

# Fall wheat planting may be delayed as farmers wait for break in drought

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Pacific Northwest wheat farmers will likely plant their crop later than normal this year in hopes of fall rain that will replenish moisture in the soil, industry leaders say.

USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service reports Washington subsoil moisture was 60% very short, 32% short and 8% adequate for the week ending Aug. 22.

Idaho subsoil moisture was 40% very short, 39% short and 21% adequate.

Oregon subsoil moisture was 75% very short, 16% short and 9% adequate.

"Topsoil moisture is worse," said Glen Squires, CEO of the Washington Grain Commission.

USDA reports topsoil moisture is 72% very short, 23% short and 5% adequate in Washington.

Idaho topsoil moisture is 41% very short, 36% short

and 23% adequate.

Oregon topsoil moisture is 76% very short, 12% short and 12% adequate.

"Some producers have, or are, waiting to seed, hoping for moisture," Squires said. "At the same time others are beginning and planting now."

The USDA indicates winter wheat seeding is at 7% compared to a five-year average of 2% at this time of year, Squires said.

"But one must consider that harvest completed much earlier this year," Squires said.

Squires hopes recent predictions of a La Nina bringing more rain and snow this winter are accurate.

"Idaho remains in historic drought," said Casey Chumrau, executive director of the Idaho Wheat Commission.

Currently, 88% of Idaho's land area, including nearly all 44 counties, are experiencing severe or higher drought conditions. Fifty-eight percent



Capital Press File

**A farmer near Soda Springs, Idaho, plants fall wheat. Many farmers are reportedly delaying planting in hopes of getting some rain.**

of the state is currently classified as extreme or exceptional drought.

"Idaho needs substantial rain to prepare for planting and provide a good start to next year's crop," Chumrau said. "High wheat prices and lower prices for some specialty crops might result in additional wheat acres but it is still too soon to know."

Lauren Port, of the Washington Crop Improvement Association, said her organi-

zation has received reports of seed producers getting 30% to 50% of normal yields, with some reports of "shriveled" and "small-seeded" crops.

Data on the 2021 seed crop is limited at this time, but early seed samples are still showing strong germination, Port said.

"Because of limited or no soil moisture, the seed dealers that I have spoken with anticipate that fall seeding will take place later than nor-

mal," she said. "Folks that would usually be planting late August may be looking at late September, or later."

To the south, timing of planting will lean toward mid-November as producers wait for precipitation, Oregon Wheat CEO Amanda Hoey said.

"For some, I expect it to bump up nearer to deadlines associated with crop insurance dates," she said.

Hoey expects the number of planted wheat acres to increase. She points to higher wheat prices and water issues driving the switch in regions such as in the Treasure Valley.

"For areas where stored water is reduced due to drought, producers may be looking at less water-intensive crop options for the upcoming year," Hoey said.

Anticipating more wheat plantings, the Oregon wheat industry has been advising growers moving into wheat directly following corn to

break down corn residue to minimize opportunities for fusarium head blight to gain hold in the wheat crop.

"Particularly with the limited chemistries available, management controls are an important consideration," Hoey said, adding that farmers should consider breaking the disease cycle with a non-grass crop.

A price premium for club wheat, a subclass of soft white wheat named for its clubbed appearance, could spur more planting this year, Squires said.

Western white wheat is a blend of soft white wheat and club wheat. Key overseas customers in Japan, Thailand and Singapore purchase Western white wheat.

Club wheat is priced \$1.50 to \$2 higher than regular soft white wheat at various locations.

"Which would be good as total supply has dwindled to an estimated 12-year low," he said.



EO Media Group File/East Oregonian

**U.S. potato exports are rebounding, a new report finds.**

## U.S. potato exports rise in marketing year

By **BRAD CARLSON**  
Capital Press

U.S. potato exports increased by 4% in volume and 1% in value for the marketing year that ended June 30.

Volume exceeded 1.73 million metric tons while value approached \$1.81 billion, Potatoes USA reported Aug. 19.

Potatoes USA is the marketing organization for 2,500 U.S. potato farmers.

International demand returned in 2021 after falling in 2020 on COVID-19 impacts, the marketing group said. But shipping problems and tight U.S. supplies continued to limit exports.

"Basically, we are looking for a continued recovery in exports this coming fiscal year," Potatoes USA Chief Marketing Officer John Toaspern said in an interview.

He said demand is recovering in many international markets and conflicts over trade policy have eased.

"Another positive aspect is that it does appear European production will be smaller than it was the previous year," limiting competition, Toaspern said.

Shipping delays, cancellations and increasing costs persist, he said.

"Certainly the resurgence of COVID and the continuing struggle to get that under control could have impacts on demand," Toaspern said.

The outlook for U.S. potato supplies "has gotten less optimistic due to the hot weather this summer," he said. "It's still too early to tell, but it could have an impact on yields."

Potatoes USA said the 2020-21 marketing year's export gain was led by a 9% increase in the fresh category, a 10% increase in chips and a 2% increase in frozen products. The categories make up 51% of exports com-



**John Toaspern**

binated. Only dehydrated products declined — by 4%, mainly on labor issues and tight raw-product supplies.

A big gain in frozen exports to Mexico, partly on recovery from an earlier tariff on fries, drove the increase in the category as most Asia markets were held back by shipping challenges.

Fresh-potato exports increased to Canada, the biggest destination. They increased to Mexico but remained limited to a 16-mile border zone.

Potatoes USA said a Mexican Supreme Court decision should help open the country to U.S. fresh potatoes. The late April decision affirmed the right of Mexico's Ministry of Agriculture to establish requirements for U.S. potatoes.

## Expert: Lowest stripe rust in 30-plus years

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

Stripe rust in Pacific Northwest wheat country this year is at its lowest level since USDA Agricultural Research Service research geneticist Xianming Chen began working in the region more than 30 years ago.

"Usually, even if we have low rust, we can have quite good stripe rust data in our experimental fields near Pullman," Chen told the Capital Press. "But this year, we even tried twice to do artificial inoculation. The rust did not develop because it was very dry, hot weather conditions."

Chen arrived in 1985. He's only had to inoculate three times in the last 30 years, he said.

Most years, there's adequate rust in Chen's experimental fields, which include wheat varieties susceptible to the disease. Most growers are raising varieties with some level of resistance.

There was "almost no rust" in farmers' commercial fields, Chen added.

Based on the Washington State University campus in Pullman, Chen plants varieties in Pullman, Walla Walla and Mount Vernon.

This year, the only reliable data for Chen's research came from WSU's Mount Vernon location on the wetter, cooler, western side of the state.

Chen plans to add a winter wheat nursery under irrigation in Central Ferry, Wash., in the fall.

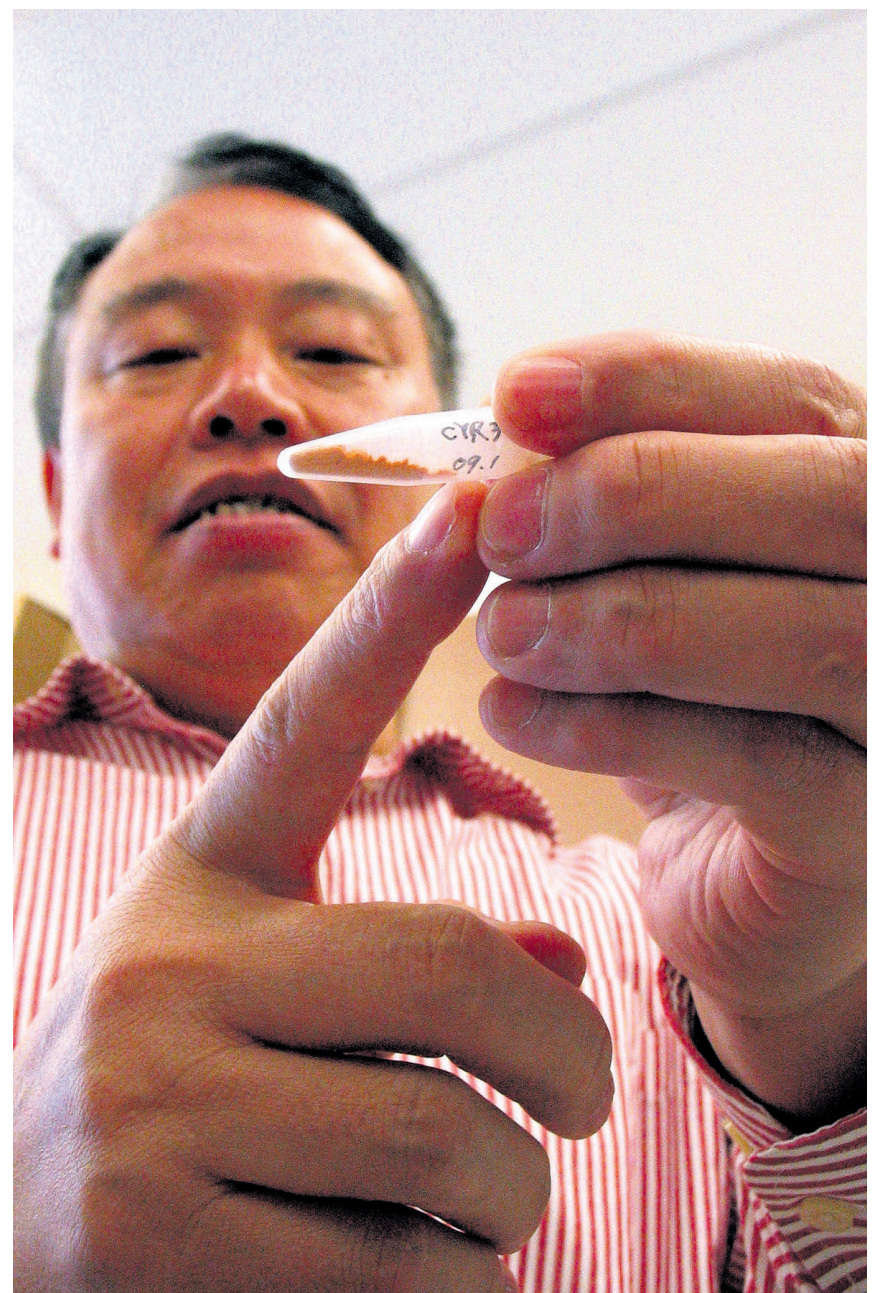
"That way, we can guarantee two sites have a good level of rust," he said.

Dry weather began in April and continued through August.

Just because there was low rust doesn't mean there was no rust. Prior to the artificial inoculation, Chen's team spotted several infected leaves at the Pullman site, considered the first appearance on the Palouse. That was about two weeks later than normal, Chen said, so the spot didn't develop further.

Stripe rust is completely gone for the current growing season, Chen said.

Stripe rust prefers cool, wet weather.



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press File

**Xianming Chen, USDA Agricultural Research Service research geneticist.**

"A good year for wheat production is also a good year for rust development," he said.

There's still some rust spores in the plants, but Chen expects a very low infection rate come fall.

"Even if just a few spores survive ... later on when weather conditions are favorable, they can develop very quickly," Chen said.

He will continue to monitor conditions in winter and spring.

"The rust is still there," Chen said. "It's there, not completely zero, but not (producing) enough to do damage."



University of Idaho

**Stripe rust is at a 30-year low in the Pacific Northwest.**




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