

Buckwheat and Buckwheat Seed

fagopyrum esculentum (Polygonaceae)

Fast Facts:

Acres in Washington: 5245; seed: 250
Percent: U.S. Acreage: 85%; seed: 25%
Percent Acre Value: \$250 average; seed: \$325
Number of Growers: 24 ; seed: 5
Value of Production in Washington: \$2.5 Million; seed: \$81,000
Washington produced 308,729 bushels in 2007
* Statistics Provided by the Washington Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS).

Description of crop:

Buckwheat is a short-season crop that is double-cropped following wheat, potatoes, sweet corn or peas. It is usually planted after July 1 and has a 75-day growing season. Cultural practices are similar to wheat, but buckwheat requires less fertilizer. The market for buckwheat is limited in the United States, where some is ground into flour and added to baking mixes. Virtually all buckwheat raised in Washington is exported to Japan, where it is used to make fresh soba noodles. A large portion of Washington's buckwheat seed is brought in from Canada. In the past 10 years, Washington growers started growing buckwheat, a new crop to the state. The only difference between buckwheat and buckwheat seed production in Washington is that buckwheat grown for seed must be established in a field free of weeds.

The average yield is 1700 pounds with a high yield being 2700 pounds per acre. The moisture of the crop at harvest is critical. Buckwheat must be harvested within a range of 14.5 to 16.5% moisture. Buckwheat that is less than 14.5% is too dry to ship to Japan because it will not make the correct grade for flour. Buckwheat that is over 16.5% moisture can spoil in transit and has an off color flour.

Three companies buy Washington's entire buckwheat crop. Buckwheat is the only small grain grown in Washington that is not a grass crop.

Key pests:

Buckwheat is a largely pest free crop. Sclerotinia or white mold can be a problem, particularly if the crop has received too much nitrogen. Sclerotinia is more of a problem following peas and less of a problem following corn and wheat.

Buckwheat has been grown in the same field for eight consecutive years without development of disease problems. Insect pest do not damage buckwheat. However in 2006, growers in the Mattawa area noticed two-spotted spider mites exiting late planted sweet corn moved to buckwheat and caused sufficient damage to negatively impact yields. Weeds are the only pests that can interfere significantly with buckwheat production, but even weeds have little impact. Nightshade species, red root pigweed and shepherdspurse can be problem broadleaf weeds. Barnyard grass can be a

problem if the field is over-irrigated, and volunteer wheat or peas may develop depending on the rotation. Weeds can be a problem also in fields following potatoes. However, because buckwheat grows rapidly, weeds are usually unsuccessful competitors. If late-planted (planted after August 1) buckwheat matures during the fall migration of waterfowl, birds feeding in the field can be a problem.

Key pesticides:

In 1994 one product was registered in Washington State on buckwheat. By 2006 there were 133 products available for commercial production of the crop, of which 88 contained glyphosate (e.g. Roundup) as the sole ingredient. Most growers do not use pesticides in the production of buckwheat. One Washington buyer of buckwheat requires growers to use no pesticides during the buckwheat growing season.

Critical pest control issues:

Buckwheat is commonly grown following early season potatoes. Use of Matrix (rimsulfuron) on potatoes precludes production of buckwheat in the same season due to soil residual phytotoxicity. Growers should not use buckwheat after using Atrazine or Pursuit on the season's first crop.

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Location

of production: Grant, Adams, Franklin, Benton and Walla Walla counties



Buckwheat Field

Buckwheat Production in Washington State



Area of Buckwheat Production