefit Polk County 4-H and FFA. www.mvwagfest.com

Tuesday, Feb. 28

Managing large poultry flocks workshop, 5:30-8:30 p.m. Southern Oregon Research & Extension Center, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Demand for local eggs

and poultry meat is hot, but how does one manage larger flocks of birds? James Hermes will present this poultry class with a focus on breed selection, poultry health and disease, feeding and nutrition and economics. <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec/farms>

Successional Planning Workshop, 9 a.m.-4 p.m. Chemeketa Eola Hills Campus, 215 Doaks Ferry Road NW, Salem, Ore. This is the second part of a workshop on succession planning. If you missed the orientation, you can still attend. Presenters in the morning will be Clarie Fiegenger, Green Belt Trust and Ron Marek, attorney. Afternoon presenters will be Carl Sohn, Farm Credit Services and Riley Makin, attorney. Lunch is provided. Sponsored by the Polk and Marion soil and water conservation districts, the Greenbelt Land Trust and the Luckiamute Watershed Council. \$50 per family <http://www.polkswcd.com/success.html>

Thursday-Friday March 2-3

Idaho Hay and Forage Conference. Best Western Inn, 800 N. Overland Ave., Burley, Idaho. Speakers will include Dan Underlander, a University of Wisconsin forage specialist; Steve Orloff, a University of California Extension adviser; and Doug Robison, senior vice president of Northwest Farm Credit Services. www.idahohay.com

Wednesday, March 8

Taxes and Succession Planning. Noon-1 p.m. Join us for a free online webinar and an introduction to how planning ahead for estate and gift taxes can help address family and business needs and meet retirement goals for the current generation. Presented by: Carol Wachter and Heather Tomsick, Deloitte Tax LLP, and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University, 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2gW7KjQ>

Thursday-Sunday March 9-12

Natural Products Expo West, Anaheim Convention Center, Marriott and Hilton hotels, 800 W. Katella Ave., Anaheim, Calif. www.expowest.com

Saturday, March 11

Northwest Bison Association annual meeting, 8:30 a.m.-5:30 p.m. Forest Grove Senior Center, 2037 Douglas St., Forest Grove, Ore. The NWBA annual meeting will focus on small-scale bison ranching and facility setup and lots of stories from ranchers that have seen everything from tires as a fence to our setups and everything in between. Dr. Richard Veeman with Veterinary Services of Oregon will speak on his experience with bison along with Pat Fitzgerald with Fitzgerald Corral. A ranch tour of the L Bar T Bison Ranch is included. Pre-registration is preferred but not required. www.nwbisonassociation.com

Wednesday, March 15

Agricultural Biodiversity on Farms: Conservation Practices Working for Western Farmers, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. McMenemy's Edgefield, 2126 SW Halsey St. Troutdale, Ore. A first-of-its-kind conference on the benefits of agricultural biodiversity in Western farming systems and the practices that support it. Sponsored by the Oregon State University Integrated Plant Protection Center, the Xerces Society and Oregon Tilth. <http://bit.ly/2kpWRsK>

Thursday, March 16

Building Family Business Value from the Inside Out, 7:30 to 9 a.m. BridgePort BrewPub, 1313 NW Marshall St., Portland. Much can be done to build the value of the business from inside the enterprise, and the earlier the process begins, the more sustainable the results will be. In addition to building value, most businesses become more efficient and profitable along the way. Presented by Francis Brown, Key Private Bank and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University, 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2gr3KCO>

Sunday, March 19

Home Orchard Society 42nd Fruit Propagation Fair, 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Clackamas County Fairgrounds Main Pavilion, 694 NE Fourth Ave., Canby, Ore. Hundreds of varieties of free scions and cuttings. If you graft this is paradise, or you can choose custom grafting by experts for \$5. Free with your ad-

mission are hundreds of varieties of apple, pear, cherry, plum and persimmon scions; cuttings of grapes, kiwis, and figs to root; and experts to answer fruit growing questions. Cost: \$7 per person (family \$12) www.homeorchardsociety.org/events

Friday-Sunday March 24-26

18th Annual Northwest Horse Fair and Expo, 10 a.m.-8 p.m. Friday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday and 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday. Linn County Fair and Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road, Albany, Ore. Three days of clinics, seminars and performances for horse enthusiasts. Cost: Adults \$12 a day, children ages 6-12 \$6 a day, Parking \$4. www.equinepromotions.net

Friday-Monday March 24-27

Oregon FFA State Convention. Deschutes Fair & Expo Center, 3800 S.E. Airport Way, Redmond, Ore. www.oregonffa.com

Saturday, March 25

Clackamas Tree School, 8:15 a.m.-5:15 p.m. Clackamas Community College, Clairmont Hall Room 117, 19600 S Molalla Ave., Oregon City, Ore. Tree School attendees can learn about basic forestry from "A to Z" — tree identification, woodland management, pest management, wildlife enhancement, chainsaw operations, safety and maintenance, truffle hunting and cultivation, among many other topics. Advanced sessions focus on business management, managing for timber, forest roads, wildlife and biodiversity. Cost is \$50 per person in Clackamas County, \$65 per person outside Clackamas County and \$25 for youths 13-18 with an adult. <http://bit.ly/1Tt8Lk>

Tuesday, April 11

Do Your Kids Want the Business? Planning for Yes or No, 7:30 to 9 a.m. Oregon State University Extension Service, 8187 SW Tualatin-Sherwood Road, Tualatin, Ore. Presented by Steve Bennett, Farleigh Wada Witt and the Austin Family Business Program, Oregon State University, 800-859-7609, <http://bit.ly/2h3k8Ck>

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