

To appreciate the bond between Whitman College and the farmland that is its heritage, one need only consider the lyrics to the “Whitman Hymn” written in 1914 by the school’s third president, Stephen B.L. Penrose:

*Here’s to the blue sky above us!  
Here’s to the wheat fields gold!  
Here’s to the friends that love us!  
And our love shall ne’er grow cold —*

From the day in December 1860 that Whitman College founder Cushing Eells gifted a large portion of his farm at Waiilatpu — the Whitman Mission grounds — to support the new school, Whitman and the land around it have been inseparable.

Whitman students have studied extensively the economics of the college’s farms. In tough financial times, Whitman faculty have taken second jobs on farms. For more than a century, farms have been a vital source of support for the college.

Historically, some of Whitman’s largest gifts from donors are farms. In turn, the college has contributed to the agricultural bounty and historic preservation of the Walla Walla Valley through its ownership and prudent management of those properties.

Wendell Berry once wrote: “ ... The man born to farming ... enters into death yearly, and comes back rejoicing.” So, too, the college born of farm soil renews itself yearly, nurtures academic pursuits, and fosters environmental and social stewardship through its ties to the land.



Sarah Abdurrahman

# Traditional yields

Whitman farms cultivate paths  
to success, ties to the valley

*Stories by Keith Raether*



The summer day was ripe for leisure, wheat prices in 1973 had spiked, but **Dwelley Jones '39** was not distracted. There were 3,000 acres of farmland to look after and an auxiliary irrigation pump to repair.

He assigned the job to “the philosophy major”: son **Dwelley Eugene Jones '74**, soon to enter his senior year at Whitman College. Morning came and went like so many dragonflies. Dwelley Sr., an economics major at Whitman, checked on progress around noon.

“How are you getting along with that pump, son?”

“Haven’t got it running yet, Dad.”

Work went on, the day wore on, the pump refused to burp, much less purr. Sometime in mid-afternoon, Dwelley Sr. revisited his son with a slightly revised question. “How’s that *philosophy* working out with the pump?”

Dwelley Jr. laughs about that day now. The pump eventually cooperated, though not through any help from Kierkegaard. “I don’t think I drew on any great thinkers to get the job done,” Jones recalled.

The irony in Jones’ story, clear as his father’s ribbing, is that farming does require deep thinking — constantly. “To be successful at this business, you have to anticipate, plan and adjust,” said Jones, whose family ties to Whitman and farming span the better part of a century. “The rigors of it demand good ideas, efficient operations and a healthy respect for Mother Nature.”

Whitman, he maintained, trained him well for two jobs: operating his own family farm and advising the managers of Whitman’s farms as a member of the college’s farm committee. “The investigations, the questioning, the synthesis of new and old information — all of it has value to anyone, regardless of the business you’re in, the work you choose,” he said.

For Jones, as for the college, the rewards of farming are tangible and

substantial, especially at a time of booming wheat prices. In 2006, Whitman’s 15 farm properties generated \$650,000 in net income — income that “provides financial support to students and makes Whitman generally more affordable,” according to Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer **Peter Harvey '84**. Last year, with wheat prices at an all-time high, profits soared to \$1.24 million.

“Whitman has built a remarkable reputation over the years as a good operator and owner of farmland,” said **Alex McGregor '71**, who serves on the Whitman Farm Committee and farms his own land in Hooper, Wash., where the Snake and Palouse rivers meet. “The college has a very good reputation in the farm community.”

Agriculture has always been in Whitman’s blood. Cushing Eells, the school’s founder, donated part of his farm to build and sustain it. In lean financial times, faculty worked second jobs on farms. Whitman students participate in summer harvests and other farm work, and on any obliging day of the year, they can be found hiking, cycling, running or meandering down the country roads that border the wheat fields in the outlying area.

The college’s farm properties are held in two ways: as investments of its earning endowments, which support the school’s operating costs, and through trusts that pay income from the farms or proceeds from the sale of the land to living donors or their heirs.

Dwelley Jones Jr. and his brother, **Dave Jones '76**, don’t farm Whitman properties, but Dwelley sits on the Whitman Farm Committee that decides who does. (See story, Page 17.) Learning and farming have been lifelong occupations for three generations of the



**Dwelley Jones Jr. '74**





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— Dwelley Jones Jr. '74

Jones family, a tradition that began with Charles Jones, a Walla Walla banker who acquired most of the family’s farmland, and continued through Dwelley Jones Sr., co-founder and a president of the Washington Association of Wheat Growers, who passed away in 1991.

“My dad was a lifelong student of many things,” said Dwelley Jr. “He loved history. He studied weather voraciously. He was fascinated by sunspot cycles and how they impacted agricultural production.”

Dwelley Sr. pioneered new farming practices, maintained a close association with scientists at Washington State University and experimented with different crops. One that stuck was garbanzo beans, a variety of which bears the name Dwelley.

“He was always on the forefront; there was never any status quo,” said Dwelley Jr. “His life after Whitman sort of echoed the aim of the college. He lived to learn.”

Dwelley, 56, and Dave, two years his junior, inherited that approach — along with the responsibility for the family’s agricultural properties. The brothers operate 3-D Farms under a 50-50 partnership, with help from three full-time farmers and additional labor during harvest.

“The essence of this business is decision-making,” said Dwelley. “Which fields will get winter wheat this year? Do we need to pre-irrigate the ground this time to get the crop started? Do we direct-seed a field (seeding a crop into the

previous crop’s residue with minimal disturbance to the soil)?”

Dwelley and Dave Jones have farmed for 30 years. Both are married (Dwelley to **Julie Thomassen Jones '79**, daughter of Whitman mathematics professor Richard Thomassen; Dave to **Donna Perry Jones '76**, daughter of former Whitman President Lou Perry), and both have children, but there are no future farmers on the horizon in either family.

Production methods change, yields increase with better plant materials, grain markets fluctuate like the weather. All of it is food for thinking.

Two years ago soft white wheat, Whitman’s main crop, yielded \$5.10 a bushel. McGregor thought the price so good that he included it in a PowerPoint presentation extolling the virtues of farming. Then 2007 came in like a Lotto jackpot. At the beginning of 2008, the price of soft white wheat hit \$14 a bushel.

Times are good for Washington’s farmers and Whitman’s farms. But Dwelley Jones and McGregor and Whitman’s 20-odd farm managers know better than to unfold the hammock.

“I keep reminding myself, as my dad would, that the day we run out of ideas is the day we’ll be out of business,” Jones said. “It’s like going to class. It always helped to have something in mind before you got there.” ■

## WHITMAN FARMS at-a-glance

Total Number of Farms: **15**  
 Total Tillable Acres: **16,131**  
 Original Book Value: **\$6,962,897**  
 Assessed Full Value in 2000: **\$13,135,000**  
 2007 Net Income: **\$1,242,000**  
 6-year Average Income: **\$698,000**  
 Average Price per Tillable Acre: **\$850**  
 2007 Value Estimate: **\$13,950,000**

Total number of bushels of wheat produced by Whitman farms in 2007 (college share): **155,400**

Other crops:  
 Barley: **201 tons**  
 Dry peas: **127 tons**  
 Green peas: **125 tons**

**Bushels of wheat per student**  
**103.8\***

How many colleges can say that?

*\*Based on bushels of wheat produced by Whitman farms in 2007 and fall 2007 enrollment.*



# Farm Committee oversees 22,000 acres of farmland

Farm committees at Whitman trace back to the 1930s, when farm mortgages came into the college's investment portfolio. The "modern" Whitman Farm Committee took root in 1950, when Whitman President Chester Maxey appointed a group of four local farmers — Henry Copeland, Lester Robison, Ed Tucker and Clarence Braden — to oversee its farm holdings.

The current all-volunteer group acts as a kind of professional management team for Whitman's extensive farm assets. Members tour all 15 Whitman farm properties twice a year. They decide when to sell crops and who to hire to manage each property. They approve leases (executed by attorney and committee member **Jim Hayner**).

"The people on our committee are farmers who know the business inside and out," said **Pete Reid '49**, assistant to Whitman President George Bridges and overseer of Whitman's farm interests. "They're current on everything from fertilizer rates to weed control. You know, they think a lot like the college does — creatively, innovatively."

The congruence should come as no surprise. Thirteen of the 17 farm committee members are graduates of Whitman. Two of them — **Hayner** and **Dave Wyckoff '67** — are also trustees of the college. Wyckoff, who farms in Prosser, is in his second year as committee chair.

The committee oversees a combined 22,000 acres of farmland stretching over four counties: Walla Walla, Umatilla, Garfield and Columbia. "It's been a very dynamic process," said **Alex McGregor**



**Alex McGregor**

'71, a history major at Whitman (and visiting assistant professor of history 1977-78), who owns McGregor Company, a fertilizer and farm supply firm with 42 outlets in Washington, Idaho and Oregon. "The committee and the college, I think, have been wise in their judgment not to tell people how to farm but rather to choose talented, knowledgeable people and let them make informed decisions."

The core committee works closely with Reid and Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer **Peter Harvey '84**, ex-officio members of the group, on everything from soil conservation to lease agreements. Most of the 15 leases call for the farm manager to receive 60 percent of the crop and the college to take 40 percent. For drier properties, the split is 67 percent for the farmer and 33 percent for Whitman. On the low-yield Braden property, the college receives only 28 percent of the crop, but 65 wind turbines on the property generated nearly \$100,000 in

revenue in 2007 and enough electricity to supply a campus the size of Whitman.

"It's a harmonious arrangement," McGregor said. "If you find dedicated people who care — and Whitman has a strong record of that in all areas of its operation — strong partnerships occur naturally, and you come to see how valuable they are to the success of everything you do."

## Whitman Farm Committee 2007-08

**Dave Wyckoff '67** (Chair)  
**Bob Danforth**  
**Dennis Davin '56**  
**Jack Fredrickson**  
**Jim Hayner**  
**Dwelle Jones '74**  
**Frank Lamb '62**  
**Don Lieuallen '58**  
**Alex McGregor '71**  
**Walter Minnick '64**  
**Anne-Marie Zell Schwerin '85**  
**Mark Vogler '74**  
**Paul Webb '40**  
**Jerry Zahl**

Ex-officio members  
**George Bridges**, president, Whitman College  
**Peter Harvey '84**, treasurer and chief financial officer  
**Pete Reid '49**, assistant to the president

Whitman has been in the farming business since the early 1930s, when farms became a part of the college's portfolio. This undated historic photo was shot by Dr. Elizabeth Welty, a member of the Whitman College Board of Trustees.





## WHITMAN FARMS

The portfolio may read “Whitman College Farms,” but the identifying family names remain to honor those who have gifted their properties to the school — families whose names are a living record of the history of the Walla Walla Valley.

**ADAMS FARM:** Whitman’s best-producing farm. Deeded to the college by Vernita Watts Adams in 1973. Located near Athena, Ore. 2,390 acres, 1,918 tillable. Produces wheat, barley, green peas. Farm manager: Charles Betts.

**ALTO-WOOD FARM:** Alto Farm gifted to Whitman by Grant Bond in 1956. Wood Farm acquired in 1969. Farms merged in 1983. Located 12 miles north of Waitsburg, Wash. Combined property 1,576 acres, 1,493 tillable. Produces wheat and barley. Farm manager: David McKinley.

**BRADEN FARM:** (Pictured here) Largest farm in Whitman portfolio. Gifted to the college by Clarence Braden, first chairman of the Whitman Farm Committee, in 1984. Located 35 miles northwest of Athena. 9,034 acres, 6,100 tillable. Produces wheat and barley. Property also used for wind-generated electricity production. Farm manager: Mark Sherry.

**DAVIDSON FARM:** Oldest farm in Whitman portfolio. Acquired in 1934. Located eight miles south of Waitsburg. 260 acres, 145 tillable. Produces wheat. Farm manager: Steve Shoun.

**DUNLAP FARM:** One of various farm properties gifted to Whitman and other beneficiaries from the Rose Stonecipher Trust in 1970. Located five miles northeast of Huntsville, Wash. 290 acres, 283 tillable. Produces wheat, peas. Farm manager: David McKinley.

**ERICKSON FARM:** Half-interest in farm gifted to Whitman by Frances Erickson in 1970; half-interest acquired in 1986. Located eight miles north of Walla Walla. 884 acres, 850 tillable. Produces wheat and barley. Farm managers: Mark and Fred Sherry.

**JONES FARM:** Gifted to Whitman by Lowden Jones in 1965. Located near Waitsburg. 560 acres, 522 tillable. Produces wheat and peas. Farm manager: David McKinley.

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— Pete Reid ’49

Chris Bishop '79

## Pete Reid '49, "Mr. Farm," oversees committee

Robert R. "Pete" Reid '49 has known many titles in his 62-year affiliation with Whitman College. Few are clearer or more endearing than the one that describes his supervision of Whitman's agricultural interests.

"Mr. Farm," as Reid is often called, has looked after the college's farm properties for more than 50 years. "The job came to me," Reid said, "and I was happy to do it. Still am."

To be precise, jobs in administration at Whitman came to him before he even graduated from the college. In Reid's senior year — 1949 — Chester Maxey, then president of Whitman, hired him to set up a business placement office and assist in admissions. Before he could blink, Reid was alumni director, then assistant bursar, then bursar.

In 1966 he was named treasurer of the college, a position he held until 1991. That was the year Reid was supposed to retire. Instead he was named assistant to the president, a post he continues to hold.

"Mr. Farm" oversees the Whitman Farm Committee and the college's 15 farm properties. He tours farms with the committee and on his own. He thinks about alternative uses for untillable land. And he smiles a lot on the job, especially now.

"2007 was a very good year for wheat," Reid proclaims. Which is also to say it was a very good year for Whitman and the farming community to which it is tied.



Pete Reid

**MOUNT FARM:** Gifted to Whitman by Joe Mount in 1987. Located near Prescott, Wash. 1,607 acres, 1,485 tillable. Produces wheat and barley. Farm managers: John and Dan Grant.

**RULO FARM:** Gifted to Whitman, like Alto Farm, by Grant Bond in 1956. Located 12 miles northwest of Walla Walla. 1,224 acres, 1,166 tillable. Wheat/barley crop rotation program. Farm manager: Jerry Stiller.

**SHEPHERD 1 FARM:** Newest farm (with Shepherd 2 Farm) in Whitman portfolio. Gifted to Whitman by Helen Shepherd in 1995. Located eight miles southeast of Pomeroy, Wash. 540 acres, 528 tillable. Produces wheat and barley. Farm manager: Mark Ledgerwood.

**SHEPHERD 2 FARM:** Gifted to Whitman by Helen Shepherd in 1995. Located eight miles southeast of Pomeroy. 422 acres, 272 tillable. Produces wheat and barley. Farm managers: Jerry and Mike Ledgerwood.

**STONECIPHER FARM:** One of various farm properties gifted to Whitman and other beneficiaries from the Rose Stonecipher Trust in 1970. Located eight miles northwest of Dayton, Wash. 2,114 acres, 1,945 tillable. Produces wheat and barley. Farm managers: Jay and Ted Penner.

**TALBOTT FARM:** One of several farm properties gifted to Whitman and other beneficiaries from the Rose Stonecipher Trust in 1970. Located eight miles southeast of Starbuck, Wash. 1,843 acres, 663 tillable. Now in Conservation Reserve Program. (Whitman maintains cash lease with Talbott.) Farm manager: Mike Talbott.

**USHER FARM:** Deferred gift to Whitman from Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Usher in 1955. Located 10 miles northeast of Waitsburg. 949 acres; no more than 550 acres cultivated at a time. Wheat/barley crop rotation program. Farm managers: Van and Byron Seney.

**ZOELLNER FARM:** Gifted to Whitman by Bertha Zoellner in 1975. Located 17 miles northwest of Walla Walla. 480 acres, 467 tillable. Produces wheat and barley. Farm managers: Walters Farms.

Farm statistics compiled from the 1998 Whitman College Farm Report prepared by economics students.