



A welcome 'asset'

New Montana Wheat and Barley Committee Exec. VP hits the ground running



By Cassidy Strommen

If there's one component that new Executive Vice President Kent Kupfner wants people to know about the Montana Wheat and Barley Committee (MWBC), it's that the farmer-driven organization helps lead the state's agriculture industry.

"We're proud to represent production agriculture and wheat and barley growers around the state, and we're confident that the product that we produce is consistent and reliable and of high quality," said Kupfner, who began his leadership role with MWBC in November 2022.

The committee was created in 1967 after the Montana Legislature responded to state wheat farmers' requests for a self-help market development program, resulting in the MWBC, a refundable checkoff program. In 1973, a refundable barley checkoff was added and the organization changed its name to reflect both commodities.

A half-century later, the committee continues promoting the same priority areas that helped establish MWBC and helps oversee an industry that generates over \$4 billion in economic value. Checkoff funds are invested into research projects, market development and education services that directly benefit Montana wheat and barley growers.

Kupfner holds those values near and dear to his heart. Before joining the MWBC team, Kupfner bought and sold commodities and managed logistics for grain elevators. His commercial grain trading experience made him an ideal fit for MWBC.

"I am relatively new to that position, but certainly not new to the grain industry," Kupfner said. "I spent 30 years in the commercial grain industry, and most of that has been in

Montana, so I am able to promote and represent U.S. wheat and specifically Montana wheat in the marketplace."

Kupfner takes direction from seven farmer directors who represent districts across Montana. The farmers set the budget and help determine the directions they would like to see the committee take. Kupfner's collaboration with the board is essential to upholding the committee's mission.

"Kent brings a lot of experience to the table," said Denise Conover, a Broadview farmer who chairs MWBC. "It has been a very smooth transition because he knows how the process works, especially when talking to overseas buyers. He is truly an asset to the Montana Wheat and Barley Committee."

The 2023 growing season has been a relatively good one for Montana wheat and barley growers, having received more rain this growing season than in previous years. With the expected increase in bushels, Kupfner is excited to invest more checkoff dollars toward research projects, market development and education services.

"We're definitely seeing a large rebound in production for spring wheat, barley, durum and winter wheat, and so our gross revenues will certainly be higher. We will certainly handle that influx of money judiciously," Kupfner said. "What that allows us to do is rebuild some of our reserves that we've dipped into. It'll just help finance our overall mission."

The committee is looking forward to upcoming visits from trade teams, including groups from Southeast Asia, Korea, Japan and Mexico. Teams will be hosted across the state, especially in the north-central "Golden Triangle" where grain production is the most heavily concentrated in Montana. 🌾