

OSU EXTENSION SERVICE

MID COLUMBIA FARMER'S NEWSLETTER

March 2026

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Grain Prices

The average price for soft white wheat in Portland for **January and February was \$5.91 and \$6.00** per bushel for 10.5% protein. A year ago the price was at \$5.99 and \$6.16 during January and February. So far **the average price in March has been at \$6.10** per bushel, a year ago the price was at \$6.13. Barley prices continue to stay at \$170 per ton.

Sherman County Rain

Average precipitation in Moro for the crop year so far is at 95% of the 30 year average with an average of 7.95 inches as of March 1. Across Sherman County average precipitation during January and February was 0.82 and 2.04 inches. Rainfall in January ranged from 0.30 inches outside of Grass Valley to 1.05 outside of Moro. Rainfall in February ranged from 1.56 in Grass Valley to 2.53 above Rufus. The AgriMet weather station above Rufus reported 0.93 inches in January and 2.2 in February.

Wasco County Rain

Crop year rainfall at The Dalles Airport is at 9.26 inches at 92% of the 30 year average as of the start of March. Average precipitation across Wasco County in January was 0.82 inches, ranging from 1.62 in Mosier to 0.53 inches in The Dalles. February average rainfall was 2.36 inches ranging from 3.46 in Mosier to 2.05 inches outside of Dufur. The AgriMet weather station in Dufur has reported 8.13 inches so far this crop year, but appears that there may have been a sensor glitch over the winter.

Climate Outlook

Over the next three months there are equal chances for above or below average temperatures and precipitation. Early March appears to have some good rain in the forecast with a pineapple express system bringing in warm temperatures and moisture. Not great for the declining snow pack, but will provide some good moisture. A high pressure ridge may arrive later in March keeping us warm and dry. In the North Central Region of Oregon (Hood River, Wasco, Sherman, Gilliam, Morrow, and Umatilla Counties) **the next three months (March - May) are expected to be about average with 0.2°F above average temperature with precipitation 93% of normal.** The forecast for March is for temperatures to be 1.0°F above average with precipitation at 70% of average. April is forecasted to have temperatures 2.0°F below average and precipitation at 132% of average. May is forecasted to have temperatures 1.6°F above average with precipitation at 79% of average.

February precipitation across most of the Mid Columbia region averaged around 170 to 200% of normal with temperatures at about average across the region. The last three months had temperatures averaging 3°F to 5°F above normal with 130 to 150% of average precipitation. Last week Wasco and Sherman Counties were rated as D0, abnormally dry, on the drought monitor. However, as we continue to dry out, the drought monitor now shows the bottom tips of both counties in D1, moderate drought. The drought in North Eastern Oregon continue to worsen.



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Snow Pack Update

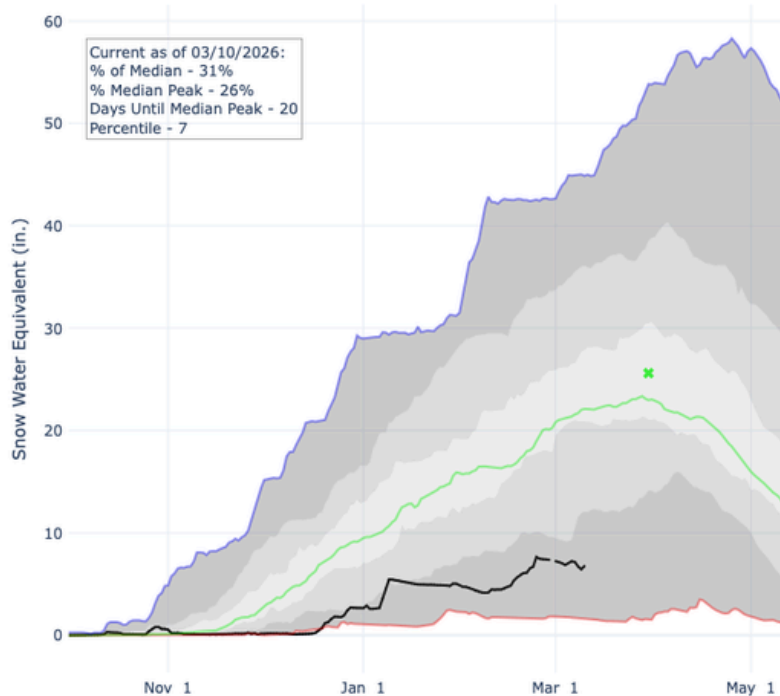
As of March 1 snow levels across Oregon continue to be one of the worst years on record. So far snow levels are at the second lowest in 46 years with 2014-2015 being the lowest. Long term snow monitoring locations in Crater Lake National Park indicate the second lowest levels in 82 years of record. Precipitation in the form of rain has been slightly below average across most snow monitoring locations in the state, but will quickly dry out this spring without any meaningful snow pack to melt. It may be a very long fire season and irrigation will likely end considerably sooner than normal. Additional snow last week and potentially through April may help, but likely not enough to significantly improve conditions.

For the Hood, Sandy, and Lower Deschutes Basin snow water equivalent was at 31% of median as of March 1st with precipitation at 95% of median.

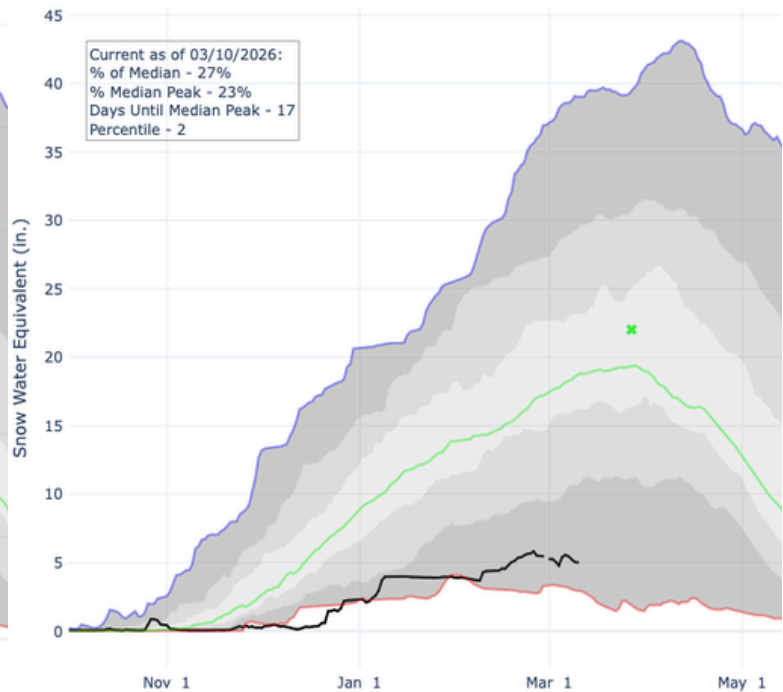
For the Upper Deschutes / Crooked Basin snow water equivalent was at 27% of median as of March 1st with precipitation at 78% of median.

Snow water equivalent is at 51 % of median with precipitation at 90% of median for the snow survey station near the headwaters of Fifteen mile creek in Wasco County. This is only the fourth year of data collected for that site.

SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT IN HOOD-SANDY-LOWER DESCHUTES



SNOW WATER EQUIVALENT IN UPPER DESCHUTES-CROOKED



Wheat Crop Conditions

Winter wheat acreage in the United States is down slightly from 2025 with 32,990 thousand acres compared to 33,153 thousand acres last year. Severe drought is starting to impact crop conditions in the Great Plains and parts of Nebraska and Colorado. Overall wheat conditions locally are good, but stripe rust is expected to be at higher levels and it may dry out quickly later in March. In addition, many of you have likely heard of issues with winter grain mites in Washington. This is discussed in more detail later in this newsletter.

Wheat Marketing Outlook

Wheat prices have bounced up slightly due to the recent conflict in Iran, but overall the conflict has mainly introduced a high amount of volatility into the wheat markets. Input prices in the form of fuel and fertilizers will likely increase as a result as well. The conflict will likely reduce demand for wheat from the Middle East, further worsening the over supply and likely putting more of a long term damper on markets.

Argentina continues to lead with the lowest priced wheat out of all the major exporters and set a new record of 19.5 million tons in wheat exports. Russia has lost its competitive export advantage due to a strong Ruble and elevated prices. Seasonal transport slowdowns are also making exports slower and more expensive out of Russia. Favorable weather in Russia has increased expected wheat production.

Global wheat ending stocks have been reduced by 0.6 million tons, but still remain at a five year high. The stock to use ratio is at 23%, the highest since 2020/2021 which will continue to dampen prices. The Ag West Farm Credit monthly outlook is for wheat to be slightly unprofitable.

Fertilizer Trends

Fertilizer prices will likely be significantly increased due to the recent war in Iran. Fertilizer shipments through the Strait of Hormuz have been halted, which will limit supplies and increase prices. While the majority of fertilizer imports to the United States come from Canada and Russia, prices will follow global prices regardless of if the war directly impacts imports. Fertilizer prices usually closely follow oil prices, which have also surged due to the recent conflict. The recent price update below likely does not reflect the full impact of the recent conflict. Fertilizer experts are surprised that prices have not surged more yet, but the longer the war continues the more the prices will reflect it. Crop producers in the mid west are already making choices to produce more soy beans than corn, partially due to the expected fertilizer increase as soy beans require less nitrogen than corn. For farmers getting spring crops in the ground this recent spike in fertilizer prices and oil could not come at a worse time. In some regions of the United States fertilizer companies are refusing to sell or deliver fertilizer until prices stabilize.

- Anhydrous is up 19% from a year ago and slightly up from a month ago at \$895/ton or \$0.55/lb. of N.
- Urea is up 14% from a year ago and 5% from a month ago at \$625/ton or \$0.68/lb. of N.
- UAN28 is 16% higher than a year ago and up by 5% from a year ago at \$412/ton or \$0.74/lb of N.
- UAN32 is 18% higher than a year ago and 7% higher than a month ago at \$467/ton or \$0.73/lb of N.
- Potash is slightly lower than last month with an average price of \$487/ton, this is up 9% from a year ago.
- DAP is up 11% from a year ago and slightly lower than a month ago with an average price of \$850/ton.

Winter Grain Mites

You may have read reports of winter grain mites being found in eastern Washington. Some producers have also found them in Oregon. Winter grain mites are not insects as they are closely related to spiders. As a result, they require a different scouting approach. These mites are very small about $< 1/16$ long. Scout for them in dark or during low-light periods, such as cloudy weather or early morning and evening. Their feeding can give wheat a silvery or grayish cast, so pay close attention to discolored or stunted patches in the field. A hand lens can be useful to check leaf sheaths and lower stems, where mites tend to feed before retreating into the soil when exposed to bright light. See the photos below:



Because mites are not insects, most insecticides are not effective controls. The primary effective miticide option noted by WSU Extension is dimethoate, which provides control when applied during cool, overcast periods while mites are actively feeding. The mite has two generations per year with each life cycle from egg to adult lasting about 100 days. The first generation may emerge as early as October and typically peaks in December or January with the right weather (wet and warm), with the second generation peaking in March or April. Damage may be mistaken or misidentified as winter damage as the winter wheat leaves are yellowish and the plants are stunted. check these links: <https://smallgrains.wsu.edu/26mites/>, <https://extension.sdstate.edu/which-mite-it-identifying-mites-wheat-fields>

Stripe Rust

Field observations show unusually early development of stripe rust and predictions indicate high potential for yield losses in the 2026 wheat season for the eastern Pacific Northwest. Stripe rust has already been found this winter in Washington and in Pendleton. Given the unusually warm winter it is critical to be scouting your fields. Highly susceptible varieties could experience yield losses of 40-60%. Commercial fields will likely have yield losses between 8% and 40% without a fungicide application.

If you are growing susceptible varieties it is highly encouraged to applying a fungicide with the active ingredient propiconazole at broadleaf herbicide timing. There is no evidence that applying other active ingredients is necessary for stripe rust control in our region. There are several other more expensive fungicide options available that will not provide a return on investment. Fungicide applications should be made in winter wheat fields with moderately resistant to susceptible varieties with stripe rust ratings 3 to 9 at herbicide timing. Given our weather there is the chance that a second fungicide application may be needed 20 to 30 days after the first application on susceptible varieties. The need for a second application can be determined by whether active stripe rust appears after the first application.

Winter wheat varieties that you definitely need to spray (resistant ratings of 6 or higher) include LCS Dagger AX, UI Magic, VI Voodoo, LCS Kraken AX, and others with a rating of 3 or higher. It is likely not worth the financial investment of applying fungicide to a resistant variety though, such as LCS Shine, LCS Artdeco, or LCS Kamiak for example. However, many resistant varieties (stripe rust ratings 1 and 2) have only high-temperature adult-plant (HTAP) resistance, which is only effective once the weather gets warm and plants reach the middle jointing stage (Feekes 7). As a result, it is important to actively scout all fields and be prepared to apply fungicide only if needed to resistant varieties. HTAP resistance should be kicking into gear in those resistant varieties soon with the warm weather coming.

Research from WSU over the past several years indicates that there is minimal return on investment for applying fungicides on winter wheat when it is a resistant variety. Two years of research by Dr. Christina Hagerty, OSU Cereal Pathologist, also suggests limited benefits for using fungicides on resistant wheat varieties. While many companies like to sell more expensive fungicides to improve plant health, this does not translate into higher yield or a return on your investment for applying them.

Cattle Markets

Cattle markets continue to stay strong for cow-calf producers. Supplies remain tight as beef demand stays high. Herd rebuilding continues to be slow and will keep prices elevated. The suspension of cattle imports from Mexico continues to tighten beef supplies as well. The lower cattle numbers are negatively impacting beef packers that have less animals to process. Tyson recently closed one of their larger plants in Nebraska that could process 5,000 head per day. With fewer cattle and favorable feeding prices feedlots are retaining cattle longer. The number of cattle on feed for more than 150 days is more than 20% higher than a year ago. Unlike typical seasonal patterns, fed cattle weights have continued to rise rather than decline heading into spring.

For the week ending on March 13th, national live steer prices were at \$234.77 per cwt (hundred weight), down \$5.17 per cwt from a week ago, and up \$34.64 per cwt from a year ago. Dressed steer prices were at \$372.04 per cwt, down \$7.78 per cwt from a week ago, and up \$54.85 per cwt from a year ago. Cattle slaughter was down by 61,000 head from a year ago. Cattle weights are down by 39 pounds. Profits are expected to continue to be highly profitable for cow calf producers thanks to declining cattle supplies and lower feed costs. Increasing drought across the west is starting to be a concern. USDA reports that half of the cattle inventory is in an area experiencing drought.

Hay Markets

Hay prices continue to lower, largely due to oversupply. Current hay stocks are the highest they have been in the past five years. Nationally, alfalfa hay prices continue to track near or below last year's levels with January reported at \$160 per ton. Other hay prices are well below year-ago levels with January at \$131 per ton nationally. The Ag West Farm Credit reports that hay will produce breakeven profits thanks to stable prices, but with high production costs and soft export demand. The current snowpack may make for a challenging and short irrigation season across most of the west that may increase prices in the future.

Hay Markets Continued...

Pricing off the Oregon Direct Hay report (accessed here: <https://beav.es/iTs>) for the central Oregon region (Crook/Deschutes/Jefferson/Wasco Counties) showed the following trends:

- Over the last two months good quality alfalfa has been selling for an average of \$150/ton, while premium was selling at \$260/ton.
- Mixed grass hay with premium quality has been selling for around \$300/ton.
- Orchard grass with premium quality has been at \$300/ton.
- Bluegrass hay is also selling at \$300 with premium quality
- Triticale hay with good quality was selling for around \$220/ton.

Farm Financial and Succession Planning Workshop, March 24th, 1 pm, The Dalles

Are you a farmer wanting to sharpen your financial knowledge, a new or small operator eager to learn, or a producer considering changes that a business plan could help guide? Join OSU Extension and Oregon Agricultural Trust to discuss how farm financial analysis tools such as business plans, balance sheets & cash flow budgets can help with decision making & achieving your farm & ranch goals.

This **free workshop will be held on Tuesday, March 24th from 1 pm to 3:30 pm both in person at Columbia Gorge Community College and online.** In person session will take place at CGCC, Building 3, Classroom 3.203, 400 East Scenic Drive, The Dalles, OR 97058. Please RSVP and register here for both the in person and online class: tinyurl.com/2026-TheDalles-Workshop. The recording will be made available following the class. Email andrea@oregonagtrust.org with questions. Light snacks and beverages will be provided, sponsored by Bank of Eastern Oregon.

OSU Tree Fruit Economics Symposium, April 8, 2026 9:00 am - 2:45 pm

The Columbia River Gorge Discovery Center, 5000 Discovery Dr., The Dalles

This symposium will be worthwhile for hay and wheat producers to consider attending! Join us for the Tree Fruit Economics Symposium on April 8, 2026, at the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center in The Dalles. This event brings together growers, industry professionals, and experts from OSU and beyond to explore current economic trends, cost-management strategies, market opportunities, and policy updates impacting the tree fruit industry and agriculture in general in the Mid Columbia. We hope to see you there for a day of insight, connection, and practical tools to support your operation. **Register here:** <https://beav.es/GzK>

For more information please contact Ashley Thompson by email: ashley.thompson@oregonstate.edu or phone (541)296-5494

Fuel Break Considerations and Wildfire Preparedness, March 24th, 3:45 pm to 4:45 pm in The Dalles

Are you ready for the upcoming fire season? This class will share information and research updates on fire behavior and fuel break implementation for agricultural producers to help you better prepare your farm for fire season. Defensible space and fuel mitigation will be covered as well. **This free workshop will be held on Tuesday, March 24th from 3:45 pm to 4:45 pm at Columbia Gorge Community College and online.** In person session will take place at CGCC, Building 3, Classroom 3.203, 400 East Scenic Drive, The Dalles, OR 97058 following the Farm Financial Planning Workshop. Contact Jacob.powell@oregonstate.edu for additional information.

Fuel Break Considerations and Wildfire Preparedness, March 25th, 2 pm to 3:30 pm in Moro

Are you ready for the upcoming fire season? This class will share information and research updates on fire behavior and fuel break implementation for agricultural producers to help you better prepare your farm for fire season. This free workshop will be held on Tuesday, March 25th from 2 pm to 3:30 pm at the Sherman County Extension Office. RSVP not necessary.

Tentative dates for Wasco / Sherman Crop Tours - June 1 and 2nd

Crop tours in Sherman and Wasco County this spring are tentatively planned for Monday and Tuesday, June 1st and June 2nd - still determining which county will happen on which day.

Sherman Station Experiment Station Field Day

The experiment station field day will be on June 10th from 8 am to noon starting at the Sherman County Fairgrounds in Moro.

OWGL 100 Year Celebration

This year marks 100 years since the formation of the Oregon Wheat Growers League. A 100 year celebration is planned to take place in Moro, OR at the Sherman County Fairgrounds on Wednesday, June 10th from noon to 5 pm following the Sherman Experiment Station Field Day. Please consider joining OSU for the field day and the OWGL for the afternoon.

U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) App

As an “on-the go” solution, USW has launched the U.S. Wheat Associates mobile app, now available as a free download on the Apple App Store and Google Play Store. The app is designed to put the full breadth of USW’s reports and market information directly in the hands of the people who rely on it most – farmers in the fields or millers and bakers who use U.S. wheat. U.S. Wheat Associates (USW) has worked to keep customers, trade partners, and stakeholders informed with timely and reliable market information. Price Reports, Harvest Reports, Crop Quality Reports, and Commercial Sales Reports have long been available through the USW website and will continue to be available in the new app.

New Seasons' Zero Foodprint Supply Chain Regeneration (SCR) Grant

This grant is for farmers and ranchers: provides up to \$25k to implement farm practices that build healthy soil and sequester carbon. Eligible practices include cover cropping, hedgerow establishment, prescribed grazing, and much more. SCR Grants follow the same application process as Restore Grants, so you can learn more about the process at www.zerofoodprint.org/apply. Applications are open March 3 - April 7. All managers and owners of agricultural operations in California, Colorado, Oregon and Washington are eligible to apply.

Drone Training

I held another introductory drone class for farmers back in February with Mike Davis, CGCC instructor and drone business owner. Mike would like to hold a focused 28 hour training that would allow producers to become certified to use spray drones. He wants to have three hour weekly meetings for an interested cohort of farmers that would include flight time and class room work. This class would not be free and come at a cost to each farmer. If this is something you're interested in please reach out to Jacob Powell at 541-298-3581 or Jacob.powell@oregonstate.edu.

Fuel Break Ideas

With an early spring already upon us, it may be worth thinking about the upcoming fire season. Now is a good time to think about creating and maintaining defensible space around your farm. Most farmers know how scary a full engulfed wheat field fire is to control. But just a reminder that flame lengths on mature ripe wheat can easily reach 16ft, these flame lengths can easily double or triple under heavy winds or when burning up steep slopes. Research by experts in Australia and I support these fire behavior metrics. Fuel breaks should be at least 50 ft wide to have any chance of modifying fire behavior next to wheat, 100 ft will give you an even better safety margin, especially under windy conditions. Fuel breaks are not meant to stop the fire, but rather reduce fire behavior so you can safely stop the fire. Having easy and quick access to your fuel break also makes a big difference. Consider placing fuel breaks along existing roadways. Clear out fence line vegetation that may be present between roadways and the fuel break. Many two tracks have a thick mowhawk of vegetation down the middle that also poses a control risk. Unharvested wheat can also generate embers like sagebrush, which is another reason to increase the width of fuel breaks. Sagebrush can also generate extreme fire behavior with flame lengths on flat ground easily reaching 30 ft. On steep slopes flame lengths increases to 90 ft and likely requires fuel breaks at least 120 ft wide to effectively change fire behavior and create a safe place that you can try to suppress the fire. A bare earth fuel break is the most effective, but may not be suitable on steep slopes where erosion will be increased. Herbicides can also be used. If you want to learn more consider attending one of the fuel break classes discussed above.