



The Cereal Sentinel

A newsletter for Treasure Valley cereal producers

July 22, 1999

Issue No. 20



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The goal of this newsletter is to serve the best interests of Treasure Valley cereal producers. It will be issued periodically as information warrants. Correspondence and inquiries should be addressed to: **Parma Research and Extension Center, 29603 U of I Lane, Parma, ID 83660 (208-722-6701 Ext. 216) (Fax-208-722-6708) (Email bradb@uidaho.edu).** The *Cereal Sentinel* is made possible in part by a grant from the Idaho Wheat Commission.

Brad Brown

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1999 Pests

Barley Stripe Rust

Incidence of stripe rust has been sporadic in the last three years. After a disaster for many spring barley producers last year due to the worst barley stripe rust infection to date, it appears that we have dodged the bullet in western Idaho for the 1999 season. I have not seen barley stripe rust in the fields that I've been in this spring and summer. There is none in the variety trials that we have located between Mtn Home and Weiser.

When will it be a significant issue again? We've seen barley stripe rust in two of the last four years. Last year's infection was hopefully as bad as it will get. If it isn't any more frequent than it was for wheat prior to release of resistant varieties, then it will only be an occasional problem. Last year's conditions, cool and wet conditions during early grain fill, were especially conducive for development of the disease. We also saw stripe rust in some wheat last year that we don't usually see.

Though winter barley tends to develop and mature early enough to be less affected by stripe rust, most varieties nevertheless are susceptible. If you are considering a winter barley planting this fall, consider one of two varieties that do have barley stripe rust resistance. **Kold**, the first release for the PNW with resistance, and **Strider**, the most recent OSU release.

Cereal Leaf Beetle

The Cereal Leaf Beetle was more widespread this year in western Idaho than any year previous. While some infestations were high enough to warrant spraying and control, populations exceeding one larvae per flag leaf were pretty isolated. Yet some evidence of larval feeding was evident in most all fields I was in. We can expect the pest to be with us for all time now.

There is some good news on this front. Larvae collected in southern Idaho have been found to be paracitized with introduced biological control agents. This suggests that spraying for control will probably be required only in the very worst of cases.

This has been the experience in the Midwest where the beetle was a problem for a time.

One researcher who worked on the beetle in the Midwest shared with me how difficult it was to even find the pest after the introduced biocontrol agents were established. He said they had to travel over 200 miles to find a significant population. Now that's a population we can live with.

But until our natural populations of biocontrol agents are firmly established, early scouting and relating the existing populations to the economic thresholds is the best course.

Control recommendations are available in the Pacific Northwest Insect Control Handbook (available from Ag Publications at 208-885-7982 or your local Cooperative Extension Office). For more details about the beetle consider ordering "**The Cereal Leaf Beetle – A New Pest in Idaho**" CIS No. 994, also available from Ag Publications, and possibly your local Cooperative Extension Office. The publication is also available on-line from the University of Idaho, College of Ag **Catalogue of Idaho Resources** (<http://info.ag.uidaho.edu/>) but the color plates are not present or downloadable, only the text.

As a reminder, should you have the leaf beetle in your area and believe your site would be a good candidate for a paracite release you might contact Mike Cooper at 208- 332-8620. If the site is suitable, Mike may want to add it to his list of potential release sites for when more parasites are available.

Russian Wheat Aphid

Just as barley stripe rust is absent from the 1999 season, even more conspicuous is the absence of the Russian Wheat aphid. Counts from the Suction Trap Network across southern Idaho have revealed very few if any Russian Wheat aphids. If they are out there they certainly aren't showing themselves.

Grasshoppers

Grasshoppers are abundant this year as is only too obvious to those of you in the outlying areas.

Be sure to work with your local extension office for assistance with bait and other measures for control. Even relatively mature grain is at risk if the heads are lost. Under these conditions, don't delay harvest any later than necessary.

Timely Harvest

Speaking of delays in harvest, there are a number of good reasons for not delaying the harvest any later than necessary after it's combine ready. Not only is there greater risk of grasshopper damage, there is also increased risk of late season rain or hail. The effects of hail are pretty obvious. But excessive rain can cause sprout damage for which there are significant discounts.

There is another factor to consider. Until such time as the industry pays you on a dry matter corrected basis, the longer you let the grain lose moisture the less weight you are paid for if you deliver from the field to a local elevator. You can't deliver it too wet of course. But there's no sense in letting it dry out to 6 or 8% moisture if you can deliver at 10 or 11%, assuming you have control over harvest timing.

Dockage and Discounts

To the less informed "dockage" may sound like the fee for securing your fishing, ski, or other pleasure craft to the local dock, wharf or pier while you sample the local amenities. But as most of you know, dockage is a more serious matter for grain producers. It is the easily removed nongrain material in the grain, including chaff, stems, and rocks. Foreign material by comparison is all nongrain material that remains after dockage is removed.

Producers have suffered considerable discounts for dockage the past several years as the export trade has adjusted rates to encourage the delivery of cleaner grain. Discounts as high as \$1 a bushel have occurred. The discounts are with us to stay despite the investment of PNW exporters in high capacity cleaning equipment. The discounts may

actually worsen. Japan has announced its plan to reduce their allowable dockage in all US Wheat classes beginning November 1999.

We began reporting on this in a June 1994 *Cereal Sentinel* (Issue 2) article. At that time, Japan was accepting up to 0.8% dockage without additional discounts. Allowable dockage was reduced to 0.7% in that year with 2:1 discounts. Japan then reduced the dockage limit to 0.6% in January 1996 and further to 0.5% on January 1, 1997. The latest announcement indicates the new limit will be 0.4% in the coming November with a tentative further reduction to 0.3% in November 2001. Taiwan reduced its dockage tolerance in the Western White class to 0.4% as early as October 1994.

The new specs are further evidence of the pressures on our industry to provide a cleaner product more competitive with Canadian and Australian wheat. Dockage in wheat from Canada and Australia, our major competitors, consistently averages well below 0.5% according to our customers. These moves promise to make our wheat more competitive.

Japan maintains that the restrictions have significantly reduced the dockage in wheat delivered to them. Since cleaning grain is more expensive for the exporter we can be assured that the costs will continue to be passed on to whoever provides their grain, i.e. elevators, producers.

Economic Research Service studies indicate the US grain industry needn't worry about cleaning all the wheat it exports. That might cost the industry as much as \$8 million. Their recommendation was to target importing countries with the lowest tolerances for dockage and foreign material, which represent about 20% of all US wheat exports. Roughly a third of the total wheat exported from the PNW is now under strict dockage specifications. Benefits with this strategy were predicted in the range of \$8-\$10 million.

The importance of marketing cleaner wheat is recognized to varying degrees by the industry. Wheat marketed from Texas Gulf Ports apparently is unable to meet the reduced Japanese dockage

requirements since those ports have limited high speed cleaning facilities and wheat typically averages 0.7 to 0.8% dockage. Whereas cleaning facilities have been installed by several PNW exporters in the recent past at their own expense, these private investments have not been made at Gulf facilities.

The National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) has announced it's support for improved cleaning capacity in the U.S. system and the USDA has announced a task force to investigate solutions. Gulf port exporters would prefer a government subsidy to help defray the costs of high capacity cleaners. Understandably, that is not sitting well with PNW exporters who had to defray all the costs of their increased cleaning capacity.

Dockage can be controlled with appropriate combine settings. With wheat prices as poor as they are it may be tempting to pay less attention to combine settings in an attempt to simply be rid of this crop as soon as possible. But that could be costly. If anything, proper combine settings are more critical with current poor prices than with higher prices. We can ill afford high discounts and poor prices.

Also, a good deal of dockage results from lodged wheat when extra plant material must be processed by the combine. Controlling lodging with appropriate variety selection and cultural practices, optimum water and nitrogen management, and use of a plant growth regulator where appropriate can appreciably reduce dockage and the discounts associated with it.

If lodging is concentrated in areas that can be conveniently harvested separately, then it may be useful to market them separately as well. If lodging occurs, dockage may not be the only quality problem. Test weight may be lower and black tip or sprout higher resulting in a lower USDA grade. The lower price due to dockage and lower grade can be appreciable with all the problems associated with lodging.

Marketing locally as animal feed, where tolerances are not as great, may be more profitable than marketing as food wheat. This is probably true

again this year regardless of quality since feed grains are currently priced higher than wheat for export. Check local feed markets before selling wheat with significant dockage.

Some elevators can better accommodate higher dockage wheat if they know in advance the quality of the wheat to be delivered. Some elevators can segregate higher dockage wheat, and by segregating reduce the total amount of wheat that may need cleaning before shipment. The savings from lower cleaning costs in some cases are shared with producers. But elevators need to know before hand the nature of the wheat to be delivered so that it can be segregated with similar high dockage wheat. Once high dockage wheat is comingled with wheat of better quality, there is little the elevator can do but pass on the full discount to the producer.

Dockage every year undermines the profitability of our production. Appropriate combine settings, minimizing lodging, and heads up marketing can increase the returns to producers.

Current Markets

PNW Soft White Wheat

Overall planted wheat acreage is down in the PNW. This is certainly true for the soft white class in general and particularly true for irrigated soft white winter wheat, which is considerably more productive than spring wheat. In contrast, I've seen reports that spring wheat plantings are way up, but the spring plantings are less productive and it is not at all clear whether the increased spring acreage is soft white or hard red. In western Idaho, hard red spring wheat acreage is up sharply but I don't see an increase in soft white springs around. I do see a lot of corn planted in fields that I've never seen corn in before.

The USDA is predicting this year's soft white production to be down 15%. An Extension Ag Economist who reviews the situation more closely than I projected in April that the average soft white price would increase about 40 cents a bushel during the next marketing year. When last I talked with him he hadn't seen anything to change his forecast.

Hard Red Wheat- Winter and Spring

Whereas prices for hard reds have decreased appreciably from what they were last fall, they are still better priced (with good protein) than soft whites. Lately hard red spring prices (14% protein) have run about \$1 a bushel above soft whites. For hard red winter the price difference was closer to 70 cents.

The price discount for protein levels below 14% for spring and 13% for winter has increased recently. This is due probably to late season rains which can be expected to increase yield and reduce protein in the soon to be harvested crop in the Plains. Whereas the discount between 13 and 14% protein was only about 24 cents a bushel earlier it has recently increased closer to 40 cents.

For those of you that gambled on planting hard reds for the current season, it looks like you made the right decision. If the current difference in soft white and hard red price holds, you stand to gain assuming you have good protein. For those of you that tested flag leaves and applied additional fertilizer N, it should pay more this year than perhaps other years.

What about next year? It's a bit early to say. The USDA is predicting lower hard red prices based on increased expected stocks. If soft white prices increase while hard reds decline there won't be the same incentive to produce hard reds that there was this past season.

Club Wheat

Portland prices for this market class, as compared to common soft white wheats that we produce, have increased over the year from a modest 15 cents a bushel higher last year to 80 cents a bushel higher more recently. It seems the production of this market class has not kept pace with the demand for the western white class, which must contain a minimum of 10% club wheat, and the even higher club wheat requirements in the Western White class exported to Japan and possibly other countries.

Remember that the Washington and Oregon Wheat Commissions effectively lobbied Japan to

increase the requirement for club wheat content in their white wheat purchases to a minimum of 20% some time back, and more recently to 25%. This was done to improve the overall baking quality of their purchase which would hopefully help maintain or increase a declining market share and increase the price of wheat exported. It didn't hurt either that most of the club wheat production in the PNW is in WA and OR. They assured Japan that there would be sufficient club wheat stocks. Well, there must be some question on that score.

Who would most likely participate in this market? Most club wheat is grown under dryland conditions. Club wheat varieties are poorly adapted to irrigation, are tall, weak strawed, and easily lodged. Current irrigated wheat recommendations for N fertilizer would be excessive for these varieties. But they could be grown with extra precautions.

We evaluated four club wheats under dryland conditions over the three year period 1996-98. The club wheat average (43.5 bu/A) was about 15% lower than the soft white common wheats (51.5 bu/A). To put that in perspective, an 80 cent per bushel higher price for club wheat is about 26% higher than common soft wheat prices in Portland but an even higher percentage (32%) greater than common when you relate it to local prices.

Transportation costs may be higher if additional trucking is required for transport to the coast. If local elevators do not handle this market class alternative then you must arrange for transportation to the closest port facility or elevator that will handle it. The production costs would not differ for the club and common soft white.

Availability of seed could be a problem. Few if any local seed sources handle club wheats. They could find it outside our area however.

Winter Cereal Forage and P Removal

Water quality issues are becoming ever more critical. The issue of nutrient loading of surface waters, particularly nonpoint sources of phosphorus

(P) from agricultural runoff, is receiving particular attention. Confined feeding operations are natural targets as they generate large amounts of P laden manures that may be spread on limited land resources. Runoff from these lands can be important sources of nonpoint P.

Recently adopted NRCS standards now identify a soil test P threshold of 40 ppm as the point at which waste applications should be limited by the amount of P removed with the cropping system. This limit in effect will greatly reduce the amount of manure that can be applied to limited land resources.

Some of the lands receiving manures have already reached well beyond the P threshold, with values as high as 120-150 ppm P. We are evaluating a cropping system that will hopefully reduce these excessive residual P values over time. A double cropping forage system of winter cereals removed mid May, followed by corn harvested mid to late September for silage has potential for removing more soil P than any single crop. The work is supported by the United Dairyman of Idaho.

In the first harvest (boot stage) of winter cereals at Parma we removed as much as 25 lb of P with the 3 tons of dry matter per acre (May 20). Triticale was the most productive and removed the most P as compared with either winter wheat or barley. More data will be shared at a later date.

Address Corrections

If your address has changed and you would like to continue receiving the *Cereal Sentinel*, please let us know your new address. And, if you know of any who you think would appreciate this newsletter, let us know their name and address and we will add them to the list. If you would prefer not to receive this newsletter we would like to know that as well so that we could take your name off the mailing list.

Acknowledgement

We appreciate the Idaho Wheat Commission's support of this newsletter. If you enjoy the newsletter, or find that it makes a difference in your enterprise, you might call the Commission office (208-334-2353).

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