Crop Scout School Offered at the Borlaug Learning Center/ ISU NE IA Research Farm
By Terry Basol, ISU Extension Agronomist, tlbasol@iastate.edu, 641-426-6801
NASHUA – Iowa State University Extension and Outreach will be offering a crop scout school on Friday, April 1 at the ISU Northeast Research Farm near Nashua in the meeting room of the Borlaug Learning Center. This is an all-day class specially designed for growers and crop scouts with limited scouting experience (0-2yrs). Live plants for weed ID and staging of corn and soybeans will be used for a hands-on learning experience in conjunction with a traditional lecture approach.

Registration starts at 9:00 a.m. with the program beginning at 9:30 a.m., adjourning by 3:00 p.m. The main topics for the day include: corn & soybean growth and development, weed ID & herbicide injury, corn and soybean diseases, and insect identification. Instructors for the class include ISU extension field agronomists, Terry Basol and Brian Lang, as well as campus specialists Alison Robertson, extension plant pathologist, and Erin Hodgson, extension entomologist.

Registration fee of $75.00 covers lunch, materials, and refreshments for the day. Class size is limited to the first 40 paid registrants, so please register early to secure a seat. To find out more information and to register, go to: http://www.aep.iastate.edu/nescout/.

Directions: From Nashua at the Jct. of Hwy 218 (Exit 220) and Co. Rd. B60, go west on B60 1.1 miles to Windfall Ave., then south 1 mile to 290th St., then east 0.2 miles to the farm. For more information about the event, call Terry Basol at 641-426-6801.

2016 Ag Breakfast - March 16
The 2016 Ag Breakfast will be held on Wed., March 16 starting at 7 a.m. at the North Iowa Events Center - All Seasons Building in Mason City. Breakfast will be served by Chamber volunteers. The keynote speaker, Ty Higgins, is the host of Farm and Country, a popular nationally-syndicated radio program.
Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey Provides Guidance for Hiring

Custom machine work prices decline but can’t keep up with drop in crop prices

Article | 03/04/2016 | By Alejandro Plastina, Extension Economist, 515-294-0160, plastina@iastate.edu and Ann Johanns, Department of Economics, 641-733-5574, aholste@iastate.edu

AMES, Iowa – Hiring others to do custom machine work is a common practice for farmers across Iowa. The 2016 Iowa Farm Custom Rate Survey canvassed 182 farmers, custom operators and farm managers from the state, putting together a guide for pricing custom machine work.

The publication, which can be found online at the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Store (FM 1698) or on the Ag Decision Maker website as Information File A3-10, provides rates for custom work in the following categories: tillage, planting, drilling and seeding, fertilizer application, harvesting, drying and hauling grain, harvesting forages, complete custom farming, labor, and both bin and machine rental.

The survey found there was a 2 percent price decline across all surveyed categories. When the categories with the 5 percent highest and lowest change were removed, the average decline in rate became 2.6 percent.

“This change is tied to lower crop prices,” said Alejandro Plastina, assistant professor and extension economist with ISU Extension and Outreach. “The bad news is the decline in price for those who hire custom work is dwarfed by the overall decline in crop prices.”

The average rate and range for each machine work function were compiled into the survey as usual, but this year the median charge and number of responses for each category were added to provide additional context to the findings. The additions were included to make the publication more useful and user-friendly, providing clarity on how far apart the average and median charge were. Another addition to the 2016 survey is responses for scouting crops with a drone.

For the survey, the average is calculated as the simple average of all responses. The median is the response that splits all the ordered responses (from smallest to largest) in half. The range consists of the second-lowest value and the second-highest value in the sample.

The values presented in the survey are intended only as a guide. There are many reasons why the rate charged in a particular situation should be above or below the average. These include the timeliness with which operations are performed, quality and special features of the machine, operator skill, size and shape of fields, number of acres contracted, and the condition of the crop for harvesting. The availability of custom operators in a given area will also affect rates.

The Ag Decision Maker website offers a Decision Tool to help custom operators and other farmers estimate their own costs for specific machinery operations at http://agron.iastate.edu/CroppingSystemsTools/soybean-decisions.html.

Master Gardeners Growing Food for Families Experiencing Poverty

Join ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardeners in growing fresh produce to be donated to food banks

Article | 03/14/2016 | By Susan DeBlieck, Extension Master Gardener Program Specialist, 515-294-6764, deblieck@iastate.edu and Cynthia Haynes, Associate Professor in Horticulture, 515-294-4006, chaynes@iastate.edu

AMES, Iowa – With spring just around the corner, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach is looking for Master Gardener volunteers to assist at its Demonstration Home Gardens across the state. These volunteers will grow and harvest fresh produce that will be given to local food banks.

The volunteer opportunities will be available at Demonstration Home Gardens in Lewis, Crawfordsville, Ames, Kanawha, Fruitland, Nashua and Rock Rapids. Contact your local Iowa State University Extension and Outreach office for specific details on when and where to meet. This year’s themes are produce for food banks and plants for pollinators.

The ISU Extension and Outreach Master Gardener Program, ISU Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Education (SNAP-Ed) Program and the ISU Research and Demonstration Farms have collaborated to provide these opportunities to ensure that the produce grown will reach local food banks. PHOTO: Research and Demonstration Farm field day by Cynthia Haynes. More at http://www.extension.iastate.edu/article/master-gardeners-growing-food-families-experiencing-poverty.
Research Shows Extra Cover Crop Growth Prior to Soybeans Provides Benefits
Soybean yields unchanged by cover crops terminated the day before planting
Article | 03/04/2016 | By Michael Castellano, Department of Agronomy, 515-294-3963, castelmj@iastate.edu

AMES, Iowa — Research at Iowa State University, funded by the United Soybean Board (USB), suggests that an additional period of cover crop growth prior to soybeans results in high cover crop biomass production, nitrogen retention and has no negative effect on yield.

Iowa State University associate professor in agronomy, Mike Castellano, has been working on the project over the last three years to show the effect of cover crops preceding soybeans. The study consisted of three major experiments that included corn and soybean systems with and without the cover crop, winter cereal rye. The cover crop prior to corn was terminated about seven to 10 days before planting corn, while the cover crop prior to soybeans was terminated at two different times; the same day the cover crop was terminated in corn and approximately three weeks later, the day before soybean planting.

Winter cereal rye that grew an extra three weeks prior to soybean planting produced about 300 to 400 percent more biomass with a 100 percent increase in nitrogen retention, when compared with the early terminated cover crops.

The study also showed that cover crops left in the field for an additional three weeks before soybean planting increased the nitrogen in the cover crop from 40 pounds per acre to over 80 pounds per acre.

“At the present time, we can say with confidence that we can retain a lot more nitrogen in the system and lose less to the environment with increased biomass production,” said Castellano. “In the short term, that’s a great benefit for water quality challenges. In the long term, adding that biomass and keeping that nitrogen in the system will build soil health.”

In the future, Castellano believes the effects of additional biomass production and nutrient retention will lead to reduced fertilizer rates and increased yields, due to the improvement of soil characteristics such as lower compaction, more organic matter, aeration and water-holding capacity. Daren Mueller, extension plant pathologist, and Leonor Leandro, associate professor of plant pathology and microbiology, at Iowa State have also been working on the soybean and cover crop research project, focusing on the effects of cover crops on insects and disease.

“We think exploring the potential reduction for fungicide sprays and other pesticide applications are good opportunities for the farmers to see some short term benefits from the extra cover crop biomass,” said Mueller.

Currently, farmers can go online to the ISU Extension and Outreach Soybean Planting Tool to see how the planting date of different soybean varieties will effect their predicted yield. Farmers can use this tool, at http://agron.iastate.edu/CroppingSystemsTools/soybean-decisions.html, to see if there are potential advantages to planting later for extra cover crop growth without damaging yield.

The Source Matters for Getting the Most out of Aerial Imagery
As spring plans are finalized, don’t forget to consider aerial imaging as part of a continuous improvement plan. Remote sensing and the use of aerial imagery have been used for decades in agriculture, but since 2010 we’ve seen the number of available imagery providers grow extensively.

The use of imagery can vary from farm to farm, but several common uses include variable rate fertility recommendations, assessing water management performance, quantifying soil compaction and machinery induced yield limiters, locating late season weed outbreaks, and generally evaluating the consistency of crop vigor across a field.

Read more at http://crops.extension.iastate.edu/cropnews/2016/03/source-matters-getting-most-out-aerial-imagery.
New Software Developed to Monitor Sheep Feedlots

Iowa Beef Center creates new sheep feedlot software

Article | 02/26/2016 | By Garland Dahlke, Iowa Beef Center, 515-294-9910, garland@iastate.edu

AMES, Iowa – Iowa Beef Center has developed software to assist sheep feedlot managers with both detailed monitoring of animal performance along with business transactions involving the sheep feeding enterprise.

The ISU Sheep Feedlot Monitor Software (AS 7) is now available for purchase in the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Store and ensures sheep feedlots are efficient and monitored properly.

The software program was developed by Garland Dahlke, assistant scientist with the Iowa Beef Center at Iowa State University.

“This new software will provide sheep feedlot managers the same information cattle feedlots have to monitor their operation and stay efficient throughout the year,” Dahlke said.

The software provides animal performance evaluations based on real time feed consumption and financial information that can be tied to health data. This creates a basis for the estimation of current growth and subsequent performance.

The business components include day to day costs, income accounting and a built in option to track feed and drug inventory and generate billing statements for custom feeding operations.

For more information on the downloadable software visit the Store at http://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/ISU-Sheep-Feedlot-Monitor-Software.

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