



# WAR ON STRIPE RUST

## Scientist leads PNW battle against devastating wheat disease

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**  
Capital Press

**P**ULLMAN, Wash. — Xianming Chen and a crew of researchers planted winter wheat seeds by hand on a recent November morning. They carefully deposited the seeds in just the right spot so they could be easily identified as they grew.

Chen, a USDA Agricultural Research Service research plant geneticist, greeted everybody cheerfully, with a big grin and enthusiastic waves.

For several hours, he dug deep lines in the soil so the researchers knew exactly where to plant the seeds.

At times, the only sounds were



Matthew Weaver/Capital Press

**USDA research plant geneticist Xianming Chen and other researchers will monitor wheat varieties for susceptibility to stripe rust. The field is marked off with packets full of wheat seeds they would plant by hand Nov. 1 at the USDA Palouse Conservation Field Station in Pullman, Wash.**

stakes being driven into the ground to mark the plots, and the shaking of seeds from tiny packets.

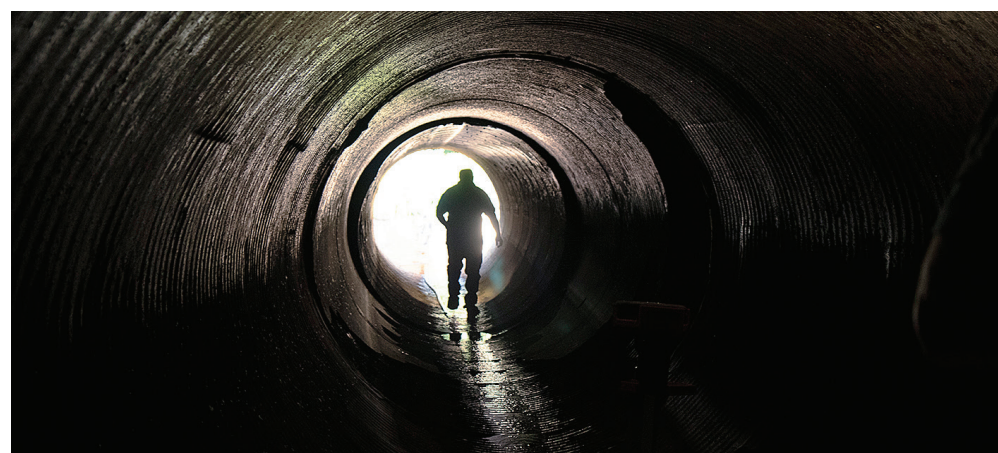
The seeds they planted are new wheat varieties from breeding programs around the country. Chen's team will monitor them as they grow to determine how vulnerable they are to stripe rust, a devastating fungus that can reduce the yield of a wheat crop by nearly half. The fungus attacks a plant by growing in its leaves and reducing photosynthesis.

"Because stripe rust is one of the most destructive diseases in our region and throughout the country, it is important ... for growers to use scientific knowledge to solve or reduce the problem in their fields," Chen said.

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Washington State University  
**Stripe rust infects wheat in a variety trial at Washington State University's test plot near Pullman.**



Sierra Dawn McClain/Capital Press File

**An Oregon dam intake tunnel. The newly passed infrastructure package contains more than \$8 billion in water-related investments, including dam repairs.**

## Infrastructure bill invests in Western water systems

By **SIERRA DAWN MCCLAIN**  
Capital Press

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The U.S. House Nov. 5 voted 228-206 to pass a

\$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill that includes \$8.3 billion dollars in water-related investments.

The package, HR 3684, includes investments in dams, waterways, flood prevention efforts, drought resilience, groundwater storage and conveyance, aquifer recharge projects and other water works.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack in a statement called the deal a "transformative, historic investment for America."

Western water experts say it's too early to map out which specific watersheds or districts will receive dollars to fund projects because much of the funding will be

offered in the form of competitive grants and loans that project managers must apply for in the coming months.

Several Oregon irrigation district managers who are looking to modernize their facilities told the Capital Press they're already drafting portfolios and compiling data to be ready when grant windows open.

Though many site-level specifics are still unknown, broadly, the bill outlines some big-picture plans for water projects in the West.

A section of the bill titled "Western Water Infrastructure" authorizes \$1.15 billion to go toward improving

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## Biden vaccination rule exempts 'truly' outdoor workers

By **DON JENKINS**  
Capital Press

The Biden administration rolled out its vaccination rule for larger employers Nov. 4, providing a narrow exemption for some outdoor workers.

Most workers, in businesses with 100 or more employees, will have to be fully vaccinated against COVID within the next two months. As an alternative, employers could let unvaccinated workers be tested weekly and wear a face covering.

People who "truly" exclusively work outdoors won't have to be vaccinated, according to the Labor Department. They will lose that exemption, however, by "routinely" riding in vehicles with co-workers or working in partially enclosed buildings.

"It looks like most farm workers would qualify (for the exemption). The challenge would be on the transportation," said Michael Marsh, president and CEO of the National Council of Agricultural Employers.

The U.S. Department of Labor said the rule was necessary because COVID poses a grave workplace danger to unvaccinated workers.

Deputy Assistant Secre-



Dan Wheat/For the Capital Press

**Ernesto Salgado picks Kanzi apples in Mt. View Orchard, East Wenatchee, Wash. Under rules released Nov. 4, people who "truly" exclusively work outdoors won't have to be vaccinated.**

tary of Labor for Occupational Safety and Health Jim Frederick said vaccinations, tests and masks will prevent the virus from spreading.

"As part of OSHA's mission to protect the safety and health of workers, this rule will provide a roadmap to help businesses keep their workers safe," he said in a statement.

The rule will apply to 84 million workers, or two-thirds of the U.S. workforce, according to the department. The department invited public comments on whether the mandate should be extended to smaller businesses.

The rule will apply to seasonal and part-time agricultural workers. Once a farm hits 100 employees, it will come under the rule and stay there, even if the workforce drops below 100.

Marsh said he expects the mandate to eventually be expanded to smaller farms that never top 100 workers. "I'm sure that will be coming," he said.

Washington State Dairy Federation director Dan Wood said the outdoor exemption could have limited application for dairy workers in milking barns.

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