Newsletter

January-February 2026

2024-2025 4-H Achievement

WSU EXTENSION
Garfield County

Welcome to the WSU Garfield County Extension Newsletter!

This is an electronic newsletter highlighting events and topics of interest to residents of Garfield County and the surrounding area. This newsletter can also be viewed on our website: https://extension.wsu.edu/Garfield/

Do you have an event or subject you would like added to our newsletter or website? Would you like to be removed from our Extension Newsletter email list?

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Potential Impact of the 2025 Drought in the Inland Pacific Northwest on Forage Production and Quality in the 2026

Ketch Pen, December 2025|Vol.75, Issue 7, Beef Cattle MythBuster

By: Dr Don Llewellyn, Livestock Extension Specialist and Director, WSU Lincoln County Extension, Davenport, WA & Dr. Steve Fransen, Forage Specialist (Emeritus), WSU Extension, Prosser, WA

During 2025, Widespread drought conditions were felt across the Pacific Northwest, and in Particular, eastern Washington. Drought was considered moderate to extreme across the region with the potential to reduce fall carbohydrate storage, lower the seed set for perennial grasses and cause a deficit in soil moisture which all may affect regrowth in the spring. While fall rains have provided some relief in dryland range and pastures in eastern Washington, there is still potential for significant effects on forage production in 2026.

The droughts changed several key factors in 2025:

Forage production was reduced resulting in less biomass. Less forage residue to moderate soil temperature and retain moisture will be a factor going into the winter. In a practical sense, the lower production reduced feed availability and increased reliance on stored and/or purchased hay and other feeds for some producers. Drought stressed forages can have increased fiber content (negatively affecting digestibility and intake), and reduced protein content earlier in the season as compared to forages produced in more normal moisture/weather patterns. Reduced protein content resulted in the need for earlier and more protein supplementation to meet the nutritional deficit of drought-stressed forages. When forage plants are stressed, their vigor and reproductive success may decline because of setting fewer seeds and entering dormancy with reduced carbohydrate reserves which weakens their ability to activate spring growth. Finally, soil health and related microbial activity may be slowed. Drier soils can suppress microbial nutrient cycling (nitrogen, etc.) and can reduce early-season nitrogen availability for regrowth.

In total, the effects of the 2025 drought increased the likelihood that spring 2026 recovery of forages may be more uncertain than in a year following more normal precipitation patterns.

What we might expect in spring 2026 for forage growth:

Due to reduced carbohydrate(energy) reserves in the plants, green-up may be slower with the implication of less early biomass. This could be exacerbated in areas where winter recharge of soil moisture is poor (time will tell) and if soil freezes dry. These conditions may have the practical effect of delaying grazing in the spring. In areas where soil moisture is recharged over the winter, spring green-up (and turnout) may be closer to normal. There can be variable recovery across landscapes as well. For example, north-and east-facing slopes, riparian areas, and acreages with deeper soils will recover faster than thin soils and south-facing slopes, and heavily grazed pastures. Another negative implication is annual weed flushes due to reduced competition from desirable perennial grasses. In addition, open soil areas increase the risk of annuals and invasive species establishing in those areas which also can suppress desirable forage regrowth. Forage quality may be affected as well, and it should be assumed that there will be greater nutrient variability that will require careful management and herd nutritional planning until normal forage moisture conditions exist.

Practical forage and grazing management actions now to prepare for 2026:

- Flexibility will be key for managing around the challenges brought on by the drought of 2025. Inventory of feeds is of great importance to provide a contingency for supplemental hay and other feeds when spring growth lags.
- It may be possible to adjust stocking rates and timing of grazing (delay turnout and allow forages to accumulate carbohydrate reserves). Rotate animals to avoid overgrazing weak forage stands. Also, give rest to areas with thin crowns and low tiller density. Timing of supplemental nutrients (i.e. energy) to the herd may also assist in extending grazing seasons.

- Rebuild vigor of the forage plants. Avoid grazing of short regrowth this winter that could further deplete plant reserves needed for 2026 regrowth. It is also essential to maintain at least 4-6 inches of forage stubble on the cool season grasses to assist in holding snow and reducing winter desiccation.
- Manage invasive annuals by scouting pastures early for cheatgrass and other annuals and use strategic grazing or herbicides as tools to reduce long-term competition.

Conclusions

Following the drought conditions of 2025, forage recovery will be slower and with more variability than normal across many parts of the Inland Pacific Northwest. It will be essential for producers to inventory feed and management resources now so that they can reduce pressure on weak forage stands and protect vulnerable plant crowns to facilitate regrowth in the spring. Adoption of flexible grazing and supplementation strategies will help to maintain herd nutrition and health and assist in forage plant recovery. In total, weather from now until spring will be a determining factor in shaping forage conditions in the spring of 2026. If significant water recharge happens this winter, spring outcomes may substantially improve. If dry conditions persist, more intensive management and supplemental feed will be required.

Winter is on the way! Looking forward to lots of green grass and healthy calves in 2026! Please let me know if I can assist you with your cattle, forages, and feed. Don Llewellyn, 509-725-4171, Llewellyn@wsu.edu

Washington State University Associate Professor and Livestock Extension Specialist

Washington's 2025 Small Grains Summary

Wheat Life, December|2025

Washington's total wheat production in 2025 reached 141.5 million bushels (3.8 million metric tons or MMT), representing a 1.5% decline from 2024 but 12% above the five-year average. Winter wheat continued to dominate production, accounting for 86% of the state's total, while spring wheat held steady year-over-year. In contrast, barley production declined sharply by 48%, driven by lower profitability, reduced demand for malting barley, and the closure of regional processing facilities. Despite these fluctuations, Washington maintained 7% of total US wheat output, underscoring its continued leadership in quality and reliability.

Washington wheat overview:

- Total wheat: 141.5 million bushels (3.8 MMT), -1.5% year over year, +12% vs. five-year average (125.9 million bushels or 3.4 MMT). Washington accounted for 7% of US production.
- Winter wheat: 121.7 million bushels (3.3 MMT), -1% year over year, +14% vs. five-year average. Yields averaged 68 bu/ac (70bu/ac in 2024).
- Spring wheat: 19.7 million bushels (537.2 TMT), -6% year over year, +1.5% vs. five-year average. Yields averaged 42 bu/ac (43 bu/ac in 2024).

US Total wheat production is projected at 1.9 billion bushels (54 MMT), a 0.3% increase year over year and a 9% gain over the five-year average.

Washington barley overview:

- Production: 2.4 million bushels (63.3 thousand metric tons or TMT), -48% year over year, and 37% below the five-year average (3.8 million bushels or 103.8 TMT).
- Share of US production: Washington accounts for 1.7% of national barley output, a 1.5% decline from 2024.

Total US barley production for 2025 is projected at 140.8 Million bushels (3.8 MMT), a 2% decline year over year and 8% below the five-year average.

Despite modest yield reductions, Washington's wheat sector remains strongly supported by robust winter wheat performance and stable spring wheat volumes. Barley's contraction underscores ongoing challenges in acreage, profitability pressures, and shifting market demand, Particularly from declining malting use and regional facility closures. Still, Washington continues to play a vital role in US and global grain supply, offering consistent quality, reliability, and value to domestic and export markets.

5 tips FOR WINTER WELLNESS

MegaFood
Fresh From Farm To Tablet™

1 EXTRA SLEEP

take the time for extra sleep

With the shorter, cooler days and longer nights, our bodies naturally need more sleep. Try going to bed 30 minutes earlier than usual in the winter months. A sleep deprived body is more susceptible to illness.

2 EXERCISE OUTSIDE

get outside and exercise

Bundle up, and take a walk. Even a 15 minute walk can make a difference. Exercise naturally supports a healthy mood and energy levels.

3 STAY SOCIAL

stay social

The winter months can naturally cause people to turn inward and be more isolated. Make a date with friends or a family member at least once a week to keep spirits high.

4 EAT PROTEIN

eat protein at each meal

Protein helps keep blood sugar levels stable, and can reduce sugar cravings. Many people increase carbohydrate and sugar intake during winter months, which can compromise the immune system.

5 FRUITS & VEGGIES

focus on fruits and vegetables

While the Farmer's Market may be closed and your garden is under snow, it's more important than ever during the winter to get a wide variety of fruits and vegetables every single day. Think 'eat like a rainbow' when you are grocery shopping.

Make sure to get extra Vitamin C. Enjoy a smoothie rich in C with ingredients like oranges and strawberries. Give yourself an easy nutrition "boost" with a scoop of MegaFood Daily C-Protect featuring immune supporting botanicals with a blend of fresh organic whole oranges, organic blueberries and organic cranberries.* (see recipe below)

MEGAFOOD'S VITAMIN C BLASTER SMOOTHIE

- 10 oz water
- 10 oz coconut milk
- 1 large, or 2 small oranges, with pith
- ½ pint of organic strawberries
- 2 scoops of **MegaFood Daily C-Protect Nutrient Booster Powder™**
- Handful of ice

*This statement has not been evaluated by the Food and Drug Administration. This product is not intended to diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease.

INFORMATION FROM WSU GARFIELD COUNTY MASTER GARDENER BARB DEHERRERA

I thought maybe I would have some fun reading about some of our under-recognized root vegetables. Here are some facts and suggestions for use. Enjoy and consider growing some in your garden this year!

Rutabaga

It was first discovered growing wild in Sweden in the mid-17th century. As a member of the Brassicaceae family, which also includes rapeseed or canola, it is a root vegetable, which includes edible leaves. Sometimes it is also used for cattle feed.

It can bring up memories of challenging times, as they store very well. During times of famine, rutabaga soup and juice were sometimes all there was left to eat. It does contain protein, lots of vitamin C, as well as other minerals and vitamins. Here are some serving suggestions:

- Add to soups or stews as you would potatoes.
- Cook, mash, add butter, salt and pepper.
- You can also add mashed potatoes or fruit to make a side dish.
- There is a Finish Christmas dish *lanttulaatikko* (rutabaga casserole) Finally, here is a recipe from upper Michigan: Pasties

Turnip

Another member of the Brassicaceae family and a root vegetable with edible roots and leaves! And can also be used for cattle feed but read on to see how good they are for humans. The first reference to turnips was found in central Asia writings, and again it was associated with being "poor." As in a Jewish text- "Woe to the house in which the turnip passes".

The green leaves contain lots of vitamins and few calories; they can have a slightly peppery taste, like their mustard green cousins. The root itself is a source of protein (although not as much as the rutabaga), vitamins and minerals and with few calories. Here are some serving suggestions:

- As with the rutabaga, you can add to soups, stews, mash with butter and salt/pepper.
- The Wardsboro, Vermont Festival features this Turnip Soup every year!
- Adding them to your oven-roasted mix of other root vegetables is a favorite.

When cooked, they become somewhat sweet and earthy tasting.

Parsnip --my personal favorite!

This root vegetable is a member of the Apiacae family, which includes carrots and parsley. In America, it is a very old-timey vegetable-but we need to bring it back!

Used since antiquity, and so highly valued that this vegetable was accepted in Rome as a payment source! Apparently, the Romans believed the parsnip to be an aphrodisiac. They no longer believe that and now primarily feed it to the hogs they use to make their Parma ham from! It was used as a sweetener in Europe prior to the arrival of cane sugar and is best when cooked but can be eaten raw.

Nutritionally parsnips are an excellent source of vitamins and minerals, some protein and lots of fiber. When left in the ground until a few frosts, the starches convert to a sugar, the same as carrots. The taste is then sweet and creamy. Here are some serving suggestions:

- As with the other root vegetables-add to soups, stews, oven roast or mashed with butter, salt and pepper.
- They can be thinly sliced and fried; poached; sauteed. Did I mention they are very versatile? The broth makes a natural thickener.
- Here is a good one for a cold winter day--Parsnip-sage-bean soup
- They can even be made into a wine!

So there you have three really good new/old root vegetables to try out in your garden this year. Get those seed catalog forms filled out! Never too early to start planning.

HAPPY GARDENING!
Your WSU Garfield County Master Gardeners

4-H

November, we recognized our hard working 4-H members with their yearend completion pins, special raffle drawings and a dessert potluck. Achievement night was well attended with each club giving a brief recap of their 4-H year and recognition a few members for their exceptional jobs Livestock Judging and contest Record book.

Livestock Judging – The livestock judging contest takes place at the Garfield County Fair. Award monies for the livestock judging contest were so graciously donated by Dick Ledgerwood & Sons, Inc, Rafter C Reds and Ledgerwood Gelbvieh.

Junior:

1st Kenley Tetrick
2nd Hadley Hames
3rd Colyer Nelson
4th Kaysen Lehmitz
5th Caden Bennett

Intermediate:

1st Daphne Waldher
2nd Sophie Miller
3rd Allie Gingerich
4th Kendyl Tetrick
5th Nataly McKeirnan

Record book contest: The record book contest is broken down by age and single or multiple project books. The award monies for this contest were so kindly donated by Four Star Supply.

Junior – Multi Project:

1st Emilee Blickenstaff – Tie
1st Hadley Hames – Tie
2nd Genevieve McKeirnan
3rd Lilah Blickenstaff

Junior – Single Project:

1st Hudson Newberg
2nd Tytus Horal
3rd Gage Severson

Intermediate – Single Project:

1st Harper Fruh – Tie
1st Colyer Nelson – Tie
2nd Peyton Newberg
3rd Shaun Bingman

As for December, we had our Bi County 4-H Camp Counselor/CIT orientation in both Pomeroy and Dayton. We had 36 4-H members attend from Asotin, Columbia, Garfield and Walla Walla Counties. There were 29 members selected for the 2026 Bi County Camp counselor/CIT Training Position. Trainings will be held monthly from January until June, there are 32 required hours of training for each member.

We are looking forward to an exciting year ahead!


Blue Ribbon 4-H Club

Creative Kids

Garfield County Livestock Club

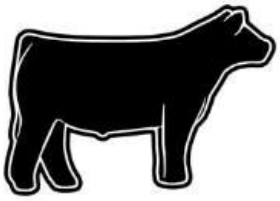

Feathered Friends


Livestock/Meats Judging

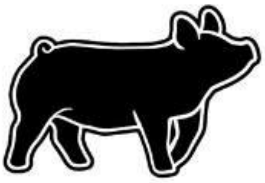
4-H leaders Laura Dixon, Hally Lindgren, Giovanna Italia, Jamie Hames, Tina Warren, & Jessica Nelson

Thank you to all of our 2024-2025 4-H volunteers that donate their time to be Leaders. There would not be a program without these amazing people; Jessica Nelson & Tina Warren for Blue Ribbon Livestock Club; Laura Dixon & Chelsey Eaton for Creative Kids; Miranda Bowen & BJ Cannon for Country Kids; Maria Dispenza & Giovanna Italia for Feathered Friends; Jamie Hames, Cody Jones, Sherry Ledgerwood, & Hally Lindgren for Garfield County Livestock Club; & Tracy Burnstad & Vonni Mulrony for Pirate Ponies. Not all clubs are clubs are pictured above because some clubs couldn't make it to Achievement Night.

2026 UI/WSU Youth Livestock Field Days



BEEF
Saturday, March 7
Nez Perce Co. Fairgrounds



SWINE
Saturday, March 14
Asotin Co. Fairgrounds

SHEEP & GOAT
Saturday, March 21
University of Idaho

Tentative Schedule:

8:00 am	Registration Table Opens
8:45	Welcome
9:00-11:45	Morning Rotations

- Meat Science or Breeding 101
- Nutrition and Feeds
- Health
- Training and Showmanship

Adults and Youth will be separated into different groups

11:45 - 12:15	Lunch Provided

(Vandal Dog, chips, cookie, drink)

12:15-1:30	Afternoon Hands-on Stations
1:30 pm	Closing

Registration will open Jan. 15!
Cost: $10/person
Register at:
bit.ly/clearwater_events

Persons with disabilities have the right to request reasonable accommodations. Please complete the accommodations form found at this link at least two weeks prior to the event: https://www.uidaho.edu/extension/civil-rights

WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
University of Idaho Extension

Are you ready to discover how government works firsthand? Registration for the **2026 Know Your Government (KYG) Conference** officially opened, **January 9th!** Join us at The Evergreen State College for an immersive experience in leadership, the legislative system, and civic engagement. Due to ongoing campus renovations, **space is strictly limited this year.** We are capping youth registrations at **70 delegates**, so be sure to sign up early to secure your spot!

Quick Facts:

Dates: February 13–16, 2026
Location: The Evergreen State College
Cost: $330 per person (includes lodging)
Deadline: Registration closes January 23rd, or when spots are full!

Register Here: https://kyg2026.4honline.com

Don't miss out on this opportunity to find your voice and lead the way! WSU Extension programs, employment, and volunteer service are available to all without discrimination (See WSU Executive Policy #15). Concerns regarding potential discrimination may be reported through your local WSU Extension office or directly to the WSU Compliance and Civil Rights (CCR) office, web: https://ccr.wsu.edu, email: ccr@wsu.edu, phone: 509-335-8288.

FFA

FFA Alumni Auction set a record for total dollars raised. The turnout was great and people's support of the Pomeroy FFA Alumni and Pomeroy FFA was humbling. We truly appreciate the donations, bidders, buyers, and those that just came out for dinner. Our students truly benefit from living in such a supportive community.

Upcoming FFA Events:

1/21: District FFA Ag. Issues & Marketing Plan Contests @ Oakesdale

2/11: Ag. Mech. @ Palouse

2/12: Ag. Mech @ Walla Walla High School

2/18: Ag. Mech @ WSU

2/25: Ag. Mech @ WWCC

3/1: Local Leadership Contests & Alumni Meeting

3/10: Sub-District Leadership Contests @ Pomeroy

3/25: District Leadership Contests @ Asotin

3/27: State Ag. Mech @ Yakima (Perry Tech)

4/4: Garfield County Preview Jackpot

4/24: Livestock Evaluation @ Asotin Co. Fair

4/29-5/3 — Jr. Livestock Show of Spokane

5/14-16: State FFA Convention @ WSU

5/27: FFA Banquet

Kyle Kimble
Pomeroy Jr/Sr High School
Agriculture Instructor
FFA Advisor

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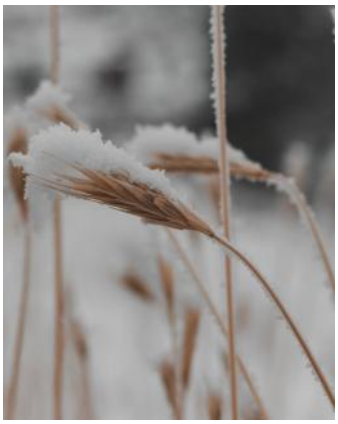
Did you know in Washington's wheat country, vernalization isn't just a technical term from a plant physiology textbook? It's the quiet, invisible season that determines whether a fall– Seeded field will ever turn gold.

Wheat Life, January|2026, Washington Wheat Foundation



Vernalization is essentially a cold-triggered developmental switch. For winter wheat, the plant begins life unable to flower. It must first live through several weeks of cool temperatures (generally 32-50 degrees F or 0-10 Degrees C) before its internal flowering genes turn on.

After this cold exposure, the plant is "vernalized," meaning it now has the ability to form a head and eventually produce seed. A lot of familiar crops besides wheat also rely on vernalization to do their thing. Many winter cereals— like barley, rye, and triticale— need a good stretch of cold weather before they can even think about making seed. Quite a few vegetables, especially the biennial ones such as carrots, onions, sugar beets, and the cabbage family, also need that winter chill to shift into flowering and seed production. Bulb plants, like tulips and daffodils, won't bloom without a solid cold spell. And even though we don't usually call it vernalization in fruit trees, apples, cherries, peaches, and almonds all have their own "chill hour' requirements that work the same way.

When winter wheat is seeded in late summer and early fall, growers in Eastern Washington are counting on one crucial promise: that the coming months will provide enough steady cold for the plants to complete their vernalization period and be ready to head out in spring.

Most Washington winter wheat varieties need around eight weeks of cool temperatures to fully vernalize. By Midwinter, that requirement is usually met. They don't rush to head because another safeguard-photoperiod sensitivity—holds them back until the days grow longer. This balance is critical in a landscape where a false spring can arrive in January, only to be slammed by Arctic air in February.

What makes Washington distinct is how variable its environments are. A winter wheat grown near the Columbia River, in a relatively mild region, faces a very different winter than one on the high, windswept plateaus in Lincoln, Douglas, and Grant counties. Washington State University's breeding program selects varieties that match these microregions: stronger vernalization and winter-headiness for the coldest zones, more flexible types where winters are shorter and the risk of late spring frost is lower. For growers and breeders in Washington, paying attention to those parallels helps refine strategies at home, ensuring that when the hills finally flush green in spring, the crop is not just alive, but perfectly timed.

Washington State University helps people develop leadership skills and use research based knowledge to improve their economic status and quality of life.

Helping You Put Knowledge To Work