



LIVE

FROM THE FIELD

Matthew Weaver/Capital Press
Brit Ausman, an Asotin, Wash., farmer and board member of the Washington Grain Commission, sends a greeting to overseas customers from his hard red winter wheat field July 30. Commission program director Joe Bippert records the video.

Virtual trade teams keep wheat farmers, overseas customers connected

By MATTHEW WEAVER
Capital Press

ASOTIN, Wash. — Brit Ausman stood in his hard red winter wheat field on a warm Thursday morning giving an update on the harvest.

A breeze rippled through the grain as Ausman spoke to millers and bakers on the other side of the world.

Yields are high and quality is good, said Ausman, who farms in the southeastern corner of the state and is a member of the Washington Grain Commission.

With travel restricted by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is the only way U.S. wheat farmers can keep in touch with their overseas customers, who last year bought roughly \$6.2 billion in wheat from them.

Joe Bippert, program director of

the state grain commission, recorded Ausman's presentation with two cameras and flew a drone to get a bird's-eye view of the crop.

Since April 28, Bippert has recorded six videos at farmers' fields around Washington state. He will record five or six more as the harvest progresses.

"If they can't come to the crop, we'll take it to them," Bippert said.

"I'd like to personally thank all of our overseas customers that purchase our products," Ausman said in his greeting. "Without you, we wouldn't be able to do what we do."

See Trade, Page 12



Kansas Wheat Commission
U.S. Wheat Associates led an in-person trade team for customers from sub-Saharan Africa near Salina, Kan., in 2019. This year, overseas buyers are getting virtual updates on crop conditions from U.S. farmers.

Feds affirm opposition to breaching Snake River dams

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

Three federal agencies affirmed July 31 that breaching four Lower Snake River dams in Eastern Washington would have high social and economic costs and require Congress to authorize it.

Barges that carry wheat would be stranded, as would farmers' irrigation pumps. And electric rates would rise, as would the chances for power

blackouts, according to a report by the Army Corps of Engineers, Bureau of Reclamation and the Bonneville Power Administration.

The final environmental statement impact lays the foundation for a decision in September on operating 14 federal dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers. A federal judge in Oregon ordered the environmental review.

The final report mirrors a draft report released in February. The agencies continued to favor spilling more water over dams in the spring to help wild salmon and steelhead protected under the federal Endangered Species Act.

The agencies rejected pleas from environmental and fishing groups to breach Lower Granite, Little Goose, Lower Monumental and Ice Harbor dams on the lower Snake River.

The report acknowledged that breaching the dams would do more for fish. But it also would damage the federal system's other uses, such as flood control, irrigation, navigation, recreation and electricity generation.

The agencies said they couldn't breach the dams unless Congress changed their mandate. They said they studied the option because of the

judge's order and public comments.

In a press release, the agencies said their preferred alternative for managing the rivers complies with President Trump's order to secure reliable water supplies in the West.

Environmental and fishing groups said they were outraged, urging Congress to intervene and predicting lawsuits.

"The federal plan totally and completely fails Idaho and isn't good enough for the many guides, outfitters, river businesses and communities in Idaho that depend on healthy runs of fish," Idaho Conservation League executive director Justin Hayes said in a statement.

"The Trump administration's reckless rush to finalize the Columbia Basin hydropower review process is heartbreaking and immoral," said Natural Resources Defense Council senior attorney Giulia Good Stefani.

Washington Grain Commission CEO Glen Squires said the report presents all the drawbacks to breaching dams. He also predicted that farm groups will need to continue to explain the dams' benefits.



Associated Press File
The Ice Harbor dam near Burbank, Wash.



Carl Sampson/Capital Press
The NORPAC plant in Stayton, Ore.

Farmer-members to receive compensation in NORPAC deal

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

A settlement deal between the bankrupt NORPAC cooperative and its farmer-members is expected to provide some compensation for past crop deliveries.

Without delving into the deal's specifics, attorneys for the growers, the cooperative and its unsecured creditors told a bankruptcy judge Aug. 4 that they've reached an agreement resolving their disputes.

For the deal to come into force, farmers representing 85% of the settlement amount will need to sign onto the agreement.

The deal affects 108 farmer-members of the cooperative, which has sold off substantially all of its food processing assets since filing for bankruptcy last year. It's now called North Pacific Cannery & Packers, as

the NORPAC name was sold along with its other intellectual property rights.

Aside from receiving a proportional share of the undisclosed settlement amount, farmers who agree to the deal also won't be subject to the "claw-back" attempt by unsecured creditors, who want to recover past payments NORPAC made for crops.

Growers who want to continue pursuing claims against NORPAC can decide against opting in to the settlement, but they would not have legal claims against them dropped, said Rebecca Russell, attorney for several farms.

"You have to choose to participate," she said.

Earlier this year, the cooperative filed a complaint against member farms who demanded

See NORPAC, Page 12

See Dams, Page 12

