

# TOO TALL TOM: Famous, fun, and (mostly) accurate

by **Ryan Janke**

For over four decades ‘Too Tall’ Tom Szymanski has brought his fun, boisterous, and sometimes in-your-face style to weather forecasting. Tom has seen and done it all when it comes to meteorology. He’s an Emmy Award winner, a History Channel sensation, a Green Bay Packers fanatic,

there.

“I got fired after six months because my boss told me I was terrible - right to my face, by the way,” Tom said. “He told me I would never make it in this line of work.”

It might have been harsh, but Tom turned the humbling experience into a life-long mission to prove

“You still have to give accurate information or else you're gonna look like a clown.” —Tom Szymanski

and avid golfer. And he can tell you all about sublimation too.

Tom started his career in Nebraska in 1981. He said his first job in media was landed to him by a friend who had to leave his job at a radio station.

“He was doing morning weather,” Tom said. “He asked me, ‘do you want to just take my job?’ I said, ‘sure.’ No experience, nothing. I didn’t have to go in for an interview. I didn’t have to do anything. I just walked in one day and the job was mine.”

Tom said it wasn’t necessarily off to the races from

his old boss wrong.

“I would send him clippings and pictures of all the awards I won in my career, and progress of where I am, and where I’m working at now,” Tom said.

Tom has had plenty to share with his old boss, including the fact that he’s won Emmy Awards for television broadcasting, which ranks among his proudest achievements. Tom was advised by a mentor to use his personality - some sort of ‘schtick’ to get the viewers attention - and he did.

TOO TALL:  
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Tom Szymanski: Even sitting down, he’s still tall.

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TOO TALL:  
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Watching Tom forecast the weather was must-see TV. From snapping his wrist as he pointed to temperatures, to giving temperatures nicknames like ‘Double Nickels’ for 55 degrees or ‘the Snowman’ for 8, to getting right up into the camera and almost into your living room, Tom's personality shined.

“If you're going to do that, you still have to give accurate information or else you're gonna look like a clown,” Tom said. “It worked for several decades. As I've gotten older, I've settled back into more of a calm delivery. I'm kind of going reverse, but I can pull it out when I want to.”

He's also been able to share with that old boss that he gained national attention in 1996 for doing the weather out in the parking lot in -40 degree temperatures.

“I was freezing my hands off. My feet were getting numb. All of a sudden I came up with this idea. I told the camera guy to go inside, get a coffee cup, fill it with hot water, nuke it, bring it out, and I'm gonna throw it in the air,” Tom said. “I took that coffee cup, and I threw it up in the air, and all of a sudden it just looked like a big puff of smoke, a big old fog came out.”

The next day, Tom was on the Today Show throwing more hot water in the air. To make sure that trick didn't get stale, he added a new one.

“It was so cold, I took an apple and threw it against a brick wall and it turned into, like, sawdust,” Tom said. “Then, I took a banana and pounded a spike into a board with it. Oh, they loved that.”

Eventually, the History Chan-

nel got ahold of the video and within a couple of weeks, he was watching other people on national television throwing hot water in the air and turning it to fog.

Tom's career took many turns over the years. He went back and forth between radio and television before landing at KFGO in Fargo in 2015 where he reports from his Weather Cave. And it is somewhat of a cave, lit only by two monitors - one for his computer, the other for a radar - and a lamp he uses to take notes.

Whether it's kids or adults, ‘Too Tall’ loves to talk weather and answer questions, like, how can the wind be blowing one direction, with a storm coming in from another?

“When you have a low pressure area, the wind around low pressure systems in the northern hemisphere rotates counterclockwise, and in toward the center of the low,” Tom answered. “I always tell people, if you're standing outside and you're facing the wind, you point to the right and that's where the low pressure system is. So, even though a storm could be approaching from the west, the wind is coming out of the east. That's because the wind is blowing in toward the low pressure system.”

He's seen plenty over the years and learned a lot about how weather acts depending on the geography where he's forecasting. Overall, forecasting has also improved. He attributes that to several things.

“Satellite imagery and technology has gotten a lot better as far as zooming in and with the fine satellite imagery. Radar has improved a lot. Computer models have improved dramatically,” Tom said.

Tom said one thing that's not talked about much is that a lot of people are more interested in weather nowadays, giving meteorologists more eyes on the sky.

Along with the increased fascination with weather comes some...interesting commentary. Recently, videos hit social media questioning whether snow was real because when a lighter or torch was taken to them, snowballs wouldn't 'melt.' They just disappeared.



Tom Szymanski is an ND legend

“When snow melts, you go from the solid phase to the liquid phase, and eventually to the gas phase where it evaporates,” Tom said. “In this case, the change in temperature was so fast that the snow skipped the liquid phase and went straight to the gas phase and just kind of disappeared in the air. The word to describe that is sublimation.”

Oddly enough, Tom said that's not the craziest weather conspiracy he's heard.

“You ever heard that tornadoes don't go over rivers?” Tom asked. “They do. If you live near a river or

a lake, and there's a tornado warning, you're not safe. A tornado does not know there's water there. Even if there's alligators in it, they will still go over the river.”

When he's not in the Weather Cave, Tom spends much of his time watching the Green Bay Packers or golfing. Many people wonder if it's possible for a man who stood 6'10" at his peak to be a good golfer. Tom chuckled that we need to define ‘good,’ for him to answer that question.

“When I was younger, I was a little bit better,” Tom said. “I play for the fun of the game now. I'm decent, I guess, but a lot of people think because I play a lot that I'm this really great golfer when I'm really not. I like to play. I play a lot.”

Tom said he tries to play 100 rounds a year. His record is over 200. He's a member at Maple River Golf Course in Mapleton, North Dakota, but plays in Moorhead, Minnesota occasionally, and plays in Arizona every year. He's also played in, among other places, Florida, Scotland, Ireland, and - of all places - Iceland.

“We were there in May of 2019,” Tom said. “What was really interesting was how long the days are because that's the Land of the Midnight Sun. We teed off at just after 8 p.m. We were getting off the golf course around midnight, and it was still light out. It's really kind of weird.”

Tom said he'd like to get back to Alaska, Ireland, or Scotland and golf there again, but other than that, his bucket list of courses he'd like to play isn't all that long.

“If the plane ride wasn't so long, I would love to play golf in Australia, but I don't think I can handle [the plane ride],” Tom said. “I think I've kind of played where I want to in the U.S. [except] maybe

Augusta National, but I'll never get on that golf course. It costs too much and you have to know the right people, and I don't.”

Golf isn't the only sport Tom has been known for. He played basketball at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, Michigan, and East Carolina University in Greenville, North Carolina. During his college career, Tom played against several men who went on to play professionally, including one household name.

“I played against Magic Johnson once in a game,” Tom said coolly, but with a sparkle in his eyes. “I don't think he remembers me. I'm a couple years older than him. We used to watch him in the dorm room on what they called Closed Circuit TV. They broadcast all his [high school] games statewide. All of a sudden, here he is. I did have a few baskets - three of them to be exact, but he had a few more than I did. He got the better of me by... not even close. It was kind of awe-inspiring.”

Tom said he's had a great career. He's been to a lot of places and seen a lot of things.

“I've seen all kinds of crazy weather in my day, predicted all kinds of crazy weather,” Tom said. “My first TV job in Mankato, Minnesota, 1989, there were six tornadoes on the ground within 10 miles of the TV station, and it was my second year of broadcasting. I've been in two hurricanes.”

Tom said he's been there, done that and realizes his career won't last forever.

“Eventually, within the next couple of years, I'm sure I will either semi-retire or fully retire, but I'll look back on it and I'll say, 'overall, I did the right thing,'” Tom said.

I think we'd all agree, Tom.



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BISMARCK, N.D. – The state-owned Bank of North Dakota (BND) reported total record assets of \$10.2 billion at year-end 2022. The growth enabled the Bank to increase its loan portfolio to a record \$5.4 billion in loans to the state’s farmers and ranchers, business owners and students in North Dakota. In addition, the Bank reported a record profit of \$191.2 million in 2022, up \$47 million from 2021.

The total loan portfolio grew by \$765 million in 2022 consisting of:

- Nearly \$3.2 billion in business loans, an increase of \$675 million.

- Agriculture loans of \$710 million, an increase of \$8 million.

- Student loans of \$83 million, a decrease of \$41 million since last year.

The return on investment to North Dakota was a healthy 19%, according to information presented to the Industrial Commission (Commission) in BND’s annual report today. In addition to these portfolios, BND administers nearly \$1 billion in legislative-directed loan programs, including school construction, state infrastructure, water projects and disaster recovery.

“BND’s annual report is a reflection of how well things are going in North Dakota,” said members of the Commission in a joint statement. The Commission, consisting of Gov. Doug Burgum as chairman, Attorney General Drew Wrigley, and Agriculture Commissioner Doug Goehring, oversees BND. “Bank of North Dakota partners with local lenders to provide economic advantages to our residents and plays a key role in helping the private sector grow the state’s economy.”

Student loan borrowers also benefitted from the Bank’s strong position. Those who have refinanced their loans with a variable interest rate received only a 1% increase in their interest rate when market rates increased by four times that amount during the last year.

“While profit numbers may grab headlines, that is not what motivates us. Rather it is being able to support the needs of local communities, business owners, farmers and ranchers through our loan programs,” stated Todd Steinwand, BND president. “I am extremely proud of our team, who in partnership with local lenders, delivers these valuable programs.”

Complete copies of the 2022 Annual Report are available at [www.bnd.nd.gov](http://www.bnd.nd.gov).



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# 2023 grazing season looking up

As the 2023 grazing season approaches, North Dakota State University Extension specialists provide an outlook for this year’s forage production.

“Despite residual impacts of the 2021 drought, we had good forage production in 2022 due to high rainfall in the fall of 2021 and timely spring rainfall,” says Miranda Meehan, NDSU Extension livestock environmental stewardship specialist. “However, as we moved into summer and fall, precipitation was below normal across the state, causing drought conditions to return.”

As of March 1, 70% of the state is experiencing some level of drought.

The two factors that will influence forage production in 2023 are April through June precipitation and grazing management in 2022.

Fall plant tiller development has a direct impact on plant growth during the subsequent year for all cool-season grasses, which are dominant in our grassland. Cool-season grass tillers, such as western wheatgrass, Kentucky bluegrass, smooth brome grass, green needlegrass and crested wheatgrass, that developed from late August through early October are the first plants to green-up in the spring. If these tillers are eaten or die due to drought, then spring growth must occur from new tillers developed in April and May.

“Unfortunately, the fall drought conditions likely impacted tiller development,” says Kevin Sedivec, NDSU Extension rangeland management specialist. “Heavy grazing during the

fall that resulted in the removal of the growing point (between the bottom two leaves) from tillers will cause additional stress and tiller mortality. In the event of high fall tiller mortality, grasses will need to develop a new tiller in the spring, delaying growth two to four weeks.”

Tillers that develop in the spring come from buds that broke dormancy in the spring, usually when soil temperatures stay about 40 degrees Fahrenheit for three

Heavy grazing use in the fall not only delays growth but causes reductions in overall plant growth and forage production. Data collected by NDSU Extension found that severe grazing use, greater than 80% removal of available forage, reduces growth of cool-season grasses and forage production. Forage production was reduced by as much as 57% on sites evaluated as having severe grazing use the previous fall.

2022 forage production



Fall plant tiller development has a direct impact on plant growth during the subsequent year for all cool-season grasses.

or more days, whereas the tillers established in the fall will grow as soon as temperatures reach 32 degrees for five consecutive days.

A photo of a new western wheatgrass tiller taken in October, the growing point is located between the first two leaves and is elevated as the plant grows. Photo taken by Kevin Sedivec.

in pounds per acre as influenced by grazing use slight-moderate (<40%), full (40%-60%), close (60%-80%) and severe (>80%) in the fall of 2022.

In addition to management, April through June precipitation drives forage production in North Dakota. Due to the dominance of cool-season grasses, rains

during this period are responsible for 80% to 90% of forage production in the state.

To help plan for the 2023 grazing season, NDSU Extension developed the following scenarios based on precipitation and management:

•If spring precipitation is normal, expect a delay in plant development and lower production due to a loss in tiller development following the dry fall. Further reductions will occur if pastures

precipitation, ranchers should prepare for a one- to two-week delay in growth this spring due to poor tiller development this fall,” says Meehan. “This delay will be greater on pastures that were grazed heavily this fall due to increased tiller mortality. Expect pastures that received heavy use in the fall to have reduced forage production this year.”

To prevent further reductions in plant health and production, Meehan and Sedivec recommend delaying pasture turn-out until the dominant forage species in a pasture reach grazing readiness. Grazing readiness for most domesticated pasture is at the 3-leaf stage, whereas grazing readiness for most native range grasses is the 3 1/2-leaf stage.

“When production is low due to delayed tiller development, it becomes easy to run out of forage more quickly if you go to full stock too early, leading to over-use,” says Sedivec. “This over-use during early green-up leads to reduced plant vigor and reduced leaf area, impacting photosynthesis and reducing food (carbohydrate) stored in roots. In the end, you may sacrifice 45% to 60% of forage production for the year by grazing too early.”

Timely precipitation is critical to forage growth and production, equally critical is the use of management practices that maintain healthy, vigorous plant communities that can withstand disturbances. Regardless of what spring brings we encourage you to have a drought plan in place with well defined trigger dates to reduce risk on your ranch.

were grazed heavily in the fall.

•If spring precipitation is 130% or more above normal, expect normal to above normal forage production.

•If spring precipitation is below normal, expect reduced forage production and a decline in forage quality earlier in the season.

“Regardless of spring



# War-torn Ukraine agricultural output diminished

By Joe Janzen, Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics, University of Illinois and Carl Zulauf, Department of Agricultural, Environmental and Development Economics, Ohio State University

The impacts of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on Ukrainian corn and wheat supply are reassessed at the war's one-year anniversary. Ukraine's corn and wheat production and exports are of broad interest because they comprise a significant share of the global market for these crops. Overall, corn and wheat exports from Ukraine in the 2021/22 marketing year were down 20% from projections made before the conflict. For 2022/23, large declines in exports of approximately one-half to two-thirds were initially anticipated but those initial worst fears about lost or stranded Ukrainian agricultural supplies have not been realized. After spiking in the months following the start of the war, commodity prices have moderated to pre-war levels which remain high in historic terms. Going forward, corn and wheat markets will balance supply response to high prices occurring in other major production regions with the prospects for continued war-induced supply losses in Ukraine.

February 24, 2023 marked the one-year anniversary of the Russian in-



Anatolii Kulibaba, 70, near the Russian border, working again after Russians occupied it. Photo by Olena Lysenko for NPR

vasion of Ukraine. On that date, Russian forces dramatically escalated the existing Russia-Ukraine conflict, initiating a "special military operation" intent on seizing Ukrainian territory including the capital of Kyiv. In the year since, Ukraine has resisted the invasion with assistance from European and American allies.

The war has caused sig-

nificant damage to Ukrainian agriculture, particularly in eastern regions most impacted by fighting. Recent estimates from the Kyiv School of Economics suggest over \$6.6 billion in agricultural infrastructure has been destroyed. The war has also substantially limited the ability of Ukrainian farmers to grow and ship their crops. The same source estimates

the war has imposed an additional \$36.2 billion in indirect costs to agriculture, mainly in the form of foregone production and higher logistics costs for continuing agricultural exports.

Lost Ukrainian agricultural production due to the war is of global significance because Ukraine is a major exporter of grains and oilseeds – especially corn

and wheat as discussed in this article but also barley, sunflower and sun oil, and other commodities. (See: farmdoc daily, February 28, 2022) Figures 1 and 2 show how Ukraine's share of world corn and wheat exports grew between 2000 and 2020 as international trade expanded. In this time, expanding Ukrainian exports captured an increasing share

of world trade. In the three marketing years prior to the war (2018/19, 2019/20, and 2020/21), Ukraine's exports made up 15% of world corn trade and 10% of world wheat trade. In this period, Ukraine was the world's fourth largest corn exporting country and the fifth largest wheat exporting country.

UKRAINE AG: continued on page 7

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**UKRAINE AG:**  
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Ukraine is widely acknowledged as a low-cost grain producer. International cost of production comparisons (See, for example: farmdoc daily, March 4, 2022; July 21, 2021) suggest Ukrainian farms have substantially lower per-acre costs and higher returns than producers in other major grain exporting countries. This allows Ukraine to compete in the most price-sensitive export markets, particularly those in the Middle East and North Africa. Losing Ukrainian grain production to the war is costly because this production can only be replaced with higher cost commodities from other production regions.

**Changes in Expectations for Ukraine Corn and Wheat Production**

To understand how expectations about Ukrainian crop production and exports have changed since the start of the war, consider projections made by the USDA in the world corn and wheat balance sheets published each month as part of the World Agricultural Supply and Demand Estimates (WASDE) report. WASDE estimates may be an incomplete picture of conditions on the ground in Ukraine at any given moment. However, they are constructed consistently across time so that changes in these estimates represent a good approximation of changes in market-level expectations.

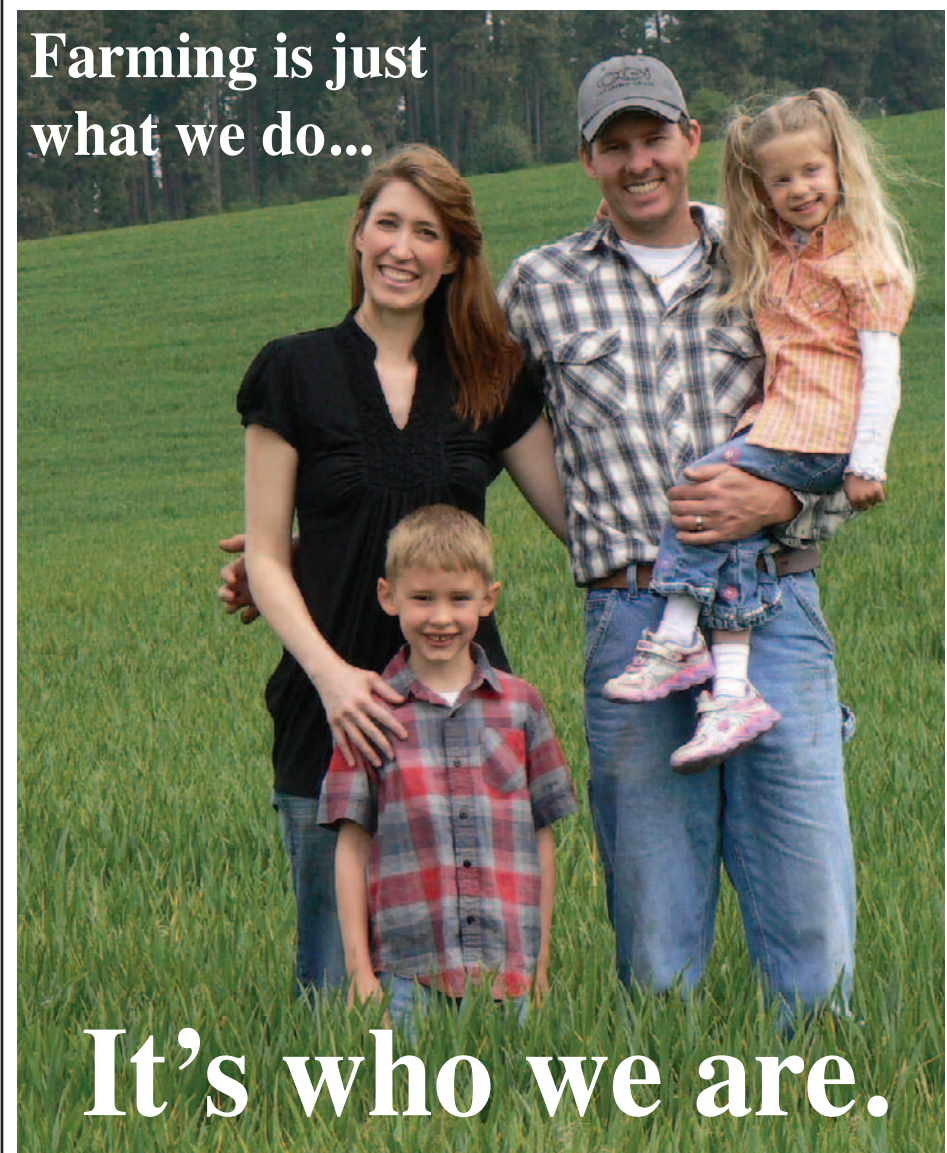
The USDA publishes initial projections for the global grain balance sheet in May prior to the start of the marketing year. (i.e. Forecasts for the 2022/23 marketing year that begins September 1, 2022 were published in May 2022.) Production estimates are typically finalized by the following May and other balance sheet quantities are finalized by the December following the marketing year. (i.e. May 2023 and December 2023 for the 2022/23 marketing year.) In between, forecasts vary as available data and expectations change.

Export projections for 2022/23 have increased substantially from initial levels first reported in May 2022. USDA initially projected corn exports for 2022/23 of 9 million metric tons for corn and 10 million metric tons for wheat. This would have been a decline of roughly two-thirds and one-half of past long-run levels, respectively. While these initial predictions appear particularly dire with hindsight, it should be noted that export movement of Ukrainian grain had ground to a near halt at the time these forecasts were made. In July 2022, Russia and Ukraine agreed to reopen some Ukrainian Black Sea ports for maritime grain shipments. This Black Sea Grain Initiative has facilitated substantial export activity and improved expectations about the quantity of Ukrainian grain exports in 2022/23, especially for corn.

Since the summer of 2022, Ukraine export projections for 2022/23 have increased dramatically. Prospects for improved export logistics along with increased production estimates discussed above have led to higher 2022/23 export projections with corn increasing 13.5 million metric tons to 22.5 million metric tons and wheat increasing 3.5 million metric tons to 13 million metric tons. High Ukrainian corn exports put a dent in overall global feed grain market tightness; an additional 13.5 million metric tons of corn exports represents roughly 7% of global corn trade.

Data provided by the USDA Economic Research Service suggest grain movement from Ukraine under the Black Sea Grain Initiative appears to have been focused to some degree on corn rather than wheat (See: Figure 8 in Wheat Outlook: January 2023). Initial movement under the initiative sought to clear the backlog of corn stocks during the August to October period where wheat exports would typically dominate.

Expectations regarding the size of Ukraine grain inventories were also affected by the war, increasing substantially following the Russian invasion in February 2022. Ukraine's agricultural economy is highly export oriented, with very low stocks levels typical at the time just prior to harvest. Old-crop corn ending stocks forecasts jumped from about 1.5 million to...



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A Ukrainian soldier watches a tractor plow a field in March near Kyiv, Ukraine.

... 7 million metric tons following the start of the war. New-crop corn ending stocks estimates were similarly high, reaching a peak of 12 million metric tons. Better than anticipated grain export movement has since dropped 2022/23 corn ending stocks estimates to just 3.4 million metric tons, much closer to long-run levels.

For wheat, the rise in projected old-crop ending stocks following the start of the war was like corn, but slightly smaller in absolute magnitude. Wheat ending stocks for 2021/22 rose from about 2 million to 6 million metric tons. New-crop ending-stocks estimates were similar to final old-crop levels but have since declined. However, the drop in forecasted wheat ending stocks is much less dramatic than the change for corn. When and how Ukraine reduces stocks to long-run levels remains an outstanding question.

Changes in Ukrainian agricultural production in the past year illustrate the se-

vere impacts of war on market volatility. In the immediate aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, agricultural commodity prices soared. (See: farmdoc daily, March 7, 2022) The May 2022 corn futures price for old-crop delivery increased by \$1.32 per bushel or 19% between February 24 and April 18. Old-crop May 2022 wheat futures price increased by \$2.36 per bushel or 27% over the same period, briefly touching a high of over 13.60 per bushel in early March. Since the Spring of 2022, prices have moderated with current old-crop futures prices near those levels observed prior to the start of the war. The combination of improved prospects for Ukrainian exports and production responses elsewhere have cooled the market, though current price levels remain high in historic terms. In general, the Black Sea Grain Initiative appears to have had a significant impact on the market's perceptions of the global supply and demand balance.

Moderating prices and increased Ukrainian exports do not imply the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war is over. First, the situation on the ground remains tenuous. The ability for Ukrainian exports to flow from Ukrainian Black Sea ports is limited by the continued maintenance of an agreement between the warring states. The Black Sea Grain Initiative has been continued in 120-day intervals but there is no guarantee Russia will agree to allow further exports the next time the agreement is due for renewal in March 2023.

Going forward, corn and wheat markets will balance the supply response to high prices occurring in other major production regions with continued war-induced supply losses in Ukraine. Prospects for 2023 Ukrainian production may be poorer than in 2022 and much more uncertain. Ukraine's 2022 wheat crop was already planted prior to the start of the war. Logistics required to get necessary agricultural inputs like seed and fertilizer to Ukrainian farms may be more difficult now than in 2022 when some inputs were already on farms prior to the invasion. Finally, the market must also consider how elevated Ukrainian grain stocks will be incorporated into the world market if peace does break out. All these factors point to continued market volatility in the year ahead.

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No job too big, David Parker working on a semi truck engine.

# Under pressure, A1 keeps farmers in the fields

**by Dylan Bender**

When the phone rings, it's almost always an emergency. Donald Rohrbach of A-1 Ag Repair in Wishek is one of those guys that keeps farmers farming amidst a frenetic push to get planting done or the harvest in the bin.

Wear and tear is a natural part of the life cycle of all things mechanical. Equipment related to agriculture, whether it be tractors, semis, attachments or small engines, repairs are a part of owning the machine. The lifespan of these machines is based on many different variables; amount of use on the machine, the weather conditions the machine is operated in, frequency of maintenance, and

many other factors.

Most farm equipment lifespans are measured in hours of operation. The average lifespan is hard to place with dealers like John Deere stating 4,000 hours is around average, with many other organizations out there saying that with proper maintenance newer machines have the potential to last up to 12,000 hours.

As the technology around agriculture continues to advance, so do the complications that come along with the repairs. That's where the guys who keep things moving come into the picture, wizards like Donald Rohrbach. Diesel mechanics are his specialty.

He learned the trade between a de-

gree and training at the North Dakota State College of Science, and years of real-world, hands-on, experience before and after the fact.

He deals with a lot of the surprise issues. There are mechanical mysteries to be solved. It demands creative-thinking at times. Imagine dealing with a diesel Rubik's Cube with the clock running and a nervous farmer breathing down your neck, because every minute on the sidelines is a dollar lost.

Sometimes you get jobs that no one else wants. For instance, John Deere's Infinitely Variable Transmission (IVT), a notoriously difficult rebuild, is just one recent notch in Donald's belt. The repair

is so challenging, it's tough to find a mechanic to take it on, and the cost difference between repair and replacement, an oft-recommended solution, can be tens of thousands of dollars.

Rohrbach crushed it. It's a source of some pride. "It's out in the field today," he said.

Every year presents unique challenges. The description of this one might have come with some expletives from impatient farmers. "People usually start bringing early but this year with the snow was bad for getting things in because people just couldn't get equipment out," Rohrbach said.

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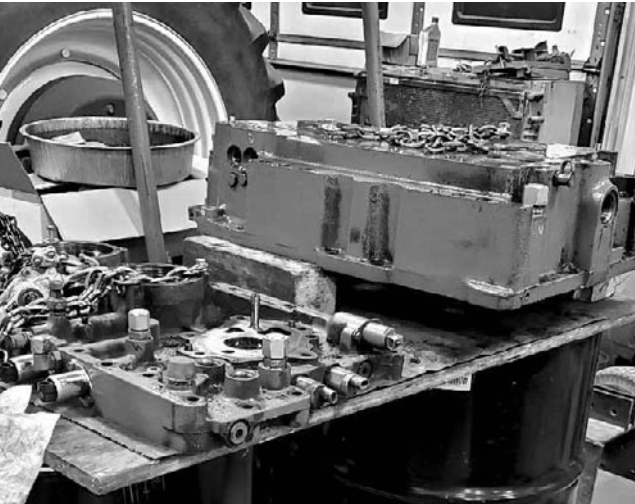
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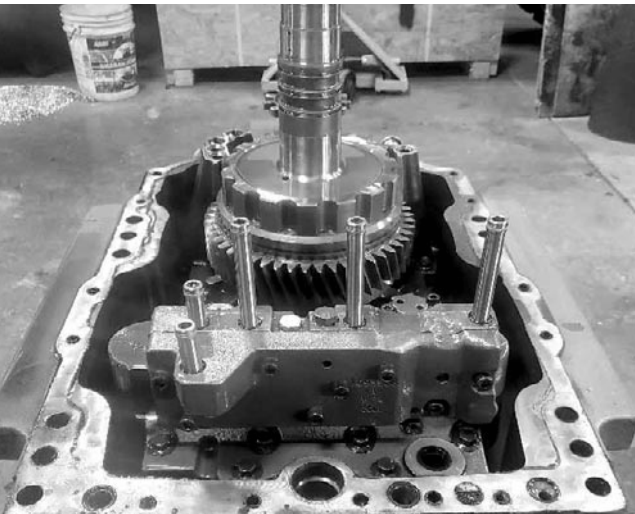
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John Deere's Infinitely Variable Transmission (IVT).

He's keeping especially busy with service calls amidst the mad rush to get into the fields. "Normally the calls and shop work are about 50/50 but right now I do a lot of farm calls," he said. He keeps going so farmers keep going. Donald's right hand man is David Parker. His wife, LaDonna, handles the books. A1 Ag Repair can be reached at 701-202-5938 or found at 3909 85th St. SE Wishek, ND.



Transmission under construction.



Donald Rohrbach on the job.

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