



Ag & Hort Update



July 2008

Summer is finally here and is being welcomed with open arms; a majority of us are saying good-bye to spring, and rightfully so. Spring has been a real struggle this year, from planting to spraying to re-planting—the main theme has been rain. Although in most years we are complaining of not receiving the timely rains, we are all grateful to get a break from Mother Nature. This is not saying that we want the rain to shut off for good; we just need a break. Cutting hay, spraying corn and soybeans and replanting in some cases is your main concern; however you still need to scout. There have been several reports of bean leaf beetles feeding on soybeans, leafhopper damage in alfalfa and some anthracnose starting to show up on the lower leaves of corn. These are not the topics that you wanted to hear, but this is the reality of a wet and cool spring. If you need any assistance in doing some scouting please call and let me know. Well, July is a busy month so I won't ramble. Have a safe and enjoyable summer.

Kent Ganzer

Upcoming Dates:

June 27 – Armstrong Field Day, Lewis
June 28 – Senior 4H Canoe Trip
July 4 – 4th of July Celebrations
July 4 – 5 – Westphalia Parish Picnic
July 6 – 14 – Shelby County Fair
July 12 – 13 – Earling Parish Picnic
July 20 – Harlan RAGBRAI
July 26 – 27 – Portsmouth Parish Picnic
August 7 – 17 – Iowa State Fair

Shelby County Fair Starts July 6

“Fun in all Shapes and Sizes” is the theme for this year's Shelby County Fair. The fairgrounds will once again come alive with the sounds of fun and the smells of great food. Whether it's the livestock shows or the great entertainment, this year's fair is sure to have it all. Sunday will start out with the dog show. Tuesday is 4-H static judging day. Wednesday night the carnival rides will open and there will be a tractor pull in front of the grandstand. Thursday starts with the poultry show, breeding beef, cats and small pets, dairy and rabbit judging. Thursday evening is full of entertainment with Arm Band night at the carnival, the fair parade, crowning of the 2008 fair queen and entertainment provided by the band Danger Kitty. Friday will start out with the swine and horse shows and ending with the talent show and Elvis Impersonator Greg Ring. Saturday is the sheep and goat show, Apple Pie Morning, cherry pie & muffin auction, ag olympics and auto races in front of the grandstand. Sunday will be market beef judging, 4-H style show, garden tractor pull, chain saw carver auction, the share the fun contest and the parade of

champions. Monday will conclude the fair with the livestock auction and youth dance. This promises to be a great fair and I am looking forward to seeing you all there.

2008 Custom Farming Rates Released

A rapid increase in the cost of fuel for Iowa farmers has created difficult problems this spring, especially for custom farmers. Iowa State University's Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey had initially figured diesel fuel prices to be \$2.75/gallon delivered to the farm. Now diesel fuel has risen above \$4.00/gallon. The total cost of spring tillage increased by 10 to 15 percent, depending on the depth of tillage. Planting, spraying and harvesting costs will increase by 7 to 10 percent. If you want a copy of the Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey stop by the Shelby County extension office.

Can I Grow Grapes?

Iowa grape acreage has increased from about 30 acres to more than 850 acres since 2000 and wineries have increased from 11 to 70. With this increase in wineries, grape production is lagging behind demand. Before investing in such an enterprise, there are a number of factors you should consider in determining if a vineyard is right for you. Here is a little information on the main factors.

Site and Soil. Site suitability for growing grapes is related to winter temperature, frequency of spring and fall frosts, and length of growing season. First, when looking at the frequency of frosts, the coldest air temperatures occur under radiation freeze conditions when there are no clouds and very little or no air movement. Under these conditions, cold air settles into low-lying areas. For this reason, elevated sites will be warmer in the winter, less prone to late spring and early fall frosts and have a longer growing season better suited for grapes. A general rule would be to locate a vineyard at least 50 feet above the valley floor.

An ideal vineyard has good internal drainage yet a sufficient moisture-holding capacity, a pH in the 6.0 – 6.5 range, and organic matter content in the 2 – 3 percent range is ideal. Soils with a pH below 6.0 can be limed to bring up the pH. However many Iowa soils are high in magnesium, which can interfere with the uptake of potassium. Therefore, be careful in choosing what type of lime you use; try to avoid dolomitic lime to raise the soil pH. If soils are above 6.8, you can use elemental sulfur to try and acidify the soil, but if you get much above 7.0, it may not be economical or justifiable.

Soils that are classified as "well-drained" are ideally suited for growing grapes. These types of soils provide good aeration for root development and have adequate soil moisture-holding capacity to sustain grapevines through intermittent periods of drought. Soils that are classified as "moderately well-drained" may require some modification.

Organic matter—typical Iowa soils have the capability of releasing about 20 pounds of nitrogen per acre per year. Grapevines do not need high amounts of N, but if N is available, they will continue to grow as long as temperatures are warm enough to promote growth. Because of this characteristic, grapes tend to be less hardy on high organic soils. When the organic matter is in the 3 – 5 percent range, you can compensate for the N release by reducing fertilizer applications of N and growing early maturing, very hardy cultivars. If the organic matter is above 5 percent, your chances of establishing a successful vineyard greatly decline.

How do I find out all these different values? Soil testing. Before establishing a vineyard, it is very important to test the soil to determine if the organic matter content is suitable, if the pH needs to be adjusted and if the soil needs amended to optimize the phosphorous or potassium content. This is very important because the calcium in the lime and the P and K move slowly through the soil; correcting a deficiency of this nature after the grapes are planted is difficult. When soil sampling, submit separate samples for cores 0 – 6 inches and 6 – 12 inches. *Information provided by Paul Domoto, Dept. of Horticulture.*

Nitrogen Loss – Do I Need To Be Concerned?

With the continued rainfalls and flooding concerns, nitrogen (N) loss is an issue. While the wet period early this spring had an influence on N in the soil, excessively wet conditions now are especially critical for N losses due to warm soils and considerable conversion of applied fertilizer and manure N to nitrate. This is a very important time to assess crop conditions, productivity and the potential need for N applications. Crops are growing rapidly, this needs immediate attention if you plan on adding additional N.

Nitrate is the form that can be moved out of the soil profile by leaching or denitrification. If fertilizer N is applied in the nitrate form, that N is subject to immediate loss. Greater losses occur in the spring when soils are recharged with subsoil moisture and soils are warming above the 50 degree mark. Cool temperatures in the spring help slow the conversion of nitrate, but once the soils start warming the N is converted to nitrate, which allows for the potential of leaching and denitrification especially in waterlogged soils. For more information visit, www.extension.iastate.edu/cropnews.

Attention Livestock Producers!

Are you a livestock farmer who is feeling the strain of rising feed costs and other inputs? The unpredictable nature of the livestock markets also adds tension to the situation. How will you protect yourself? What if the downturn lasts longer than anticipated? If you answered yes, then this one-day conference is for you. Pre-register by June 30 and it's FREE or pay \$25.00 at the door on the day of the conference. To register call (866) 598-3693 or visit www.iowafarmbureau.com

What: Information & Resources for Beef, Dairy, Pork & Poultry Farmers

When: July 7, 2008

Where: Scheman Building – Ames, Iowa

Speakers: John Roach, Market-to-Market; Dave Miller, Research & Commodity Services Iowa Farm Bureau; Chad Hart, Center for Agriculture and Rural Development; Dr. John Lawrence, ISU Dept. of Economics. Sponsored by the Iowa Farm Bureau. For more information contact the Shelby County Farm Bureau Office.

There are tiny holes in the foliage of my eggplants. What should I do?

Flea beetles are the most common pest of eggplant in the home garden. Adults are tiny, shiny and black. They possess large hind legs that enable them to jump. Flea beetles eat small, round holes, resulting in "shothole" damage. Minor flea beetle damage will have little effect on crop yields. If significant damage begins to appear, treat plants with an insecticide.

Do I need to deadhead my perennials?

Deadheading is the removal of spent flowers. The removal of spent flowers is an important gardening chore for many perennials. This is recommended after the flowers are spent; deadheading also prevents the self-seeding of golden marguerite, yarrows and other potentially invasive perennials.

Several of my onions are forming flower heads. Why?

Onions are grown from seeds, sets and plants. Flowering is most likely to occur on onions grown from sets. Sets are small onion bulbs that were grown the previous year, harvested, stored through winter, and then distributed to garden centers in the spring. When selecting sets, select bulbs that are smaller than a nickel in diameter. Sets larger than a nickel in diameter are much more likely to flower. Flowering plants are best used as green onions as they do not form good-sized bulbs.

When should cherries be harvested?

Sour or tart cherries should be harvested when the fruit are full-flavored, somewhat soft and juicy. Harvest sweet cherries when the fruit have attained the proper size, are uniformly colored and possess their characteristic flavor. For immediate use, the cherries can be picked without the stems attached to the

fruit. However, harvest the cherries with the stems attached if intending to store the fruit. Store cherries immediately after harvest. Place cherries in perforated plastic bags and store in the refrigerator at a temperature of 32 – 35 degrees F.

Weed seed-free forage and mulch

Are you looking for weed seed-free mulch or straw for a roadside or erosion-control project? Are you a horse owner, looking for local sources of “certified” weed seed-free hay?

A new addition to the Iowa Crop Improvement Association’s (ICIA) web site is an opportunity to connect suppliers and purchasers of certified forage and mulch offering individuals the opportunity to be included on the following lists:

- * Potential Suppliers
- * Potential Purchasers
- * Current Sources of Certified Forage and Mulch

The ICIA began offering a noxious weed seed-free forage and mulch program in 2006 as an opportunity for farmers to add value to their forage or mulch products. This program provides assurance that forage and mulch field and storage site to verify the product is free of any seed bearing plants on a list of 54 noxious or undesirable weeds. The program requirements and application forms can be found at the ICIA website at www.agron.iastate.edu/icia or for more information you can call the Iowa Crop Improvement Association’s office at (515) 294-6921.

Garden for the senses, field day August 6

As the cost of produce continues to rise, gardens could become more popular. Gardens are generally easy – when Mother Nature cooperates, that is. One of the reasons that many people like gardening is that it engages all the senses. You can enjoy beautiful flowers, smell wonderful herbs, see and hear birds singing, and touch plants as you tend to them or harvest them and then finally taste the fruits of your labor. Let this year’s Home Demonstration Gardens be a garden for your senses.

The Home Demonstration Gardens feature many new and unusual vegetables and annual flowers each year. Featured plants this year include heirloom and modern hybrid tomatoes. At least 8 different cultivars of heirloom and modern tomatoes are planted at the demo gardens; if the timing is right, you can even taste them. Many gardeners claim that heirloom tomatoes are some of the best tasting tomatoes available.

Another feature for our sense of taste is personal-sized watermelons, ranging from 3 to 15 pounds. They are growing 8 different cultivars that will vary in size; surely there is a small fruited watermelon that will work in your garden next year. Plant the perfect sized watermelon for your family, one that will fit in your refrigerator and is only big enough for one or two people.

For your sense of smell, the garden contains a wide assortment of herbs. Nothing “spices” up your meals better than fresh herbs. The gardens have nine cultivars of basil, four cultivars of thyme, three cultivars of parsley, three cultivars of dill and a sampling of sage, fennel, cilantro, chives, mint, oregano and marjoram for your nose to smell and your mouth to taste.

Finally, for your eyes they have flowers. Spreading or ground cover petunias will provide a brilliantly colored carpet of blooms. Over a dozen species of cut flowers are showcased. Another feature will be plants with green or greenish flowers. Green is one flower color that is hard to find in the garden.

Does this sound fun? Do you want to experience a whole new world of new cultivars that you can plant in your garden next year? This is your chance to hear about, touch, see, smell, and taste all the plants in the garden. The nearest Home Demonstration Garden is in Lewis at the Armstrong Research Farm. The field day is August 6 at 6:30 p.m. For directions please contact the Shelby County Extension office or you can visit www.ag.iastate.edu/farms/. Hope to see you there!