

Wheat Advantage



APRIL 2026

SUSTAIN OUR FOOD FUTURE | GROW WHEAT

Rotate Into Profits

Why Wheat Belongs in Today's Crop Rotation

Across South Dakota, cropping systems have evolved dramatically over the past two decades. Strong markets and streamlined equipment have pushed many farms toward simplified rotations dominated by corn and soybeans. While those systems can be efficient, agronomists and producers alike are rediscovering the value of bringing small grains—especially wheat—back into the rotation.

The message is simple: adding wheat isn't just good agronomy—it's good business.

Through research, on-farm experience, and educational programs like the South Dakota

Wheat Growers Association's Rotate Into Profits seminars, farmers are seeing how wheat can strengthen soil health, improve the performance of subsequent crops, and increase long-term profitability.

Breaking the Cycle with Crop Diversity

Crop rotation has long been one of agriculture's most powerful management tools. Introducing wheat into a rotation adds diversity to cropping systems that might otherwise rely on just one or two crops. That diversity pays off in several ways.

Continued on page 3



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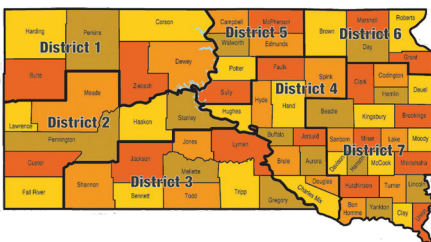
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From the SDWGA Office

Working for South Dakota Wheat Growers

As I sit down to write this column, the House Committee on Agriculture has just passed the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2026 (H.R. 7567) on a bipartisan vote of 34-17. I was able to watch part of the committee proceedings, and it was encouraging to see the progress being made.

Wheat farmers continue to face rising input costs, challenging commodity prices, and uncertainty in global markets. For that reason, we applaud the committee's work and the bipartisan effort to move farm bill legislation forward. At the same time, Congress' work on the farm bill is far from finished, and we encourage both the House and Senate to continue working toward passage of a strong bill that provides certainty for farmers and rural communities.

Earlier this winter, I had the opportunity to travel to Washington, D.C. for the National Association of Wheat Growers (NAWG) Winter Conference and annual Day on the Hill. A special thank you to SDWGA members Steven and Carrie Rumpza for joining me on the trip and representing South Dakota wheat growers so well in our meetings with members of Congress and their staff.

NAWG continues to do tremendous work on behalf of wheat farmers across the country, advocating for policies that support wheat research, trade, crop protection tools, and a strong farm safety net. I encourage you to check out the article about the NAWG meeting elsewhere in this issue of Prairie Grains for more details about the discussions and priorities coming out of the conference.

Finally, if you're interested in staying up to date on both state and national advocacy efforts, I encourage you to follow the South Dakota Wheat Growers Association on Facebook. We regularly share updates on legislative issues, industry news, and the work your membership dollars help support.

Thank you for your continued support of SDWGA and for everything you do to produce one of South Dakota's most important crops.

- Jennifer Scharpe, SDWGA Executive Director 

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Continued from page 1

Different crops have different growth patterns, nutrient demands, and pest pressures. By alternating between crops such as corn, soybeans, and wheat, producers disrupt pest and disease cycles that thrive in continuous or simplified systems. Rotations also help manage weeds by introducing new planting and harvest windows as well as different herbicide options.

When growers rotate between crop types—broadleaf crops like soybeans and cereal grains like wheat—they create a natural disruption in the life cycle of many insects, weeds, and plant diseases that would otherwise build up over time.

Research Continues to Show the Value of Rotation

Long-term research across the Northern Plains continues to confirm the benefits of diversified crop rotations. At Dakota Lakes Research Farm near Pierre, corn yields increased from about 203 bushels per acre in continuous corn to 217 bushels per acre in a corn-soybean rotation, and climbed to 235 bushels per acre when wheat was added into a more diverse rotation.

Similar findings have been documented in USDA Agricultural Research Service studies near Brookings, where soybeans grown after small grains have shown yield increases of up to 25 percent compared to soybeans following corn. More recent agronomy research across the Midwest has also shown that diversified rotations including small grains can increase corn yields by 1–11 percent and soybean yields by 6–12 percent.

These results highlight an important principle of diversified cropping systems: the next crop often benefits from the one before it.

Building Healthier Soils

Healthy soil is the foundation of every successful farming operation, and wheat plays an important role in building that foundation.

Unlike many row crops, wheat produces significant residue and root biomass that contribute to soil organic matter. Wheat is

considered a high-carbon crop, meaning the residue it leaves behind decomposes slowly and helps build stable organic matter in the soil.

Organic matter is critical for soil productivity. It improves soil structure, increases water-holding capacity, and provides a natural reservoir of nutrients such as nitrogen, sulfur, and phosphorus.

In many South Dakota soils, organic matter levels average around 5 to 6 percent. Maintaining or increasing that level can improve long-term fertility and reduce the need for synthetic inputs over time.

Producers often describe wheat residue as protective armor for the soil—shielding it from wind erosion, buffering heavy rainfall, and helping maintain soil structure.

Continued on page 4



For crops like wheat, like this winter wheat, last year's crop residue and litter remain on the soil surface, offering protection from wind and water erosion. Credit: USDA

A Valuable Tool for Managing Soil Moisture

Water management is another area where wheat provides significant advantages.

Residue from winter wheat helps reduce evaporation and protects soil moisture for the next crop. Research shows wheat residue can reduce evaporation losses from roughly 35 percent of crop water use to closer to 15 percent, depending on conditions.

Wheat residue also helps break the force of raindrops, preventing surface crusting and improving water infiltration. In some soils, crust formation can reduce infiltration rates by as much as 75 percent. Wheat stubble protects the soil surface and allows more water to move into the root zone.

For farmers in semi-arid areas of South Dakota, that additional stored moisture can translate directly into higher yields for the following crop.

Weed, Pest, and Disease Management

Adding wheat into a rotation also helps manage pests, weeds, and diseases.

Many of the most problematic pests and diseases in corn and soybeans thrive when their host crops are grown repeatedly. Rotating to a cereal crop interrupts those life cycles.

For example, alternating crop types can dramatically reduce populations of insects such as corn rootworm and help prevent the buildup

of crop-specific pathogens in the soil. Similarly, wheat's rapid early-season growth can provide ground cover that suppresses weed emergence.

Rotation also expands herbicide options. Wheat allows growers to use different chemistry and application timing compared to row crops, which can help manage herbicide-resistant weeds.

Economic Benefits Beyond Yield

The agronomic benefits of wheat often translate directly into economic gains.

Wheat typically requires fewer fertilizer inputs than crops like corn. Nitrogen requirements are generally lower, which can reduce fertilizer costs while still producing a profitable crop. Furthermore, wheat acts as an efficient nutrient scavenger; its deep, fibrous root system can capture residual nitrogen left lower in the soil profile by previous crops, preventing costly leaching and keeping those nutrients within the "bank" for future use.

Wheat also creates additional marketing opportunities and spreads financial risk across multiple crops. Diversified systems are less vulnerable to price swings in any single commodity.

Perhaps just as important is wheat's early harvest window, which opens the door to additional revenue opportunities. Following wheat harvest, producers may plant cover crops, forage crops, or other double-crop options that provide livestock feed or soil health benefits.

Yield Advantages Observed in Diversified Rotations that Include Wheat

(Based on USDA-ARS Brookings long-term study)

Crop Rotation	Soybean Yield Advantage	Corn Yield Advantage
Corn-Soybean	Baseline	Baseline
Corn-Soybean-Spring Wheat - Pea	+23-27%	Up to +45% vs CS
Corn-Pea-Winter Wheat-Soybean	+13-38%	Higher than CS (rotation effect)
Corn-Oat-Winter Wheat-Soybean	+16-38%	Higher than CS

Source: USDA-ARS Integrated Cropping Systems Research, Brookings, SD

In many cases, the true value of wheat shows up not only in its own yield but also in the performance of crops that follow it.

Protecting Soil for the Long Term

Soil erosion remains one of the greatest long-term threats to agricultural productivity.

Small grains like wheat are particularly effective at protecting soil from erosion because they provide dense ground cover and extensive root systems. Compared with many row crops, wheat significantly reduces both wind and water erosion.

Keeping soil in place preserves the most valuable asset farmers have—the topsoil that supports crop growth and long-term productivity.

A System That Works Together

Agronomists often refer to the concept of “synergy” in diversified cropping systems. Instead of each crop being managed independently, the rotation works as an integrated system where each crop supports the next.

Wheat plays an important role in that system.

It contributes residue and organic matter to the soil, breaks pest cycles, improves moisture retention, and helps stabilize overall farm profitability. When combined with other crops in a thoughtful rotation, wheat strengthens the entire cropping system.

Looking Ahead

As markets, weather patterns, and input costs continue to shift, many South Dakota producers are reevaluating the role of diversification in their operations.

The evidence from both research and on-farm experience continues to point in the same direction: rotations that include wheat can improve soil health, reduce risk, and enhance long-term profitability.

For farmers looking to strengthen their cropping systems, the path forward may be as simple as returning to a proven principle of agriculture:

Rotate into profits. 



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How Public Wheat Breeding Protects South Dakota Growers




**SOUTH DAKOTA
STATE UNIVERSITY**

The South Dakota Wheat Commission prioritizes supporting South Dakota State University's (SDSU) spring and winter wheat programs—not just out of tradition, but because of a strategic necessity. Dr. Karl Glover, SDSU spring wheat breeder, states "South Dakota wheat producers will always be better served through the operation of more,

rather than fewer, strong regional breeding programs". Here is a brief explanation of why public programs remain vital in a world of private options:

- **Tailored Performance:** While private varieties may chase a single "home run" trait like ultra-high yield, public programs tend to focus on more balanced traits including high yield, stable protein, and regionally relevant disease resistance. This is not meant to diminish private releases but simply demonstrates how they may have a different focus than public releases.
- **Protecting Local Interests:** If private companies consolidate or shift focus to different regions, South Dakota growers could be left behind. Public programs ensure that no matter what happens in the corporate world, our farmers have access to well-adapted, affordable varieties.
- **The Innovation Pipeline:** Public universities often do the heavy lifting of "pre-breeding"—the slow, difficult work of increasing genetic diversity. Private companies then build on this public foundation. Without SDSU breeders, the "genetic gain" that makes next varieties better could suffer.

Conclusion

The relationship between public and private wheat breeding is a unique "special relationship" that doesn't exist in many other parts of the seed industry. It's a system where competition drives innovation, but collaboration ensures stability. For a South Dakota producer, understanding this means recognizing that a win for SDSU is a win for the entire state's bottom line. Supporting public programs ensures that we continue to train the next generation of plant scientists, our seed remains affordable, and our varieties remain well-adapted to South Dakota growing conditions. 

2025 Research Projects

Research and its funding are an integral part of success in agriculture. Growing wheat efficiently and economically is as important to the profitability equation for wheat farmers as is marketing. In 2025, South Dakota wheat checkoff dollars provided funding for the following SDSU research projects:

- Enhancing Resilience of Wheat Against Diseases
- Glutopik Method-Driven South Dakota Wheat Quality
- Spring Wheat Breeding for Disease Resistance
- Spring Wheat Breeding and Cultivator Development
- Spring and Winter Wheat Variety Trials
- Develop Early Forecasting System with Imaging and AI
- Winter Wheat Breeding and Variety Development
- Accelerated Breeding for Enhanced Resilience in Winter Wheat
- Wheat Disease Diagnostics and Nurseries
- Root Traits for Improving Drought Stress 



Your **wheat checkoff** funds research and expands markets.



Research

Supporting SDSU wheat breeding programs for hard red spring, winter, and white wheat

Funding studies to improve pest, disease, and stress resistance

Investing in soil health, crop rotation, and fertility research

Analyzing wheat quality, from planting to harvest, to meet end-user needs

Exploring value-added uses like biodegradable plastics and new wheat-based products

Domestic Markets

Your checkoff keeps South Dakota wheat in demand across the U.S. by:

Supporting programs that develop new wheat-based foods and products.

Funding promotions that highlight wheat's nutritional value to U.S. consumers.

Working with millers, bakers, and buyers to match South Dakota's high-quality wheat with specialty market needs.

Partnering with organizations to increase U.S. wheat consumption.

International Markets

Over half of U.S. wheat is exported every year.

Your investment connects South Dakota wheat to markets around the world:

Hosting international trade teams and overseas quality seminars.

Funding training seminars on milling and baking techniques using U.S. wheat.

Defending our market share from global competitors like Canada and Australia

SD Wheat Growers Association in Action

Advocacy is a core part of the South Dakota Wheat Growers Association's mission. Over the past several months, SDWGA has been actively engaged on several issues in Pierre and Washington, D.C., ensuring the voice of South Dakota wheat growers is represented in policy discussions.


During the 2026 South Dakota Legislative Session, SDWGA successfully worked to oppose Senate Bill 189, legislation that would have significantly changed the state's commodity checkoff refund system. SDWGA collaborated with Cash Anderson of May, Adam, Gerdes & Thompson LLP, along with partners including the South Dakota Corn Growers Association and other agricultural groups, to help educate lawmakers on the potential impacts of the proposal.

The association also closely monitored numerous property tax proposals introduced during the legislative session. With property taxes becoming a major point of debate in Pierre this year, SDWGA remained engaged to ensure the interests of agricultural producers and rural landowners were considered as discussions evolved.

At the national level, SDWGA recently joined a coalition of agricultural organizations urging the Environmental Protection Agency to maintain

a science-based pesticide registration process, ensuring farmers continue to have access to safe and effective crop protection tools.

The association also signed a letter supporting continued funding for U.S. international food aid programs, including Food for Peace and the McGovern-Dole Food for Education Program, which utilize American-grown commodities to combat global hunger while supporting U.S. agriculture.

These activities are just a few examples of how SDWGA membership dues support advocacy efforts that protect and promote the interests of South Dakota wheat growers. 



South Dakota wheat growers visiting with Senator Mike Rounds in his D.C. office during the NAWG Day on the Hill. Photo credit: Carrie Rumpza.

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