

Gleanings from the Montana Wheat & Barley Committee



By Kent Kupfner, Executive Director
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New Directors

MWBC recently welcomed two new directors to our team. Cindy McKamey and Courtney Herzog were appointed by Governor Gianforte to replace retiring directors Charlie Bumgarner and Densie Conover, respectively. We will certainly miss Denise and Charlie and their contributions to MWBC, but we're also excited to get Cindy and Courtney on board and we're looking forward to their involvement.

Trade Team Season

In Montana, August translates to harvest season and trade team visits. MWBC hosted three trade teams during the month all representing the Japanese wheat and flour milling industry. Japan is historically the third/fourth largest buyer of US wheat with approximately 85 percent of the hard red winter wheat and 60 percent of the hard red spring wheat originating from Big Sky Country. MWBC is always excited and motivated to welcome customers to Montana so they can meet growers; view harvest first-hand; ride on combines; tour commercial grain elevators, seed plants and flour mills; and learn about grading procedures at the State Grain Lab. Each trade team is unique in its makeup with



Boyd Heilig, far right of Moore, poses with JFMA members, along with Brett Dailey, Kent Kupfner and Cindy McKamey of MWBC

varying levels of interest regarding facets of the industry they would like to focus on. However, a common thread is consistently their desire to meet growers and visit their farm operations. For many team members, it is their first trip to America. We roll out the red carpet and make sure they have a great time and learn as much as possible while they are in Montana. MWBC appreciates the time and effort of everyone involved from the commercial grain industry, the State Grain Lab and especially the growers who welcome the teams to their farms, shops and bin sites. While combines and tractors might seem second nature to many, the Japanese visitors are always excited and impressed when they have the opportunity to check out the equipment and go for a ride.

BNSF Update

MWBC welcomed Mike McKay, Montana's BNSF ombudsman, and Matthew White, general director of agricultural products, to our office for a visit and opportunity to discuss BNSF rail operations in the state. Mike and Matt addressed performance issues related to car placement and velocity. They noted that shuttle sets offered to the marketplace were reduced from 155 to 140. Their objective is to turn fewer shuttle sets faster (velocity) while improving customer service and their overall performance. Issues related to cross border logistics with Mexico were also addressed. The slow return of empties and the damage to hopper cars while in Mexico are creating multiple problems for the railroad.

Challenging Growing and Harvest Season

It seems every year is different in production agriculture, and that has not changed this year. Favorable fall seeding conditions resulted in excellent stand establishment for the 2024 Montana winter wheat crop. Mild June temperatures, average precipitation, modern farming practices and ever-improving varieties resulted in an excellent crop in terms of quantity and quality. While protein levels are below average, statewide yields have been excellent. The most recent USDA estimate of 51 bushels per acre matches record yields established in 2020 and 2023. Growing conditions changed significantly after July 8 when a blistering stretch of hot, windy weather and limited precipitation took a toll on all spring planted crops. As we approach September, harvest of spring crops continues. Unfortunately, untimely rainfall interrupted harvest on multiple occasions and caused crop damage in some areas of the state. We are all disappointed and frustrated with the hand Mother Nature dealt us during the second half of the growing season. Perhaps the silver lining is the rainfall will improve conditions as seeding is rapidly approaching.

We are all in this together. Please keep your head up, be safe and best of luck this fall.



Jess Bandel, Floweree, gives a tractor ride to a member of the Nisshin team