GRAIN AND RAIN

The average price of soft white wheat at Portland was $4.89 per bushel in November and $4.96 in December. Club averaged $7.55 and $7.91 for the same months. Barley averaged $107.50 per ton in November and $112.50 in December.

Rainfall as reported at the Sherman Experiment Station in Moro was 1.04 inches in November, 1.18 in December. Many reports for December from around the region are coming in higher and it is suspected the difference may be in how snow fall is measured. The last 2009 snowfall was a wet one.

GRAIN VS. COLD SNAP, ROUND ONE

The recent cold snap in December hit our small grain plants without any cover. Did it damage the plants? We may have come through this safely. Here’s why.

While our deep soil moisture is low, recent rains before the snap made soil moisture in the top foot adequate. Adequate, not excessive, soil moisture is an asset for small plants as hydration helps them bear the freezing. Larry Lutcher of Morrow County uses the analogy of anti-freeze. Put it in your radiator, it lowers the freezing point. Salts, nutrients and organic compounds in the cytoplasm of the plant cells do the same. Plants that are adequately hydrated have an improved ability to accumulate and synthesize their own “antifreeze.” And we did ease into the cold snap so the plants had some time to prepare, “hardening”, which prepares special gums and resins which resist frost damage.

Our plant sizes were in good shape. While plants with one or two tillers have a good tolerance of cold weather, smaller plants with 3-4 leaves are a bit lower down the scale, but still fairly tough. Our biggest concern is with those late seeded or late emerging plants that had only one or two leaves. Typically we say that a plant needs three leaves to have developed a root system with some energy reserves capacity. The smaller plants are more susceptible without that reserve to recover. If you start scouting in your fields, start at the last seeded, as that is where one would expect the smallest plants.

With a few exceptions in selected areas, our cold snap was during a relatively calm period. There was little or no wind during that snap so we did not have plants being subjected to sandblasting by frozen grains of soil. Smaller
weaker plants are again more susceptible to damage there. The rains and warmer temps that preceded the snap aided our crops.

In our direct seeded fields, emergence is typically a bit slower, so plants may have been smaller, but the surrounding straw residue offers some degree of protection. The temperature drop may not have been as significant because the residue also keeps a lower temp to begin with. Still, the residue should have offered better protection.

Another factor in favor of the crop comes through the breeding program. Your money has helped Dr Jim Peterson and others develop varieties with traits for the end user and for you the producer. Improved winter hardiness can be found in Tubbs 06 and Skiles. Early data on the ORCF 101 said it was ranked at Tubbs levels, but it may be slightly lower. The ORCF 102 has a stronger cold tolerance than does 101; one of the reasons is it is so much more popular in the Palouse region. Still, ORCF 101 beats out Stephens (which has a lower winter-hardiness rating but has an amazing ability to recover quickly), which beats out Goetze and Gene.

You may wish to scout, but will want some warmer weather to do so. Watch for leaf damage. Poor ones will look weak, and have a dark shade or purple color. These are non-functional and will eventually abort. Do not decide to replant without checking the crown of the plants. For the most part, wheat crowns in our area were pretty well protected, but to be sure, dig the plants out and inspect them for healthy tissue color. Brown or black or even rotting tissue is not a good sign.

Still not sure? Then do the “Rag Doll Test.” Dig up some representative plants, taking care to not damage the roots. Clip off the green growth to about an inch above the crown level. Wrap the remaining part in a paper towel with the top of the paper wrap covering the crown and leaving the crew cut- cropped top part extending above the paper. Put the “rag doll” in a shallow pan (pie pans work well) with a small amount of water with the top of the rag doll out of the water. Place the pan in an area set at a comfortable room temperature. Make sure the water does not dry out, and give it a couple of days. If the crown is well, you will see new growth emerging.

If the rag doll shows no signs of recovery, quietly beat a path to your seed salesman before the neighbors do.

2010 BRINGS NEW LAWS & REGULATIONS

No surprise but 2010 also brings us some new rules and changes you should be familiar with. For example;

Cell Phone Use in vehicles (including farm equipment) while driving is now banned unless you use a hands free device. Youths under 18 are banned from using any communication device, hands free or not. Your one exception is if the mobile communication is needed for part of the job or in emergencies. Calling for grain prices is not considered an emergency but warning a driver when moving equipment down the road can be considered part of the job.

The Move Over law is clarified. This is the one that says when you come upon an emergency vehicle on the shoulder with its lights flashing, you are required to move over to another lane. Emergency vehicles include police, fire and/or rescue, ambulances, road repair/construction and tow trucks. If you are unable to pull over, you are required to slow down which is now defined as 5 MPH under the posted speed.

And beginning January 10, you will now need to dial the area code for all phone calls including local ones. Not a big deal, but you may have to re-program each saved number in your phone, fax machines, modems, auto-dial, paging and alarm directories. So to call the Extension Office we are now at 541-565-3230 in Sherman County and 541-296-5494 in Wasco County.

Now with two items dealing with phones, this might be a good time to remind you can register your phone for the national “Do Not Call” registry. You must call from the phone you wish protected from telemarketing calls. The number to register is 1-888-382-1222. Cell phone numbers were released earlier in 2009, so yours may need protecting.
CONGRATULATIONS DARREN PADGET

We extend our congratulations to Darren Padget of Grass Valley on his election to the presidency of the Oregon Wheat Growers League. Darren follows a long line of leadership to this organization that was the first commodity group in the nation.

HAZARDOUS WASTE COLLECTION EVENTS

For businesses and households in the area, the hazardous waste collection events will be held in The Dalles on the first and third Saturday of every month, beginning January 16. Each event runs from 9 am to 3pm.

In our outlying areas, special events are scheduled for Maupin (April 24), Moro (May 8), Dufur (May 22) and Tygh Valley (June 26).

And for agricultural producers only, you can once again bring hazardous ag related materials in for special collection events February 26 in The Dalles, May 8 in Moro and back in The Dalles on November 10, 2010. You will still need to preregister with the contractor before the event and your fist $400 in disposal costs are free.

And as an added bonus, for years we have said “No” to latex paints at these collection events. Latex paints simply do not qualify as hazardous. However, by mid-year, we hope to have things set up to where we can accept your old cans of latex paints for re-use and recycle. So hold on to those until the new program is in place.

IT’S A SURE Thing

The FSA office reminds you that the SURE (Supplemental Revenue Assistance Payments) program is now open for sign ups. If you had any crop production losses in 2008, you may want to check with your local office for details.

SURE provides crop disaster assistance payments based on production or quality losses. The SURE assistance provides an amount equal to 60 percent of the difference between the SURE farm guarantee and total farm revenue. To qualify, producers must have had a 10% loss and obtain approved crop insurance under Federal Crop Insurance Act or NAP coverage. Producers must have farm ground in a county that was declared a disaster county by the Secretary of Ag. Wasco and Sherman County qualify.

Contact your local office soon.

STATEWIDE MARKETING MEETINGS RESUME JANUARY 14

The statewide marketing sessions resume at the local County Extension Offices beginning at 8 am Thursday January 14. These sessions unite 11-14 counties via the magic of technology in live time discussion of market factors and influencing happenings that impact our grain production and trade. They also discuss strategies to use to reduce your marketing risks.

Co-sponsored by the Oregon Wheat Growers, these are open to all interested parties.
SAIF Workshop February 10

SAIF is conducting a repeat of its December session on February 10 at the Discovery Center in The Dalles. While there are no pesticide credits for this session, it does help you avoid surprise, random inspections by OSHA. Besides, the meetings are concise and present a different set of relevant information each year. Meetings start at 9:30 and end at 2:30 and they provide the lunch, but you do need to preregister, either on-line with SAIF or by calling 1-800-285-8525.

Pesticide Core Class January 26

A new year is started for renewing your pesticide applicators license. Do not wait until the end of the year; begin by attending the Pesticide Core and Pre-Exam workshop Tuesday January 26 in The Dalles at the Columbia Gorge Community College, in the auditorium on the third floor of Building No 2.

The class begins at 8 am and runs through noon to qualify for either Core credits, or if you have satisfied your Core requirement, it will give you four hours of “other”. An applicator needs a Core class as part of the 16 recertification hours over a five year period to automatically renew their license. There is a $10 registration fee payable at the door for the workshop.

This is the workshop you want to attend if you need to obtain your applicator license. We will have state proctor for the exams on hand beginning at 1:30 pm. You will want to bring a picture ID and $25 for the exam fee.

Neighborhood Meetings in February

Wasco County ranchers and farmers will want to schedule one of the following dates to attend the Neighborhood Meetings if they haven’t been invited to a more specific site.

Open meetings are Feb 10 in Maupin (9 am) and Wamic (1 pm), and February 11 in The Dalles (9 am) and Dufur (1 pm). More details will be announced in the next newsletter.

Sherman County dates will be set next week.