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2018 Wheat Quality Council Hard Spring Wheat & Durum Tour Completed

Summary by Dave Green, Executive Vice President

The Wheat Quality Council hard spring and durum tour was conducted July 23-26 in North Dakota plus parts of South Dakota and Minnesota. **(Tour Map)** There were 56 registered participants this year, and most of them were first-timers on this tour. We had 13 drivers following the eight predetermined routes we have used and compared against for 30 years. We use the wheat yield formula provided to us by NDSU.

The 325 spring wheat fields surveyed averaged 41.1 bushels per acre. Up from 38.1 last year. The 17 durum fields averaged 39.3 bushels, similar to last year's 39.7. We evaluated no hard winter fields that we were aware of.

The average for all 342 wheat field stops was 41.1 bushels per acre. This is 3 bushels better than last year's 38.4. (See Tour Results)

Day One covered the southern half of North Dakota, southwestern Minnesota and northeast/north central South Dakota. Yields were highly variable across most routes. Many commented on the reduced acres in many areas as producers are shifting to row crops. The southwest ND region was vastly improved from a year ago as the area recovered from last years drought. Only rare wheat fields being abandoned to hay. The highest yielding spring wheat field was estimated at 80.4 bushels and the lowest was 11.7, with a day one spring wheat average of 38.9 bushels versus last year at 37.9 bushels.

Day Two covered northwest and north central North Dakota. We found a lot fewer durum fields this year, as was predicted before the tour started. Durum continues to move north and west. The yields remained highly variable as we moved along the routes. We had a spring wheat high for the day of 69.7 bushels, a low of 19.7 with a day two average of 41.3 bushels. Last year these routes averaged 35.8 bushels.

Day Three concluded the tour by covering north central/north east North Dakota and north west/west central Minnesota. We had a huge contingent visiting the ND Mill so fewer stops were made. As is usually the case, this was the highest yielding area of the tour. The day three average was estimated at 46.3 bushels, compared to 46.2 one year ago. Our high was 82.5 and our low was 30.2 bushels per acre.

My personal observations: Its been a long time since I was this surprised about a crop. We knew that seeding had been delayed by cold weather and the crops have been maturing at a high speed due to warmer air since planting. We also knew that the drought last year made the row crops use much more subsoil moisture reserves. I ignored all that info and was more impressed with the reports from others about the crop. Crop condition weekly ratings were the highest in 25 years and the July crop estimate showed ND at a record yield per acre. I was caught up in thinking just how big the crop would get. We discussed adjusting our formula to account for the extra kernels. I mistakenly told the group that it was unfortunate they would only see high yields and would not get a look at poor yielding fields to complete their training. We actually found the crop very average but with wide ranges of yields in many areas. Some fields were planted late due to rain delays and some fields nearby planted on time looked much better. Wheat planted after row crops looked especially poor compared to other fields. Only the NE areas of ND and the NW areas of MN looked really good. We saw zero durum fields between Minot and Devils Lake this year. There have been very few in that area in the last several years.

Although you could find some common diseases like scab and ergot, insect damage from grasshoppers and wheat stem maggot, that was not the story. Heat and dryness was the issue. The plants show all the signs of accelerated development. Many fields are shorter, tillers fewer, heads smaller and kernel set less than needed for big yielding crops.

Some harvest had already taken place (mostly winter wheat) and we hoped to see more going on while we were there. The crop in most of the state was not quite ripe. Northern areas were several weeks away from harvest. Like most years, almost all of the wheat that's planted will be harvested. We also are aware of the continued push of acreage to the west as row crops have been better for producers in the east regions. We feel that it is important that we have followed the same routes for 35 years because of the data we have collected, but realize we sample more in the east and changes may be needed. This year we routed more cars to the Southwestern districts.

Once again, our results are not official. The National Agricultural Statistics Service will publish official results in early August. Watch for them and see how we compare. We have been very close for the past ten years or so. We are not as scientific as they are, we simply overwhelm them with the number of fields we visit, and our formula provided by NDSU has been working very well.

Thanks to all of you who came, drove cars or helped in any way to make this tour a success. The newcomers have told me they learned a great deal, had a lot of fun and would love to do it again. This tour is training that is hard to get today for a very reasonable cost. Our attendance continues to show we add value to our company members.

Please mark the Wheat Quality Council 2019 Annual Meeting dates on your calendar. It should be interesting evaluating all the new wheat lines grown this year. The dates are February 19-21 at the Embassy Suites in Kansas City.

