

**The Founding
of the
Oregon Wheat
Growers League
A History**

by Karen Spears Zacharias

Introduction and History:

"The strength of the Oregon Wheat Growers League is the result of hard work and dedication of its members and leadership ... " Those words, penned by Stan Timmermann (OWGL president 1981), reveal why for the past 75 years the Oregon Wheat Growers League has been a model for the nation.

The OWGL became the nation's first wheat commodity organization, having been formed in 1926. It has benefited through the years from the abilities, the knowledge and the dedication of its leaders. Men like E.R. Jackman, crop specialist, D.E. Stephens, superintendent of the Moro Experiment Station and Frank Ballard, county extension agent who were faculty members of Oregon Agricultural College, took their roles as researchers and educators to heart. It was these men that many farmers sought out when they were threatened with a crop failure by a devastating freeze in December 1924.

Paulen Kaseburg (OWGL president 1949) remembers his father Albert Kaseberg of Wasco being one of the farmers that sought out help. "Nobody knew where to buy seed. My father and others asked their extension agents where they could buy seed. Dad said most everybody got their seed in Pendleton that year," Paulen Kaseberg recalls.

An economic conference planned by the Extension Service in the spring of 1926 received heightened interest among the agricultural community after they were credited with saving the 1925 harvest crop. "They held a meeting in Moro and invited all the wheat growers in the Columbia Basin," Kaseberg recalls. Two hundred fifty citizens attended. The bulk of those in attendance were wheat farmers, but they were also joined by bankers, millers and even officials from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. This meeting was called the Eastern Oregon Wheat Growers Economic Conference. It was held Feb. 11-13, 1926 and it was at that meeting, the farmers were told where they could find seed for planting.

Conference leaders facilitated discussion about other pressing topics as well. "They talked about marketing, but more about transportation. How to get grain down the Columbia River," Kaseburg recalls. Committees were also formed at this time to tackle grower issues. One of the committees emerged into an organization designed to promote the interest of wheat growers. Specifically, the group wanted to unite their efforts to help growers deal with emergencies and to coordinate educational programs with OAC Extension Service.

Marion T. Weatherford (OWGL president 1947) summed up the focus of that group this way: "Wheat producers recognized they had problems that could not readily be solved by the growers as individuals. Concerted cooperative efforts were needed."

And, that, Paulen Kaseberg said is how the Eastern Oregon Wheat League initially was formed. The group began meeting annually. Even, though I'm a Duck (University of Oregon alumni) through and through, I think those agents from Oregon Agricultural College (now Oregon State University) were invaluable. County agents are always providing us with information," Kaseberg said.

Over the past 75 years the dynamics of the wheat industry and the grower's concerns have not changed significantly. "Look at any annual meeting agenda from past decades and you're likely to see the same issues being bantered about," said Daren Coppock, Chief Executive Officer of the National Association of Wheat Growers. Topics such as market development, grain prices, fuel costs and transportation woes have taken center stage down through the years.

Roy Forman (OWGL president 1944) said he doesn't believe the problems growers face today are any different than those faced in years past. "In fact," Forman suggested, "they aren't problems at all. What we thought were our biggest problems - things like getting our wheat to market, or fuel costs - weren't really problems. We just didn't know it," he said laughing heartily.

Coppock laughed, too, when told of Forman's philosophical remarks. Addressing problems and seeking solutions takes up a big chunk of Coppock's daily schedule. Coppock assumed his NAWG job in August 2001. On a crisp October afternoon, he sits in his Washington D.C. office with one ear tuned to the House

Hearings on the 2002 Farm Bill and the other to a long-distance phone call.

It's been three weeks since that fateful Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001, when terrorists swooped in from the nation's clear blue sky and blasted a crater through the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and the hearts of Americans people.

Suddenly, Forman's outlook seems more plausible. How important can the price of wheat be when contrasted against weapons of mass destruction? Yet, it is this very same act of terror that underscores for Coppock the necessity to address the nation's foreign trade policy. "Unilateral export sanctions almost always end up hurting us," Coppock said. "When we impose sanctions on Iraq, it isn't Saddam Hussein who goes hungry, it's the people on the street who go hungry." Another important issue Coppock is focused on is helping obtain trade promotion authority for the President. "There are 111 countries that have formed 130 free trade agreements that don't involve the United States. Nobody wants to negotiate a trade agreement with the U.S. when Congress can turn around and nickel and dime the thing to death," Coppock explained.

These are all pretty weighty topics for a boy who grew up in rural Adams, OR, but Coppock will tell you that's exactly why he's able to do the job as well as he does. "The fact that I grew up bucking bales in a small town really helps me here," he said. "I find I'm able to talk to farmers or folks in town." When asked who he considers to have been the most influential people in his career, Coppock doesn't hesitate. "There have been several of them. John Oades, U.S. Wheat in Portland, Tom Winn, from the greater urban metropolis of Helix, officers in the Wheat League and men like Stan Timmerman and Bob Buchanan, who have been leaders in the industry.

It's been 75 years since the Oregon Wheat Growers League got into the business of growing hard-working, dedicated leaders like Harry Pinkerton, Loyd Smith, Ralph McKwen, Jr., Floyd Root and numerous others. Some say that Daren Coppock could be further evidence that the Oregon Wheat Growers League is continuing to grow hard-working, dedicated leaders. "Daren was always a bright and shining star, from the time he was in 4-H 'til he got his first job right out of college as director of the Oregon Grains Commission," Don Stonebrink said. "We're lucky to have him."

Today, OWGL boasts a membership of over 1700 such leaders. Men and women who like Coppock, possess a variety of skills and talents and whose knowledge and experience is as vast and deep as the mighty Columbia River. Morris Wilson (OWGL president 1954) summed up his own personal success this way, "Everybody builds on somebody else's shoulders." In other words, one generation's achievements are built upon the shoulders of the previous generation's. Wheat growers today need to take a moment and reflect upon the sturdy set of shoulders beneath them. It's time to give thanks for these individuals, who have given this generation of growers the boost up.

Those early years:

During those early years, a nationwide economic depression led to bank closures. The bank in Moro was just one of thousands of banks that folded. Farmers throughout the Columbia Basin faced bankruptcy.

Leaning against his tractor one evening in 1932, Albert Kaseberg told his young son, that he hadn't paid on the mortgage for years. Paulen Kaseberg recalled his father words as he admonished the youth to seek another career besides farming: "They could come and take this farm any day and I'd be powerless to resist it."

But in 1935, under Roosevelt's administration, relief finally came in the form of the Agricultural Adjustment Act. It called for federal payments to wheat growers, allowing them 54 percent of their normal production for reduced production. Initially, the act was ruled unconstitutional by the Supreme Court, which forced the reconvening of agricultural and governmental interest for a new bill in 1938. Implementation of such national programs was facilitated by the existence of the League.

Moreover, EOWL had additional national impact in 1939 when it sponsored a national contest for compliance with the acreage adjustment of the AAA. As part of the League's 1939 annual event 26 state representatives took part in the annual conference, held in Condon that year. And only two years later, on Dec. 6, 1941, the AAA director stood before the crowd that had gathered for the annual conference in Heppner and told them of the nutritional needs created in wartime England. Two days later, of course, the U.S. was also at war.

Those war years created shortages of all sorts. But one that directly affected wheat growers was the shortage of jute. Oregon growers, who were still sacking their wheat in 1941, bought their jute from India. But after the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor and took control of the shipping lanes, jute was hard to come by, Kaseberg recalled. "That's when we switched to bulk storage," he said. But with a world war underway there was no need to store the grain for long. "We didn't have overproduction problems in those years," Kaseberg noted. "We had to feed the world."

It was at the tail-end of this wartime climate that Roy Forman accepted the leadership mantle of OWGL president.

Roy Forman
OWGL PRESIDENT
1944

THE DALLES - At age 28, Roy Forman was the youngest man elected president of Oregon Wheat Growers League. He accepted the honor back at the urging of former president Millard Eakin (OWGL 1943).



Now, at age 85, Roy Forman has earned another honor - the league's longevity title. All presidents prior to Forman, and several following his term, have died. Forman's hearing diminished at an early age due to disease, but his memory is intact. Phyllis, his bride of 63 years, transcribed those memories.

With a yellow notepad on her lap and a pen in her hand, Phyllis wrote down each question and passed it over to Roy. Kicking back in his recliner, Roy recalled those early years of the league and of farming in general. Asked why he was elected to such a lofty position at such a tender age, Roy replied, "I was noisy so I got put to work."

The young couple had expected he'd be called up for the draft during World War II, but it never happened, Phyllis said. Roy took over the family farm in Antelope, OR when he was only a boy of 19. The year was 1935. Roy's father had died the previous fall. As the only son, the family farm, about 1640 acres, fell to him. "Dad hadn't been well since an operation in 1929 and since a horse had kicked him in the spring of 1930," Roy recalled.

An older sister and a cousin helped Roy put up the hay that year. Thankfully, Roy had plenty of experience to draw upon. "I was sewing sacks by the time I was 15," he said. He had good neighbors to boot. He and neighbor, Eldon Borthwick, were constantly helping each other out. "We loaned each other our equipment because neither one of us had much."

Roy said he bought the first diesel tractor in the valley in 1936. "It was an AllisChalmers tractor that ran on spark plugs," he said.

His own father, also named Roy, had previously owned a gas-powered tractor. "It was well over 6-feet high and the wheels on that thing were 3- feet wide. It had four disc plows you could attach behind it," Roy said. However, he explained, because of the tractor's weight using it for plowing could be pretty ineffective. Mostly they relied on a team of horses to get the plowing done. "It took about 40 head. Quite often though, we'd double up with somebody else's team." Often that other team was provided by his uncle, Frank Forman. Frank and Roy Forman had both left the family farm in Barton, now Boring, OR, and homesteaded adjoining farms in Antelope in 1897. A cousin still farms the family's original plot in Boring, and one of the couple's son now runs the Antelope ranch.

Roy said when his family first homesteaded in Antelope wheat wasn't in demand. "In the 1900s you didn't grow wheat, you grew bush land," he said with a laugh. "There wasn't much of a market." And getting any product to any market back then was an all day affair. Roy's father owned a Denby truck that, when everything was going right, could get up to a maximum speed of 18 miles per hour. "We'd sack the wheat out of the bin by lantern light. And we'd leave for Shaniko at the break of dawn and get back at dark," he recalled.

In those early years, 25 bushel an acre was considered a fair crop. But in 1927, Roy said a crop of Turkey Red yielded 40 bushel an acre for his father. "That's the crop that built the house," he said.

Fertilizers, introduced shortly after Roy Forman's term as president, upped crop output dramatically. But the first time he applied nitrogen sulfate, Roy said he wasn't impressed. "I put on 15 pounds per acre and ran the corners out double. Everybody kept telling me, 'You're going to burn it up.' Even the county extension guy was telling me, 'You're going to burn it up.'" If it hadn't been for those corners where he'd

doubled up, Roy said the fertilizer made no noticeable difference. But those supple corners convinced him that fertilizer was going to revolutionize his farm.

"I got the best yield I ever had after we went to using fertilizer. It made a world of difference," he said. On an average, the yield was about 35 bushels an acre, but sometimes he got as much as 60 bushels, he said. He claimed the most he ever made legally was \$4.50/bushel. But he said he sold some wheat under the table for \$5.

"There was a man, I think he was Turkish, who paid \$5 for it. He hauled it away in his own truck," Roy said. The whole thing was a learning process, Phyllis added. Especially in those lean years.

A drought nearly burned them out in 1955. "I don't think we harvested more than a couple hundred acres," she said. That was the year, Phyllis said she gave birth to the couple's last child, their seventh one.

"You didn't farm for the money," she said. "You farmed for the way of life. It's a better way to raise a family. Kids on the farms learn things kids in town don't. And everybody works hard."

Despite his depth of knowledge, Roy is reticent to offer young farmers much advice. Maybe, he said, because he never received any himself. "Dad wasn't around when I was making all my mistakes," he said.

There were years, he said, when he lost hundreds of thousands of dollars, and times when he broke even. When he served as president, the league was just beginning to venture into an overseas market. Mostly, his term was spent fighting freight rates that, he now says, weren't really a problem. "We seemed to always have a surplus of wheat," he said. "And we were always fighting freight rates. But even that wasn't nearly as big a problem as we made it out to be."

He figured from Shaniko to Portland freight rate was about 8.5 cents a bushel. The railroad was the only transportation ticket in town, he said. "We didn't have the truck transportation or river transportation that we have now."

Over the years, Roy added 1000 acres to land his father had amassed. And by the time he sold his own wheat ranch in 1976, Roy had diversified into cattle and sheep ranching as well.

Today, the couple reside in a hilltop home in The Dalles that overlooks the Columbia River. The only stock they have to worry about is what's in the refrigerator. Grandsons and their buddies pop in and out throughout the day looking for grub. "It's my job to keep the refrigerator stocked," Phyllis said.

Scanning through the league's most current newsletter, Roy concluded, "You gotta love farming. You don't go into farming for the money. You farm for the way of life."

THE WAR YEARS

World war brought strong prices. And even some good weather. Growers were rewarded with strong yields. But as the war drew to a close, it was clear to many of the Basin wheat growers that high yields coupled with declining demand would usher in substantially lower prices.

When Paulen Kaseberg assumed the title of president in 1949, the idea of market quotas were looming on the horizon. "Because we were at full production during the war years, we had a surplus when the war ended," Kaseberg recalled.

To cope with overproduction problems, market cards were issued. "Those cards allowed you to sell so much. If you had a 1000 acres and you usually had 50 bushels an acre, and the government wanted you to cut back 20 percent. They would say, 'OK, you can sell 40,000 bushels instead of 50,000,'" Kaseberg said.

But years before those market quotas went into effect, Jim Beamer (OWGL president 1946) appointed a committee to study the problem and propose a recommendation at the 1946 conference, held Dec. 16-18, in La Grande. Jens Terjeson, of Pendleton, chaired the committee, which included Bob Wood, H.R. (Ike) and Marion T. Weatherford. The committee report called for a Wheat Commission, created by Legislative statute with the authority to tax each bushel of wheat. The goal was to provide funding for a wide scope of studies related to production and marketing and to expand into foreign markets.

The duo teamed up with Ernest Fatland, a state senator from Condon, Fred Miller, who actually wrote the legislation, and Giles French, who introduced the bill to the House. The end result of their efforts was a bill that passed both houses of the legislature with only a single dissent from Eugene Marsh of McMinnville, who declared, "I just didn't want you fellows to think getting a bill through the Legislature was so damned easy!"

The Oregon Wheat Commission, appointed by Governor Snell, that included Marion T. Weatherford convened on April 27, 1947 as the nation's first of its kind for wheat. EJ. Bell, a long-time employee of the USDA, was appointed director of OWC.

This was just another instance where careful planning and energetic follow through on behalf of a league committee paid off.

It was during Paulen Kaseberg's tenure as president that the Eastern Oregon Wheat League changed its name to Oregon Wheat Growers League.

Paulen Kaseberg
OWGL president
1949

LOCUST GROVE - The church stands empty now. Straw covers the wooden plank floors. There are no pews, no pulpit, no hymnals, no Bibles. But on sunny summer days, light radiates through the arched, and, now, glass-less windows. And if you stand still in the beam of those rays and listen very carefully you can hear the locust trees yawning.

These locust trees are a 100-years old or better now. Most still stand erect, in rows, looking ever so much like sentries on guard. These proud and daunting protectors stretch to embrace the church's towering steeple. Like a mother grasping for her young soldier boy as he returns home from the war.

Locust Grove Church, built in 1895, is the church where Paulen Kaseberg's grandparents sang and worshiped and gave thanks, for both the bountiful years and the lean ones.

In 1882, John Kaseberg, Paulen's grandfather, homesteaded the craggy hills that tumble and fold end-over-end to the nearby Columbia River. The German immigrant was a wagon-maker by trade. But he and his pregnant wife, Henrietta and the couple's six children followed the Oregon Trail west. Bone-weary, they put their wheels in park and claimed a quarter section of dust peppered with tumbleweed. Eventually, John Kaseberg would add another section, for a total of 960 acres, in Sherman County, near what became Highway 30.

"He figured out the county was so dry you couldn't even starve to death decently," Paulen Kaseberg, 87, said of his grandfather's acquisitions. Albert Kaseberg and his wife Metta, Paulen 's parents, inherited 80 acres of John Kaseberg' s ranch. Then they bought out other family members and neighbors and successfully expanded their farm to 1280 acres.

As the only son - and for 13 years, the only child - Paulen started in the farm business before he learned to read. "I started learning farming as soon as I got old enough to go to the chicken house. Mother would say, 'Go to the chicken house and see if they have water. Pick up the eggs while you're there and bring 'em back,'" Paulen recalled. "I did that until I was physically big enough to hold down a job. I was 14 years old when I worked my first harvest. I was about 5' 3' and 120 pounds." Nowhere near strong enough to handle his dad's tractors.

"My dad was a very progressive farmer. He got his first car in 1914 and his first tractor in 1916. In 1927, he bought a Best 60 tractor. It didn't have hydraulic assisted steering. You had to steer it with brute strength. I remember how difficult it was to operate. I couldn't do it," he said.

But the tractor's 60 hp engine did enable it to cover twice as much ground, even over the steep slopes, Paulen recalled.

Plumbing came to the Kaseberg home in 1928. Prior to that, all the water had to be hauled in. Initially, from a ranch nearly four miles away. "We didn't haul water daily. We had a 11,000 gallon cistern. But before we got our own well, the only flowers Mother ever planted were spring bulbs. And we didn't have a lawn," he said. They had to drill 514 feet before finding water.

Updating his farm, especially when it came to buying new equipment, created other complications for Albert Kaseberg. When he bought his first diesel tractor in 1934, Metta Kaseberg had a fit. "When my mother saw Dad's new tractor she told him, 'If you can afford that, you can afford to modernize this house,'" he said.

Albert Kaseberg probably had no idea that his new tractor would cost him so much. Not only did he have to ante up the bootie for the new tractor, he ended up buying his wife a refrigerator, that ran on bottled gas, new wallpaper, and he built a ceiling in the kitchen where for years only wooden joists hung overhead.

A shrewd businessman, Albert Kaseberg told his son, "Do all your budgeting and planning on a 30 bushel

crop." Yet, his business acumen did not prepare Albert Kaseberg for the kind of devastation brought on by the Great Depression.

"When I graduated from Wasco High School in 1932, my father said, 'I've gone 3 years without paying on the mortgage or the taxes. They could come and take this farm any day and I'd be powerless to resist it. I want you to go to college and learn a trade,'" Paulen said.

When he graduated from high school he had \$300 in the bank in Wasco. Money he'd earned from harvesting. Paulen was now as strong as his father. On a good day of harvest, he figured he could sew and stack 950 of those 140-pound sacks of grain. Proud of the man his boy had become, Albert Kaseberg gave him another \$100. The first thing he did was withdraw it all and deposit it in a bank in The Dalles. His father was furious.

"It was the only time my father ever swore at me. He told me, 'That was a damn foolish thing to do. The bank at Wasco is a lot stronger than the bank at The Dalles. The men at Wasco wouldn't let you lose a dime,'" Paulen recalled. When the Wasco bank failed to open following the Labor Day weekend, the boy was feeling quite smug. A couple of weeks before The Dalles bank shut down, Paulen had taken his money and bought postal savings bonds. "I survived two bank closures," he said, grinning at his good fortune.

However, he noted, in the long run his father was right. "When the bank in The Dalles opened back up it only paid its depositors 80 percent of their deposits. The bank at Wasco paid out 105 percent." And it was the bank at Dufur that earned the respect of farmers throughout the region, he noted. "They stayed open. Even after the economy changed a lot of farmers stayed at that Dufur bank because they were so appreciative," he said. Paulen is not your typical Eastern Oregon farmer. "I am a University of Oregon graduate. A Duck surrounded by Beavers. Even my blood is green," he said with a chuckle. He earned his degree in business and economics before coming back to the family farm. He started ranching in earnest in 1937. He and wife Margilee, raised three children on the farm, two boys and a girl.

Over the years, Paulen said he's seen the price of wheat fluctuate, but the problems wheat farmers face have remained pretty consistent. "The issues are basically the same - transportation, productivity, weed control and market." Drought is something you learn to live with, he said. "We've only had 6 inches of rainfall since September." But there has been one variable added into the equation - the environmental issue.

"I think we've done a pretty good job of controlling erosion with strip-cropping, diversion ditches and the expanded use of no-till. Erosion isn't much of a problem when you don't have rain," he said, shaking his head in wry awareness.

There was a time when Paulen thought chemicals would revolutionize weed problems. "I used to think if we'd spray two or three times we'd eradicate all the weeds. My goodness, now we have more weeds. Just different kinds. We don't have the problems with fireweed and mustard and knot grass that we used to have. But we have goat grass and skeleton weed. That goat grass is really a problem because of its ability to cross-pollinate and because it mimics wheat in height and looks," he said.

Fertilizer didn't change farm operations the way that World War II did. Paulen served as president of the League in 1949. Those were some exciting times for growers. "The economy was booming. There had been so much pent-up demand during the war," he said.

The League didn't waste any time looking to develop their overseas connections. They immediately began to hit their congressmen up for some price parity between the domestic and foreign markets. Kaseberg traveled to D.C. as president to bring the big boys of the Senate Agriculture committee up to snuff on the issues. "I was scared about the questions they would ask, but all they wanted to know about was summer fallow," he said with a chuckle.

Eventually, wheat farmers were able to get a deal that blended the prices between the two markets, he said. "It was exciting once the Public Law 480 went into effect. It allowed the U.S. to sell wheat to Japan and take their yen in payment. We'd spend that yen in Japan on market development. Lots of things expanded.

We had market managers in Japan, the Philippines, India and Singapore. These were primarily rice-eating countries. We put rolls there," he said.

Trade with the Pacific Rim meant the ability to market to millions and millions of people. "We helped the Japanese grow considerably taller because of the variety we introduced to their diet," he said. Perhaps the league should consider making Seattle Mariner Ichiro Suzuki their poster boy.

Paulen's two sons are now farming the 2200 acres that Paulen amassed. Farming is not just a business, he claimed. "It's a way of life." A way of life that keeps families intact, he said. "A doctor's son can't go to work with him. A lawyer's son can't. But there's no generation gap in farming. You don't hear farm kids say, 'My old man doesn't know anything.' Because they are learning their father's skills."

Outside Paulen's home two fawns romp in the brush with their mother. Across the road, Kaseberg's sons and grandson attend to business in the family shop. And just a stone's throw away is the church where Paulen Kaseberg's grandparents knelt and gave thanks.

Just as it has for the past 75 years, the price of wheat is surely going to continue to fluctuate. And technology is surely going to continue to change the world.

But it's here in the midst of yawning locusts that one can still find the stuff that makes for a truly radiant life: The faithful and enduring prayers of a loving family. A family that's learned to give thanks for the bountiful years and for the lean ones.

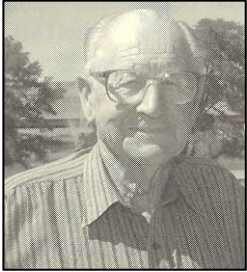
THE BOOM YEARS:

The 1950s witnessed a concerted effort to educate the public on the benefits and versatility of wheat in food preparation, especially with respect to marketing Northwest wheat into the Pacific Rim. The most memorial educational effort during this period was the production and distribution of the film, Give Us this Day. The League estimated that the film reached 25 million viewers during the decade. Advertising campaigns and a staff of home economists were sponsored by a joint effort of the League and the Commission.

In 1951, Ed Bell was loaned to the federal government to work in the Philippines, Japan and India. Bell had limited success. Then in 1954, Dick Baum, the Executive Vice-President of OWGL, made a tour of nine Asian countries. He was joined by Gordon Boals of the Miller's National Federation and Earl Pollock of the Foreign Agriculture Service of the USDA. These men agreed that Japan constituted the best country for a potential wheat market. They focused their educational efforts on that country.

It was during this time that Public Law 480 was passed authorizing the purchase of American products with foreign currency. After that the flood gates were opened, said Morris Wilson, OWGL president, 1954. "That opened up millions of dollars to be spent on wheat projects," Wilson recalled. "Wheat became increasing popular in Pacific Rim countries like Japan."

Morris Wilson
OWGL president
1954



ARLINGTON - After church on Sunday, families from Wheeler and Gilliam counties gather at the Village Inn Restaurant in Arlington for lunch. Refills on coffee are free and the milkshakes are served only one way - extra thick.

In a booth, sitting behind Morris Wilson, 88, a young man leans over his platter and picks up a hefty hamburger. Lettuce and ketchup spill out the sides of the jumbo bun. And for just a moment you tune out Wilson, who served as president of Oregon Wheat Growers League in 1954 and wonder, is that bun made from Oregon soft white wheat?

It could be Morris' own BLT sandwich is made from grain grown in Gilliam, Wheeler, or Wasco counties. Then there is that wire story from early August to consider. The one that claimed drought and new planting strategies have stunted this year's yield. Some crops in Eastern Oregon, deemed too short to harvest, are instead being turned over to cattle for grazing.

If predictions prove true, this could be the smallest harvest in 30 years for some of Oregon's soft white wheat farmers. Wasco County has been declared a federal disaster area and the Moro weather station has recorded the lowest rainfall in 84 years, the wire story said.

Turning back to Wilson, you ask him the obvious question, why would any person want to become a wheat farmer? Today or even 60 years ago? Wilson laughs and looks over at his wife of 62 years, Viola. They exchange that look of silent daring, "You wanna be the one to explain it?"

Finally, Wilson antes up. The Spokane native moved to the company-owned town of Kinzua, just outside of Fossil, when he was 18. He took a job at Kinzua Pine Mill Corp. that paid him 38 cents an hour. He swears he wasn't in the market for a wife. "I could barely support myself," he said.

Yet, for entertainment, he attended the Saturday night dances at the Grange hall. That's where he met Viola Smith, daughter of Loyd Smith, a wheat farmer in Mayville, OR.

Flashing her still effervescent smile, Viola denied her daddy told her to go out and find a man able enough to help out on the ranch. She had her own plans and they didn't include marriage.

First, she earned her teaching degree from Oregon Normal College, in Monmouth, OR. Then, after teaching elementary school for a few years, she earned a degree in education from Oregon State University.

Wilson recalled that initially Loyd Smith wasn't all that enthralled by his daughter's choice of beaux. "One time I went down to see Viola after work and the family was eating supper on the screened back porch. I heard Loyd say, 'It's that wood rat again,'" Wilson said with a laugh.

When the couple married, Wilson continued working for the lumber company. By then he'd worked his way up the ranks to personnel manager, in-between stints of completing course-work on a business and education degree at University of Oregon. Although he failed to complete his final year of course work, Wilson was granted a degree in 2000 by University of Oregon President Dave Frohnmayer, who recognized Wilson's lifetime achievements in the field of agriculture and business.

Wilson stayed in the timber industry until he was 30. By then the couple had a 6month-old baby daughter, Adele, a roomful of furniture and a second-hand Chevrolet, and very little else. "I was 30 and that was my life accumulation. It didn't look like I could go any place in the job," Wilson recalled.

In 1943, Loyd Smith made his son-in-law a generous offer, a partnership in the family wheat ranch. Viola declined to be a consultant regarding her husband's career path. Even though, with her brother Jack away

at college, then in the military, she knew her father was desperate for reliable help.

"You couldn't hire decent help," she said. "All the young men were in the service. There were agriculture counties all over looking for help. But all you could hire were bums or drunks." And while he was neither of those, Wilson said he knew so little about ranching it could be summed up in a sentence. Thankfully, Smith was a patient teacher and his student was an eager learner. "I tried not to be shown how to do a job more than once," Wilson said. "On that grounds, my father-in-law and I got along well."

Ranch work not only shaped Wilson's future, it changed the shape of his hands - from tapered fingers to broad stubs. Always a man of slight build, Wilson said he dropped 20 pounds in his first month as a rancher. But he noted, those years were exciting times. Although Oregon produced only about three percent of the nation's wheat crop. The League led the nation in organization and development.

"Between 1947 and when I was elected in 1954, the Oregon Wheat Commission had begun to accumulate some funds. They directed \$105,000 to the Wheat League towards a movie project - Give Us this Day, Wilson recalled.

Following World War II, markets opened in the Pacific Rim. "The war is what pulled wheat farmers out of the hole," he said. Public Law 480, enacted by Congress, strengthened the economy of wheat ranching.

That program allowed underdeveloped countries, like the Philippines, who owed the U.S. money, to write off those funds in return for training and development projects to upgrade their countries. "That opened up millions of dollars to be spent on wheat projects," Wilson recalled. "Wheat became increasingly popular in Pacific Rim countries like Japan." Particularly the soft white variety produced by Northwest growers. "Those countries would use it for noodles and pan bread," Wilson said. "Anything that didn't take gluten to rise."

Oregon's wheat growers were popular stateside as well, he added. "We were being called upon by other states to develop Leagues and Commissions. States like Kansas, Nebraska and Texas, major wheat growing states, were calling us, asking for our help." And although they didn't lead the nation in production of wheat, Wilson said, Oregon growers felt confident that they led the way in development, organization, policy and procedures, and politically.

"We were egotistical enough to think, 'Who better to come to than us?'" he said. It was while working at Kinzua that Wilson had first learned to follow procedure and policies. And it was from his father-in-law that he learned to be a contributing member of the League. "Lloyd was a chronic meeting-goer," Wilson said.

When Jack returned from his tour of duty and joined with Wilson and Smith, the partners developed a ranch that eventually spread across 7500 acres and two counties, Wheeler and Gilliam.

One generation's achievements are built upon the shoulders of another generation's achievements, Wilson said. "Everybody builds on somebody else's shoulders."

He was always aware that his accomplishments were due in a large part to Loyd Smith. But whenever he tried to show that appreciation to Smith, he would be rebuffed. "Lloyd would say, 'A shroud doesn't have any pockets,'" Wilson said. That was Loyd's way of saying he might have been in the poorhouse without Wilson's help.

But besides Smith, Wilson said the two men who really served as mentors to him were E. R. Jackman and Dr. Don Hill, who worked with Oregon Agricultural College (OSU) extension service and experiment station.

"Historically, I don't think a lot of people recognize the influence of the extension service. I remember how much they contributed to the Wheat League. They helped us get organized, they helped in development of wheat varieties. More than anything else, I depended on their wisdom," Wilson said.

Education, project development, market strategies were just a few of the benefits Wilson said he received as a member of the Oregon Wheat Growers League. Beyond that, he said, being a wheat grower enabled him to form lasting relationships with many folks, including men like E.R. Jackman and Dr. Hill.

The BLT on his plate is half-eaten. The young man, who was sitting behind Wilson, gnawing on the jumbo-sized burger, is long-gone. But the waitress staff is still rushing around refilling coffee for the afternoon crowd at the Village Inn Restaurant as Wilson concludes his thoughts about his life work.

"I have wonderful friends because of the League, life-long friends," he said, his eyes brimming with appreciation. The kind of friends who stick with you during the boom years and the bad ones. While wheat crops may suffer through times of drought, it's obvious that wheat growers always find ways to flourish.

THE EXPANSION YEARS

In 1956, Joe Spiruta, of the Oregon Wheat Commission, prepared an exhibit for the Osada Trade Fair. The exhibit drew such crowds that police supervision was required. By the end of that year, Spiruta was authorized to establish a permanent trade office of the OWGL in Tokyo.

In 1957, marketing efforts begun by the League in India and Korea were turned over to the Washington Wheat Commission to administer and fund with the assistance of Nebraska growers.

Despite this overseas marketing push, growers continued to overproduce. Mounds of wheat piled up in storage. Again, it was leaders in the OWGL that stepped up to the plate to figure out a solution. And since overproduction was not solely an Oregon growers' problem, leaders looked beyond their borders for an answer. Washington and Idaho growers were invited to the table. A Tri-State committee was formed. Its purpose? Coordinate their efforts.

Pushed along by the likes of Ronald Rew, Jens Terjeson, and Frank Tubbs, this committee emerged into the Western Wheat Associate. Based in Umatilla County, this entity took over responsibility for foreign market development. Again, the foresight and leadership of these skilled fellows and the many like them, served growers well. Wheat purchases doubled in Japan between 1961 and 1965. Moreover, under the impetus of the Wheat Associates educational offices in India and Pakistan along with Public Law 480, one-third of all U.S. wheat exports were bound for those countries.

As far as Milton Morgan is concerned, there was no better time than 1964 to be president. "Those were exciting times," he said. "I traveled the world over."

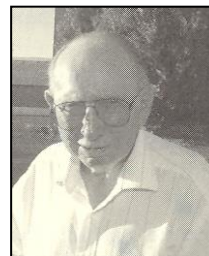
Milton Morgan

OWGL president

1964

IONE - As Milton Morgan sits in his brick home on a Sunday afternoon in August watching television news, a motorcade of cars and trucks, lights flashing, head west on Interstate 84.

An American flag waves from the antenna of one vehicle. On the rear window of another are these words: "Convoy of Tears." Comprised of Northwest ranchers and farmers, this group has been making headline news while marshaling support for irrigation water rights with their "Klamath Bucket Brigade" rallies. I



During the summer of 2001, over 1000 Klamath Basin farms were cut off from irrigation water by the federal government because of a reduction of rain and snow packs which reportedly threatened migratory birds and endangered fish. Responding to the news, Morgan, 88, shakes his head and said, "I loved ranching. But oh, boy! It's tough now. I'm telling you it's hard to be a rancher these days."

Milt Morgan was president of Oregon Wheat Growers League in 1964. "Those were exciting times," he said. "I traveled the world over."

Introducing other countries to Oregon wheat was just one aspect of the job that he thoroughly enjoyed. But even that job had its challenges. Morgan didn't speak Japanese and his foreign counterparts didn't speak Ioneese.

"I remember when I was in Japan they made a film of one of my talks and they dubbed it over in Japanese. I had no idea what it said," he recalled with a chuckle. Morgan grew up in the Eightmile Canyon area just south of Ione. His father, Milton Morgan Sr., ran a dairy and wheat ranch. Morgan said he never considered any other career besides ranching. "I was raised to be a farmer," he said. "Just a regular farmer."

He graduated from Ione High School in 1931 and married his high school sweetheart, Margaret Crawford, in 1938. Margaret was a farm girl herself. "Her father, Wate Crawford, owned a ranch on the opposite end of town," Morgan recalled, out in Juniper Canyon. But Morgan swears he didn't marry the girl for daddy's land, but because, he said, "She kept me in order."

The couple moved to the ranch at Eightmile canyon in 1939. Morgan remembers the year clearly because that first year he practically lost the family's 1600 acre ranch. "It was pretty near harvest time and the crop got hailed out," Morgan recalled. "When I looked out at the ground the fields were just laying down on the ground. We had hail about the size of golf balls."

The struggling young family did not have hail insurance. And Uncle Sam did not come knocking at the front door with an emergency fund check to tide them over, Morgan said. "We didn't get any government aid. We just about lost all of it," he said.

Despite having recently suffered a stroke, Morgan recalled with eye-wincing clarity the burden of telling his father that they'd lost the crop. "I didn't cry but I sure felt like it," Morgan said.

Out of the 800 acres that had been ready to harvest, Morgan estimated he was able to salvage about 50 to 80 bushels. He never would have survived if it hadn't been for folks like Henry Baker, a cousin and a neighbor, who helped the family out, Morgan said. "We had people give us money. Henry helped me get back on my feet," Morgan said.

Losing a crop was nothing compared to the loss of the couple's oldest son, Jack. The blue-eyed boy was only 4 when he died of meningitis. Daughter Marilyn was only 6-weeks-old. A third child, Gary, was born later.

Losing a child is a "pretty lonesome" experience, Morgan said. "It was spring time and Jack just took ill with a fever. We took him to the hospital in Heppner, but he never recuperated," he said. Prior to the boy's death, Morgan said he had trouble keeping young Jack off the farm equipment. "He really loved the tractors," he said.

Morgan had his own favorite tractor. A D-6 Caterpillar. "It was the best tractor I ever owned. It really had power," he recalled.

During the good years, the farm would produce 40 bushels an acre. Morgan's brother-in-law, Rollo Crawford, was his right-hand man. And when he wasn't running around with Crawford, Morgan was often hanging out with the likes of Frank Tubbs or one of the many other buddies he formed friendships with during his Wheat League days. "Paulen Kaseberg was a good friend," Morgan said. Kaseberg was president in 1949.

For men like Morgan, who never obtained a college education, the League provided them with invaluable resources. "We got up-to-date information and the friends I made at the League shared their farming skills with me, encouraged me and thanked me," he said. "You learn a lot from those people cause you travel around so much. I was real proud to be president of the Wheat League. I miss my friends."

Although, ranchers today have better technology and better tools, Morgan said one thing about ranching has remained consistent - the price of wheat. "You could never tell what the price of wheat was going to be, and that's still true today," he said.

THE INVESTMENT YEARS

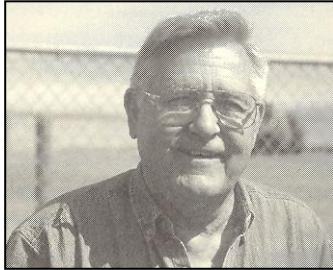
The 1970s brought the first increase in bushel assessment, a 100 percent increase to one cent per bushel. As Bill Hulse noted at the 50th anniversary conference, held once again in Moro on Feb. 11-13, "... the Commission income had not been increased since it was started in 1946. My deduction would be, you either had too much money at that time, or we don't have enough now."

Glen Brogoitti (OWGL president 1971) knew it was the latter. During those years, all travel expenses were paid for by the growers themselves. "There wasn't a travel budget," Brogoitti said. So not only were leaders dedicating their knowledge, time and energies, they were also picking up the tab at the end of the evening.

Still, Brogotti said he didn't mind giving of his resources, including the ones in his back pocket. "I felt like everybody in the wheat industry needed to work at it once in a while. I don't consider it a volunteer thing. I think it's something you need to do."

And, no doubt, due to the kind of commitment displayed by Brogoitti and leaders like him, by 1975, Japanese importation of wheat from the U.S. had grown from a little under 2 million tons to 3 million tons. By 1974, 93 percent of Taiwan's nearly three-quarters of a million tons of wheat came from the US, and by 1975, all of South Korea's 1.45 million tons of wheat came from America.

Glen Brogoitti
OWGL president
1971



HELIX - In the north corner of Glen Brogoitti's garden, the tomatoes are still green on the vine. But it's early yet, a dose of September's moonlight is sure to color them red.

In his driveway is a motorhome. Brogoitti is inside, unpacking from a recent trip. Although he's well-traveled, Brogoitti's main roost is less than two miles from the home in which he was born.

Farming is the only life he's ever known, but it wasn't the only one he ever dreamed about. "I wanted to go into commercial aviation," he said. "I always liked to fly." But it was his father, Sieb, who dissuaded his son from enlisting during the Korean War. "Dad was pretty instrumental in my life. He talked me out of joining the service. He encouraged me to go onto college. He said he needed me here on the farm," Brogoitti recalled.

At Oregon State University, he studied agriculture. In 1949, the then 21-year-old youth bought 460 acres and struck out on his own. "I felt like I knew the business, and Dad helped me," he said.

That same year Brogoitti became a life member of the Oregon Wheat Growers League. "I got into it for the fellowship and because it was a way to keep informed. The league gave us a lot of information we didn't get in newspapers," Brogoitti said.

And there was one other reason he joined. "I felt like everybody in the wheat industry needed to work at it once in awhile. I don't consider it a volunteer thing. I think it's something you need to do." It was that kind of participatory attitude that propelled Brogoitti into the role of president of the League in 1971. It was a year in which growers were faced with one major battle - cooperation.

"We had problems in the Pacific Northwest because at that point there was a definite line between Washington farmers and Oregon farmers," Brogoitti recalled. As president, he determined to develop a more cooperative relationship between the two states. Primarily, he said, Washington's Senator Warren Magnuson "wielded power" in Washington D.C. and as a result farmers to the north were reaping benefits Oregon farmers weren't.

Under the direction of Bill Bell, president of the Pacific Northwest Grain Grower Cooperative, and the Oregon Wheat Growers League, a concerted effort was made to make Oregon farmers a strong presence in D.C., Brogoitti recalled. "Bill and I joined forces," he said.

He also added that because at that time the League wasn't well-funded, lobbying efforts came out of their own pockets too. Still, it's an investment Brogoitti has never regretted.

Today, the leadership in Washington and Oregon understand the value of being good neighbors, Brogoitti said. "Our interests are the same," he said.

Transportation was another challenge he faced during his term, and it too, was solved through cooperative political channels. "There was a dock strike in Portland. It literally stopped all grain from going through Portland," he said. It was a crisis that farmers could ill-afford. Since the end of World War II, Oregon wheat growers had worked tirelessly on developing markets in the Pacific Rim. The dock strike jeopardized those markets.

Brogoitti acted swiftly. "I sent a letter to everyone of the existing past presidents, calling them to a round table to discuss how we could get the strike settled," he explained. Nearly 85 percent of those receiving the

letter turned out, Brogoitti noted. "We did what we could to try and get that strike to bust loose. I asked them, 'Who do you know in the Agriculture Department? Who do you know in the Labor Department?'"

With the pipeline, ships and elevators chocked full of grain, they had to get something moving. "We twisted some arms," he admitted. Their diligence paid off. "We finally got the log jam going," Brogoitti said.

When he was a young man who dreamed of flying, Brogoitti never realized that doing a job well could also take a man to soaring heights.

Today, his 4,000 acre operation continues to thrill him. "I dearly love to be out plowing in the spring, watching those red-tail hawks fly around and follow the tractor. How they can swoop around and not flap a wing amazes me," he said.

THE CRISIS YEARS

With Public Law 480 and the general economic surge resulting from increased federal spending in the late 1960s, there occurred a corresponding agricultural boom. Between 1973-1981, planted acreage increased among all crops by 12 percent.

Wheat experienced an increase in acreage put under production close to 30-percent. Much of the purchase of this new acreage and the means of production were obtained from borrowing. But these events were occurring at the same time as the OPEC oil embargo produced a dramatic increase in petro-chemical prices, affecting fuel and fertilizer costs, the onset of hyper-inflation, and the Soviet wheat embargo after their invasion of Afghanistan in 1980.

This stoppage of exports to the Soviets came at a time when they had risen to the second largest importer of American wheat behind Japan. Additionally, between 1960 to the late 1970s, U.S. government pay-outs to support wheat exports declined by a little more than one-sixth. These conditions converged to suppress commodity prices, around 20 percent in the two years 1980-81, at a time when production costs were on the rise. Thus, American agriculture came to the TV news screen of the mid-1980s as an industry in crisis.

Stan Timmermann
OWGL president
1981

PENDLETON - Sipping on a cup of coffee at Zollman's, along Pendleton's Main Street, Stan Timmermann hems and haws when asked questions about himself. Instead, he pulls out a professional resume and passes it across the table. "Read this. It has everything," he says.

Yep. It's all there. Under Education is his 1953 graduation from Oregon State University. Next to Occupation is his 3407 acres of dryland, summer fallow wheat farm. Listed by family are daughters, Laurie Timmermann, Wash. D.C., and Kate Finn, Ithaca, N.Y. Even the names of his grandchildren are listed. As are 25 recitations of the past chairman and president roles he's held over the years, including that as president of the Oregon Wheat Grower's League in 1981. Impressive. But still not something Timmermann appears interested in talking about.

Time to shift gears. "So what do you think about our foreign trade policy?" Leaning over the table, Timmermann's blue eyes blaze bright. And although he doesn't say it, you know he's thinking, "Now we're talking."

This time he isn't the least bit reticent about his remarks. "It's the very worst," Timmermann said. "We think we can still force other countries to come around by refusing to sell wheat to them. We have a very poor international trade policy." Such policy only serves to weaken our relationships with other countries, he added. Timmermann's tone is intense. His frustration evident. He speaks with the voice of authority. Primarily because he's had years of experience in dealing with the topic. A glance back at the Jan. 1981 issue of Oregon Wheat reveals that in his first address as president, Timmermann identified the trade embargo against Russia as one of the most important issues facing farmers.

"We lost the potential and we're, in essence, given nothing as relief for the market disruption caused by a new force in foreign policy. According to this policy, the food and fiber productive resource of the United States shall be used as a diplomatic weapon in the affairs of international detente," Timmermann wrote, noting that then Secretary of Agriculture John Block was in full support of such a policy.

Timmermann then issued a call to arms for his fellow farmers: "A new farm bill will be legislated this year. It is imperative that this legislation contain a strong agricultural export trade policy. "In a stronger sense, it must protect me well being of farmers whenever and for whatever reason an embargo may be put into force," Timmermann urged.

Twenty years later, Timmermann is still harping on that same message. "We think we can still force other countries to come around by embargoes. Do you know right now we have embargoes against 40 countries around the world? "We use embargoes as a tool for international detente. Well, when that happens, Canada ends up selling wheat to Cuba," he said, pausing to sip from his cup and to let the ramifications of his remarks settle in.

Timmermann makes no bones about the fact that he believes in a free trade economy. But he brings to the table a breadth of knowledge that he's gained firsthand. He's traveled around the world several times and visited nearly every country on three continents.

There was a time when Timmermann said he'd like to see a completely open trading policy, dollar for dollar, that doesn't limit trade based upon another country's own internal policies regarding human rights. But only weeks after the Sept. 11 terrorists attack that laid flat the World Trade Center and cut a crater into the U.S. Pentagon, killing an estimated 6500 people, Timmermann reconsidered his previous stance.

"We've always had a problem with Afghanistan. It's a very, very depressed country with two internal strife systems. We've got a problem there," he said.

Taking another sip of coffee, he continues. "This has become a national patriotic issue when we've got

bombs going off in downtown New York. It's a very, very large dilemma. It makes it difficult to trade freely or to decide what's going to be the fairness doctrine to come out of that?" he asked.

Those are questions that Timmermann believes have to be addressed in the next farm bill, currently being crafted. "2002 is a new year. What comes out of the farm bill is very important. We need to make damn sure things don't get dizzy, like a dog chasing his tail. Hopefully, we've learned from our mistakes," he said.

THE ENVIRONMENTAL YEARS:

The Soil Bank Act of 1956 was the first seed of what would evolve into the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Aware that eroding cropland needed to be protected, and seeking to prevent soil trauma caused by overproduction, Congress authorized the USDA to enter into long-term conservation plans with growers. Additionally, the Department agreed to share the cost of converting cropland from production into protective vegetative cover.

During its life span, the Soil Bank Program diverted 28.7 million acres to conservation practices on 306,000 farms.

By the 1970s, the prices of farm commodities were on the rise, partly because of an increasing overseas market. Growers filled the demand by planting crops on marginal lands, including pastures and range lands.

Environmental educational awareness programs heightened public concern to the damage caused by agricultural erosion and water runoff carrying sediment, nutrients, and chemicals into streams, rivers, lakes, and other bodies of water. Studies by the USDA found that erosion was wreaking havoc on the Nation's cropland. Soil losses were estimated at a rate of 3 billion tons per year.

Such erosion couldn't help but affect wildlife habitat. Intensive farming and the widespread conversion of fallow land to production was thought to have destroyed habitats for many species, creating declining populations.

Environmental concerns were prevalent in the minds of many growers during Don Stonebrink's tenure as OWGL president. In the Sept. 1990 issue of Oregon Wheat, Stonebrink reported that growers in general were concerned about "environmental issues, such as farm conservation plans for water quality and quantity, wetlands, endangered species, reduction of farm chemicals and animal wastes ...".

Don Stonebrink
OWGL president
1990

LOSTINE - For the past three years Wallowa County has been suffering through drought conditions. Don Stonebrink, 64, said the dry conditions have impacted farmers throughout the county. "Seems like we always got a timely spring rain that helped us make a crop. But we didn't get one this year or the last two years. It's just plain dry," he said.

Stonebrink farms 1500 acres in the Leap area, about five miles northeast of Lostine. But despite the dry times, Stonebrink would never let inclement weather deter him from doing what he loves best. "Farming is a way of life, not a job," he said. "When you're a farmer you get to see things grow and you're always working to try to improve the ways things grow."

It's not always just crops that farmers are coaxing along. Sometimes it's a senator or congressman or a piece of legislation. Over the years, Stonebrink, who served as League president in 1990, has done his share of coaxing. "Most Congressmen, Senators and other federal agencies don't even understand farming," Stonebrink said. "Every time you get a new one, you have to educate them."

That's still the case according to Daren Coppock, CEO of the National Association of Wheat Growers. "You have to give them a course in Farming 101," Coppock said. "Even more so than ever because many of them don't have any agriculture in their district."

Coppock, who has been hard at work on the 2002 Farm Bill, said the irony of that lack of knowledge is never more prevalent than in the range of proposed amendments to the Farm Bill. "Even before the House can deal with the Farm Bill, they have to wade their way through 59 proposed amendments," Coppock said.

The lack of basic agriculture knowledge among the nation's elected officials is why Stonebrink believes it's crucial for farmers to be involved with groups like the League. Seasoned growers are the ones who can best explain how a farm or environmental bill might affect local growers. Too many of those crafting legislation lack a grasp on the fundamentals of farming. "These people don't even understand why we need dams, or how come we only plant summer fallow every other year," Stonebrink said.

A person doesn't have to be politically involved to be a farmer, but to be a successful farmer, Stonebrink said there is no other way. "With all the other environmentalist and other big groups out there, farmers wouldn't stand a chance if the League wasn't politically involved," Stonebrink asserts. "Who would be in D.C. lobbying for us? Or in Salem working on the legislature?" Good leadership is fundamental to good business, Stonebrink noted.

In his own tenure as president, Stonebrink said he dealt with a number of issues. Specifically, he recalled the concerns folks expressed over CRP land. "CRP had been around for a few years. It'd started up in 1985 as a way of dealing with the highly eroded land we were farming," he recalled.

Stonebrink said by 1990, farmers were beginning to ponder, "How do we take this soil out and put it back into production. It had been all sodded down." A lot of farmers were really skeptical of the program at first, he noted. "They were worried about putting land into permanent vegetation. They worried about pests in the grasslands, the grasshoppers, the beetles. They thought CRP land would be a place to harbor insects," he noted.

Stonebrink said he didn't necessarily share the skepticism. "I rotated hay all the time. It has a lot of grass roots. I'd rotate it every 5 to 7 years and put it back into crops. I was used to working up the ground. It was no big deal," he said. But for those folks who'd never raised hay, only summer fallow, the uncertainties were understandable.

Stonebrink also dealt with the ongoing issues of cost controls, balancing the bottom line against the price of fuel and transportation. The burden of transportation costs has always been a specific hardship for

Wallowa County farmers, Stonebrink noted. "We aren't as close to the river or the rail lines as Umatilla County. We ship our grain out by truck to Lewiston where it's then loaded on barges. We tried to get the price of transportation down but we weren't very successful," he said.

But there were some significant victories. Stonebrink credited Wes Grilley for getting the Oregon Grain Commission up and running in 1989. The notion of strength in numbers, which had led wheat growers to join together in 1926, continued to replicate itself. By forming a commission to represent all of Oregon's grain products, Grilley said growers' interests were better served. "The value of the Oregon Wheat Growers League and the Oregon Grain Commission is a legislative voice," Grilley said.

Stonebrink noted with delight the young man they singled out to serve as the commission's director, a recent college graduate, Daren Coppock. "Daren had always been a bright and shining star. This was his first job right out of college, and he did a real swell job," Stonebrink said.

Farming has been a good way of life for Don Stonebrink and his wife Charlotte. And, he has hopes that it will provide the same kind of satisfaction for future generations. "My son Melvin, 26, is building a house on the farm now, and his wife is expecting their first child. So we may have another generation of farmers. Hopefully, we'll pass the land along and keep it going," Stonebrink said.

THE INTERVENTION YEARS:

For growers, perhaps the best news of the 21st Century was the "Freedom to Farm Act of 1996." In the March 1999 issue of Oregon Wheat, the OWGL President Judy Rea summed it up this way: "The freedom to plant what, where and how much, if at all was great news to most." However, all was not golden. Trade Sanctions were a continual problem for growers.

In 1999, both House and Senate members of the 106th Congress announced that trade sanctions, as they related to agriculture products, were a priority for them. At that time, Oregon wheat growers exported 85 percent of their product. Pakistan was one of the top buyers of soft white wheat, primarily produced in the Pacific Northwest. They were due to purchase 3.2 million tons of wheat for the 1999/2000 market year. But a military takeover of the government in late 1999 caused President Clinton to enact a trade embargo against the country. Thereby, cutting Oregon growers off from its third largest customer of soft white wheat.

Seven years previously Oregon growers were ordered to halt sales to Iran, at that time Oregon's largest customer of soft white wheat. The loss of yet another market to trade embargoes was devastating to growers. "We had fought long and hard over the previous 50 years to develop markets. This truly is market loss at its worst," Rea said. Wheat embargoes are a woeful way to craft trade policy, she said.

"Iran was able to get all the wheat they wanted from other countries." Which explains why Rea was proud that her administration was able to help convince Congress to reimburse farmers for the hits they took during the Iran trade embargo. "We finally made the point that the government owed us for the loss of that market," Judy replied.

Judy Rea
OWGL president
1999



IONE - Farmhouses and grain elevators dot the countryside in this hamlet that Judy Rea, 66, calls home. But don't let this town's appearance fool you. This is not a quiet bunch. Behind nearly every door in this community is a political activist. Somebody whose had to fight to make a living and yell to be heard.

The town is full of farmers that know how to make a stand. They did just that when the environmentalist's groups, fraught with worry over the Washington ground squirrel (protected in Oregon, but not in Washington), came to town and attempted to push their collective weight around.

And these are the very same farmers who put their toes down right smack dab on top of those highfalutin folks trying to shut down the access road that runs north south between lone and Boardman.

And while it's true Judy Rea's figure may not cast an imposing shadow, her knowledge and skills do. So it came as no surprise to her lone neighbors when Rea became the League's first female president in 1999. Neighbors around these parts just shook their heads and muttered, "Wonder what took 'em so dang long?"

Rea, whose father was a schoolteacher turned wheat farmer, was nearly 8 when the family moved from Connell, Wash. to lone. The move wasn't easy on the young girl. "We left a lot of family behind," she said.

She particularly missed her grandparents. But she never regretted her rural life. She got involved in 4-H. "I was perfectly happy," she said. Which is why she never left the farm. "I wasn't unambitious. I just wasn't interested in leaving a small community. I wanted to stay on the farm," she said.

She grew up and married her high school sweetheart, Keith. Since 1960, the two of them have been farming the family's home place, in the Gooseberry area, about eight miles south of lone.

They've prospered and coped even during the lean times, primarily, Rea said, because of her husband's work ethic. "My husband has that drive, ambition and work ethic in his core," she said. "Keith and I have been able to farm in some very generous years. And we were always thrifty people, who lived below our means." But even frugal folks have bad years. Rea recalled their worst harvest. "It was 1977. There was a drought that year. I think we got eight bushels an acre. It was a terrible crop," Rea said.

Despite her role as the League's first and only female president, Rea dismisses any notion that she's special or gifted. "There's a lot of women in agriculture out there," Rea said. "There's a good share of women on farms. They are involved in everything, from planting, to selling, to picking seed varieties, to ordering them. They pay the bills and know how much the farm makes. "They are every bit as capable as men at running the farm with the exception of physical capability," she added.

Still, as far as decisions go, many women are making all those on their own too, she noted. "Many women are doing it on their own. Even the widows handle the farms by themselves now. They couldn't have done that years ago. Back then when a husband died, the widow left the farm," Rea said. Besides, how could it possibly be a big deal when Ann Veneman, the Secretary of Agriculture is a woman? Rea asked.

Still, she reluctantly admitted, there were a few men who indulged sexist attitudes about her leadership role. "My husband can probably tell you how frustrating that was for me. Some people were intimidated by my presence. But most fellows were very, very helpful," she said. "But I didn't please them all." Most of the disparaging comments came from those of the younger generations. "My generation of men were very supportive of me," she recalled.

Asked what she feels was her greatest contribution as a woman farmer and League member, Rea takes a deep breath and holds it for an uncomfortably long time. "Maybe I have yet to make it," she said with a

laugh.

THE HORIZON YEARS

While in decades past agendas from annual meeting may have had similar themes, that's likely to change some in the upcoming decades. Now in addition to age-old issues of wheat price, fuel cost, trade sanctions and transportation woes will be a list of concerns related to the development of genetically manufactured organisms, GMOs.

"It has to happen," Wes Grilley said of the development of genetically-engineered organisms. "There are all kinds of hybrid corns and grains out there but not wheat. But in order to keep costs competitive and to maximize production, genetically manufactured plants will be part of it," Grilley said.

Phillip Zurbrick (OWGL president-elect) is not the least bit afraid of the future. In fact, he embraces the help offered by advancements in the biotech field. "I don't fear it, but I do think we need to educate the consumer," Zurbrick said. "There's a lot of hype about us moving toward this new technology. And everything is so political. In my opinion, there's a lot of fear-mongering about GMOs."

If consumers were better educated, Zurbrick said they'd be less likely to throw bricks at the idea. Besides, he added, "A lot of the advancement is based in traditional plant breeding to develop new and better varieties," he added. If consumers were provided with better information, they wouldn't be so afraid. "When you take the time to educate consumers, you don't get that backlash," Zurbrick said.

Still, Zurbrick thinks the wide use of GMOs is a ways off. "Ultimately, it'll come, but I don't think we'll see a lot more of it until 2020."

That gives Dr. Zurbrick nearly 20 years to help educate the public.

Phillip Zurbrick
OWGL president-elect
2002



LA GRANDE - A yolk-colored sun sinks silently from a cloudless sky and disappears into the twilight. The lolling mountains, that had looked so inviting moments earlier, now form a foreboding presence as they turn deep blue, then black. The Blues, as these mountains of the Wallowa National Forest are called, can leave a person feeling shut off from the world, very sadly so, or very safely so.

It's here, at the base of the Blues, that Phillip Zurbrick, 63, was born and bred on the land his great-grandfather settled.

As a youth Zurbrick's belly burned with the desire to be a farmer like his father, and his father before him. "I wanted to be a farmer, but it never looked like it'd be a possibility," he said. With three sons to choose from, how would his father ever be able to choose?

So Zurbrick decided to pursue a safe course of study at Oregon State University agriculture/vocational education. "I figured I could always fall back on the teaching," he explained.

He started out in 1961 as the lowest paid teacher in Elgin, OR. "I made \$4800 a year for a 12-month contract," Zurbrick said. He spent three years teaching in Elgin before he was lured away by the University of Arizona. The land-grant college offered Zurbrick the opportunity to pursue his Master's degree and a teaching job. "They said I could join the faculty even though I didn't have a Ph.D.," Zurbrick said. "They said they could arrange for that."

And so they did. Zurbrick started to fast-track through a 13-month program at Ohio State University. He arrived on the Columbus campus just months after the Kent State fracas with five kids in tow. None of them owned a lick of winter clothing. "It was an adventure," Zurbrick said with a chuckle. One of many that would span Zurbrick's 25-year teaching career at the University of Arizona. What Zurbrick had intended to be a job "to fall back on" became his livelihood.

But that fire in his belly never diminished. Zurbrick told anyone who would listen that one day he was going to return to La Grande to farm. And he kept to his word.

Shortly before his retirement in 1993, Zurbrick called his youngest brother, Jeffrey. "My brother is brilliant," Zurbrick said. "He could have been a medical student, or anything he wanted."

Like Zurbrick, what Jeffrey wanted was to keep the family farm going. So while Zurbrick chased theories, Jeffrey rounded up fertilizer. Jeffrey asked his brother the obvious question, "You ready to farm yet?" He didn't have to ask Zurbrick twice. In 1993, Zurbrick and his wife, Jacquetta, moved to the farm. Zurbrick calculated, some might say speculated, that if they got four years of a good crop that they'd be in good shape.

They got three. Then a freeze hit in June of 1996. "We went from 100-bushel wheat to 45 bushel wheat in four hours," Zurbrick recalled.

Disasters are often remembered with clarity. "I remember that morning. I was headed out to change the water in the pea field and everything was covered in ice," Zurbrick said. "I checked the temperature. It was 27 degrees. That very day was the Umatilla County Farm Crop tour." The researchers on hand for the tour tried to reassure the farmers. "They told us it probably wasn't as bad as we thought," Zurbrick said.

Guess again. With wheat prices over \$6 in Portland that year, Zurbrick figures the freeze lost him about \$400,000.

But bad weather is the least of the problems today's growers face. Zurbrick said it's the political climate that causes most growers so much grief. "We're faced with so many regulations, just look at endangered species regulations. Look at the situation in Klamath Falls," he said.

During the summer of 2001, over 1000 Klamath Basin farms were cut off from irrigation water by the federal government because of a reduction of rain and snow packs. A drought, which the EPA claimed threatened migratory birds and endangered fish.

Such actions endanger growers as well, Zurbrick said. "That situation is a prime example of how court orders and government agencies threaten growers," he said. "If it happened there, are we going to be next?"

Until there are some legislative changes in the Endangered Species Act, Zurbrick said growers are continually going to face such challenges. But Zurbrick is not one to throw up his hands and scream, "The farm is dying! The farm is dying!" Instead, he believes education and leadership are more crucial than ever. "The people involved in the League are the ones who are concerned about their future. It's easy to say you can't do anything about it. But that's just rationalization for not getting involved."

While the numbers of growers may be declining, Zurbrick said more and more growers are recognizing the need to be educated, articulate, and involved. "It used to be 40 percent of the population farmed, now it's less than three percent. We don't have the political power we once had, so we have to use sound science and make our case logically," he said. Anyone care to argue with Professor Zurbrick?

Conclusion: THE 2002 FARM BILL

WASHINGTON - As growers nationwide tuned their radios to the Congressional station, the House resoundingly approved a \$170 billion overhaul of farm programs on Oct. 4, 2001. And in so doing, representatives turned a deaf ear to shrill urban lawmakers and environmentalists who were looking to swipe billions in crop subsidies for conservation programs.

"We wanted to get rid of the bad and keep the good parts, and that's what we did," said Rep. Larry Combest, R-Texas, chairman of the House Agriculture Committee. Approved by a vote of 291-120, the bill creates a new subsidy program to protect grain and cotton farmers when prices drop.

But the bill isn't without its dissenters. Critics in the White House say the subsidies will encourage overproduction and benefit the farmers who need it the least. Without any mention of the "V" word, the administration made it clear that it wants more money put into conservation programs. "We do believe there can be additional things added into the bill to reach a broader number of people and a broader number of farmers," said Agriculture Secretary Ann Veneman.

Groups representing grain, cotton and soybean growers viewed the proposal as a major threat to their government support and had secured a pledge from Combest to shelve the bill had the amendment been approved. The House approved an amendment moving \$1 billion in crop subsidies into rural development. But the farm bill still would boost commodity programs by \$49 billion, or about 63 percent, over the next 10 years. Conservation spending would grow by \$16 billion, or nearly 75 percent.

The Senate Agriculture Committee is expected to start writing its version of the bill this month. The committee's chairman, Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, along with Sen. Dick Lugar of Indiana, the senior Republican, want to boost conservation programs. Harkin is pushing a plan to make special incentive payments to farmers who improve their farming practices. "The momentum for this kind of reform is going to build and build," said Ken Cook, president of the Environmental Working Group.

Critics of the House's conservation amendment said it would have taken too much land out of production, harming rural businesses in the process. "We don't need the federal government controlling more land," said Rep. Tom Osborne, R-Neb.

The bill also more than doubled funding, to \$200 million, for the Market Access Program, advanced by Rep. Doc Hastings, R-Wash., to help farmers break into foreign markets by defraying the costs of promotions, market research and technical assistance. Participants get matching funds up to 50 percent of their program's costs.

Additionally, the House approved 235-183 an amendment that would annually shift \$100 million in crop subsidies to rural water grants and other development programs. Rep. John Peterson, R-Pa., said the money amounted to a "crumb for rural America."

The proposed 2002 Farm Bill doesn't differ much from the 1996 one, said Daren Coppock, chief executive officer of the National Association of Wheat Growers. "In all ways, except one, this is the 1996 Farm Bill," he said.

That exception, if approved, will create more flexibility for market loans, raising the safety net for farmers. "When the market goes down, support will be increased," Coppock explained. Coppock said he supported the 2002 Farm Bill. "I'm in favor of it. It's probably the best deal we're going to get," he said.

AUTHOR'S BIO:

Karen Spears Zacharias writes from her Pendleton home near the Umatilla River. Zacharias is a 1979/Communications graduate of Oregon State University. She is a columnist and Oregon bureau reporter for the Tri-City Herald, Kennewick, Wash. Her husband, Tim, is also a 1979 graduate of Oregon State University/History. The couple have four children, Stephan, Ashley, Shelby, and Konnie. In her spare time, Zacharias likes to cheer on the Beavers and mix up a batch of her family's favorite Angel Biscuits, using Oregon soft white wheat, of course.

This booklet was compiled with the help of many invaluable people who graciously shared their personal stories with Zacharias. Each of the presidents featured in these pages were interviewed by Zacharias, either in person or by phone. She also conducted interviews with others who are mentioned in the pages of this book. Zacharias wishes to thank each of these individuals for their time and for sharing their stories.

Other historical information was gleaned from a variety of sources, including *The Founding of the Oregon Wheat Growers League*, by Bob Rost, *They Broke the Trail*, by Dr. D. D. Hill in collaboration with E.R. Jackman, *Oregon Wheat Growers League, 50th Anniversary*, a compilation of writings, past issues of *Oregon Wheat*, and from information provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and news stories from the Associated Press.