

Wheat Farming in Washington – Version I

Adapted from Jim Kershner's HistoryLink.org Essay 20504

Wheat is a top growing crop in Washington. People have grown wheat here since the 1820s. It is very important in Eastern Washington where most crops in our state are grown.

Wheat was the first grain crop grown in Washington. The Hudson's Bay Company was the first to plant it. They first planted wheat at Fort Vancouver. Later, pioneers near Walla Walla found wheat grew well there as well. That was in the 1860s.

The crop grew well in other areas, too. Settlers began growing wheat along the Columbia River and then farther north. They found this is where wheat grew the best anywhere in the country. These areas are called the Columbia Basin and Blue Mountains.

Farmers harvested their wheat using 32-horse teams. The horses pulled a machine called a combine that gathered the wheat stalks. Today, farmers use a similar machine powered by a motor instead of horses.

Most of Washington's wheat is sent to other countries. At first, Europe bought most of Washington's wheat. That changed around 1950. Farmers then sent most of their wheat to Asia and the Middle East. There, the wheat grain helps create noodles and flatbread.

Today, the two top wheat growing counties in Washington are Whitman and Lincoln. They also grow the most wheat of any counties in the United States.