

Washington wheat farmer elected NAWG president

By **MATTHEW WEAVER**
Capital Press

Paterson, Wash., wheat farmer Nicole Berg has been elected president of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

She will have a one-year term. Berg is a fourth-generation farmer. She farms with her father and two brothers. They grow dry-land and irrigated wheat, bluegrass seed, field corn, sweet corn, sweet peas, green beans and alfalfa.

Berg is also on the board of the Federal Crop Insurance Corp.

She is NAWG's second female president, following Judy Olsen, of Garfield, Wash., in 1994.

The NAWG board also elected Klamath Falls, Ore., farmer Brent Cheyne as vice president, Keefe



Nicole Berg

Felty of Altus, Okla., as treasurer and Pat Clements of Springfield, Ky., as secretary. Dave Milligan of Cass City, Mich., is past president. One of Berg's first actions as president was to seek a resolution encouraging collaboration with North Dakota wheat growers. The North Dakota Growers Association withdrew from NAWG in 2019, citing a decline in support for issues specifically related to that state.

"In Washington D.C., it's all about coalitions and alliances, and it's about singing the same song from across the country," Berg said. "If you go to D.C., and you're just

from Washington, you don't get too far with regard to policy. But if you go in with a coalition of 20, 30, 40, 50 states, you actually push policy and make things better."

NAWG will send a letter to the North Dakota association within the next week, Berg said.

Ed Kessel, first vice president of the North Dakota association, said the organization preferred to wait and see NAWG's letter before commenting.

Berg also sought a resolution seeking involvement from diverse and underserved farming groups.

Both resolutions passed during the board meeting.

Other issues concerning Berg and other NAWG leaders were:

- **Impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.** The war has impacted

the wheat market with prices rising and falling by daily limits, Berg said.

"It's quite the rollercoaster we're on," she said. "There's just a lot of uncertainty across wheat country, whether it's price or inputs. And the inputs — I'm looking at some of my numbers today, and man, they've gone up. Wheat growers, we run on a thin margin already."

Berg and her family purchased diesel and fertilizer last fall, and did some work in the fall they usually reserve for the spring. That will help, Berg said, but the future's uncertain.

"Farmers need to watch their pocketbooks," she said.

- **New uses for wheat.** The industry is also exploring other ways to use wheat. Previously, the

industry looked at making boards out of straw, Berg said.

"We are feed and food," she said. "Are there other things we can do with our product and get it on the shelves?"

A loaf of bread might cost \$3 at the store, but farmers only receive 17 cents of that, Berg noted.

"Now my fuel prices are going up, and I can't pass that on, because I'm a price-taker," she said.

- **Open-door policy.** Berg invites farmers across the country to help her tell their story.

"I have to hear from them, I have an open-door policy," she said. "If you have an issue with something, call me up, or call another officer. Because that's what we're here for, isn't it? I look forward to working their policy."

Members of Congress urge stronger action on potato access to Mexico

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

The National Potato Council has praised 33 members of Congress for calling on USDA to press Mexico regulators to honor an expanded trade deal.

U.S. fresh potatoes are allowed in Mexico within 16.15 miles of its border with the U.S. An earlier agreement allowed the U.S. full access, but Mexican producers successfully sued to stop the expansion in 2014. The Mexican Supreme Court in April 2021 restored full access.

The countries late last year concluded a work plan. Mexico officials in December toured U.S. potato operations in Colorado. They told USDA they were satisfied and that full market access should be available by February.

But Mexican regulators have demanded additional U.S. site visits this year as a prerequisite for reopening the full market. USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service and its counterpart agency in Mexico jointly announced Feb. 16 that access

would be delayed well into 2022.

Mexico registers its processing companies to import U.S. fresh potatoes. It announced two registrations will be granted this year.

U.S. senators and representatives from both parties, in a March 14 letter to Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack, said neither requirement is part of the work plan.

They urged USDA work with Mexico regulators "to ensure that the trade deal is honored by expeditiously reinstating access for U.S. fresh potatoes and to express that any Mexican request for enhanced agricultural access to the U.S. should not be granted until this access is restored."

Since Mexico appears to be continuing to avoid responsibility to restore access, "we request that APHIS explain its decision-making process to agree to these unscientific and inconsistent demands."

The members of Congress are concerned the agency came to the agreement with its Mexico counterpart without consulting the domestic

industry, "and that this may be indicative of the process that USDA is undertaking to restore fresh access."

"The process that the U.S. is supposed to be pursuing is one to restore, not establish, access for these potatoes," they wrote.

National Potato Council President Jared Balcom, a grower based in Pasco, Wash., said in a statement that the issue "has dragged on far too long, and we appreciate members of Congress for weighing in on behalf of America's potato growers and the communities they support."

"Just when we thought Mexico was preparing to honor its trade commitments, we learned that they added last-minute requirements and reinterpreted the agreed-to work plan to once again prevent U.S. potatoes from gaining full market access," he said.

The council is advising USDA and the U.S. government about the economic consequences of reducing or preventing trade, CEO Kam Quarles told Capital Press.

Idaho Power seeks increase in irrigation rates

By **BRAD CARLSON**
Capital Press

Irrigators will pay Idaho Power Co. 2.3% more for electricity if the state Public Utilities Commission approves a change related to exiting a coal-fired operation earlier than anticipated.

Boise-based Idaho Power last year requested a rate increase to fund accelerated depreciation of coal-related investments at Jim Bridger Power Plant near Rock Springs, Wyo.

The company's most recent long-range plan concluded that ending coal-fired operations there by 2028, about two years early, would reduce costs to customers over the 20-year planning horizon.

The overall increase would boost revenue by \$27.1 million, Idaho Power said in a release. Proposed price increases by customer category are 2.3% for irrigation, 2.24% for general service, 2.23% for large power, 2.08% for residential and 1.99% for small



Sean Ellis/Capital Press

A farm field in southwestern Idaho is irrigated last in this file photo. Idaho Power Co. is seeking a 2.3% rate increase for irrigators.

general service customers.

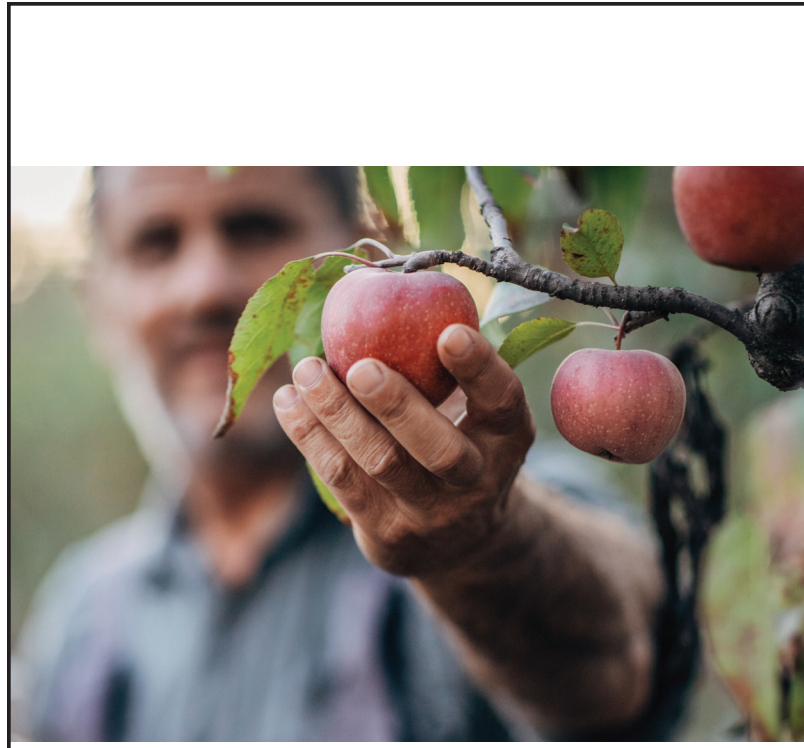
Separately, Idaho Power expects to file its annual power-cost adjustment with the commission April 15. Company spokesman Jordan Rodriguez said irrigation and all other customer classes will be impacted.

The power-cost adjustment passes costs and benefits of supplying energy to customers. It changes with annual fluctuations in power costs. Hydroelectric power generating condi-

tions are among factors.

It is one of two annual cost adjustments Idaho Power files.

The company in mid-March filed its annual fixed-cost adjustment with the commission. It would reduce billed revenue by 0.81% for residential customers and by 0.82% for small general service customers, the company said. The overall proposed decrease for these customer classes is \$4.8 million or 0.81%.



AFTER WE UPGRADED OUR IRRIGATION SYSTEM, THE SAVINGS CAME BY THE BUSHEL.

Too little water isn't good for the apples. Too much wasted water isn't good for the apple grower. That's why we looked to Energy Trust of Oregon to guide us on the installation of a new, more efficient irrigation system. Happy apples. Happy us. See how they can help your business at [EnergyTrust.org/for-business](https://www.energytrust.org/for-business).



ENERGY TRUST for BUSINESS
Run Better

EnergyTrust
of Oregon

Serving customers of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, NW Natural, Cascade Natural Gas and Avista.