Iowa State University Extension and Outreach will again offer the Crop Advantage Series to producers at 14 locations across Iowa during January. Each year, ISU Extension and Outreach specialists and field agronomists present the latest crop production research and information for the upcoming growing season to producers, agronomists and industry leaders.

There is no other program in our crop production education year that we are able to bring this many extension specialists together to individual sites across the state like we are able to do with Crop Advantage meetings. In 2018, nearly 2,000 individuals attended the meetings across the state, representing all 99 Iowa counties and surrounding states. Eighty-four percent of attendees responding to follow-up surveys said information from Crop Advantage would likely save them between $5 and $20 per acre.

Each location has a slightly different agenda, as determined by the local Field Agronomist. For example, the Le Mars location on Jan. 22 will feature one morning and one afternoon keynote speaker. Elwynn Taylor, ISU Extension Climatologist, will begin the day at 10:00 a.m. with “Profitable Use of Weather Data,” and Dr. Chad Hart, ISU Ag Economist, will highlight the day with “2019 Ag Outlook; It’s Stressful. How can we Deal with It?” at 2:30 in the afternoon. Between those two keynote presentations are three 50-minute time periods where attendees can choose from three topics offered during each period, allowing all to create their own educational agenda during the meeting. Topics include Northwest Iowa drainage issues, potassium effects on the crop, lean and mean crop production for 2019, the soybean gall midge, tariffs, on-farm research results and more. We recognize that every farm situation is unique, so there is not one key piece of information. That is why we are providing a menu of strategies that producers can choose from as they look to control costs, maintain or enhance productivity and search for profitability.

All meetings are approved for Certified Crop Adviser (CCA) continuing education credits, and every location offers the opportunity for private pesticide applicators to receive continuing education credits. To qualify for the pesticide continuing education you must attend all day and add the session offered for this at the end of the day. The cost for the CCA credit or the pesticide continuing education is built into the registration cost of the conference.

Response from producers has been very positive. In addition to receiving the latest research information from the university, the meetings have been a valuable way for producers to provide input back to Iowa State researchers and specialists on what their needs are. It works both ways.

Early registration for each location is $50; late registration made less than seven days prior to the meeting or on-site is $60. Registration also includes lunch and printed proceedings. Online registration and more information is available at [http://www.cropadvantage.org/](http://www.cropadvantage.org/) or from your local ISU Extension office. If you cannot make the Le Mars site, other Northwest Iowa sessions will be held at Sheldon on Jan. 3, Storm Lake on the 8th, Okoboji on Jan. 15 and Denison on Jan. 30. Agendas will vary by site, so check out those details at the website above, or contact me, Joel DeJong, at 712-546-7835. I hope to see you there!
Feedlot Forum 2019 and a BQA Update

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A New Era in Marketing is the focus of Feedlot Forum 2019. This year’s forum, which is January 15 at the Terrace View Event Center in Sioux Center, features national experts discussing marketing from the feedlot to the consumer’s table.

Keynote speakers include:

- Tom Brink, CEO for the Red Angus Association, visiting about the importance of traceability and programs underway to implement this management practice.
- Jessica Dunker, president of the Iowa Restaurant Association, will discuss consumer trends in the restaurant industry and the kinds of beef products restaurants want to feature.
- Chad Hart, ISU Extension Ag Economist, will share how trade tariffs impact the price of grains and livestock.
- Rounding out the day is Andrew Gottschalk, president of RJ O’Brien, presenting opportunities and challenges in marketing ag commodities in a period of lower prices.

But that is not all. Feedlot Forum 2019 will also include a trade show featuring the latest products and services for 25 companies and a $10 beef certificate for each attendee.

For a flyer or further information, please contact Beth Doran, ISU Extension and Outreach Beef Program Specialist, at 712-737-4230 or doranb@iastate.edu. Student registrations will be $10 per person. Other registrations are $25 per person (includes lunch). All registrations are due January 10 to ISU Extension and Outreach—Sioux County, 400 Central Ave. NW, Suite 700, Orange City, IA 51041.

Looking Back and Forward on BQA Training – BQA is helping producers not only to be certified to sell cattle to packers, but also to address consumer questions. This is a win-win scenario for everyone.

In 2018, a total of 17 BQA trainings in Northwest Iowa helped certify 718 producers and agri-business professionals. Participants were from 24 Iowa counties and five states. My thanks to the participants, producers and businesses who hosted a training, and agri-business professionals who helped present and market these trainings. Everyone is committed to quality beef and market access.

There are still a couple of ways to get certified. An in person “wrap-up” meeting will be held on February 5 from 1:00 to 3:00 p.m. at the ISU Extension and Outreach—Buena Vista County Office in Storm Lake. There is no charge, but please pre-register by February 3 by calling 712-732-5056.

If you will be selling cattle and need to be certified before then, BQA training is offered on-line and free of charge at www.bqa.org. Participants only need to complete one of the several curriculums that are offered on-line.

Looking forward in 2019, at least one packer is requiring cattle haulers to complete Beef Quality Assurance Transportation (BQAT) by January 1, 2020. The BQAT curriculum includes the following: stockmanship; bio-security; fitness for transport; pre-trip planning and loading; on the road, arrival and unloading; and risk and emergency management.

There are two lines of BQAT training – one for professional drivers and another for farmers or ranchers. Both are offered on line at www.bqa.org and free of charge. Face-to-face meetings are being discussed. Stay tuned for details as available.

Happy New Year!
Missing Your Garden? Look to Low Tunnels for a Season Extender

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With snow piling up in Northwest Iowa, many of us miss the wonders of our summer gardens. However, your garden can continue well into winter, or start earlier in the spring with the use of a low tunnel.

Creating a low tunnel in your home garden can extend the growing season for many of your cool season plants such as lettuce or spinach. The tunnels are beneficial during early spring to get plants outside earlier for a quicker maturing time. Low tunnels may sound overwhelming, especially since they are often discussed in commercial gardening, but they can be simple and helpful for the everyday gardener.

Low tunnels are a non-permanent structure that can be removed during the summertime. The tunnel frame can be anywhere from 2’ to 5’ in height depending on the plants growing under the tunnels. The frame of the tunnel, or hoop support, can be created out of a variety of materials from metal to plastic, with a spunbond polyethylene (poly) material to cover. Metal ribs, or thick metal wiring, can work as a great support. PVC piping is another alternative that you can use instead of metal, but will struggle in the heavy winds more than a stronger metal rib. The material will need to be bent into a hoop shape to create the tunnel structure. The poly materials come in a variety of weights that can provide an additional 2-8 degrees of warmth under the low tunnel. The lighter the material, the more sunlight will penetrate through to the plants. The heavier material will offer better protection against frost, which is extremely helpful if you are trying to start plants earlier in the spring, or extend them into the colder months. It all depends on your preference of materials. Once the poly cover is draped over the hoop supports, it is important to clip the poly material onto the supports and weigh down the edges of the cover with some type of weight to make sure the material stays in place. You can use anything from cement blocks to soil. As long as it is something that won’t fly away.

In addition to extending your growing season, a low tunnel also acts as an insect barrier. This is especially useful if you battle with cucumber beetles in your garden. However, it is important to remove the cover once the plants begin to flower to allow pollinators access to the plants. You must also remove the cover during the summer to release trapped heat so that the plants don’t get damaged. This is a fun project to start planning for your garden while waiting for the growing season to return. For more information on how to build a low tunnel, view Extension Commercial Horticulturist Joe Hannan’s YouTube video (https://youtu.be/4U7e4VTJ8-o).

Check Grain Carefully Now

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Fall 2018 was a hard harvest season with a lot of wet weather and less than ideal harvest conditions. Problem bins of corn and soybeans showed up early this past fall in November and December with a lot of hot spots. This is especially true of soybeans in small bins without fall floors.

On a clear, nice day, go out and check your bins. After someone with a good nose is in the bin, turn on the fan and smell the first air that comes in the first minute of the fan running to be sure that the grain smells fresh and pleasant. If it smells a little moldy, there is an issue and if it is a sour silage smell, there is a big issue. Walk around on the top especially where the spreader may have dumped the fines. Because of replant issues last summer, there have been spots in bins where the fines and wet soybeans all accumulate and don’t let much air through. A spot of wet spoiling grain the size of a basketball can spoil an entire bin of grain. The spoiling process produces a lot of heat and each pound of grain spoiled will produce 6 pounds of water to spoil more than 6 more pounds of grain, and it can happen fast.

Core the bins and make sure that this grain is in good shape. Many of the problems will occur near the center and near the top, where they can be checked. Maintain the temperature below 40 degrees until you plan to sell or use it. Call me or your local Extension Ag Engineer with questions.
Jan. 1 • **Offices Closed** • All Counties

Jan. 3 • **Crop Advantage Series** at 9:30 a.m. • Northwest Iowa Community College, Sheldon

Jan. 3 • **Iowa Commercial Manure Applicator Certification** at 9:00 a.m. • All Counties

Jan. 5 • **Sioux County Beef Weigh-In** at 8:00-11:00 a.m. • K&D Feedlot, Sioux Center

Jan. 5 • **Master Gardener Volunteer Meeting** at 9:30 a.m. • Public Library, Sanborn

Jan. 6 • **Osceola County 4-H Awards Dinner** at 4:00 p.m. • Legion, Melvin

Jan. 8 • **Crop Advantage Series** at 9:30 a.m. • Buena Vista University – Siebens Forum, Storm Lake

Jan. 10 • **Women in Ag Annie’s Alumni Gathering** at 5:30 p.m. • Osceola Community Hospital, Sibley

Jan. 12 • **Osceola County Beef Weigh-In** at 8:00-10:00 a.m. • Fairgrounds, Sibley

Jan. 12 • **Lyon County Beef Weigh-In** at 8:00-11:00 a.m. • Jansma Cattle Company, Rock Rapids

Jan. 15 • **Feedlot Forum** at 9:30 a.m. • Terrace View Event Center, Sioux Center

Jan. 15 • **Crop Advantage Series** at 9:30 a.m. • Arrowwood Conference Center, Okoboji

Jan. 17 • **Annie’s Project** at 5:30 p.m. • Frontier Bank, Rock Rapids

Jan. 22 • **Crop Advantage Series** at 9:30 a.m. • Convention Center, Le Mars

Jan. 24 • **Annie’s Project** at 5:30 p.m. • Frontier Bank, Rock Rapids

Jan. 24 • **Private Pesticide Continuing Instruction Course** at 7:00 p.m. • Orange City

Jan. 28 • **Confinement Manure Applicator Training** at 1:30 p.m. • Sibley

Jan. 31 • **Annie’s Project** at 5:30 p.m. • Frontier Bank, Rock Rapids

[https://www.extension.iastate.edu/countyservices/](https://www.extension.iastate.edu/countyservices/)

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