



Ag & Hort Update



March 2008

Welcome to spring! It felt like March 20th would never get here; I have been waiting since December. This winter has been very busy in many ways, mostly with meetings that have been centered around Soybean Rust, PQA Plus Certifications, Private Pesticide Meetings, FSQA Trainings, Master Gardeners, Machinery Sharing Workshops, and the Beginning and Retiring Farmer Workshop to name a few. Most of you have attended at least one of these meetings this winter; it is now that you can finally take all your information and implement this knowledge into your operation this spring and summer. Whether it is just cleaning the garden, pruning fruit trees and other shrubs or bushes or tilling the land for next year's crop, you have been informed of the most current information and you are ready to battle the challenges that lie ahead. Although these challenges may not always be easy, there are plenty of resources available for you. Please feel free to call me at anytime if you have a question. Remember to be careful on the roadways this spring; it will soon be shared once again with farm equipment. Be patient and courteous and above all have a very safe and enjoyable spring.

Kent Ganzer

Upcoming Dates

April 3 – 4-H Pancake Supper, Vets Auditorium, 5:00 – 7:30 p.m.

April 8 – Private Pesticide Training, Shelby, 9:30 a.m.

April 19 – State Fair Swine Weigh-In, 4:30 – 5:30 p.m.

April 24 – Office Closed, In-service

April 26 – 4-H Sheep and Goat Weigh-In, 9:00 – 10:00 a.m.

May 15 – County Fair Animal ID Sheets Due

May 26 – Office Closed, Memorial Day

May 29 – Butterfly Camp, K-3 at Nishna Bend

May 30 – Fish Camp, Prairie Rose Lake

Last Chance to Renew Your Private Pesticide License

The last Private Pesticide Training for Shelby County and the surrounding counties will be April 8 at 9:30 a.m. at the Shelby Community Building. If you wish to recertify by training and not by exam, you must attend a CIC session each year. But, you always have the option of taking the exam to recertify. If you miss one year of CIC programs, Iowa law requires you to retest when your certification expires. The exam is given by the Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS). Local testing locations are over, but you can test daily in Des Moines. You must score 70 percent or more and pay \$15.00 and you will be certified for three years. There will also be testing once a month in Malvern. There is a \$15.00 training fee for attending Iowa State

University Extension educational CIC programs. If you have any questions regarding the Private Pesticide Recertification please call the Shelby County Extension Office at 755-3104.

Crop Insurance to Cost More in 2008

AMES, Iowa -- Crop insurance will be more costly in 2008, due to the increasing value of crops that will be insured. The corn indemnity price for yield insurance (APH) is up to \$4.75 this year, which is a considerable increase over last year's price. Revenue insurance policies are at \$5.40 for corn this year, up from \$4.06 last year. Soybeans are at \$11.50 per bushel for yield insurance this year, and the revenue insurance soybean price is at \$13.36, up \$8.09 from last year. Each bushel is worth a lot more this year, and insurance prices rise right along with the market value. With these numbers, an approved yield of 150 bushels of corn and 50 bushels of soybeans, at maximum coverage levels, would guarantee \$600 to \$700 per acre.

Over the last decade since revenue insurance was introduced, the market gradually has been shifting away from traditional yield insurance and towards revenue insurance, a trend that most likely will continue this year. This is due to the fact that farmers see more price risk than they do yield risk. It is important to look at just how much coverage do you need. Input prices are up, so take a look at break-even cash flow to see what percentage of coverage would be best. 75 percent coverage has been the most common in the past, but 65 or 70 percent coverage may cost as much as 75 percent costs last year. This is a very important variable to look at in order to avoid large increases in premiums. Another way to look at insurance options is to use them to lock in high revenue levels per acre. However, you still need to market crops at the current prices to receive that revenue. Even at best, there is a 15 percent or maybe 20 to 25 percent deductible. In short, crop insurance does not replace a good marketing plan.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has implemented a new biotech yield endorsement this year, which applies to certain hybrid technology. Data has shown these hybrids to reduce production risks, leading to a discount on crop insurance premiums if you plant at least 75 percent of the corn in an insured unit to hybrids covered by the endorsements. The savings could be as much as 10 to 30 percent, but be sure to look at all the variables involved, such as the cost of hybrid seed, and weed or insect problems that could arise. The USDA requires seed dealer verification and verification that the seed was planted. Farms are subject to spot checks during the year. The last day to make changes in coverage was March 17th; the good news in the crop insurance picture is that farmers that were insured last year, but didn't change anything this year by the 17th, won't lose coverage. Their insurance plan from last year will continue, though at a higher price. Information provided by ISU Extension Economist William Edwards.

What is the proper way to plant onion sets?

Before planting sets, separate the bulbs into two size groups – those smaller than a nickel in diameter and those larger than a nickel. The larger sets often bolt (produce a flower stalk) and don't produce good sized bulbs. Use the larger sets for green onions. The smaller sets can be allowed to develop into mature onions. Plant sets in early spring as soon as the ground can be worked (typically late March to early April in Iowa). Sets should be planted at a depth of 1 to 1.5 inches in rows 12 to 15 inches apart. For dry onions, plant sets 2 to 3 inches apart. Sets grown for green onions can be planted closer together.

When would be the best time to prune potentillas?

Summer-flowering shrubs, such as potentilla and Japanese spirea, bloom in summer on the current year's growth. Prune these shrubs in late winter or early spring (March or early April).

How should I care for my Easter lily?

In the home, Easter Lilies prefer daytime temperatures of 65 to 70 degrees Fahrenheit with slightly cooler nighttime temperatures. Avoid drafty locations. Place the Easter lily in bright light, but out of direct sunlight.

If the pot is wrapped in decorative foil, punch a hole in the foil at the bottom of the pot for water drainage and place a saucer underneath the pot. Water the Easter lily when the soil becomes dry to the touch. Water the plant thoroughly until water flows out of the bottom of the pot. Discard the excess water that drains into the saucer. Today, most florists use a molded plastic pot cover. When watering these plants, carefully remove the Easter lily from the pot covering, water the plant in the sink, and then drop it back into the molded pot cover.

As the flowers open, remove the yellow anthers before the pollen starts to shed. Removal of the anthers prolongs the life of the flower and prevents the pollen from staining the white petals. Remove the flowers as they wither. After flowering, the Easter lily can be discarded or saved and planted outdoors in the perennial garden.

How do the various types of peas differ?

There are three main types of peas. The garden pea is grown for shelling. Snow and snap peas are edible podded peas.

The garden or English pea has been grown for many years. Garden peas are harvested when the pods are well filled and the seeds are sweet and tender. The pods of garden peas are NOT edible.

Snow peas (sugar peas) are harvested when the pods are long and thin, just as the seeds begin to develop. Young pods are tender, string less and may be stir-fried in Chinese dishes, steamed or cooked like snap beans. If the seeds are allowed to develop fully, they may be shelled and used like garden peas.

Snap peas are best picked when the seeds are nearly full size. The pod walls are thick, fleshy, and crunchy. Snap peas may be eaten raw in salads, snapped and cooked like snap beans or shelled for garden peas. They also freeze well.

Rabbits have damaged several trees and shrubs. Can I save them?

Trees that have been completely girdled have essentially been destroyed. Wrapping or applying pruning paint to the damaged area will not save the tree. Deciduous shrubs have the ability to produce new shoots at their base. Because of this, many of these shrubs will recover. Some shrubs will require several years before they fully recover.

Ethanol Plants' What's the Impact on Local Economies

The presence of an ethanol plant improves the areas job market, increases the economy and offers farmer's competitive prices for their corn, according to many economists, but what is the real impact?

What impact are ethanol plants having on Iowa's job market?

One of the most prominent changes ethanol plants have brought with them so far is the tremendous increase in the job market. Close to 30 plants are operating right now, and 15 more are under construction. Soon 42 plants will be operating in Iowa with 1,900 jobs in the plants alone. Counting support jobs created the plants, there will be an astonishing 8,200 jobs boosting Iowa's economy. These jobs range from basic labor, which requires no higher-level education, all the way up to senior level positions.

Who will get these jobs?

Grain handling and other jobs that involve moving material make up about one third of the workforce in the plant. The local workforce fills these positions. High-tech jobs such as engineers most likely will be filled from

an outside workforce, as will senior positions such as plant managers. Higher-level positions will make the highest wages. All of the jobs available in ethanol plants pay at a very high rate for the Midwest, as do all the jobs linked to ethanol plants, such as electricians. Additionally, linked job markets created by ethanol plants are some of the best in the state.

What is ethanol doing to the value of corn?

This additional use of corn is driving demand up at an incredible rate, benefiting grain farmers in the market. Higher corn prices have an adverse effect on ethanol plants by thinning out their profit margin. Higher corn prices also reduce the margins for livestock feeders. In order to process 2 billion bushels of corn per year, 55 ethanol plants would be required. Iowa just passed the 2 billion bushel mark last year, which means that even with the new plants in production, not all the corn could be used for ethanol production. If this were the case, an estimated 10,500 jobs would be created in the ethanol industry.

Do we have enough corn to make ethanol and feed livestock?

A large amount of the corn produced in Iowa typically is used as feed for livestock. Byproducts from ethanol plants still can be used to feed cattle, but it is less suitable for pork and poultry diets. Coincidentally, Iowa has the country's largest concentration of hog farms. Most of the large cattle concentrations are in the southern and western parts of the United States, so there is a mismatch between the demand for ethanol byproducts and supply. Additional non-corn sources for producing ethanol currently are being studied at a plant in Palo Alto County, but there is no production as of yet. Biomass could be a better source, but not enough information is known at this point to say for sure. Information provided by Iowa State University Economists.

Farmers Markets

There is a growing interest in farmers markets. The term "farmers markets" is often used since it describes the direct selling to the consumer by the producer (or farmer). This marketing system could also be described as a community market since there are additional advantages to the community that such a market provides. Most farmer markets are sponsored or established by grower or producer groups, civic organizations, community service agencies, extension or educational programs or from private citizens.

A major advantage of the farmers market is that it provides an effective marketing system for the producer or farmer. Most producers are often part-time, retired, or hobby gardeners looking to supplement their incomes. The farmers markets also allows for an opportunity for a "mix" of vendors operating side by side in the market. Consumers receive a benefit of fresh, high quality products and the opportunity to directly interact with the producer. Many people look forward to market day and this interaction at the farmers market. There is an advantage to the community when customers are brought to the business district, taxes and fees add to local business income, and a feeling of community activity results. Chambers of commerce and economic development officers recognize the enhancement to the community that such business activity provides. Please support and interact with your local farmers markets, these markets support the surrounding communities by buying local.

Analysis of Crop Market Fluctuations

Chad Hart, Center for Ag & Rural Development

Due to crop shortages abroad, there is a strong export market for corn, soybeans and wheat. This increased demand has sparked competition for farmland for planting these crops. There is a worldwide wheat shortage, particularly in Australia and it doesn't help that China had a real rough winter, which led to low oilseed production. With Australia, China and other countries experiencing a shortage of crops, coupled with declining the declining value of the U.S. currency, a good portion of our crop production is being exported.

The USDA predicts 2.5 billion bushels of corn will be exported this year. We are at about 80% of that prediction already, at a time of year when normally only about 60% of the predicted exports have been shipped abroad. Again, this is partially due to the weakness of the American currency. Foreign countries want to take advantage of the exchange. Our corn is going to foreign economies where the dollar is the weakest. Foreign countries are now competing with bio-fuel producers for the crop supply, driving the market value up. This isn't necessarily a good thing.

One of the largest uses of the U.S. crop supply is for livestock feed. Increased demand for crops decreases the amount available for livestock production, driving up the cost of feed and hurting livestock producers. With all the demand for all different types of crops, it is no surprise that the acreage allotment prediction for each crop in 2008 is changing daily. A short while ago the USDA predicted 88 million acres for corn and 71 million acres for soybeans, but have quickly changed their numbers to 90 million acres for corn and 71 million acres for soybeans.

Corn and soybean markets have been rising as we see record high prices for these crops, but we are near record low stocks for corn and soybeans. The prices will depend largely on the weather this year – a drought is certainly possible, which would drive market prices up. A report coming from the USDA at the end of March should reflect the jockeying of cropland among the different crops. The market will adjust when these projections for crop acreage become available. Current predictions show corn acreage decreasing while soybeans are increasing.

What are the Right Tools for the Job?

When pruning trees and shrubs, you need to start with the right tools. There are various types of pruning tools. Generally, the best tool for the job is determined by the size of the plant material and the situation. First, select high quality tools, high quality tools are not inexpensive. However, if they are used and cared for properly, they will perform better and outlast the poor quality, less expensive choices.

Hand pruners or pruning shears are generally used for cutting branches up to $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter. There are two basic types of hand pruners. Scissor type pruners have curved blades that overlap (scissor action) when making the cut. Anvil-type pruners have a sharpened upper blade which cuts against a flat surface (anvil). Each type of pruner is available in different sizes. Generally, scissor-type hand pruners are preferred over the anvil-types. Sharp, properly used scissor-type pruners make close, clean cuts. Anvil-types can't cut as close as scissor-types and generally crush the stems when pruning.

Attempting to prune branches larger than $\frac{3}{4}$ inch in diameter with hand pruners often results in torn, jagged pruning cuts to the plants and may damage your pruning shears. Branches from $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1-1/2 inches in diameter can be effectively cut with lopping shears. Lopping shears consist of blades attached to long handles. The long handles provide more leverage, so cuts can be made through larger branches. Lopping shears are also excellent for pruning difficult to reach branches. Pruning saws are used on branches larger than 1-3/4 inch in diameter. Small tree branches that are hard to reach from the ground can be pruned with a pole saw or pole pruner. A pole saw is essentially a saw blade attached to a long pole. Pole pruners consist of a stationary hook and hinged blade operated by a rope and mounted on a long wooden or fiberglass pole. Pole saws and pole pruners can usually be used on branches up to 2 inches in diameter. A chain saw is the last tool used by the home gardener. The chain saw is used on large tree branches, however chain saws can be extremely dangerous when used by home gardeners that have little experience or skill operating these. Home gardeners should use pruning saws rather than chain saws when pruning trees. Never cut or prune large tree branches that are near or in contact with power lines, always contact a trained arborist. One last tool that is used would be the hedge shears. Hedge shears (manual or electric) are used to shear formal hedges to definite shape and size. They should never be used as a pruning tool. Information gathered from James Romer, ISU Horticulturist.