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**Ag coalition provides new voice**

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**Co-op benefits lamb industry, consumers**

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**Idaho wolves attacking sheep despite controls**

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# Direct results

By T.J. BURNHAM

**U**SING resources efficiently will be the chief theme of the Pacific Northwest Direct Seed Association's annual meeting in Kennewick, Wash., on Jan. 23-24.

PNDSA Vice President Kyle Morscheck, a second-generation direct seeder in Genesee, Idaho, says the 2008 program is "exciting in that it does what PNDSA is most about: helping growers adopt and improve their DS efforts."

Direct seeding more than 1,500 acres of wheat, Morscheck is a grassroots advocate of the increasingly popular farming technique on his fourth-generation operation. His father, Ray, started the farm's DS practice more than 15 years ago.

"Direct seeding works out well, but you must be a dynamic planner," says Kyle Morscheck. "Things change from year to year, and you have to be prepared to deal with major issues like residue management. We've gone through a number of transitions working on this problem. Right now, we're in a two-pass system flailing our fall stubble before we plant with the Flexicoil seeder."

For the past 15 years on the farm, DS has been a "constant, slow evolution," he says. "We have our goals, and we're slowly

## Key Points

- PNDSA annual meeting is in Kennewick, Wash., Jan. 23-24.
- The association is part of a direct-seed mentoring program.
- In program, a DS farmer assists a grower new to the process.

working toward that end."

Morscheck keeps a close watch on new technology. He is searching for a drill that will work in the fall when the land is dry and hard, as well as in the spring when the land is wet. "We hope to get to a one-pass system, but it is hard to find a disk drill that does a good job of fertilizer placement," he notes. "With a hoe-type drill, you get better fertilizer placement, but in the spring there's difficulty with seed placement."

## Talking it out

Technology demands of direct seeding is just one of the topics discussed by the Clearwater Direct Seeders, a group that meets for breakfast monthly to discuss successes and challenges experienced with DS.

"People share information about obstacles they've come across," says Morscheck. "This kind of group is very valuable for direct seeders."

Similarly, PNDSA's collaboration in a new direct-seed men-



**DIRECT-SEED DESCENDENT:** Genesee, Idaho, farmer Kyle Morscheck is a second-generation direct-seeding farmer who helps lead his industry toward wider use of DS as a farming option.

toring program aims to resolve producers' DS challenges.

"This program focuses on people finding it difficult to make the transition into direct seeding, and who are finding it hard to decide which drill they should buy," Morscheck says.

Headed by Hans Kok, a University of Idaho conservation tillage Extension specialist and PNDSA affiliate, the program is set for a pilot run in Idaho's Latah County in 2008.

"We'll be matching experienced direct-seed farmers with intensive-tillage producers who are leaning toward DS. The program, which pays the DS grower's equipment transport and application costs, brings the direct-seeding farmer to the interested grower's field where up to 100 acres are seeded with both producers working closely together," explains Morscheck.

The direct-seed farmer will provide consultation to the

participating grower on what is happening throughout the crop year in the direct-seeding process. An economic analysis is included under the program to provide the intensive-tillage grower with a comparison between normal costs and those under DS farming.

"PNDSA is a great information exchange organization," Morscheck adds.

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**CORN STUDIES:** University of Wyoming Associate Professor Anne Sylvester covers the tassel of a corn plant in a UW greenhouse to capture the pollen during a controlled cross in which males and females can be mated at will. The male flowers are in the tassel of a corn plant and are separate from the female parts found in a developing ear on the stalk.

## Researcher creates Wyoming 'Corn Belt'

By ROBERT WAGGENER

**B**RIGHT lights illuminate the University of Wyoming greenhouse complex late into the night. It's cool outside, but inside the greenhouses is a "Corn Belt" environment for a maze of corn trials — hot, humid days and warm, humid nights. It's the kind of environment where shirts quickly stick to skin.

Anne Sylvester, an associate professor in the UW College of Agriculture's molecular biology department, is performing this research in Laramie to help breeders develop better corn varieties, which allows growers to harvest improved crops.

The research is centered on understanding the molecular mechanisms of growth, development and function of organisms, including how corn leaves grow.

Sylvester says leaves are

### Key Points

- University of Wyoming researcher is studying corn.
- Research focused on leaf development.
- Understanding corn's genes helps research of other grains.

the most important source of carbohydrates in corn, and past genetics research has led to optimal shapes for maximum production. But many aspects of cell growth can still be manipulated to accommodate corn growth in changing climates and to test methods to optimize growth for biofuels production.

### Breeding strategies

Cells make up the leaves, and Sylvester's goal is to identify all the genes involved and then understand how genes, cells and the growing environment

interact to direct growth of corn plants. This information contributes to a larger body of knowledge that guides future breeding strategies.

"My basic research is communicated to more applied researchers, who then translate the findings to practical outcomes for growers and breeders," Sylvester says.

An example is how edible sweet corn was developed for humans from original, nonedible lines. The discovery of how starch is converted in corn kernels occurred at a university setting and intensified the breeding of diverse corn lines for human food and forage, she explains.

Since corn has remarkably similar genes and proteins as barley, oats, rice and wheat, Sylvester says, understanding the genes in corn could have similar implications for breeders and growers working with closely related grains.

"The emerging genetics and molecular information unleashes corn as the single most important model plant for all of agriculture," she emphasizes.

### Corn poses as model

Corn — or maize, as geneticists call the plant — is a model genetic system both for agriculture and for researchers who want to identify genes and study their function in plants.

"Corn plants are good experimental genetic systems, most significantly because of their ability to conduct controlled crosses where males and females can be mated at will," Sylvester says.

Waggener writes from Laramie, Wyo.

# Ag Census time is here

### Key Points

- Ag Census forms are in the mail this month.
- Completion of forms is mandatory.
- Census information helps decision-makers on ag issues.

By T.J. BURNHAM

**W**HEN you receive your Census of Agriculture forms this month, not only is it mandatory to respond, but it's also in the best interest of the farm industry.

"The census provides the only source of information that is uniform across all counties, states and the nation," says Chris Mertz, Oregon Agricultural Statistics Service director in Portland.

"Producers are usually receptive to participating in the census because they know if they want to have a voice in their industry to educate decision-makers, this is their opportunity to record their information," explains Mertz.

"If you want to make sure policy-makers make the correct decisions, it is in your interest to complete the census as accurately as possible," he says. "This is your livelihood, and much of what happens in the future will depend on figures from the census."

The forms take about 30 minutes to complete, but for more complex operations it could take longer, says Mertz.

The information from the census serves agriculture in many ways. "For example, companies and cooperatives might use the figures to decide on where to locate facilities to best serve producers," he explains. "Community planners need the figures to target services for rural residents. USDA uses the information to make staffing decisions."

The census is completed

every five years, unlike the Population Census, which is every 10 years. Previously done by the U.S. Department of Commerce, the current census marks the third time it was conducted by USDA.

The census also complements the numerous reports provided by the Agricultural Statistics Service. "This is the big benchmark to talk to everyone at one time," Mertz says.

New this year is the ability to complete the census using the Internet instead of filling out the hard-copy documents mailed out this month. "This should save producers a lot of time," he says.

### Information confidential

Your personal information sent in during the census will remain confidential. Respondents are guaranteed by law that their information will be kept confidential, says Mertz.

Who must participate? Every rancher and farmer, regardless of acreage or type of operation, must file if they make \$1,000 or more from agriculture. Even if you did not participate in agricultural business in 2007, but received a census form, you must complete the paperwork.

Census data is available through your local National Agricultural Statistics Service office, and in many depository libraries, universities and state government offices.

The census looks at land use and ownership, operator characteristics, production practices, and income and expenditures.

Census documents must be completed by Feb. 4. Information from the survey will not be available until 2009, when a series of reports will be issued. More information on the Census of Agriculture is available by calling 888-424-7828 or by going online to [www.agcensus.usda.gov](http://www.agcensus.usda.gov).



CHRISTOPHER MERTZ

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