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# Drought conditions affecting most wheat farmers

BY SARAH STEPHENS  
SPECIAL TO GAZETTE

Drought conditions have already affected most farmers.

While statewide yields are down overall by 40%, the North Central region is down by 50%. Wheat production remains the same at 2.3 million acres and 2021 yields plummeted to 39.1 bushels per acre, down from 72.4 bushels in 2020.

Official statewide data is being released in December.

The lack of rainfall is causing high protein content in soft white wheat, according to Michelle Hennings, executive director of Washington Wheat Growers. She said one of the best actions farmers can take is to buy crop insurance for uncertain times.

The Washington Wheat Grower's Association is advocating for a national ad hoc disaster program that includes

“This year was very challenging and caused hardship on most farmers.”

— Michelle Hennings,  
Washington Wheat Growers

quality loss of protein, Hennings said. The program requires a 5% or more loss to qualify. For optimum quality, it is best for soft white protein content to remain under 10.5%. The regional average is 11.3%.

The Adams County area falls under the 25.2% in the exceptional drought category, according to the U.S. Drought monitor. The biggest concern this year was not having enough moisture to seed. There has not been enough rainfall

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ROGER HARNACK | THE GAZETTE

A farmer cuts his wheat field during harvest.



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# The role of technology in agriculture

## SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

When asked to think of industries that utilize technology in unique ways, few people may immediately think of agriculture. But technology has left a significant footprint in every industry, and the agricultural sector is no exception.

The National Institute of Food and Agriculture notes that modern farms operate a lot differently than the farms of yesteryear. Dramatic changes have taken place within the agricultural industry over the last few decades, helping farming operations become more efficient and profitable as well as safer and more eco-friendly.

Robots, temperature and moisture sensors, aerial images, and GPS technologies are now routinely employed within the agricultural industry. The NIFA notes that the value of such technologies cannot be understated. Thanks to the technologies at their disposals, farmers no longer have to uniformly apply water, fertilizer and pesticides

to their farms. Technology now allows them to use only the minimum amounts required as they zero in on individual plants and target specific areas of their farms. The NIFA notes that the utilization of these technologies produces some very real benefits, including:

- Higher crop productivity
- Reduced impact on natural ecosystems
- Less runoff of chemicals into rivers and groundwater
- Increased worker safety

Safer, more efficient and more eco-friendly operations can only make the agricultural industry more successful in the decades to come. That's especially notable as the world continues to confront climate change and how it might affect the food supply.

Though few may recognize the role of technology in modern farming, there's no denying the impact that various technologies have already had on the agricultural industry. And that impact figures to become even more profound in the decades to come.



SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

A remotely operated drone ventures through crops.

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## Drought conditions affecting most wheat farmers

to improve drought conditions.

"This year was very challenging and caused hardship on most farmers," Hennings said.

Prices are good in comparison to last year, soft white wheat nearly doubled. In October 2020, soft white wheat prices were on average \$5.87 per bushel and have since risen to \$10 per bushel by the beginning of October.

The price of wheat nearly doubled, but it doesn't seem to be affecting wheat industry workers. Not only are wheat industry workers considered as essential, but many work on family owned farms that employ no more than five

people.

Significant improvements are not forecasted for this year. Many farmers are optimistic that conditions will slowly improve across the region.

"What really matters is the spring moisture. Chances are things are going to be better this year," said Byron Behne, Senior Merchandiser of Northwest Grain Growers.

Winter wheat on summer fallow had a better moisture profile than others, Behne said. This is the first year some companies got a discount for having higher protein content than in previous years.

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# Explaining granges and how they affect rural residents

SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

Local granges serve as a center of rural life in many agricultural communities. People who live outside such communities may be unfamiliar with granges, including what they are.

The most basic definition of a grange is an outlying farm or land with a manor building on the property. When first developed in 12th century Britain, granges were properties that may have been owned by a lord, who chose to live on the property or leased it to others. Other granges were held by the church, mainly by monasteries.

The grange definition and system was modified when the concept was brought to North America. After the Civil War in the United States, Oliver Kelley, the commissioner of the Department of Agriculture, realized while touring the region that poor farmers in the South bore the brunt of the war's devastation. Kelley noted outdated farming practices that were disorganized and largely ineffectual. He considered an organization that could bring farmers together across the country with a spirit of mutual agricultural cooperation.

Out of this idea the National Grange of the Order of Patrons of Husbandry (also called The Grange) was established as a nonprofit organization in 1867. The goal was helping rural American fami-

lies with a strong emphasis on issues related to agriculture. The first grange (Grange #1) was founded in 1868 in Fredonia, New York. Other granges soon sprung up across the country.

The organization operates on four tiers: community, county or district, state, and national level. It is the oldest American agricultural advocacy group with a national scope. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., it has membership in the hundreds of thousands. According to The Grange, their mission is to strengthen individuals, families and communities through grassroots action, service, education, advocacy, and agriculture awareness.

In addition to agricultural advocacy, The Grange has been involved with a number of legislative and practical initiatives. For example, it currently is aiming to find ways to reduce the cost of Medicare as well as helping to reform the U.S. Postal Service. It also is advocating for open auctions of spectrum frequencies used for wireless technology to provide greater access to high-speed wireless technology to rural areas. Various Grange halls and centers are located across the country, and these facilities host events and provide gathering spots for families.

Tracing their origins to 12th century Britain, granges remain a central component of agricultural life in the 21st century.



JUSTIN SLAYTON | THE GAZETTE

The North & South Palouse Grange sits idle on SR 272 outside of Colfax.

## Fall Fertilize for Healthier Lawn

BY MARK AMARA  
WSU GRANT-ADAMS MASTER GARDENER

Lawns need be fed regular applications of nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium and other nutrients to stay healthy. Choosing the right kind of fertilizer and applying it at the right time is important.

Here in eastern Washington, there are optimal times to apply nutrients to help keep the lawn healthy and vigorous. Washington State University recommends considering fertilizer applications four times per year, May 1,

June 15, September 1, and November 1-15 after the last mowing and before the ground freezes. When nitrogen is applied in the fall, avoid early spring applications until after April 1 unless nitrogen deficiency is apparent. Better root growth and vigor are encouraged and can avoid the flush of growth by annual bluegrasses. If one application is missed, do not double up on subsequent rates; just use the recommended amount each time fertilizer is applied. For those who fertilize only once or twice a year,

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## Fall Fertilize for Healthier Lawn

Fall is the most critical time to fertilize rather than in the spring. Fall fertilized lawns green up more quickly and look better earlier in the spring than lawns that weren't fertilized in the fall. Spring fertilizer applications tend to promote leaf growth often at the expense of root growth. Except in unusually warm years, once the weather becomes more winter-like, grass goes dormant and the soil is cold, it is too late to fertilize. Nitrogen releasing fertilizers require sufficient soil microbial activity to release nitrogen and won't work in cold soils.

Ideally, soil testing is the most accurate way to determine the number of pounds of fertilizer to add. In general, eastern Washington lawns only need nitrogen though other nutrient needs can be assessed through testing. Sulfur is a nutrient that enhances color and helps control certain weeds and diseases in lawns. Washington State University recommends using a moderate rate of 2-3 lbs. sulfur per 1000 feet per year. So, selecting a lawn fertilizer that contains sulfur or ammonium sulfate should be part of a balanced fertilizer management program. As a rule of thumb, lawns require about one pound nitrogen per 1000 square feet per application for each of the recommended four application times each year. Since both nitrogen and sulfur are soluble in water, applications are recommended every year. By contrast phosphorus is not soluble and stays in the soil much longer.

Percent nitrogen is always the first number listed on the fertilizer bag

though checking whether it is controlled release, slow release, slowly available or water soluble is also recommended. Divide 100 by the percent nitrogen on the bag to figure how much is needed per 1000 square feet. For example, a fertilizer with 20 percent nitrogen would require  $100/20$  or 5 lbs. of fertilizer produce per every 1000 square feet of lawn. Figure out the number of square feet in lawn and divide by 1000. Using the above example, multiply by the pounds of fertilizer needed per 1000 square feet which gives the approximate number of pounds of fertilizer to spread on the lawn. So, if a lawn measures out to 12,000 square feet, divide 12,000 by 1000 = 12. Then multiply 5 times 12 = 60 which is the pounds of fertilizer needed to be spread over 12,000 feet lawn to supply 1 pound of actual nitrogen per 1000 square feet.

Most quality lawn fertilizers offer a balance of fast and controlled release sources to provide quick color (without a big surge of growth) and some longer lasting nitrogen. Using balanced fertilizers like 10-10-10 is not advised for repeated use because of the excessive application of phosphorus which can build up to excessive levels, may lead to potential runoff problems and encourages more weeds in the lawn.

Inorganic sources of nitrogen like ammonium sulfate and ammonium nitrate, usually give better results in early spring and late fall than organic forms. After the soil warms, organic sources like sewage sludge or plant and



SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

animal byproducts can do better due to increased microorganism activity in the soil. Natural organic lawn fertilizers are typically very low in nitrogen. If using this type, consider doubling the rates of application since generally only half the nitrogen is available to the grass the first year. Otherwise, for conventional fertil-

izers, gardeners should apply nitrogen in a slow-release form. Quick release or water-soluble nitrogen is easily leached out of the root zone by irrigation and rainfall. Winterizing fertilizers are not recommended, are often more expensive and contain higher levels

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## Fall Fertilize for Healthier Lawn

of potassium which is only beneficial if indicated by low soil test. However, a complete winterizing fertilizer may be good to use for the early November application. Dry fertilizers should be applied when the grass is dry and irrigated immediately afterwards or if irrigation water is not available fertilize to coincide with an anticipated rain event. If a quick release fertilizer is used on sandy soils, split the one lb./1000' into 2 applications approximately 2 weeks apart to reduce possible leaching of nutrients. Slow-release fertilizers are recommended on sandy soils or close

to water sources to reduce the threat of leaching or runoff.

Master Gardeners are on call 24/7 year-round to answer gardening questions. Contact the WSU Grant-Adams Master Gardeners at the WSU Grant County Extension office, Phone: 509.754.2011 Ext. 4313 or Email: [ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu](mailto:ga.mgvolunteers@wsu.edu). Online reference services are available at <https://extension.wsu.edu/grant>. Sealed samples may be brought for identification to the WSU Extension Office, 1525 E. Wheeler Road, Moses, Monday-Friday, 8-5 PM.

## How to support local agriculture this fall

### SPECIAL TO THE GAZETTE

The global pandemic that has upended daily life has exacted a toll on many industries. Businesses have been asked to close or temporarily scale back operations, while organizers of recreational gatherings have been tasked with reevaluating the practicality and safety of annual events.

Throughout the United States and Canada, autumn fairs, exhibitions and activities provide revenue for many people. But due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus, many of these annual events have been postponed, adversely affecting local agricultural industries as a result. Governments in certain places have responded to the cancellations and offered assistance to local farmers and agricultural industries. For example, the Province of Ontario is providing nearly \$1 million to assist organizations that had to cancel fall events due to the coronavirus pandemic. In addition to support-

ing such efforts, the general public can pitch in to help offset some of the financial losses accrued by local farms.

- Check for virtual events. Some fall fairs or livestock events have been moved to the digital realm. That means competitors who were entering livestock or even home crafts into competitions can still participate. Organizers may ask for videos or photos of entries and then a committee will vote on the winners. This is one way to keep entry fees and even cash prizes moving along.

- Support local farms or orchards. Fall is harvest season in many areas, making this a popular time of year to visit nearby farms and to purchase fruits and vegetables directly from the source. Many farms have implemented safety protocols that align with COVID-19 health recommendations to safely welcome visitors. Things may look a little differently at orchards and

*Continued on Page 8*

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# How to support local agriculture this fall

farms, but smaller crowds and wearing masks should not compromise the fun of picking your own foods.

- Explore farm-to-table. Private individuals as well as restaurant owners can develop relationships with area agriculture producers to increase the availability of farm-to-table offerings. Restaurants can revamp menus to include a greater share of items sourced from nearby farms. Individuals also can rely on produce stands and farmers' markets to stock their pantries. Some farms may offer delivery and mail-order as well.

- Offer financial services. Financial advisors can help farmers

who are struggling with finances work through their options. Institutions may be able to extend the terms of loan repayments, refinance loans, restructure debt, or get credit extensions. Lower interest rates have created some new opportunities farmers may not be aware of. Financial advisors can help farmers navigate an uncertain financial time.

Farmers and agricultural organizations are facing greater challenges as fall fairs and other events are being canceled. The public can support agriculture in different ways to offset the financial losses stemming from the pandemic.

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