

PENDLETON

# Wheat growers gather for field day

Projects include weed control, disease resistance

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**  
East Oregonian

Gusty winds made for a chilly Tuesday morning at the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center north of Pendleton, where scientists with Oregon State University and the U.S. Department of Agriculture hosted their annual field day for local wheat growers.

The station, located on Tubbs Ranch Road, is home to both OSU and the USDA Agricultural Research Service. Field day provides an annual update of ongoing research projects to help farmers improve the quality of their crop and the bottom line of their business.

Participants rode in buses from one wavy wheat field to the next, where project leaders discussed their latest findings on experiments to battle weeds, plant diseases and soil degradation. Representatives of the National Association of Wheat Growers were also on hand to gather feedback on priorities for the 2018 Farm Bill.

Christina Hagerty, plant pathologist at the station, said this year was a perfect storm for stripe rust across the region, given early seeding of winter wheat followed by a cool, wet spring. Stripe rust is capable of cutting wheat yields by more than half if it goes untreated.

Hagerty passed around samples to show how to identify diseases such as stripe rust, eyespot and crown rot. While OSU has done a good job of developing disease-resistant wheat varieties, Hagerty said options are still lacking for soil-borne mosaic virus, which has been another major focus of her program.

"Our options for genetic resistance are pretty limited," she said.

Bob Zemetra, a wheat breeder for OSU in Corvallis, said he began screening for soil-borne mosaic virus in 2008. The disease is especially on the rise around the Walla Walla Valley, and can cause severe stunting in plants.

"One of my goals is to release varieties that can fit in across the state, and in these micro-climates," Zemetra said.

Other issues raised during field day included soil stratification, where the nutrient and pH levels are uneven in the soil profile. Don Wysocki, a soil scientist with OSU Extension Service, said that problem



Staff photo by George Plaven

**Christina Hagerty, plant pathologist for the Oregon State University, discusses how to identify wheat diseases during field day at the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center.**

is "like a freight train coming down the line" for farmers.

One possible soil amendment is biochar, a charcoal-like substance made by roasting biomass such as woody debris at high temperatures and low oxygen. Biochar has already been proven to instantly increase organic matter and soil pH in tests conducted at the research station.

Stephen Machado, agronomist for OSU, reviewed his data from early experiments and said he is now looking into how long the residual effects of biochar may last.

"If it does last, I think this is going to be a great thing for farmers," Machado said.

When he started his project, Machado said biochar cost a whopping \$1 per pound. The price has since dropped to 5-10 cents per pound, and he anticipates market demand could make biochar a cost-effective solution in the future.

Later during the lunch break, David Schemm and Chandler Goule with the National Association of Wheat Growers outlined the industry goals for the next farm bill and agriculture appropriations for fiscal year 2018. Schemm, the association's president, emphasized the importance of crop insurance

moving forward. "It's a key component to a good risk management program," said Schemm, a farmer from western Kansas. "It's about ensuring your program will be there the next year."

Schemm said the association opposes the proposal in President Donald Trump's budget that calls for a \$40,000 hard cap on crop insurance subsidies, which could prevent some larger and mid-size farms from ensuring their entire acreages.

"This is something that cannot work," Schemm said.

As the Trump administration announced its intention to renegotiate the North American Free Trade Agreement, the wheat industry is also urging the government not to harm its trade relationships with Canada and Mexico. Exports to Mexico have been especially strong under NAFTA, increasing by as much as 400 percent, according to the association.

A second field day will be held Wednesday at the OSU Sherman County station in Moro.

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# Former TRCI inmate faces child porn charges

By **PHIL WRIGHT**  
East Oregonian

A former inmate of Two Rivers Correctional Institution faces almost two dozen counts of possessing child pornography while he was in the Umatilla prison.

The Umatilla County District Attorney's Office on May 18 indicted Robert Wayne Bray, 51, on 22 counts of first-degree encouraging child sexual abuse and one charge of supplying contraband. All the crimes took place Dec. 7-9, 2014, according to the indictment.

District Attorney Dan Primus said he could not discuss the details of the case but confirmed Bray was an inmate in the state prison at the time of the alleged crimes. He was later released after serving his sentence.

Bray has a history of child sexual abuse and making and accessing child pornography, according to court records. And the *Argus Observer* reported Bray in 2001 bypassed security measures on a computer at the call center in Snake River Correctional Institution,

Ontario, and downloaded at least 22 pornographic images of children.

Bray had been in the prison there since 1996, serving almost 19 years on a Douglas County conviction of using a child in a display of sexual conduct and delivery of a controlled substance to a minor, the *Argus Observer* reported. Dan Norris, the Malheur County District Attorney at the time, told the newspaper the Douglas County case involved Bray "taking pictures of children performing sex acts or using them in a live sex show."

Accessing the child porn in 2001 netted Bray another 15 years in prison, according to the *Observer*.

Bray had a hearing Monday in Umatilla County Circuit Court, Hermiston, to face the 23 new charges, but he did not appear. He has been in the Douglas County Jail, Roseburg, since May 2 on a parole violation. His release date from Douglas County is July 28.

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# Two taken to hospitals after crash on overpass

East Oregonian

Two Boardman residents were seriously injured in a three-vehicle collision on Highway 207 Monday near Interstate 84.

A teenager was most seriously injured, and he was transported by air to a hospital in Richland and later to Spokane.

Oregon State Police is still investigating the crash, which took place at 10:31 a.m. on Monday. The investigation so far shows that Markus Smith, 20, was driving a silver Pontiac Grand Am with a 13-year-old male passenger. The Pontiac was stopped at the stop sign at the top of the I-84 eastbound ramp of exit 182.

The Pontiac pulled onto Highway 207 and into the path of a commercial motor vehicle operated by Kevin Helzer of Hermiston. The Pontiac side-

swiped Helzer's vehicle and spun, striking another vehicle, which was facing south and waiting to turn onto I-84 eastbound.

Smith was seriously injured and transported by ambulance to Good Shepherd Medical Center in Hermiston. His 13-year-old passenger, whose name was not released by OSP, suffered critical injuries and was transported by Life Flight to Kadlec Medical Center in Richland, and then to a Spokane hospital. Helzer and Glen Sharp, the driver of the other commercial vehicle, were not injured.

As of Tuesday morning, the condition of both Smith and his passenger were unknown. Good Shepherd said Smith was no longer a patient at the hospital, but did not say whether he had been released or transported for further care.

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