FIELD & FEEDLOT



NORTHWEST AREA EXTENSION JANUARY 2009 ISSUE

Extension Web Sites

Ag Decision Maker
http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/
Beef Center
http://www.iowabeefcenter.org/
Manure Management
http://www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/
Pork Center
http://www.ipic.iastate.edu/
ISU Extension Dairy Team
http://www.extension.iastate.edu/DairyTeam/

Land Values Increase Slows

By Ron Hook, ISUE Farm Management Specialist

The average value of an acre of farmland in Iowa reached $4,468 in 2008, continuing to increase for the ninth year in a row, according to an annual survey conducted by Iowa State University Extension. Mike Duffy, ISU Extension farm economist who conducts the survey, said the indicators toward the end of the year imply the upward trend may be slowing as the national economy battles recessionary pressures.

The 2008 average was an increase of $560 over last year, the second-highest dollar increase ever recorded in the 67 years that ISU has conducted the survey. The 2007 survey reported a $704 increase over the previous year. The 2008 figure was an increase of 14 percent over 2007, compared with a 22 percent increase last year. Over the past 40 years, the survey has found annual changes ranging from an increase in value of 31.9 percent in 1973 to a loss of 30.2 percent in 1985.

Duffy said the timing of the ISU survey is especially important this year because of the trends in the national economy this fall. The survey is conducted in November each year and the current numbers are based on estimated values as of Nov. 1, 2008, compared to one year earlier. “There have been considerable changes in the situation in Iowa over the past few months.”

"Monthly average corn and soybean prices in Iowa had been continually rising until July 2008. Corn averaged $5.41 per bushel in July and current prices are below $3.00. Soybeans averaged $13.10 in July and the current prices are below $8.00 per bushel. This change in revenue has been accompanied by substantial increases in the costs of production, especially for fertilizers and seed,” Duffy noted.

He said the lower grain prices in recent months and the higher costs of production mean lower net revenue per acre, which is an indicator that land values will be moderating. Other surveys conducted earlier in the year indicated higher increases, including a 17.6 percent increase for two six-month periods ending in September, reported by the Realtors Land Institute, and a 17 percent increase for the year ending in October, reported by the Seventh District Federal Reserve Board.

Despite the indicators that rapid increases may be coming to an end, Duffy said the ISU survey did show considerable strength in Iowa farmland. Land values have almost doubled since 2003, going from $2,275 to $4,468 in just five years. In 2008, three counties averaged more than $6,000 per acre. This is the first time any county has averaged over that amount. Similarly, 2008 marked the first time that no county has averaged below $2,000 per acre.

Of the nine crop reporting districts in the state, Northwest Iowa reported the highest average value at $5,395 per acre. The lowest average in the state was in South Central Iowa at $2,573 per acre. West Central Iowa was the leader in percentage increase at 19.6 percent, while South Central Iowa had the lowest percentage increase at 10.7 percent.

The highest county average in the state was Scott County at $6,310 per acre, while Decatur County was lowest at $2,002 per acre. Sioux County led the state with the largest dollar increase at $891 per acre, while Monona County had the largest percentage increase at 19.9 percent.

Low grade land in the state averaged $2,967 per acre, an increase of $311 or 11.7 percent over the 2007 survey. Medium grade land averaged $4,195 per acre, a $528 increase or 14.4 percent. High grade land averaged $5,381 per acre, an increase of $695 or 14.8 percent.

Survey participants were asked to indicate positive and negative factors that affected land prices during 2008. Good grain prices was by far the most frequently mentioned positive factor, listed by 34 percent of the respondents. Another 14 percent mentioned low interest rates as a major factor.

Three negative factors impacting land values were listed by

more than 10 percent of the respondents. They included high costs for the inputs needed to grow crops, listed by 24 percent; declining grain prices, listed by 18 percent; and the poor general economy, listed by 14 percent.

Thirty-eight percent of the respondents to this year's survey reported more land sales in 2008 than in the previous year. Buyers were existing farmers in 69 percent of the sales, and investors in 24 percent of the sales, with new farmers at 3% and other purchasers at 4%.

Summarizing the results of the survey, Duffy said he views 2008 as "a return to more normal conditions in the land market where the unbridled exuberance we witnessed the past 24 months has been curtailed. I think the land values will retreat some from the highs, but not go into the free-fall we witnessed in the 1980s. Where land values will go in the next year or so is really anyone's guess, but, overall, Iowa farmland should remain a good investment for the long run."

Additional information on the 2008 survey is available on the ISU Extension Web site www.extension.iastate.edu/landvalue

Virtual Niche Farm Tours

By Dave Stender, ISU Extension Swine Field Specialist

Niche pork production is an option for smaller pork producer's that are looking for a premium price for their market hogs. Typical niche systems alter the way they raise pigs to meet the demand of certain consumer groups. Niche markets differentiate their products through a variety of methods such as: farrow in pens; limit the feeding of anti-microbials; allow outdoor access or develop a special breed characteristic.

Because of bio-security sensitivity on pig farms, it is difficult for niche producers to see the various methods of producing pigs for a niche market on other farms. To solve this problem we are using phone and computer to host virtual farm tours this winter.

This promises to be a great way to conveniently connect with niche pork producers and see how they are managing their operation. Each week a different farmer will present a picture tour of his operation and discuss technologies, ideas and strategies used in the operation. Emphasis will be placed on new and innovative techniques and ideas.

The tours will all be on Tuesdays at noon to 1:30 pm on a teleconference starting Jan 20th and ending Mar 10th. Niche tours include the following farms in Iowa:

Martin Kramer, Algona
ISU Allee Research Farm, Newell
Steve Howe, Thurman
Dan Wilson, Paullina
Tim Roseland, Gilman
John Kenyon, Mallard
Ron Mardeson, Elliott
Tom Frantzen, Alta Vista

Participants will view a common set of images of each farm. These images and accompanying materials will be mailed out or available to download ahead of time, and they will also be available on-line during the calls.

Host farmers will describe the images, and you will be able to discuss the pros and cons of options with your peers and University Swine Specialists. This type of peer-to-peer learning through shared experiences will deepen your knowledge on effective niche pork production techniques.

For participating in the meeting you will need a computer and a phone, details can be found in the following brochure: http://www.ipic.iastate.edu/events/virtualniche.pdf

For more information call Dave Stender at (712)225-6196; cell (712)261-0225 or email dstender@iastate.edu.

Current Soybean Seeding Rate Guidelines

By Joel DeJong, ISU Extension Field Agronomist & Palle Pedersen, Agronomist

Agronomic studies over the past 20 years have often shown that the chance of getting yield increases as final soybean plant population moves above 100,000 plants per acre is small. However, there are a few cases where 100,000 plants per acre at the end of the season might not be enough. Prior to 2006, ISU recommendations were made based on research conducted prior to the use of roundup ready varieties, and plant competition was probably more critical because of the need to reduce weed competition. However, do we still need to adjust our seeding rate for planting date, tillage, or row spacing? What about the whole story on seeding rate versus economics? It has previously been an insurance to overseed just to be sure that we received the proper stand since seeds were not very expensive, but who can afford this today, with increased seed costs?

To answer questions about whether current seeding rates are appropriate, numerous studies were initiated in 2003 to update ISU's recommendations. After more than 30 experiments we have seen very consistent data. One key thing that this research has shown is we do not find a seeding rate by row spacing interactions. You do not need to increase your seeding rate if you are using a 15 inch row spacing compared to a 30 inch row spacing. Palle Pedersen, ISU Soybean Specialist, conducted all of his research with 15 and 30 inch row spacing comparison since the trends show that drills probably will disappear in the future. Another key thing identified in that research is that you do not need to increase your seeding rate if you are planting late or if you have to replant. It is all about weed management if you have to plant late. The bottom line is that we just need 100,000 healthy uniform distributed plants per acre at the end of the season.

Dr. Pedersen now recommends farmers try to see if they can manage a lower seeding rate (Table 1). Early season weed

management has to be optimized since soybeans are very sensitive to early season weed competition under high yielding environments. If not, you will see a yield loss from reduced seeding rates. He proposes that you should try to use a seeding rate of 125,000 to 140,000 viable seeds per acre (need to be increased if the germination is below 90%) if you have perfect seedbed conditions at planting. If you have wet seedbed conditions or if you have a lot of residue since you are using reduced tillage practices, then it may be an advantage for you to increase your seeding rate to 140,000 seeds per acre. Here is a "decision tree" on how to get to a final stand of 100,000 plants per acre using a planter:

+Good seedbed ("tillage")
+1-1.5 inch planting depth
+Relatively new planter (< 5 yr old)
+Moderate planting speed (< 6 mph)
+Excellent seed quality

IF you have 5 "+" your seeding rate can be 125,000 viable seeds/acre. IF you have 4 "+" your seeding rate can be 140,000 seeds/acre, etc. The more risk for a good stand you place these seeds into at planting time, the more "insurance" seeds we would recommend.

Table 1. The "new" seeding rate guideline for optimum planting conditions are:

15 inch	125,000 to 140,000 seeds per acre
30 inch	125,000 to 140,000 seeds per acre

It is not a secret that planting 20 to 30% more seed than we really need is an expensive insurance. Improved planter technology and increased seed quality have resulted in more accurate plant populations and stand establishment that are only slightly reduced from the seeding rate, and do not require over seeding by 20 to 30. It is quite obvious that we may develop new seeding rate recommendations in the future. Soybean is not a crop we grow to improve our corn yields, it is a crop that should be taken as seriously as corn. Proper management practices are important if you want to keep soybean profitable.

To see the results from the NW Iowa On-Farm research project, see our web site at: http://ofr.ag.iastate.edu/.

To see Palle Pedersen's soybean management fact sheet on optimum plant populations - and other soybean research result topics, go to this web page: http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/soybean/extension_pubs.html.

Beef Feedlot Meeting

By Beth Doran, ISU Extension Beef Field Specialist

2008 has been quite a year! We've experienced floods, changes in environmental regulations, volatility in the grain and livestock markets, world-wide financial crisis, and historically high fuel prices. So, what does 2009 hold in store and how can a feedlot producer be prepared?

This is the focus of a Beef Feedlot Meeting on January 13 at the Corporate Center in Sioux Center. The meeting begins at 8:45 a.m. with registration and concludes at 3:00 p.m.

ISU Tools to Help Feedlot Producers - include centers, spreadsheets and publications ranging from ration formulation to environmental regulations to figuring the optimal weight to market cattle. See what ISU offers!

Adding Value to Cattle through Age and Source Verification – is one way to add to the income of the feedlot, but a feedlot operator must perform certain procedures to capture market premiums. Learn how to qualify for premiums.

Changes in Iowa Environmental Regulations – have included the way animal units are counted and how manure is stockpiled. Current discussion centers on the application of manure to frozen ground. Hear the latest update on rules.

The Legal Defense Fund – is a fairly new, but important term. There is an avenue for feedlot producers to seek help and assistance in environmental litigation.

The Outlook for Ag Credit – is highly dependent on the economy. With the U.S economy in a turmoil, what does this mean for agricultural producers and agri-businesses?

Valuing Changing Co-Products and Re-Thinking Feeding Programs – are two important questions. New ethanol processing methods are changing the nutrition of the co-products. With high-priced corn, are there more profitable ways to feed cattle?

Cattle Market Situation and Outlook – will be presented by Mike Miller of Cattle Fax. He will discuss opportunities and challenges in the grain, feeder cattle and fed cattle markets.

For more information, contact Beth Doran at 712-737-4230 or doranb@iastate.edu. Registration ($20/person) is due January 9 at the Sioux County Extension Office.

Iowa's Sheep Future

By Dennis DeWitt, ISU Extension Livestock Field Specialist

The Northwest Iowa Sheep Producers Association and ISU Extension are hosting a regional sheep producers meeting Saturday, January 31, 2009 at the Community Building in Sanborn. A National report released about the future of sheep production in the US has direct references to Iowa. Dr. Dave Thomas, University of Wisconsin was one of the study authors. He will be sharing what Iowa producers need to do to make sheep production profitable and sustainable. In addition Dr. Suzanne Millman, ISU College of Veterinary Medicine and previously with the Humane Society, will be sharing the social and applied behavior of farm animals with the assessment of pain and aggression on animal welfare. Contact Dennis DeWitt at dewitt@iastate.edu or call 712.336.3488.