Grain and Rain

Soft white wheat at Portland averaged $4.64 per bushel in March and club brought $8.64. Barley prices averaged $120 per ton for the same period.

On the brighter side, precipitation reported at the Sherman Experiment Station in Moro exceeded the long term average by .01, coming down .97 of an inch for March. That keeps our crop year-to-date total above the long term average of 9.29 inches or .81 inches above normal. Hopefully we are getting some recharge in our deep soil moisture banks.

Wasco County recorded an average of .83 of an inch, ranging from .51 in Bakeoven to 1.36 inches in Mosier.

Avoid Spray Damage to Cherries

As you know, cherry trees become very sensitive to certain pesticides when the trees reach the critical stage known as “bud break”. We are there, so all pesticide applicators need to use extra caution when applying any pesticides. While most of us wouldn’t mind having a field of orchards trees, none of us want to pay for a neighbor’s crop that returns zero to us.

Cherry trees are especially sensitive to the class of herbicides known as the “Sulfonylureas” or “SU’s”. This is an amazing chemistry (known as ALS inhibitors) that seals off a particular point in the genetics that virtually chokes off the hazard. The beauty is that a little herbicide goes a long ways, meaning we only apply small amounts per acre. On cherry trees with their super-sensitivity to the chemical, a little goes even further. Not only can it impact the fruit production for the current year, it could reduce or stop production for several years, resulting in the possible premature removal of the trees.

We are into the sensitive period for those trees now, so please halt application of any SU’s and discuss options with your fieldman. Common sulfonylureas in wheat production include: Harmony Extra, Harmony GT, Finesse, Ally, Ally Extra, Amber, Canvas, Glean, Oust, Peak, Rave, Cimarron and Express.
Avoid Spray Damage to Cherries...continued

The newer chemistry of Imidazolinones (the Imi’s) are also ALS inhibitors but we have not heard them discussed in relation to potential damage on cherry trees. These pesticides (including Beyond, Arsenal, Raptor, Pursuit, Assert and Plateau) should be regarded with the same precaution as the SU’s on cherries until we get a green light on them.

Another caution is to avoid drifting by being sure you are not spraying during an inversion. An inversion is where you get a layer of cold trapped under a layer of warmer air. This happens frequently in the Mid-Columbia and often in and around The Dalles, partially due to the geology of the area trapping the colder air in place while a warmer air mass moves in over the top. Because of its proximity to the river and elevated humidity, the area is frequently socked in with a layer of fog. On other days, smoke can be seen rising to a low level, then flattening out as thought it had hit the bottom side of a firm surface.

An inversion can also occur when radiation from the surface exceeds the amount of radiation from the sun, meaning it can occur at night or during the winter when the angle of the sun is low in the sky. In the resulting inversions, the air in the lower level is very still.

When the air is still, particles can stay aloft and float for great periods or like smog, accumulate enough to become visible or give the sky a hazy appearance. Smog is a perfect example of pollutants trapped in a lower level because of cold air being trapped under the warmer layer. It can be very common in areas trapped by higher hills that often trap the cold air into a “bowl” area. It is why an area like The Dalles can be so socked in while there is blue sky once you hit the top of Auction Yard Hill.

Applying pesticides in or near an inversion can keep particles suspended and allow them to float to a lower site, possibly a couple miles away. Use caution when applying any pesticide.

Avoid Spray Damage to Grapes

The Mid-Columbia has also seen a growth in the number of grape vineyards in recent years. Grapes seem to have a greater sensitivity to a wider class of pesticides than do cherries. Mary Corp, Umatilla County Extension Agent and Dan Ball, OSU Weed Specialist at the Columbia Basin Ag Research Center have produced a very handy one-page fact sheet to help you avoid the risk of spreading harm to vineyards. It includes what to avoid and what you may substitute with a higher degree of safety. That flyer is reprinted in this Newsletter for your use.

Lawn and Garden Questions?

Your best bet for answers is the Mid Columbia Master Gardeners, trained volunteers who love gardening and a good challenge. They can help identify your problem and offer you the best research based answers for dealing with those issues.

The Master Gardeners can be found at the Wasco County Extension Office at the Columbia Gorge Community College on Tuesday and Thursdays, from 1 pm to 4 pm, and on Saturdays at the Fred Meyer Garden Center in The Dalles, from 9 am to 2 pm. You can bring your plants or bugs in at any time but these times are when you can expect your answers.

Soil testing is also provided by the Master Gardeners in The Dalles. Soils will be tested for nitrogen, potassium, phosphorus, pH, and humus and soil texture. Cost of each test is $20.00, payable at time of service, to Wasco County Master Gardeners. For information on how to collect a proper soil sample, refer to the Soil Collection flyer on the Master Gardener website (http://extension.oregonstate.edu/wasco/mastergardeners/MGMMainPage.php) OR contact the OSU Wasco County Extension Service at 296-5494. Testing will be performed each Wednesday. Samples need to be received no later than 8:30a.m., but will be accepted earlier in the week.
Skeletonweed Rising

Our old friend the Rush Skeletonweed is making its presence even more visible as growers begin to take a deeper look at CRP lands and the neighboring range areas. Many of these acres have not been closely inspected since going into CRP, but with planning to remove many acres from that program, these partially ignored lands are drawing attention.

Patches from a handful of plants to over 15 acres have been reported and treated. At this stage, the new plants have a dandelion looking rosette and may be starting to bolt. We once heard that the only difference between a dandelion rosette and a skeletonweed one is in the taste, but I don’t know what that difference is. The bolting stem normally shows fine, downturned hairs that may extend up to about the first branches, but recent discoveries are revealing many plants without those downturned hairs.

We don’t expect any flowering until about the Fourth of July when the yellow flowers appear. Skeletonweed flowers can set viable seed within 72 hours. It can continue producing seeds up until Thanksgiving. These seeds all have the parachute attachments, again much like dandelions seeds, which allow them to float in the winds for up to nine miles. One can see why this weed can become so much a problem in a short time.

But wait, there’s more! The skeleton weed also spreads by roots. Its root system sends out lateral roots as far as 15 feet and those roots have growing points every inch to inch and a half. That’s another reason we caution you not to farm through a patch of skeletonweed… each part of that farmed-through root is capable of producing yet another plant.

Once you pass the rosette stage, the stems are about like baling wire in thickness and just as bare. Very few and then only very small leaves might be seen on above the basal leaves, and give the plant it’s “skeleton” name. These narrow stem with no leaves mean there is very little surface to catch a killing pesticide.

Another key to identification and another key to making control so difficult is the latex sap found inside the plant. This gooey substance is thick and sticky, much like the popular white glue used by school kids and wood workers. The Russians actually worked with these plants in WWII to try and produce latex rubber for their machinery needs. The thick sap also makes it nearly impossible for pesticides, if you can get them to stick to the plant, to translocate down to the root system to kill it.

That sap also gums up the inside of your combine at harvest should you run through a patch. Then it causes all the worst parts of the chaff to stick to things on the inside of the machine, creating a nightmare for the kid you select to stuff inside to clean it out.

And it is competitive. In parts of Australia, where it got into wheat fields, rush skeletonweed reduced yields by up to 70%. All the more reason to keep a sharp eye for this plant on range ground and especially on CRP lands that you may be contemplating taking out and farming.

If you think you have found some rush skeleton weed, contact your Extension Office or your County Weed District and ask for a positive identification. Pulling the plant only stimulates the growth of new plants from the remaining root system.
June 16 marks the 100th anniversary of the first research field Day ever held at the Sherman Experiment Station in Moro. So the annual field day in Moro this year will not include any research updates from work researchers are doing but will instead, focus on the work that preceded it for the last 100 years. Old equipment, practices, rotations and crops will be featured. Any history buff or farmers wanting to show off what it was like in the day will want to attend this field day.

Learn when some of the “new miracle” crops were first planted; test your skills in identifying some of the old equipment; guess which crop always scored in the most profitable crop rotations. See some of the old hard reds, tall clubs and the earliest semi-dwarfs, the variety of non-cereal crops once produced in order to find the best rotation for man, beasts and land resources.

Paradise Rose is catering the luncheon at the end of the tours. It will be different; you will learn surprising things and a good time will be had by all. Mark this one down and do not miss it. Bring your cameras!