



## Director Clark Joins Gov. Gianforte in Promoting Value-Added Ag in Great Falls

Director Clark and representatives from the Montana Department of Agriculture continued their focus on highlighting the diversity in Montana's agricultural ecosystem yesterday where they joined Governor Gianforte in Great Falls, Montana to visit Montana Milling, Inc.

Montana Milling, Inc. has been in operation since 1972. With locations in Great Falls and Conrad, Montana Milling prides itself on its commitment to using high-quality Montana grains. With a rich history in the milling industry, they have been able to establish themselves as a trusted provider of premium grains for various applications. By specializing in custom milling that is processed at their state-of-the-art facilities, Montana Milling can consistently deliver exceptional grain products that cater to the diverse needs of their customers.





*“A large part of success in our agricultural industry is due to the ability to consistently deliver high-quality products. Montana has a competitive market advantage by being able to deliver top-tier ag products and Montana Milling takes it to the next level with their capacity to cater to a diverse set of customer needs,”* Director Clark said.



Montana Milling understands the importance of meeting customer preferences and requirements, which is why they are committed to delivering tailored solutions. Whether it's a small-scale bakery or a large-scale food production facility, their offerings are designed to meet the unique demands of each customer. With their dedication to quality, reliability, and customer satisfaction, Montana Milling stands as a trusted partner for businesses and individuals seeking top-notch grain products.



Learn more at: [agr.mt.gov/Home/News](https://agr.mt.gov/Home/News)





## Director Clark Delivers Keynote Address at Billings Chamber Ag Banquet

On Friday, January 26th, 2024, Director Clark gave the keynote address at the Billings Chamber Annual Ag Banquet to nearly 700 attendees.

Director Clark touched on the current state of Montana agriculture, trade markets, the need to buy local foods, and supporting youth in agriculture.



*"Despite consistent federal overreach, supply chain issues, volatile markets, and inflation, I am certain of one thing; there is HOPE. Projections and prospects for the future of agriculture in Montana are positive because of the superior quality of our products and the people who raise them being second to none. I know firsthand that being an agricultural producer in Montana takes passion and perseverance. We are all operating in a divided world where there is a collision of visions between rural America and urban consumers. Agriculture is in our blood here in Montana. Empowering the future of agriculture is not just a necessity, but a responsibility we all share. By investing in education, innovation, buying local, and support for young farmers, we can ensure a sustainable and prosperous agricultural sector for generations to come. Let us embrace the potential of technology, foster entrepreneurship, and create opportunities for the next generation to thrive in this vital industry. Together, let us sow the seeds of empowerment and cultivate a future where agriculture not only feeds the world but also drives economic growth, preserves our environment, and nourishes our communities,"* said Director Clark







## Young Ag Couples Conference 2024

The 43rd Annual Young Ag Couples Conference kicked off on January 17th here in Helena, Montana.

We were honored to be joined by Governor Gianforte, Coach Mike Van Diest, Henry and Sara Hollenbeck, and others throughout the week.

A big thank you to the Rocking Z Guest Ranch for hosting on opening night!







## Montana Wheat & Barley Update: *The El Nino Conversation*

“Over Christmas, we were waiting around for a turkey on the stubborn route to getting cooked when the topic of this warm winter surfaced. Someone said, “It’s that El Nino thing,” and hence the discussion began about this strange no-snow Montana winter. I said something like, “The last time I remember a really warm winter with no snow was when dad and I rode into the Little Belt Mountains in January – I think maybe 1983.”

Officially, it seems, we are in an “open winter” with high temperatures setting records in some areas of the state and bare roads to drive, for the most part. Old timers defined this as a winter that stays consistently warm and no snow cover. To make it even more odd, we’ve had an occasional rain in, like, the middle of December. What is up with that?

### **The Essentials of an El Nino**

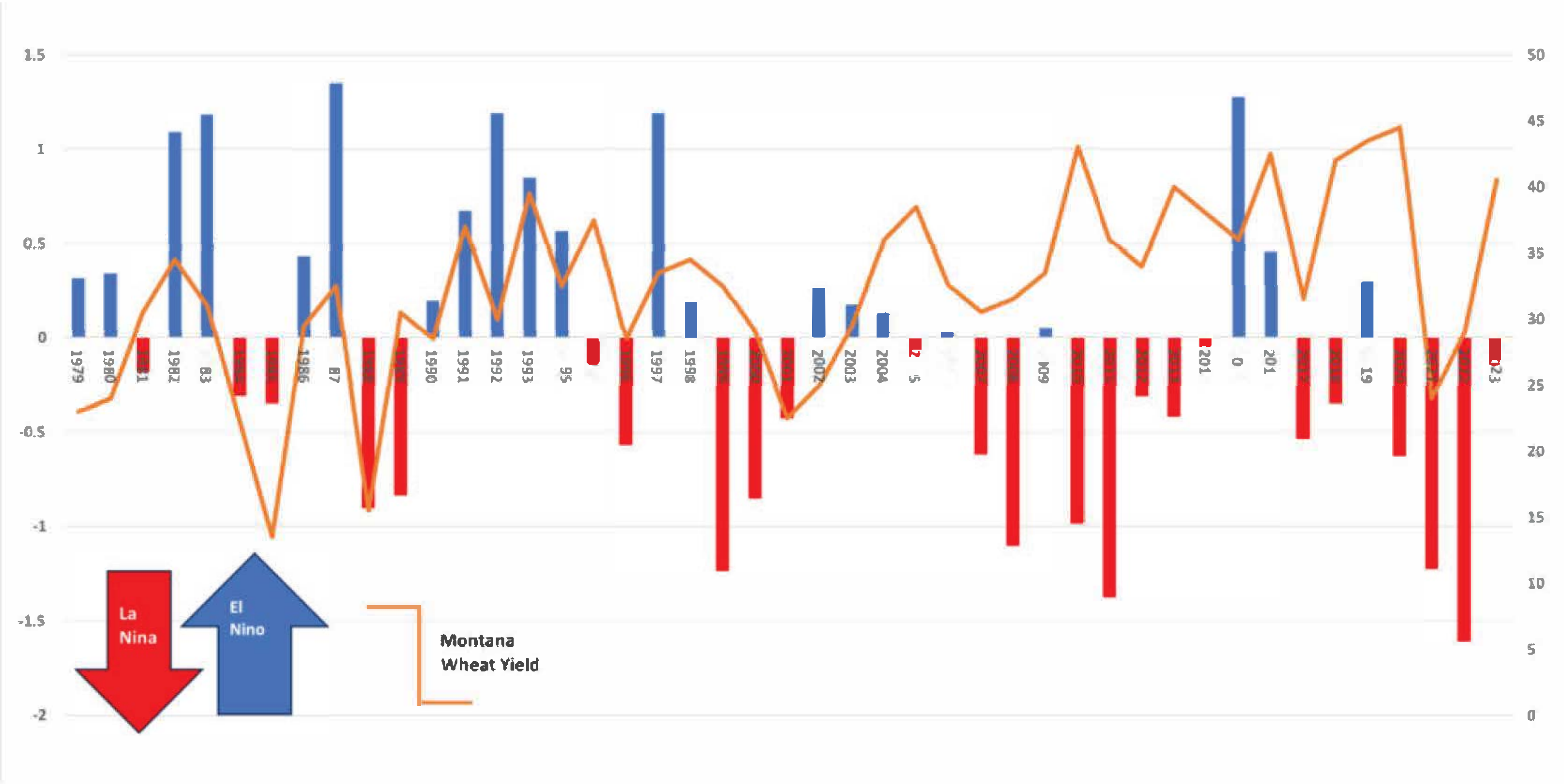
An El Nino event is curious and worth exploring, in case it might affect the 2024 Montana crop. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) characterizes El Nino as “unusually warm ocean temperatures in the Equatorial Pacific.” They occur every two to seven years and are launched by a shift in the trade winds. (“Two to seven” sounds a bit random, until you consider the reliability of any given forecast, right?) Scientists measure three months of Pacific Ocean temperature data before they can determine, and thus declare, an El Nino event. Not to be confused by its colder cousin (La Nina), the trend causes increased rainfall across the southern tier of the U.S., drought along the West Pacific such as Australia, and drier and warmer conditions for the Pacific Northwest including Montana.



## Current Conditions

Last June, NOAA declared the arrival of El Nino and expected it to be moderate to strong. It looks like they were spot on. Those of you diehard Farmer’s Almanac followers are probably irritated with their predicted snowy bliss of skiing and snow forts for this year. Apparently, they didn’t get the NOAA memo! This week, Showdown Ski Area at Neihart began offering free lift tickets to skiers with season passes from certain other Montana slopes. Mountain snowpack recordings are anywhere from 33 to 50 percent of normal at this time in Montana, which is not good news for irrigators.

As I write this, we are entering into a severe cold front planning to impress us with well below zero temperatures into the weekend. It doesn’t sound like it will last long, nor is it bringing much snowfall with it. AccuWeather’s long-range forecast shows that El Nino will continue its course with moisture arriving late March followed by a wet spring. If they are correct, and that’s a big IF, we could see moisture through the spring planting season.



## What To Expect?

U.S. El Nino history appears to have a positive influence on a cropping season as it begins and ends, covering two cropping years. That would make sense according to our 2023 season, where moisture levels were mighty and harvests just as strong for most in production agriculture. Sam Anderson, our market development director, laid Montana historic yield data over the same timeline of El Nino. In most cases with El Nino, it appears that the year following its close will be dry. If that comes true, then the summer of 2025 could be drier and warmer.”

-- Lori Wicket, Marketing & Communications Director, MWBC





## Northwest Transition to Organic Partnership Program

The Northwest Transition to Organic Partnership Program (NWTOPP) provides support and resources to producers transitioning to organic and those who are currently certified organic. All program are free of charge.

Interested in organic certification? The Northwest Transition to Organic Partnership Program (NW TOPP) provides support and resources to producers transitioning to organic and those who are currently certified organic. All programs offered free of charge.

- Connect with a certified organic mentor through a farmer-to-farmer mentorship program.
- Talk with an organic certification specialist for one-on-one assistance with the certification process and paperwork.
- Attend educational events, including workshops, webinars, field days and more all centered on organic production and certification.
- Get help with navigating organic certification and production resources.

Learn more, find events, resources, and apply for mentorship at [organictransition.org](https://organictransition.org)

Let us know how we can help you! Contact Hanna, Organic Transition Specialist, at [TOPP@tilth.org](mailto:TOPP@tilth.org) or 541-286-7228.





## Montana State Grain Lab Update:

“Business through the Grain Labs has recently slowed to more typical levels following a busy year. The summer harvest kept the labs quite active all the way through December. In 2023, lab sampling staff logged 120,000 road miles collecting 2,900 official samples from over 30 locations across the state. The total number of samples inspected and graded was 16,500, up 30% over the previous year. With extra effort, lab staff did a great job minimizing wait times and keeping up with the higher demand.

The grading of wheat in 2023 led the field by sample volume at 3,850 and was followed in order by peas (2,950), lentils (2,890), barley (2,780), canola/mustard (1,340), chickpea (1,180), flax (170), Khorasan (160) and ten other commodities. The overall quality of the inspected samples seemed to be improved over the previous couple of years although the variation around the state is always significant.

The lab in Great Falls provided another trade team visit at the end of October for visitors from Japan with a focus on wheat and durum wheat. Lab staff also attended and managed booths at two conventions: Montana Grain Growers/Northern Pulse in November and Montana Ag Business/MT Grain Elevator associations in January. In March, the lab will also attend and manage a booth at the annual KATQ Farm Expo in Plentywood.

The Great Falls lab has started supplying anonymous samples and test results from our current mycotoxin testing equipment to a company in California that is developing imaging technology as a rapid test alternative. The group works actively with FGIS in testing mycotoxins in wheat and corn using cutting-edge imaging-based technology. Their technology is “revolutionizing mycotoxin testing with just 30 seconds results”. They also published case studies with organizations such as USDA for their corn mycotoxin test.

Two new permanent staff members have been added recently. Ron Dunlap was hired on in Great Falls as a permanent part-time sampler after working there for 6 months in a seasonal sampling position. Brian DeJardine has joined the Plentywood lab as an Ag Technician and will be working toward an inspector position. Brian has loaded grain cars, driven trucks, tractors, sprayers, managed spray crews, operated Farmers Elevator in ND, and worked as an Agronomy Sales Rep.”

**-- Dan Reimer, Director, Montana State Grain Lab**





## MDA On the Road & Where to Catch Us

- PNW Wheat Quality Council Meeting - Boise, ID | Jan. 31 - Feb. 2
- NASDA Winter Policy Conference - Washington D.C. | Feb. 4 - Feb. 7
- Wheat Foods Council - San Antonio, TX | Feb. 6 - Feb. 8
- Montana Water Resources Conference - Fairmont Hot Springs, MT | Feb. 8
- Alfalfa Seed Advisory Council Meeting - Billings, MT | Feb. 8th
- Ag Development Council Meeting - Helena, MT | Feb. 13 - Feb. 14
- U.S. Grains Council Meeting - Guatemala City, Guatemala | Feb. 14 - Feb. 16
- NASDA Emerging Markets Trade Mission - Cuba | Feb. 18 - Feb., 23
- Wheat Quality Council Conference - Olathe, KS | Feb. 20 - Feb. 21





## Montana Agritourism Conference Announced for 2024 at Montana State University - Bozeman

Hosted by the Montana Agritourism Fellows and Montana State University, the Montana Agritourism Conference comes to MSU in May of 2024.

Featuring educational sessions, networking opportunities, and keynote speakers regarding the value and importance of the agritourism industry in Montana.



## MONTANA AGRITOURISM CONFERENCE

**"Building Agritourism from the Ground Up:  
Inviting You to the Table"**

**FRIDAY**

**MAY 3,  
2024**

**8AM - 4PM**

**at Montana State University in Bozeman**

**FEATURING EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS,  
NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES, AND KEYNOTE  
SPEAKERS ON THE VALUE AND IMPORTANCE OF  
THE AGRITOURISM INDUSTRY IN MONTANA**

**Hosted by the Montana Agritourism Fellows and MSU.  
Registration opens in February 2024.**



**Montana  
Agritourism**



More information at: <https://www.montanaagritourism.com/>





# What We Have Been (responsibly) Drinking Lately:

We like to get our “Drink of the Month” into different hands around the department.

After a month of strange weather and “dryness” for those of us that participated in “Dry January”, we have a special local treat to highlight for you this month.

“The **Honey Weizen**” by **Jeremiah Johnson Brewing Co.** out of Great Falls, MT

“FOR OUR AWARD-WINNING HONEY WEIZEN, WE USE GENEROUS AMOUNTS OF LOCALLY HARVESTED HONEY FROM SMOOT HONEY COMPANY (Power, Montana) TO CAPTURE THE FLAVORS OF SWEET CLOVER AND MONTANA WILDFLOWERS. WE THEN BREW WITH WHEAT AND MONTANA PALE 2-ROW MALT, SAPPHIRE HOPS, ORANGE PEEL, AND FERMENT WITH GERMAN YEAST. FINALLY, WE DRY HOP WITH ROSE HIPS FOR A BEER THAT IS LIGHT AND SWEET WITH A PLEASANT TART FINISH.”





## What We've Been Listening To Recently:



## Some Oldies for Your New Year:

1. Kiss an Angel Good Mornin' - Charley Pride
2. Sleeping Single in a Double Bed - Barbara Mandrell
3. Delta Dawn - Tanya Tucker
4. Y'all Come Back Saloon - The Oak Ridge Boys
5. Luckenbach, Texas - Waylon Jennings, Willie Nelson
6. Louisiana Woman, Mississippi Man - Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty
7. Jolene - Dolly Parton
8. I'm a Ramblin' Man - Waylon Jennings
9. It Must Be Love - Don Williams
10. Crazy - Patsy Cline, The Jordanares



# We'd Love Your Feedback



Agriculture and in specific, Montana Agriculture is all about community. We thought, one does not have to be directly involved with agriculture to be a part of this community. Thus, our external facing monthly newsletter was created. It is meant to inform, inspire, educate, and reach our agricultural community hand out to whomever would like to be a part of the happenings here at the MDA.

Like to see a section that we didn't cover this month? Let us know! We'd love to hear from you.

Until then, Happy February Friends!