

Walla Walla County Conservation District

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Fall 2005

Published regularly to provide information to land users

Volume 7, Issue 2



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Retirement Celebration and Dinner In honor of Larry Hooker

Everyone is invited to attend a buffet dinner to honor Larry Hooker on the occasion of his upcoming retirement. The festivities will begin with a No-host bar at 6:00 followed by a buffet dinner featuring marinated steak, halibut, and a variety of side dishes. Reservations are required, and the cost includes dinner, gratuity, and tax. Please join us as we celebrate Larry's many years of leadership in promoting good stewardship and conservation of our natural resources.

Where: **Walla Walla County Club**
1390 County Club Rd

When: **December 16, 2005**

Cost: **\$22.00 per person**

Deadline for reservations: **December 7th, 2005**

**To make reservations, send your payment
(made out to Marguerite Daltoso.) Call the
district office for more information.**



Burn Program Refunds: December 10th, 2005

Many factors combined to limit burn days this fall. We had an impressively dry summer. According to the National Weather Service, precipitation for last six months (April-September) was more than 8 inches below normal. This left fire districts understandably nervous about field burns. The Department of Ecology made some close burn calls to allow as much burning as possible in the zones that weren't affected by burn safety restrictions. After the late September rains alleviated fire safety concerns, producers in upper elevations were given priority, as their growing season is somewhat shorter than those at lower elevations. With the rain came good ventilation conditions, but fields were too wet to burn.

If you have unburned acres, come to the District office and complete a burn refund form. It's easy (no maps required!) and can be done in minutes. **The deadline this year for applying for unburned acre refunds is December 10th, 2005.** Walla Walla County is required to close their books on December 31st, so late applications can't be processed.

Blue Card: Reporting Burned Acres

If you were able to burn, did you remember to send in your blue card or report via the Ecology website, as required? Ecology considers the number of acres left to burn when making the burn call, so reporting your burned acres also helps your neighbors get their fields taken care of. Be sure to report burned acres as soon as possible.

Irrigating from a well? You need a meter too.

All irrigators are required to have an approved measuring device (meter) and record their water usage. This includes small-scale irrigators who pump from a well. If you are using a well to irrigate a small pasture, or even a large lawn (over ½ acre) you should have a meter on your system. Recording your water usage provides an accurate record of water used and protects your water right. Meter costs can vary considerably and range from \$250.00 to over \$2,000.00 (including installation.) The District program can cover 85% of that expense for irrigators. Meter cost share will only be available until 2007, but the requirement to report your water usage is in effect now. Irrigators should know that the Department of Ecology is under pressure from environmental groups to throttle back water rights, but if you have a standing record of water usage, you have good protection against water rights relinquishment.

The **fish-screen program** has been an overwhelming success. Currently, the District has provided cost share to over 260 landowners who have installed screens and are now in compliance with state and federal laws. Some of these were relatively inexpensive screens while others cost thousands of dollars. With the help of District cost share, a \$1,000.00 screen only costs the landowner 15%, or \$150.00. The District still has funding for screen installation, but time is running out. All irrigation diversions, even folks irrigating 1 or 2 acres of lawn, are required to have an approved fish screen at the point of diversion.

Got Straw??

Jim Loiland Soil Conservationist, Walla Walla

This seems to be a common challenge for direct seeders this fall, and generally it's a little late to deal with it now. I would like to share some ideas and methods that have worked this fall for other folks in the straw game.

I have seen successful recrop direct seeding into 100+ bu. stubble without touching the stubble. The key on this field was that the producer had a plan to address the excess straw before harvest. He has a "rotary" combine and was willing to slow down during harvest. He cut the straw at about 6" tall. The "rotary" machine has a factory installed chaff and straw spreader. The producer also used a shank type "Anderson opener" drill.

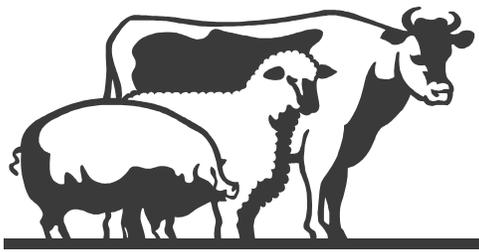
Another producer has used a harrow, crossing the combine path, as soon after harvest as possible, even in the same field with the harvest crew. He then used a flail type mower, moving opposite to the direction of harvest. The flail created enough suction to lift the long straw in the wheel tracks to allow the flail to chop that also.

Rotary mowers will work also. Just keep in mind a few tips. The bigger three- and five-bladed mowers tend to distribute the residue more evenly than the older single blade whirligig mowers. Also the style of blade (general vs. cotton etc.) impacts the results of mowing. The purpose of mowing or flailing is to reduce the length of the residue to less than the width of the opener you plan to seed with. It is almost worthless to overload your mower to the point it 1) leaves straw attached and laying across the direction you are going to seed and 2) leaves the remaining residue at the original length you harvested it (just breaks it off and does not chop it).

How can you make sure this does not happen to you? Plan ahead—residue management is a year round issue. Plan on cutting slower and taking more straw into the combine. Plan on running a harrow when the straw is dry and brittle. Think about when and how you want to mow. I really like the looks of flailing or shredding in August versus what I see when it was done after the light rains in September for re-crop. Finally, slow down a little so that the mower can do the job you want from it.

"So, I'm going to seed in the spring, what can I do?" 1) Check out another style of drill; some have more residue clearance than others. 2) If you have not mowed yet, re-evaluate it and see if you really need to. 3) Consider changing spring crops; pulse crops may not be the best for the type of opener you are using, and grains or oil seeds may take better in the 'seed to soil' conditions you will have at seeding. 4) Do a complete economic evaluation of spring crops—do they make you any money? Some local producers have looked at their operations and realized that fallow is more economical than spring crops. 5) Seek out niche crops and markets; consider a small intensive crop on the flat and fallow the balance of the field.

EQIP sign-up will be some time this fall or winter. EQIP is a tool to support changes in your operation; we can be flexible in how we approach residue management. The Local Working Group made some changes in EQIP cost share practices this year. One change increases the maximum contract amount for direct seeding to \$10,000 per crop year (555 acres) for a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 3 years. Another change adds incentive payments for the installation and use of GPS technologies for reducing overlap while applying pesticides and fertilizer, and finally, an incentive was added for the use of automated spot spraying (chlorophyll detection for nozzle on-off control).



Livestock Grants: Update

As earlier reported, everyone with livestock (including horses and small operations) with access to a river, stream, or pond needs to take action to ensure their operation does not affect water quality. The State Conservation Commission has given top priority for funding to Confined Animal Feeding Operations (CAFOs) with known water quality problems, Animal Feeding Operations (AFOs) and operations that have received notice of violation. The definitions of CAFO's and AFOs are complex, but in general, dairy farms and large commercial feedlots fall into one of these two categories, and a small pasture-based operation does not.

This does not mean that small operations have been left out of the funding loop. In July of 2006, applications for funds will be accepted from *all* livestock operations with water quality concerns on a first-come, first-served basis. **If you are interested in receiving funds, we will need to have the self-assessment workbook completed and the cost share application (which includes the project design and specifications) completed by that date.** There are other funding options, such as EQIP, available to resolve livestock-related water quality issues. If you are concerned about how your livestock may be affecting water quality, come into the district and we'll walk you through the process.

Livestock Workshop

Hosted by
Franklin County CD

November 16, 2005

Session 1: Basin City Fire Hall

Session 2: Michael Jays, Connell

Topics include solids reduction in waste storage ponds, fly management on livestock facilities, a presentation from Ecology on livestock mortalities management, and the Franklin County Livestock program, which is similar to Walla Walla's.

For more information, call
Heather Wendt @ 509-545-8546, ext 3

Conservation Compliance Reminder

Jim Loiland Soil Conservationist NRCS WW

Several issues have risen this fall as producers work fields in preparation for the next crop. As you work on getting fields ready for planting, it is important to remember that fields designated Highly Erodible (HEL) have after-planting and/or over-winter cover requirements that must be met to maintain USDA farm program benefits. This is true whether the field is dry land or irrigated.

Traveling through the wetter areas of the county, it appears that folks have forgotten what the after-planting cover requirements are for winter wheat after peas or garbanzo beans. There are several options and none are overly restrictive. A two-pass system of shanking in fertilizer and seeding is acceptable; so is no-till seeding (a one pass system). Another option is to rely upon residue (500#/ ac. or a 28% cover). Other options utilize clods only (30% 3-5" clod) or a combination of clods and cover. There seems to be an increase in the use of a disc due to the higher cost of fuels; these fields will have a difficult time reaching any of the acceptable system requirements.

Fall plowing should also be discussed. Quite a few operators fall plow in preparation for spring seeding of peas or garbs. Remember that the over-winter residue requirements are 1000# or 48% cover, or a minimum of 30% 3-5" clods. In other words, fall plowing should be rough and trashy to meet the requirements of Conservation Compliance.

Irrigators should also be aware of the requirements of Conservation Compliance. Low residue crops such as potatoes, onions, and carrots must be, in most cases, followed by a cereal grain cover crop, planted prior to Oct. 20th and maintained until 10 days prior to spring planting.

Wheat summer fallow producers have the option to use the "Moldboard Plow" option in the Alternative Conservation Systems, if included in your plan. This ACS allows a clean plowing once every 6-8 years on a case by case basis. *Fields must be designated by NRCS in advance and pre-approved.* The trade-off is that in the following fallow year residue requirements are increased by 20% over winter. **Plowing of HEL ground without prior approval can result in the loss of USDA farm program benefits.**

New Loan Program for Conservation Tillage

The District recently signed an agreement with Spokane County Conservation District which allows Spokane CD to extend their Conservation Tillage Loan Program to producers in our county. All loan agreements will be administered through Spokane Conservation District, with Walla Walla CD serving as a local point of contact. The loan terms are simple: 5 year, 6% loans with 25% down-payment required. Eligible purchases include the following:

- Implements to aid in the direct placement of seed and/or fertilizer (e.g., drills, sprayers, power units)
- Implements to aid in the removal of residue (e.g., harrows, mowers, shredders, swathers, balers, etc)
- Building for the storage of baled residue

There is a lower rate (5%) for producers who agree to follow a conservation practice agreement set forth by Spokane. For example, if a producer agrees to perform minimum tillage (one or two-pass system) on all acres in fall and spring, then the producer is eligible for the lower rate. There is a brochure describing the program in the District office. Please call the District anytime for more information.



Walla Walla County Conservation District Personnel

Mike Buckley, Chairman
Guy McCaw, Vice-Chair
Pat McConnell, Secretary
Merrill Camp, Treasurer
Ed Chvatal, Member
Todd Kimball, Associate
Allen Ford, Associate

Rick Jones, District Manager
Marguerite Daltoso, Admin. Asst
Alison Bower, CREP Coordinator.
Audrey Ahmann, Grants Admin
Greg Kinsinger, Engineer Technician
Frank Lane, Burn Program
Kay Mead, Technician

Larry Hooker, D.C., NRCS
Toots Ekholm, Soil Con. Tech, NRCS
Jim Loiland, Soil Con., NRCS

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