



## MDA's Director Clark Joins NASDA Trade Mission to Vietnam

Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) Director, Christy Clark, joined the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture (NASDA) on an “emerging markets” trade mission to Vietnam April 5th – 13th, 2024.

The goal of this international visit to Vietnam was to foster stronger ties with Vietnamese ag trade partners as well as identify and address additional trade opportunities that exist for Montana agricultural products. Additionally, the delegation sought to gain a better understanding of trade rules, regulations, and culture to strengthen the United States’ trade relationship with Vietnam.

Director Clark joined Arkansas Secretary of Agriculture Wes Ward; Rick Pate, Alabama Commissioner of Agriculture; Sherry Vinton, Nebraska Director of Agriculture; Derek Sandison, Washington Director of Agriculture; Amanda Brondy, Global Cold Chain Alliance; and members of the NASDA staff. The delegation met with supermarket executives, various agriculture businesses, seed groups, as well as toured the Cai Lan Port as part of their collaboration exploration efforts.







“The objective of the trade mission to Vietnam was to reinforce and strengthen relationships with our established Vietnamese agricultural trade partners to enhance international opportunities for Montana commodities,” said Director Clark. “Vietnam’s population is on a steep incline with a large portion entering the global middle class. Their consumers value high-quality commodities and foods which our Montana producers are known for.”

The trade mission follows Director Clark’s successful trade mission to Cuba February 18th – 23rd, 2024, and highlights the potential for Montana’s increased international agriculture presence as the department pursues to grow and diversify our state’s trade markets.

Funding for this trade mission was provided by the USDA’s Foreign Ag Service’s Emerging Markets Program through NASDA. The Emerging Markets Program (EMP) helps U.S. organizations promote exports of U.S. agricultural products to countries that have, or are developing, market-oriented economies and that have the potential to be viable commercial markets.





## Deputy Director Coccoli Joins Governor Gianforte in Highlighting Glacier Processing Cooperative

Deputy Director, Zach Coccoli, joined Governor Gianforte at Glacier Processing Cooperative in Columbia Falls, MT last week to highlight their value-added agriculture business..

Formerly known as “Vandevanter Meats”, which has been in operation since 1945, Glacier Processing Coop. was born to save the processing facility from closing it’s doors.

With a wait list of months long for meat processing, the closure of the Vandevanter Meats would leave local ranchers with a difficult choice: ship their livestock hundreds of miles to another USDA-approved facility or close their operations.

With the Montana Premium Processing Cooperative (MPPC) in Havre gaining steam, Flathead Valley producers worked together to form a similar “Co-op” business. 300 producer memberships became available for purchase to producers wishing to join the cooperative valued at \$7,000 each.

Driven by Glacier Processing Cooperative Chair, Mark Siderius, the cooperative plans to expand to reach a 50 head processing capacity.



For more information, please visit: <https://glacierprocessing.com/>





# Montana Wheat & Barley Update: Winter Wheat Receives Big El Nino Boost

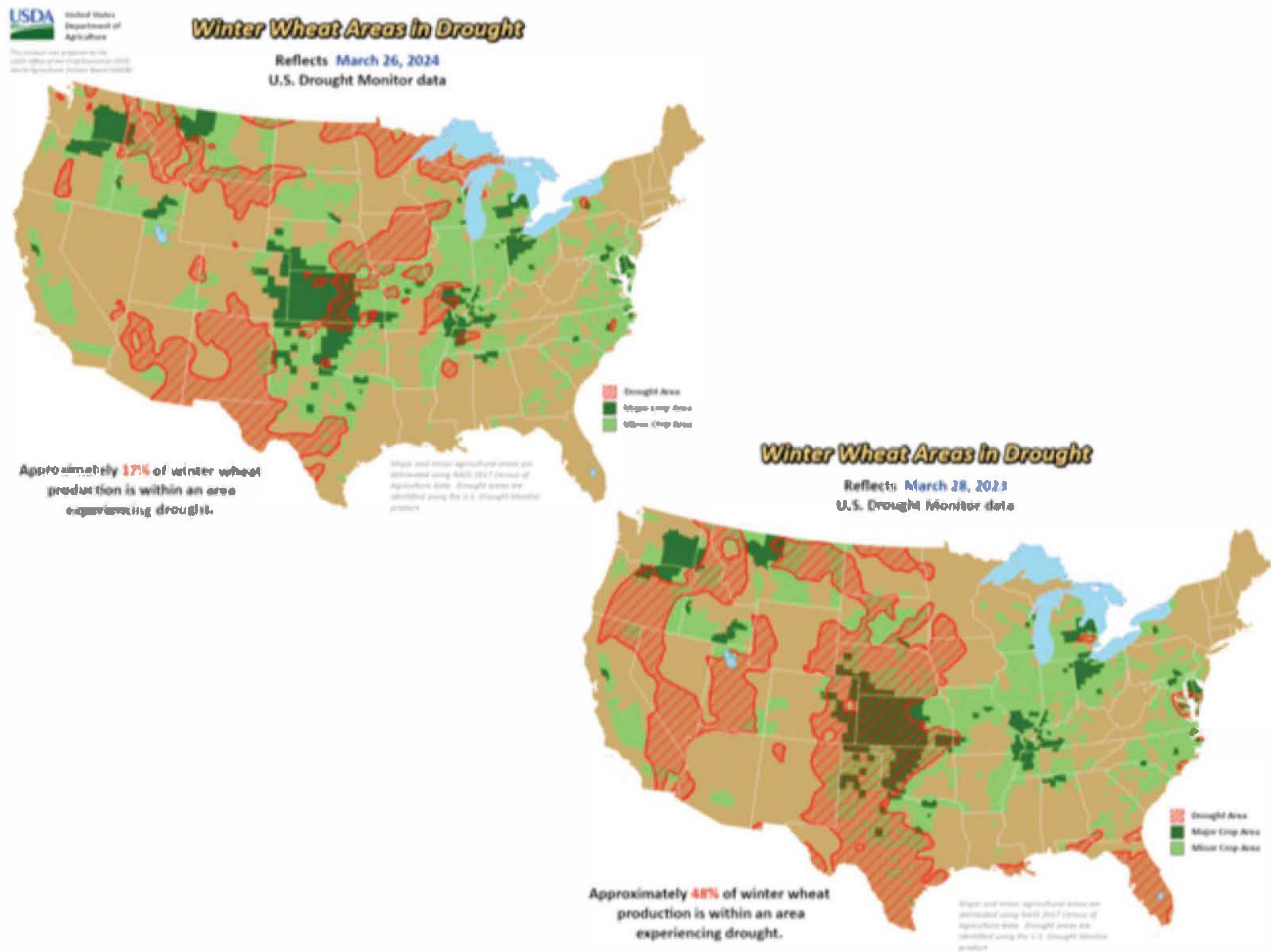
What a difference a year makes. USDA’s weekly Ag in Drought analysis feature, which matches U.S. Drought Monitor assessments with crop acreage and production regions, shows a dramatic decrease in drought coverage over the major winter wheat regions of the country in early spring 2024 compared to the same period in 2023.

The Ag in Drought update for March 26, 2024, shows just 17% of U.S. winter wheat areas in drought. That coverage portion is far less than half the drought coverage a year ago; at the end of March 2023, 48% of the U.S. winter wheat regions were assessed as being affected by drought.

That reduction in drought coverage corresponds to winter wheat crop conditions which are robust in comparison to last year.

The total good-to-excellent U.S. winter wheat rating in the April 1 USDA NASS weekly national Crop Progress report was 56%, exactly double the good to excellent total of a year ago. This figure is also the highest for the first report of the season in five years. And, not coincidentally — 2019 was the most recent year that El Nino was in effect in the Pacific Ocean during the U.S. winter season.

-- By Bryce Anderson, Progressive Farmer DTN







## Montana EDRR Spring '24 Webinar - May 23rd

Please join Early Detection, Rapid Response Coordinator, Josh Wagoner for the Montana EDRR Spring '24 Webinar, via Zoom, on May 23, from 10 a.m. to 11 a.m.

Wagoner will be giving an update on the latest with some of the EDRR species they're working hard on; rush skeletonweed, phragmites, ventenata, Palmer amaranth, etc.; where they've been seen most recently, what we might expect from this season, and what some of our cooperative plans could be.

Following Wagoner's update, the Montana Department of Agriculture's new AgCorps program will give an introduction, who they are, what they've been up to so far, what their plans are for the summer, and how they can serve you.

The last 10 minutes will be reserved for questions. Feel free to email any questions or comments now or be prepared to write them in during the webinar.

For more information, please contact Josh Wagoner at  
**[josh.wagoner@mt.gov](mailto:josh.wagoner@mt.gov)**.





## Montana Department of Agriculture Requesting 2024 ARPA AIG Round #2 Applications

The Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) is now accepting applications for over \$1.5 million in Round #2 federal funding available through the ARPA Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Program.

The intent of the Agriculture Infrastructure Grant Program is to advance Montana's agricultural industry through targeted investments in value-added agriculture projects across the state. Grants will assist with the development of innovative agricultural business improvements to keep pace with a transforming agricultural industry, create new jobs, and expand business opportunities.

The Montana Department of Agriculture will be releasing \$1.5 million for a second round of ARPA-AIG project awards. Project activities must take place between June 1st, 2024, and December 16th, 2024.

For a complete list of guidelines and eligibility requirements, please visit [agr.mt.gov/ARPAGrants](https://agr.mt.gov/ARPAGrants) or contact your regional Food and Ag Development Center (FADC).

Grant proposals are due to the Montana Department of Agriculture by 5:00 p.m. on Monday, April 29th, 2024.

For more information, please visit [agr.mt.gov/ARPAGrants](https://agr.mt.gov/ARPAGrants) or email Olivia Mays at [olivia.mays@mt.gov](mailto:olivia.mays@mt.gov).





## Gov. Gianforte Proclaims Montana Soil Health Week

On April 3rd, 2024, Governor Gianforte held a round table discussion to recognize Soil Health Week in Montana and raise awareness about how healthy soils can increase crop yields, improve nutrition, and strengthen food security.

“Montana Soil Health Week serves as an opportunity to highlight our farmers, ranchers, and all producers working toward better soil health stewardship,” Gov. Gianforte said. “By being good stewards, we are creating opportunities for the next generation and cultivating a future where Montana producers can continue to drive our economy and produce high-quality commodities.”

Joining Montana Department of Agriculture Director Christy Clark, legislators, ranchers, business owners, and community partners, the governor convened the group to highlight the importance of healthy soil for agriculture, food security, and nutrition.

“Working to maximize soil health is critical to maximizing profitability,” said Dir. Clark. “By implementing soil health principles like rotational grazing, cover cropping or no-till, our farmers and ranchers can preserve their operations for future generations while harvesting better profits.”

Last spring, the Montana Legislature passed a bipartisan resolution sponsored by Sen. Butch Gillespie, R-Ethridge, and co-sponsored by Sen. Janet Ellis, D-Helena, designating the first week of April as Montana Soil Health Week and the first Wednesday in April as Montana Soil Health Day.

“Soil health is something we’ve been interested in on our ranch and have been practicing for a number of years now. It’s a neat time of year to highlight healthy soils because Mother Earth is waking up and things are getting warmer, so the seeds are starting to sprout and are ready to be seeded on our farmlands,” said Sen. Gillespie.

Discussing ways to promote the stewardship of Montana’s soil, the group heard from Cole Mannix, founder of the Old Salt Co-op and owner of The Union restaurant set to open this month in Helena.

“Our market will showcase products that come from the landscapes of Montana, so I view soil health as a tremendous opportunity – an opportunity to increase fertility to increase crops. So, it’s a win-win,” Mannix said.





## MDA On the Road & Where to Catch Us

- Montana Agritourism Conference - Bozeman, MT | May 3
- Gallatin Valley Farm Fair - Belgrade, MT | May 7 - 9
- Value-Added Ag Visit - Livingston, MT | May 8
- WAWC & MWCA Spring Training - Ronan, MT | May 15
- Mountain Meat Summit - Bozeman, MT | May 21 - 23
- US Wheat World Staff Conference - Luqa, Malta | May 21 - 24
- EPA Region 7/8 Ag and DEQ Meeting - Denver, CO | May 22 - 23
- MSCA Mid-Year Meeting - Miles City, MT | May 28 - 30





## Montana Student Loan Assistance Program Preserves Family Farms and Ranches

The Montana Department of Agriculture's (MDA) Student Loan Assistance Program is now accepting applications. Established during the 2019 legislative session, this program provides student loan assistance to Montana's college-educated youth pursuing careers in farming or ranching.

"The Student Loan Assistance Program seeks to relieve the financial stress facing our young producers so that they can focus their energies on raising some of the world's highest quality commodities and carrying forward Montana's agricultural traditions," said MDA Director Christy Clark. "And when we can keep a family ranch in family hands, that is a success for Montana agriculture."

Qualified farmers and ranchers are eligible for student loan assistance through the program for up to five years. Applicants must be a Montana resident designated as the primary owner, heir, successor or assignee of a farm or ranch in Montana that obtained their associated or baccalaureate degree(s) from a Montana college or university and have agreed to operate their farm or ranch for at least five years.

Applications are due June 3rd, 2024, and can be submitted through [WebGrants](#). Full program guidelines are available on the department's [website at agr.mt.gov/Student-Loan-Assistance-Program](http://agr.mt.gov/Student-Loan-Assistance-Program).





## **USDA Partners with Montana to Award Approximately \$1 Million to Strengthen Food Supply Chain Infrastructure**

Under a cooperative agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS), the Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) has announced approximately \$1 million in round two funding under the Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI). Through this agreement, USDA and Montana are working together to offer approximately \$1 million in competitive grant funding for projects designed to build resilience across the middle of the supply chain. MDA is accepting applications for this Infrastructure Grant funding through June 3rd, 2024.

In May 2023, USDA announced the availability of up to \$420 million through RFSI to strengthen local and regional food systems. Through this program, AMS has entered into cooperative agreements with state agencies, commissions, or departments responsible for agriculture, commercial food processing, seafood, or food system and distribution activities or commerce activities in states or U.S. territories. RFSI is authorized by the American Rescue Plan.

Using RFSI funding, the Montana Department of Agriculture will fund projects that support the uptake of technology to increase production and add product lines for agriculture products, invest in business capacity to place products in consumer markets, build cold storage capacity throughout the state, and expand food distribution lines in underserved areas of the state. The state's investments through RFSI will aim to create a food systems infrastructure to support competitive and profitable market access for Montana farm products. The state's priorities are informed by stakeholder engagement and outreach to underserved producers to better understand their needs.



“The quality of Montana’s agricultural products and the producers raising them are truly unmatched,” said Montana Department of Agriculture Director Christy Clark. “These grants support infrastructure to invest in capacity and the expansion of food distribution lines in underserved areas of the state that directly benefit Montana’s producers’ ability to innovate and grow their operations.”

Those interested in receiving a subaward should apply directly through the Montana Department of Agriculture by June 3rd, 2024. AMS encourages applications that serve smaller farms and ranches, new and beginning farmers and ranchers, underserved producers, veteran producers, and underserved communities.

Through the program and in addition to the Infrastructure Grant funding, the Montana Department of Agriculture will support supply chain coordination and technical assistance to farmers and food businesses operating in processing, aggregation, and distribution—all critical activities to support access to more and better markets for farmers.

For more information, visit the MDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program (RFSI) webpage at [agr.mt.gov/RFSI](http://agr.mt.gov/RFSI).





# Montana Department of Agriculture Announces 2024 Pesticide Disposal Events

The Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) is facilitating spring pesticide disposal events in the Columbia River Basin region during the week of April 10th-12th, 2024, in Libby, Polson, and Butte. Summer disposal events are set for July 9th-11th, 2024, in Eureka, Clearwater Junction, and Butte. These additional pesticide disposal events were made possible through the Montana Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program (MT PSPP).

The primary objective of the Montana Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program is to have a lasting impact on the health and water quality of the upper Columbia River Basin (CRB), knowing that protecting the upper basin will also have a sustained positive effect downstream. The Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Columbia River Basin Restoration Funding Assistance Program was started in 2016 to better monitor and make a positive impact in the Columbia River Basin.



## PESTICIDE DISPOSAL EVENTS

### SPRING & SUMMER PESTICIDE DISPOSAL EVENTS

The Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) is facilitating spring pesticide disposal events in the Columbia River Basin region during the week of **April 10th-12th, 2024**, in Libby, Polson, and Butte.

Summer disposal events are set for **July 9th-11th, 2024**, in Eureka, Clearwater Junction, and Butte.

The pre-registration deadline for the spring event is Monday, April 1, 2024, and the pre-registration deadline for the summer event is Monday, July 1, 2024. Registrations for pesticide waste collection events are accepted on a first come, first-serve basis. There is no charge for the first 200 pounds of material; amounts over 200 pounds are assessed at \$1.00 per pound, and products are weighed on site. Additional fees may apply to pesticides with dioxins or dioxin precursors.

### SPRING EVENT

Wednesday, April 10th – Libby, MT  
Thursday, April 11th - Polson, MT  
Friday, April 12th- Butte, MT

### SUMMER EVENT

Tuesday, July 9th- Eureka, MT  
Wednesday, July 10th- Clearwater Junction  
Thursday, July 11th-Butte, MT

Please visit the Montana Waste Pesticide Disposal Program page to register. For more information, please visit **agr.mt.gov/Pesticide-Waste-Disposal-Program** or contact Carli Davis at **(406) 465-0531**.

These additional pesticide disposal events were made possible through the Montana Pesticide Stewardship Partnership Program (MT PSPP).





# Montana State Hail Insurance Available for Purchase

**Applications Close August 15th, 2024**

Applications for the State Hail Insurance Program are now available through the Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA).

Producers can insure crops against hail damage at the maximum coverage rate of \$75 per acre for dryland and \$114 per acre for irrigated land. Rates charged are a percentage of the insured amount and vary by county. A detailed list of rates by county and crop can be found online by visiting the MDA website. State policies are available for purchase until August 15, 2024.

Producers who previously purchased state hail insurance will receive applications in the mail. Application forms are also available online or by calling the MDA office. Staff are available to process policies, file claims, and help answer any questions producers may have regarding coverage options. Completed forms can be emailed, mailed, faxed, or used as a reference when contacting the office by phone.

## Contact Information:

Montana State Hail Insurance Program

P.O. Box 200201

Helena, MT 59620

Phone: (406) 444-5429

Email: [agrhail@mt.gov](mailto:agrhail@mt.gov)

Toll Free: 1 (844) 515-1571

Fax: (406) 444-9442

Loss claims are due to the office by October 1, 2024, and must be submitted within two weeks of the hail damage occurrence. Forms are available online or by request.





## Montana State Grain Lab Update: April '24

The State Grain Lab has remained busy despite being in the off season. Sample volume in March was a bit slower but April has made up for that. Staff sampled and inspected the first unit train in several years at the Macon facility for Farmer's Elevator. Spring wheat heading for Mexico in 111 cars was significant. A lack of government contracts this year is having some impact but there are several more rail cars being sampled at various locations as compared to the previous couple of years.

Grain lab staff managed a booth again this March at the KATQ Farm Expo in Plentywood. Patti Hedges and Dawn Johnstone managed the booth and were able to meet some new growers. The expo is an event for all things agricultural which included workshops for agronomy and area youth. The winter weather was not cooperative but that's nothing new for Sheridan County and had little impact.

The Department of Agriculture's Information Technology group toured the lab in March. They received an in-depth tour of the lab's processes and technologies. It is great to be able to share our knowledge of official grain inspection with co-workers from other offices.







Various staff from the Great Falls lab went on three educational field trips in March. They received a full tour of the IND Hemp facilities in Fort Benton on the 19th. Mass production of every part of the hemp plant is interesting to see and there are new products continuously being developed.

New processing equipment had just ran its first successful trials, so they were looking forward to significantly higher rates of production. Great Falls staff also divided up for 2 separate trips to tour the Ag labs in Bozeman. Doug Holen, manager of the MSU Foundation Seed Program, did a great job as tour guide running grain lab staff through as much as possible. They received program updates on the Cook Spring Wheat project, visited the Cereal Quality Lab, learned about the Giroux project, spent time at the Seed Lab, MSGA program, and the Post Farm's Foundation Seed Program. Doug was happy to receive the grain lab's used moisture machines and grain analyzer, a result of new grain lab machines that were recently awarded to the State Grain Lab by the Wheat & Barley Committee.

Adam Gutzwiler, the Grain Lab's Quality Assurance Specialist, attended the annual AAGIWA meeting for Official Inspection Agencies held April 14th – 16th in San Antonio, Texas. More than 100 members and guests attended which includes USDA Federal Grain Inspection Service Deputy Administrator Arthur Neal and 2 members of his team. Due to budget shortfalls, other members from FGIS did not travel to the event. Adam was happy to meet up with Javier who was part of the Heineken trade team that visited Montana last year. Some topics discussed at the meeting were 2024 Grain Outlook in México, Export Market Trends, Canadian Grain Commission Update, and a focus on new grain inspection technology. The grading of rice using near-infrared spectroscopy is expected to be released in 2025.

An internal audit process is now underway at both grain labs as required by a new Federal Grain Inspection Service directive that was released in January. Internal auditor training was completed for 8 staff members, and they are actively working through the audit requirements. The audit's purpose is to help build a framework for Official Inspection Agencies to assess and track their compliance with statutory and regulatory requirements by proactively addressing issues and preparing for external audits. The result of the lab's external audit in 2022 was an impressive 99%.





## What We Have Been (responsibly) Drinking Lately:

We like to get our “Drink of the Month” into different hands around the department.

Here’s one for spring and warmer days ahead.

**“Mexican Lager” from Lewis & Clark Brewing Co.**

“As fresh as a Montana mountain stream, Lewis & Clark Mexican Lager offers you the clarity you’d expect to find in the ice-cold spring runoff from the Continental Divide. Adding a squeeze of fresh lime will highlight this lagers well-balanced hints of corn.

Pairs best with rivers and rods.”

### MALTS

Pilsner | Vienna | 2-Row Pale Barley | Flaked Corn





## What We've Been Listening To Recently:



### Out to Grass: May 2024

1. When it's Springtime in the Rockies - Gene Autry
2. Geen, Green Grass of Home - Porter Wagoner
3. Spring Fever - Loretta Lynn
4. When it's Spring Time in Alaska - Johnny Horton
5. Lady May - Tyler Childers
6. Where the Green Grass Grows - Tim McGraw
7. Springtime - Ian Tyson
8. Spring - Tanya Tucker
9. Spring - John Denver
10. Southern Nights - Glen Campbell



# We'd Love Your Feedback



Agriculture and in specific, Montana Agriculture is all about community. We thought, one does not have to be directly involved with agriculture to be apart of this community. Thus, our external facing monthly newsletter was created. It is meant to inform, inspire, educate, and reach our agricultural community hand out to whomever would like to be a part of the happenings here at the MDA.

Like to see a section that we didn't cover this month? Let us know! We'd love to hear from you.

Until then, happy May Friends!