U.S. WHEAT & BARLEY SCAB INITIATIVE

FHB DISEASE IMPACT UPDATE

Isolated FHB Cases Reported in 2026; DON Levels Remained Low Across the U.S.

By Dr. Amber Hoffstetter



Symptoms of Fusarium head blight on winter wheat planted in New York. *(Camilo Parada Rojas, photo)*

Across most of the U.S., hot, dry conditions kept Fusarium head blight (FHB or scab) from becoming a major disease this growing season. In states where the U.S. Wheat and Barley Scab Initiative (USWBSI) FHB Risk Tool predicted high risk, conditions either turned dry or fungicide applications helped mitigate infection by the causal fungus, *Fusarium graminearum*. Isolated cases of FHB occurred where rainfall and/or high humidity coincided with heading and flowering. However, DON levels remained low in harvested grain. Overall, although drought and late-spring freezes reduced yields in some states, FHB did not significantly affect grain quality this season.

The USWBSI asked state experts to assess FHB during the 2026 growing season. Their regional reports are summarized below.

Only Localized Issues with FHB Reported in the Northeast

(Malting Barley, Spring Wheat, and Soft Winter Wheat)

Farmers in the Northeast reported very few FHB issues this growing season. DON levels remained very low, with only a few outliers. The biggest challenge for small grain producers in the region was poor germination in spring-seeded small grains due to cool spring weather.

Small winter cereals experienced mild and relatively dry conditions during the growing season in **Vermont**. Spring temperatures were cooler than normal during April and May with

relatively normal precipitation. June brought with it wet, rainy weather for some areas with some sites receiving eight to ten inches for the month, while dry conditions were reported in July through August. For most of the farmers in the region, issues with FHB and DON were low to moderate. “Much of New England experienced below average temperatures and relatively dry conditions throughout planting and flowering,” said Heather Darby, University of Vermont Extension agronomist. “Consistent cold winter temperatures and decent snow cover led to good winter grain survival, and dry conditions in the spring of 2026 led to optimum planting dates for spring grains.” For the region where spring small grains are grown, many locations reported timely planting but slow, uneven, and often poor germination due to cool, dry conditions during May and June.

The infection rates of *Fusarium graminearum* varied by location. “The levels of DON from samples submitted from the Northeast to our testing lab have been low to moderate in winter and spring grains,” noted Darby. Her lab annually tests samples from all Northeastern states including corn, einkorn, spring barley, spring wheat, winter wheat, triticale, and rye. The concentrations of DON have ranged from zero to 4.60 ppm with an average of 0.44 ppm across all samples. Overall, most farmers in Vermont were able to produce a crop with average yields and DON levels mostly below the 1.0 ppm threshold.

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Heather Darby

Small grain conditions in **New York** were generally favorable, with only localized FHB issues. Spring started off cool and dry in many of the state’s wheat growing areas. While there were some scattered showers around heading and flowering, the highest risk of rain events did not overlap fully with heading and flowering. This, combined with dry conditions later in the season, limited FHB severity.

Farmers were proactive about spraying a recommended fungicide for FHB when the FHB Risk Tool predicted elevated risk which helped reduced DON levels. “Reports from four major mills indicate that DON levels were mostly low this year, with only one or two higher-level outliers,” said Camilo Parada-Rojas, assistant professor of plant pathology at Cornell University. The confidence in the grain market was strong, and DON did not emerge as a widespread problem for winter wheat in New York.

Frost, not FHB, Was Main Challenge in the Mid-Atlantic

(Malting Barley and Soft Winter Wheat)

Across most Mid-Atlantic states, frost appeared to be the biggest challenge this season. Late-spring frosts damaged wheat and/or barley in all states except Pennsylvania. Dry conditions during heading and flowering kept FHB pressure low, resulting in few reports of disease.

Dry fall conditions in 2025 resulted in timely planting for **Pennsylvania** wheat and barley but, in some cases, it also delayed emergence. As spring began, crops experienced cool, dry

weather which slowed growth. Conditions conducive for plant growth and unfavorable for FHB development occurred at heading and flowering. At the time of harvest, a high-quality crop with respectable yields was revealed. “After a terrible scab year in 2025, growers and buyers were especially relieved that they were able to keep some fungicide in the shed and still reap an excellent harvest,” said Alyssa Collins, associate research professor at Pennsylvania State University and the director of the Southeast Agricultural Research and Extension Center.

The biggest challenges for small grain farmers in **Delaware** this season were drought and frost. An exceptionally dry spring limited yield potential in non-irrigated fields. In addition, nighttime temperatures fell to 20-30°F in late April, causing a late frost that severely damaged barley and affected wheat to varying degrees, depending on location and growth stage. Before the frost, warm weather had accelerated crop development leaving small grains particularly vulnerable. “While yields were variable due to the drought, the dry conditions kept FHB risk very low in the region and quality remained high,” said Alyssa Koehler Betts, University of Delaware extension plant pathologist.



Green secondary tiller (left) and frost damaged main tiller (right) in a barley field located in Delaware. *(Alyssa Betts, photo)*

Weather also seemed to be a challenge for farmers in **Maryland**. A late frost impacted barley fields, particularly in the southern counties, while dry conditions later in the season caused drought stress in the wheat crop. “However, low humidity ultimately limited FHB development, resulting in minimal disease occurrence and very low DON levels overall,” said Nidhi Rawat, University of Maryland small grains pathologist.

Likewise, FHB pressure remained very low in **Virginia** this season. Moderate to severe drought conditions during flowering occurred across most of the soft winter wheat production areas. Rainfall occurring later in the season was sufficient to finish the winter wheat crop in many of the regions. “No post-harvest reports of elevated DON levels were received,” said Doug Higgins, assistant professor and extension specialist at Virginia Tech Eastern Shore Agriculture Research and Extension Center. Late freeze events did result in some localized areas receiving freeze injury.

Southern Atlantic Drought Resulted in Low FHB Pressure

(Malting Barley and Soft Winter Wheat)

Drought kept FHB risk low in the Southern Atlantic, and also lowered yield potential of small grains. Untimely rains during harvest reduced yields even further for some farmers.

North Carolina farmers had a hard 2025 season due to dry weather, but 2026 was even more problematic for many. Moisture in the eastern part of the state was adequate for a decent crop, but moving westward across the Coastal Plain and into the Piedmont, drought reduced yield potential for cereal crops. The statewide average yield was 55 bushels per acre, compared to 60 bushels per acre in 2025. Some farmers opted to harvest their wheat crops early to feed as hay.

Not surprisingly, FHB was a non-issue this year for the state's wheat and barley farmers. "These dry springs have meant low risk of head blight," said Christina Cowger, USDA-ARS small grains pathologist located in Raleigh. "But they've also been hard on our winter cereals." Planted wheat acreage was down to 320,000 acres this season, with only 240,000 harvested for grain.

"These dry springs have meant low risk of head blight. But they've also been hard on our winter cereals."
Christina Cowger

Spring in **South Carolina** was extremely dry. Several farmers lost their crop due to drought conditions or made the decision to cut it early for hay. "Due to the drought, we had much lower disease pressure across the board," said Alex Coleman, Clemson University extension small grains specialist. Rain in May delayed harvest, reducing yields further. Due to the dry conditions, FHB did not pose a challenge this season for the state's farmers.

In **Georgia**, planted and harvested wheat acreage continued to decline. Dry conditions heavily characterized the growing season for small grains, including extreme drought in some key wheat-producing counties. Overall, insufficient moisture during the critical infection period inhibited FHB development and as a result FHB incidence was low across the state. The FHB Risk Tool did briefly indicate moderate risk of FHB in the primary wheat producing areas of the state, but by the time the risk increased, most of the wheat was passed anthesis and entering the grain-filling stage. The University of Georgia Plant Disease Clinic did not receive any wheat samples that were diagnosed with FHB. In addition, no reports or confirmed cases of FHB from county Extension agents, farmers, or crop consultants were received. "Overall, the 2025-2026 season was characterized by little to no observable FHB development in Georgia, most likely due to the persistent dry conditions and limited moisture during anthesis," said Alfredo Martinez-Espinoza, University of Georgia small grains extension plant pathologist.

Minor Cases of FHB Reported in Midwest

(Malting Barley & Soft Winter Wheat)

While across the Midwest region acreage was down for winter wheat, yields were not greatly impacted by FHB or weather conditions. Although some states experienced elevated levels of disease risk and a few fields showed symptoms, overall, widespread issues with FHB and DON did not occur in 2026.

Fusarium head blight was relatively low across **Michigan** this season. "Prior to flowering, there were some high levels of risk, but dry conditions through flowering reduced disease risk," said Martin Chilvers, Michigan State University extension plant pathologist. A total of 455,000 acres of winter wheat were harvested this season, with an average state yield of 90 bushels per acre.

This season's crop in **Ohio** was generally clean and healthy. Based on reports from growers, extension educators, and the small grains agronomist, yields across the state ranged from 80 to more than 100 bushels per acre. The five-location average in the Wheat Performance Trials, which includes more than 80 varieties, exceeded 100 bushels per acre. These higher yields could be attributed to cool nights, an extended grain-fill period, timely moisture, and low disease pressure, particularly from FHB.

"We certainly had moisture, and quite a lot of it for an extended period of time," said Pierce Paul extension plant pathologist at The Ohio State University. However, the rain events, which occurred throughout most of anthesis, were accompanied by cool, and sometimes cold temperatures. The colder temperatures led to frost damage in certain parts of the state. "This likely kept Fusarium head blight in check, leading to low severity and DON contamination across most of the state, even in Wooster in non-inoculated, untreated plots," said Paul. In addition to the cooler temperatures, fungicide use was fairly widespread among farmers, likely driven by the wet conditions. This likely helped keep foliar diseases in check.

In **Indiana**, the average state yield was slightly lower, at 80 bushels per acre, with approximately 225,000 acres harvested. FHB pressure was low this season, and harvest conditions remained favorable. "Both average yield and harvested acreage were lower than the previous season," said Darcy Telenko, extension plant pathologist at Purdue University.

In general, spring weather was dry for **Kentucky** farmers, limiting the risk and development of FHB across the state. "Although Fusarium head blight symptoms could be found in a few fields at low incidence, problems with DON contamination did not occur in 2026," said Carl Bradley, University of Kentucky extension plant pathologist. Farmers in the state harvested approximately 280,000 acres of wheat this season, down from 2025, with an average yield estimated at 83 bushels per acre.

"Although Fusarium head blight symptoms could be found in a few fields at low incidence, problems with DON contamination did not occur in 2026."

Carl Bradley

Tennessee continued to see a reduction in planted wheat acres with 255,000 acres planted and 69% harvested. "Very little to no FHB was observed in 2026, similar to a typical wheat season, but leaf rust did develop late in the season," said

Heather Kelly, extension plant pathologist at the University of Tennessee. Farmers in the state are choosing varieties with improved FHB resistance. This year, the statewide yield average was 77 bushels per acre.

FHB was also very low this year in **Wisconsin**, with few to no symptoms observed across the state. Stripe rust and leaf rust were observed only sporadically in some fields. No Cephalosporium stripe was observed this year, either. Occasional reports of tan spot were made, but yields were not affected except in fields planted with highly susceptible varieties. Barley yellow dwarf virus was observed at low incidence. "The 2026 wheat harvest was one of the best yielding for Wisconsin," said Damon Smith, University of Wisconsin extension plant pathologist. The statewide average winter wheat yield was 76 bushels per acre.

During the 2026 growing season, FHB was generally low in **Illinois**. "In commercial wheat fields, we observed a relatively low frequency of FHB and received no reports of grain rejection or dockage associated with scab or DON," said Boris Camiletti extension plant pathologist at the University of Illinois. Most commercial fields received a fungicide application, which likely contributed to the low disease levels. The average state yield was approximately 106 bushels per acre.



FHB on winter wheat located near Grantfork, Illinois. *(Boris Camiletti, photo)*

In southern Illinois, FHB risk was elevated, but FHB occurrence was low. "Heavy rainfall in localized areas of southern Illinois around the infection period may have created more favorable conditions for FHB development in some fields, although widespread problems were not reported," said Camiletti.

Despite higher amounts of moisture, FHB levels remained low in **Missouri**. "Cooler than average temperatures in May may have contributed," said Mandy Bish, University of Missouri's extension specialist for field crop pathology. Overall, the state's wheat acreage was down, at an estimated 600,000 acres, with an average yield of 74 bushels per acre.

FHB Pressure Remained Low Across Southern States

(Soft Winter Wheat)

A warm, dry winter posed challenges for some Southern states. Although these conditions may have contributed to lower FHB levels across the region, they also caused vernalization issues in

some areas. Harvest conditions were favorable in most locations. However, one state reported that rain caused preharvest sprouting and lower test weights in soft winter wheat, while another reported crop damage from early spring freezes.

Fusarium head blight pressure was extremely low across **Alabama** during the 2025-2026 growing season. “We had a significantly drier winter and early spring, as compared to last year, that might have contributed to the absence of FHB,” said Amanda Strayer-Scherer, Auburn University associate professor and extension plant pathologist. Disease was not observed in Alabama’s small grain variety trials, and no reports of significant outbreaks were received by extension personnel. Conditions remained favorable for grain fill and harvest, which likely contributed to the low incidence and minimal concerns with DON contamination.

Based on values from USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, wheat acres were slightly up in **Mississippi** compared to the previous year. “Weather was warmer than normal for the wheat season with scattered rainfall,” said Tom Allen, extension plant pathologist at Mississippi State University. However, rain events didn’t coincide with heading and flowering; thus, FHB pressure remained low this season. The most predominant disease in the state was leaf rust.



Winter wheat anthesis in a foliar fungicide trial located at the Lon Mann Cotton Research Station in Marianna, Arkansas. *(Jason Kelley, photo)*

Approximately 90,000 acres of winter wheat were planted in **Arkansas**. This historically low acreage was primarily due to low wheat prices compared with other crops. Growing conditions were markedly drier than in past years, with the period from November through April among the warmest and driest on record. These dry conditions contributed to reduced foliar disease levels. However, for the second year in a row, leaf rust was the predominant yield-limiting disease in the state. Severe cases could be found on susceptible varieties, particularly in the southern part of the state. Fusarium head blight levels remained low this season due to the dry conditions during flowering. Few reports of disease pressure and grain dockages were received. These low levels were accurately predicted by the FHB Risk Tool. “Overall, grain quality and test weights were higher this year than in previous years due to less rain at harvest,” said Jason Kelley, University of Arkansas extension agronomist. It is anticipated that rising grain prices will increase wheat acreage this fall.

Farmers in **Louisiana** planted 11,934 acres of winter wheat for the 2025-2026 growing season. The reduced acreage was due in part to low grain prices in the fall and high input costs. The growing season began well, and planting conditions were generally good across the state. However, freeze events in February and then again in March negatively affected crop development, particularly in the central and northern parts of the state. “Wheat that was jointed or in a later growth stage was especially hit hard,” said Boyd Padgett, plant pathologist

at Louisiana State University Agricultural Center. “This was especially the case with early maturing varieties,” Leaf rust was prevalent early in some fields; however, FHB severity was low this season. Yields in on-farm demonstration plots ranged from 43 to 60 bushels per acre, and the Louisiana State University Agricultural Center variety trial mean was 50 bushels per acre.

In the **Texas** Blackland Prairie, soft winter wheat experienced warm dry conditions throughout most of the fall and winter. The mild winter temperatures resulted in issues with vernalization on some varieties south of Dallas/Fort Worth. While much of the state suffered from severe drought conditions, the Blackland region faired significantly better overall, with areas near Dallas/Fort Worth producing some of the best non-irrigated wheat in the state. Rainfall delayed harvest throughout the region, resulting in issues with pre-harvest sprouting and low-test weights. Stripe rust pressure overall was low with some reports of high pressure in localized areas. Leaf rust pressure was significant in the southern and central parts of the region. Infestations of Hessian fly were widespread with heavy damage occurring in select fields. “Mild FHB incidence was observed in some Blackland’s fields from the northeast portion of the state into Central Texas,” said Brandon Gerrish, small grains extension specialist at Texas A&M University.

“Mild FHB infection was observed in some Blackland’s fields from the northeast portion of the state into Central Texas.”

Brandon Gerrish

In the eastern part of the Rolling Plains, the growing season started off dry. Scattered rainfall in late October greatly benefited some areas, while others were left with spotty or staggered emergence. Winter was mild but, by March the weather turned extremely hot and dry and yield potential was greatly reduced. Widespread rainfall in early April was too late for the crop to recover as much of the damage had already been done. Leaf rust incidence was moderate, mostly occurring in the southern part of the region. Wheat streak mosaic virus and barley yellow dwarf virus were also present and caused significant damage in select fields. No reports of FHB were received from this region.

In south Texas, the 2025-2026 growing season experienced drought, high temperatures, and high leaf rust pressure. Throughout most of the season, the soft winter wheat crop in this region was in extreme drought conditions. High winter temperatures resulted in vernalization issues. There were only a few reports of stripe rust; while, leaf rust was the most prevalent, mainly in irrigated fields.

FHB Incidence Generally Low in the Northern Great Plains

(Durum, Hard Winter Wheat, Hard Spring Wheat and Malting Barley)

In the Northern Great Plains, FHB risk was high for susceptible varieties in some areas. However, many crops escaped infection, or hot, dry weather reduced disease incidence and severity. Farmers also applied fungicides to manage FHB, helping reduce disease development.

Despite dry conditions, emergence and early season growth were good in **Minnesota**. By the end of May, most of the state was classified as abnormally dry or in moderate drought. Intermittent rains and higher dew points across the southern half of the state in mid-June resulted in longer periods of leaf wetness increasing the risk for tan spot, Septoria, and rust. Likewise, the risk for FHB increased in the southern half of the state, and the FHB Risk Tool predicted moderate risk for most susceptible spring wheat varieties being grown in this area. Extreme heat in early July sped up growth and development, decreasing the risk of late FHB infections.



Fusarium head blight on spring wheat in the Crookston, Minnesota Disease Nursery. *(Danielle Fiebelkorn Wrucke, photo)*

The situation was not the same in the northern part of the state. By the first week of July, about half of the spring wheat crop in the southern half of the Red River Valley had reached anthesis, with the northern half reaching this growth stage the following week. Daytime weather conditions were hot and humid and when combined with higher nighttime temperatures resulted in much longer leaf-wetness periods. Depending on the variety's resistance to FHB, the risk of FHB infection was high. In the end, mid to late July weather was hot and dry with less than a tenth of the normal amount of precipitation in parts of the Red River Valley. Daytime temperatures on average were eight degrees Fahrenheit or warmer than average. "The incidence and severity of FHB (and all other fungal diseases) were relatively low, comparable to the 2025 season," said Jochum Wiersma, University of Minnesota extension agronomist.

Heading in **North Dakota** small grains varied by seeding date. The earliest small grain crop started heading during the third week of June with a large majority of the small grains heading around July 4. For a three-week stretch from June to July, the risk of FHB on susceptible varieties was high for areas north and east of the Missouri River. After July 4, rainfall and humidity became inconsistent across the state, which drastically lowered the risk for FHB across most areas. Areas with the greatest risk for FHB were located in the northern tier near the Canadian border. "Fungicide applications targeting FHB were very common this year, which lessened concerns with FHB and DON," said Andrew Friskop, extension plant pathologist at North Dakota State University (NDSU).

"Fungicide applications targeting FHB were very common this year, which lessened concerns with FHB and DON."

Andrew Friskop

An estimated 60,000 acres of winter wheat were planted throughout the state. For the large majority of the state, the risk of FHB during

winter wheat flowering remained low. This resulted in no reports of concerning levels of FHB or DON.

Durum and spring wheat acreage were down this season compared to 2025. An estimated 0.93 million acres of durum and 4.55 million acres of spring wheat were sown. The upper quarter of the state had the highest risk of FHB. In the NDSU Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Survey, FHB was reported in 33% of the scouted fields. Within those fields, incidence was 15%, on average. Very few reports of DON or yield losses were received. Average to above-average yields in both spring wheat and durum have been reported.

Barley was planted on 440,000 acres this season. Similar to the spring and durum crops, FHB was found at variable levels on spring barley. The NDSU IPM scouts reported FHB in 12% of the scouted fields. The average incidence in those fields was 9%. No concerning reports of DON were received in spring barley.

Severe drought conditions in **South Dakota** meant FHB was generally low across the state in both winter and spring wheat. Much of the state had few to no losses due to FHB. “I had some reports of scattered FHB and bacterial leaf streak in spring wheat in the central and eastern parts of the state due to lower temperatures and some rain in the middle of July,” said Madalyn Shires, South Dakota State University assistant professor and extension plant pathology specialist. Overall, both spring and winter wheat yields were down. Many acres of winter wheat were lost due to a severe outbreak of wheat streak mosaic for the second season in a row.

FHB Incidence Isolated, Production Levels Low in the Great Plains

(Hard Winter Wheat)

Drought affected much of the Great Plains this season, limiting FHB development. Isolated rainfall led to low levels of FHB in parts of Nebraska and Kansas. The crop also faced other challenges, including freeze injury, hailstorms, and viral infections.

Dry conditions prevailed early on in the growing season suppressing fungal disease development in the eastern half of **Nebraska**. Later on in the season, isolated rainfall events led to the development of low levels of FHB in some fields, in the state variety trials, and in research plots in the southeast and south-central parts of the state. “DON levels in research plots were mostly in the range of zero to 2 ppm with a few susceptible breeding lines having higher levels,” said Stephen Wegulo, extension plant pathologist at the University of Nebraska. Leaf rust and stripe rust were both observed during early May. However, as temperatures warmed up, stripe rust development was suppressed, while leaf rust developed rapidly, increasing to severe levels in fields to the southeast and south central where a fungicide application was not applied. Widespread freeze injury occurred in April. Its effects

“DON levels in research plots were mostly in the range of zero to 2 ppm with a few susceptible breeding lines having higher levels.”

Stephen Wegulo

persisted throughout the growing season, especially in the western half of the state, where drought caused severe stunting in many dryland fields.

Kansas winter wheat production reached its lowest levels in years, amounting to roughly 200 million bushels harvested, down 42%, compared to 346 million bushels in 2025. Fall crop establishment went well however, spring brought severe and prolonged drought conditions combined with high temperatures which accelerated crop development. Statewide, the crop was consistently one to two weeks ahead of schedule. The southeast corner, where soft white winter wheat is predominantly grown, was the exception to the drought. "High moisture during and before the flowering period led to higher-than-average Fusarium head blight development," said Kelsey Andersen Onofre, Kansas State University's wheat and forage crops plant pathologist. FHB remained absent in many fields across the central and western parts of the state.

"[In southeast Kansas] High moisture during and before the flowering period led to higher-than-average Fusarium head blight development."

Kelsey Andersen Onofre

Severe and persistent drought along with warm temperatures shaped **Oklahoma**'s wheat crop this season. By mid-winter, the crop was roughly two weeks ahead in terms of crop development. Compared to the previous two seasons, yield was reduced by approximately half. This resulted in many acres being either grazed out, baled, or abandoned rather than harvested for grain. "No Fusarium head blight was reported or observed in Oklahoma during this growing season," said Meriem Aoun, Oklahoma State University small grains pathologist. Viral diseases, including wheat streak mosaic complex and barley yellow dwarf were the most prevalent. Fungal foliar diseases were present but generally did not impact the crop as much as viral diseases.

Hard winter wheat in the **Texas** High Plains was characterized by drought and heat stress as well as viral infections. Sporadic rainfall allowed for good and quick establishment in the fall in some areas, while drought conditions prevented germination until early February for others. Areas that received decent rainfall during the fall months began showing symptoms of drought by mid-February. By March, temperatures reached nearly 100 degrees in some areas, causing most of the dryland wheat acres in the region to fail due to the hot and dry conditions. Irrigation ensured some fields survival, but many growers were disappointed in the response to irrigation compared to normal. Toward the end of March symptoms of wheat streak mosaic and triticum mosaic became apparent with incidence reports much higher than average.

The Rolling Plains began fall with dry conditions, but scattered rainfall in late October benefited some areas while others were left with spotty or staggered emergence. The mild winter was followed by extremely hot and dry conditions in March which reduced yields. Rain in early April was too late for the crop to recover.



Hard winter wheat varieties showing different responses to vernalization. *(Brandon Gerrish, photo)*

Hard winter wheat in south Texas experienced hot, dry conditions. “Warm winter conditions resulted in about 50% chilling hours compared to the five-year average and many winter wheat varieties displayed at least partial vernalization issues as a result,” said Brandon Gerrish, small grains extension specialist at Texas A&M University. Viral disease pressure was high for most of the region, but no issues with FHB were reported.

Drought along with other factors made it a tough season for **Colorado**’s winter wheat. This year’s crop also experienced hailstorms, wind, late freeze events, and viruses. “I didn’t see any FHB at all, and any wheat that survived the drought had viruses. It was a tough year for wheat,” said Robyn Roberts, a field crops plant pathologist at Colorado State University. Current yield estimates are near 19 bushels per acre with only 24.3 million bushels produced in the entire state. If these estimates are final, this could be Colorado’s worst wheat crop since 1965. Despite the low yield, quality remained good, with the average test weight around 59 pounds per bushel and average protein near 12.5%. “Rough, rough year. Many farmers said this was the worst year they’ve ever seen,” added Roberts.

Unusual Conditions Result in Low Yields and FHB Levels in the Pacific Northwest

(Malting Barley and Hard Spring Wheat)

Across most small grain crops in the Pacific Northwest, conditions during heading and flowering were unfavorable for FHB development. Some late-seeded spring wheat had low FHB severity, and high DON levels were not reported.

Environmental conditions in **Idaho** were unusual this season. A very warm and dry winter resulted in drought stress and very early crop development in the winter small grains. Early heading of the winter crops exposed grain to damaging freezes throughout April, resulting



April freezes caused damage to winter wheat heads in Burley, Idaho.
(Juliet Marshall, photo)

in reduced yields of winter wheat, barley, and rye by at least 50%. As a result, impacts associated with FHB and DON were low.

The dry warm winter resulted in early planting of spring small grain crops and earlier development. These conditions were not conducive for FHB risk. Spring small grains that were seeded later, within the typical planting window, were exposed to some FHB infection. “Levels were low and DON levels were also not reported to be an issue in commercial grain,” said Juliet Marshall, University of Idaho plant pathologist.

Weather Conditions and Integrated Management Mitigate FHB in 2026

The 2026 growing season was not favorable for FHB and low levels of the disease were reported across most of the U.S. In many states, cool, dry conditions limited infection by *Fusarium graminearum* in wheat and barley. Where rainfall coincided with flowering, FHB levels generally remained low with very few concerns with DON. In areas where the FHB Risk Tool predicted elevated risk, farmers opted to make a fungicide application or relied on planted varieties with improved FHB resistance to withstand the pressure. In some cases, crop development had progressed beyond the most susceptible growth stage before conditions became favorable for infection. Overall, state specialists reported no widespread problems with high DON levels, grain rejections, or dockage.■



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The USWBSI is a national multidisciplinary and multi-institutional research consortium whose goal is to develop effective control measures that minimize the threat of Fusarium head blight (scab), including the production of mycotoxins, for producers, processors and consumers of wheat and barley. The USWBSI's more than $8 million annual allocation comes from federal funds appropriated through the USDA-ARS and is distributed to 115 research projects in 30 states.

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