



May 29, 2008

Jennifer Harte
Future of Farming Coordinator
Washington State Department of Agriculture
Olympia, Washington 98504-2560

Re: Future of Farming

Dear Jennifer,

The wheat and barley industries applaud WSDA for its efforts to develop a strategic plan to ensure agriculture becomes an even more vibrant and crucial part of the Washington State economy.

Our industry is also looking to the future. In a proactive effort to better position the Washington small grains industry to capitalize on opportunities and meet challenges ahead, the boards of directors of the Washington Barley Commission (WBC), the Washington Wheat Commission (WWC) and the Washington Association of Wheat Growers (WAWG) decided in mid 2007 to merge the existing staffs of the three entities to form a single, Washington Grain Alliance (WGA). Although the WBC, WWC and WAWG still have their respective boards of directors, the single, WGA staff has developed a unified voice within our industry.

To further this goal, the wheat and barley commission boards of directors have proposed merging into one commission with a single board of directors to provide added industry efficiencies. A survey of growers and landlords overwhelmingly supported the idea. Thus new legislation will be drafted for the 2009 Legislative Session. Our industry will need legislative support to move the industry in the direction our growers and landlords want to take it.

Vision for the Future of Farming:

Profitable farm families in vibrant rural economies, providing a safe, affordable, abundant food supply for the consuming public as well as feed, conservation benefits

and energy resources. Producers need to be profitable to pass on farm operations to the next generation.

Opportunities for Washington Wheat and Barley Producers:

Varied climatic conditions and land capabilities enhance the ability of small grain producers to provide a myriad of food, feed and energy products for the domestic and international market. Opportunities include expanding trade demand for wheat and wheat based products; developing underutilized resources such as completion of the Columbia Basin Project; development and application of technology; educating the public regarding the benefits of agriculture to society, particularly as citizens are becoming further removed from farming; and niche markets opportunities for some growers.

Current and Future Challenges:

- Profitability and maintaining the productive capability of farms and ranches in the face of factors such as regulations, rapidly rising input costs, volatile price swings, diseases, weather, and political actions.
- Ensuring the transportation system remains competitive and efficient so our industry and products are competitive in world and domestic markets.
- Lack of sufficient state funding for wheat-related research and technology transfer that benefits not only the industry, but also the state's citizens and economy.
- Need for connectivity (broadband internet service) in rural areas allowing farm families to benefit from timely access to information.

Top Three Actions State Legislators Can Take To Help Agriculture Producers Over The Next 20 Years:

- Reduce the regulatory burden on individuals and businesses that hinder agricultural production; ensure rulemaking is consistent with legislative intent; and provide favorable tax policy for agricultural food production.
- Ensure competitive, efficient multi modal (road/rail/river) transportation is available to transport crops to market and necessary inputs to the farms.
- Provide sufficient state funding for research, including technical positions, at Washington State University in the college of Agriculture, Human and Natural Resource Sciences (CAHNRS).

Expanding upon these top three issues:

Without reasonable state policies regarding such issues as taxes, land use, a flexible industrial insurance system, regulations, etc., coupled with agency rulemaking that corresponds to legislative intent, the regulatory burden can be too great, causing farming and food production to cease.

We ask the legislature to recognize that while farmers are few relative to the total population, the larger populace consumes the food they produce. Laws and policies that

support farming and maintain the productive capability of the land are in the best interests of the state, as are the conservation and energy benefits provided by farm families as wise stewards of the land.

Without the existing infrastructure in place, our rural communities and industries would come to a halt. Capacity is restricted and freight rates rise when there is a lack of multi-modal competition.

We ask the legislature to support the industry in working to: safeguard the shortline rail system with its added safety, capacity and service capabilities and economic contribution to rural communities; address the existing monopolistic railroad structure which often holds farmers captive; and ensure the Columbia and Snake River dam and lock navigation system remains viable with its fuel-efficient and emission-friendly capacity moving commodities to and from the farm.

Without research into new technologies, new products, new markets, diseases, production practices, technology transfer, etc., our industry cannot remain healthy and productive. Aside from its societal benefits, the economic contribution of the wheat industry to the state's rural and state economy is valued at over \$1 billion per year with a ripple effect of 2.53 to 1.

We ask the legislature to sufficiently support research at WSU, joining wheat and barley growers who collectively contribute more money to WSU than any other commission to their land-grant university. Washington's wheat and barley growers are savvy and understand the importance of research.

If our industry can be of further assistance with the Future of Farming project, please let us know.

Sincerely,



Thomas B. Mick
Chief Executive Officer

Washington Wheat Commission
907 W. Riverside Avenue
Spokane, WA 99201-1006
(509) 456-2481 Fax (509) 456-2812

**Washington Association
of Wheat Growers**
109 E. First Avenue
Ritzville, WA 99 169-2394
(509) 659-0610 Fax (509) 659-4302

Washington Barley Commission
907 W. Riverside Avenue
Spokane, WA 99201-1006
(509) 456-2481 Fax (509) 456-2812