

Gleanings from the Montana Wheat & Barley Committee



By Kent Kupfner, Executive Director
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JAPANESE TRADE TEAMS -- During October, MWBC hosted members from four of the top five Japanese flour milling companies including Nisshin, Nippon, Showa Sangyo and Chiba Flour Milling Company. These companies account for more than 70 percent of all Japanese wheat imports, so their impact on the Montana wheat industry is substantial. Depending on Montana's annual production results, these customers purchase between 30 percent and 50 percent of Montana's entire winter wheat crop! While not as statistically impressive, Japanese demand is also a very important component of the spring wheat balance sheet. Each of our domestic and export customers are important, but the Japanese market presence cannot be understated.



Charlie Bumgarner visits with trade team members at his farm near Great Falls, MT.

Trade team participants largely arrive from procurement, quality control, flour production and new product innovation departments. While their interests vary, they focus on crop size and availability; quality factors such as protein, test weight and falling number; and milling and baking characteristics. Most visitors are also interested in what varieties are being planted and what new varieties are in the development and release stages. The outlook for 2025 winter wheat seeding progress and crop conditions was also of great interest. In MWBC shared multiple farm visits, flour mill and bakery tours, and stops at the State Grain Lab as part of an overall experience. Most trade teams request a visit to at least one shuttle elevator and

the commercial grain industry is always accommodating.

Even though much of the agenda items is second nature to producers, these visits to Montana wheat country are completely foreign and eye opening for our guests. The opportunity to stand in a newly planted field of winter wheat, drive a tractor, observe the size of a sprayer or combine, and grab a handful of wheat from farm storage is often a highlight of their trip to Montana. Meeting producers at their farms and the chance to observe multiple generations working the land always leaves a positive impression.

GRANT REQUESTS, 2025 BUDGET & MONTANA PRODUCTION -- MWBC received 41 grant requests which will be reviewed and considered as we develop the 2025 budget during our October and December board meetings. Our annual budget parameters are primarily driven by Montana wheat and barley production results. All wheat production for 2025 totaled 172 million bushels which is a seven percent reduction from last year's 184 million bushel all wheat crop. Winter wheat production was 91.5 million, up seven percent, and spring wheat production (61 million) is down 23 percent from the 79-million-bushel crop produced in 2023. Durum production, estimated at 19.8 million bushels, is down five percent from the 20.9 million bushels produced last year. Barley production, estimated at 36.2 million bushels, is down 28 percent from the 50.5-million-bushel crop produced in 2023.

STAKEHOLDER MEETINGS -- As part of fulfilling our mission, MWBC holds a seat at the table at a myriad of industry-related meetings. I have been participating in state administrator gatherings with peers from other wheat producing states. We discuss common issues ranging from new technology, GMO wheat,

transportation, research efforts, potential new uses for wheat, demand developments and sustainability. This group is nearing completion of a guiding principles document that is dedicated to increasing profitability for the American wheat farmer through targeted initiatives that advance the US wheat industry. We have also been active as stakeholders in recruiting the next MSU Endowed Chair, pressing the need for how critical this role is for the entire wheat industry. Lori Wickett and I enjoyed attending MGGA's October board meeting presenting updates to the group on MWBC activities and hearing from growers around the state about crop results, seeding progress and the overall outlook from the farmgate.

FINAL THOUGHTS -- Montana growers are nearing the finish line planting the 2025 winter wheat crop. Like most years, seeding conditions and crop conditions are highly variable around the state. Most reports are guardedly optimistic as we near dormancy and the need for additional moisture is a consistent observation.

I'll be travelling to Japan, Korea, China and Taiwan in November as part of a US Wheat Associates trade team. We will be visiting customers and presenting 2025 crop quality data to customers in each country. I have been tasked with discussing crop quality as it relates specifically to US hard red winter wheat. I'm going to miss the Cat-Griz game, but I'll look forward to reporting back on the success of this rigorous trip and hope to see everyone at the rapidly approaching MGGA convention.