Melissa O'Rourke, ISU Extension Farm and Agribusiness Management Specialist

In the October issue of Field and Feedlot, we shared information on some of the decisions, deadlines and educational resources. For such an important topic, it bears repeating and providing a few more details.

The first decision period and deadline is Sept. 29, 2014 to Feb. 27, 2015. During this time frame, owners have a one-time opportunity to reallocate a farm's base acres or update yields. The opportunity to update allows a realignment between the farm’s current production pattern and the payment formulas for commodity programs. The acreage update will move base acreage to more closely match current plantings. The yield update could provide larger payments, based on larger yields.

Go to this link to access the decision tool -- www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/crops/html/a1-35.html -- then click on the Excel (XLS) icon. Most information needed (2009-2012 planted and considered planted (P&CP) acres, current base acres, and current CCP payment yields) was mailed by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) to owners and operators. Other required information (actual farm yields 2008-2012 on a planted acre basis) must be obtained from your farm and records. NOTE: USDA letters to owners and operators may be missing planted and considered planted (P&PC) history of covered commodities where a tract division, tract combination, new tract, or farm transfer occurred between 2009 through 2014 – contact the county FSA office if that is the case and get those records corrected.

Decision Tool – Base acreage reallocation: After identifying your farm in the top part of the worksheet by FSA farm number, input the P&CP acres to each crop in that farm for 2009 through 2012, as well as the current base acres on the farm. The worksheet calculates the new reallocated base acres as the 2014 total base acres in that farm multiplied by the reallocation percentage stemming from the planting history. Therefore, the total number of base acres will be exactly the same before and after the reallocation and only the number of acres assigned to each crop might vary. Finally, the decision tool allows you to choose whether to update base acres or retain the current base allocation and see how that impacts the payment acres for ARC-CO and PLC (equal to 85 percent of the base acres per crop) over 2014 through 2018.

Decision Tool – PLC Payment Yield Update: After identifying your farm in the top part of the worksheet by FSA farm number, enter the actual farm yields for 2008 through 2012, as well as the CCP payment yields. If a crop was not planted in a particular year, then enter NP (not planted) in the corresponding cell. If a crop was planted or considered planted but no yield information is available, then enter ND (no data). The worksheet calculates the updated payment yields as the historical average of the highest of 90 percent of the farm yield or 75 percent of the 2008-2012 average county yields. If the updated payment yields are higher than the CCP payment yields, then it makes sense to update the farm’s yield information. The first worksheet within the decision tool shows information for an example farm. The decision tool has multiple worksheets to allow a user to enter data for up to five farms.

Questions about how to use this decision tool should be e-mailed to the ISU Ag Economist who developed it – Alejandro Plastina at Plastina@iastate.edu.

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Extension Web Sites

Ag Decision Maker
www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/

Beef Center
www.iowabeefcenter.org/

Manure Management
www.agronext.iastate.edu/immag/

Pork Center
www.ipic.iastate.edu/

ISU Extension and Outreach Dairy Team
www.extension.iastate.edu/DairyTeam/
**ARC-PLC Program Elections:** Nov. 17, 2014 to March 31, 2015 is the period when producers will make program elections which will remain in effect for the 2014-2018 crop years. Producers will elect the following: (1) PLC or ARC County on a covered commodity-by-commodity basis; or (2) ARC Individual for all covered commodities on the farm. Producers will not actually enroll and sign contracts until mid-April 2015 and into the summer months.

Again, there are many on-line resources for self-education on the ARC and PLC programs. These include:

- **ISU Ag Decision Maker Farm Bill site:** [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/info/farmbill.html](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/info/farmbill.html)
- **USDA-FSA Website:** [www.fsa.usda.gov/](http://www.fsa.usda.gov/)
- **University of Illinois:** [www.farmdoc.illinois.edu/](http://www.farmdoc.illinois.edu/)
- **Texas A & M University:** [https://usda.afpc.tamu.edu/](https://usda.afpc.tamu.edu/)

ISU Extension and Outreach does not attempt to make recommendations or tell producers what the best decision will be for their operation. Instead, we seek to educate producers about decisions to be made, and the resources and tools available to them. It is up to each producer to spend time working with these tools and making their own decisions.

**Educational meetings set throughout Northwest Iowa on Farm Bill 2014 ARC-PLC Decisions**

Iowa farmers and landowners will learn about the new programs authorized by 2014 Farm Bill at informational meetings conducted by ISU Extension and Outreach and local USDA Farm Service Agency staff members. Meetings will be held across northwest Iowa to explain options available under the new Farm Bill. These meetings will focus on the Price Loss Coverage (PLC) and Agricultural Risk Coverage (ARC) that will be administered by USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA), and the Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO) administered by the USDA Risk Management Agency through federal crop insurance providers.

In northwest Iowa, meetings will be facilitated by Melissa O’Rourke, the ISU Extension and Outreach Farm and Agribusiness Management specialist in this region. O’Rourke will discuss decisions farmers and landowners will need to make in the coming months regarding Price Loss Coverage, County Agricultural Risk Coverage, and Individual Agricultural Risk Coverage options. At each meeting, O’Rourke will be joined by USDA-Farm Service Agency staff members who will discuss the program procedures, policies, rules and forms. The USDA staff are the administrators of the programs with an intimate understand of the “nuts and bolts.” They will present vital information about the programs and answer questions throughout the meeting. Each meeting will end with a question-and-answer period by FSA staff prepared to respond to participant questions. Key topics that will be covered during the meetings include base acre reallocation and yield updating decisions; Price Loss Coverage (PLC); Ag Risk Coverage (ARC); and implications of PLC and ARC on participation in the Supplemental Coverage Option (SCO).

**Register to Attend a Meeting:** For the most current listing of meeting locations and dates across the state of Iowa, check the ISU Extension and Outreach statewide calendar, or visit the Ag Decision Maker Farm Bill website at [www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm) and click on FARM BILL or contact the local county extension office.

**Call county extension office at least 48 hours in advance to pre-register.**

There is no registration fee. However, participants should pre-register by calling the local county extension office for the meeting they will attend so that their name is added to a list to receive materials. Pre-registration will assure adequate materials, seating and refreshments.

**Meeting dates, locations, times and county contact phone numbers are listed at the end of this publication.**

**Making the Fall N Decision**

Joel DeJong, Crops Field Specialist

Trying to find the right nitrogen application rate is hard because the weather is never the same from year to year. We all know that this really does effect what the “right” N rate is. We need to understand the risks for different N application rates, and use the best information available to estimate how the environment of any year impacts the “right” rate. That is why I start with the ISU N Rate Calculator, then think about what this year is doing to the nitrogen in the soil, and if I need to manage application or rates differently based on the weather and moisture levels. The ISU N Rate Calculator can be found at this link: [http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/soilfertility/nrate.aspx](http://extension.agron.iastate.edu/soilfertility/nrate.aspx).

The N rate calculator, to me, is my “odds” chart to help me understand what yield response to N applications have been over the last few years. This web page summarizes yield response trials from recent years across Iowa – 246 trials from corn after soybeans, and 133 for corn following corn. An optimum N rate is calculated for each individual site, using the cost of N and corn price as factors for determining the maximum economic return to investment. This information is compiled, and an average is calculated and displayed on the web page. That is called the “Maximum Return to N” (MRTN), the N rate where the economic net return to N application is maximized. Of course, the MRTN will change with different fertilizer and corn prices – which you can put into the program when you run it yourself.

This Iowa data, I believe, offers us our best odds chart for where to start because this is Iowa data from many fields under many different environments. We do, however, need to think about how we should adjust for environmental or management factors on our individual farms, a step that is often missed in the planning process. Start by using the N Rate Calculator at the link shown above. Look at all the tables that you can, put in different price scenarios, and review both corn...
after soybean and corn/corn data sets. If you still don’t understand it, contact your local ISU Extension and Outreach Field Agronomist to discuss it. And then consider making adjustments for your farm.

To make effective adjustments to N rates, we need to know and understand the Nitrogen Cycle. Remember that the form of N that can be lost from the soil through leaching or through denitrification when soils are water-logged would be the nitrate form. Nitrogen in the ammonium form in the soil is stable. When soil temperatures are warm, the movement from ammonium to nitrate occurs, increasing risk of N loss when our soil has excess water. The process stops at about 32 degrees, but slows greatly when we are below 50 degrees. That is why we really encourage waiting until soil temperatures are below 50 degrees and going down before we apply anhydrous in the fall. Early spring seems to be the time when we often have excess water in our soil profile, and with all the late summer and early fall precipitation we appear to be set up for many locations with excess water in the soil next spring. Reduce loss by keeping it in the ammonium form in the soil as long as possible. N-Serve added to anhydrous can help slow the process, too.

Believe it or not, there really isn’t a good relationship between what a field yields and the optimum N application rate, according to the N response research used to develop the N rate calculator. That’s not just data from Iowa State University – other Midwest universities have shown the same results. When you go to the N Rate Calculator page, click on and review all four charts. You can see there is no correlation on the table showing the individual data from all of the sites.

In summary, remember that applying too little or too much N can both cost us money. The N Rate calculator uses a large data set from Iowa fields to give us a good “odds chart” to determine where to start. However, based on the environment – including what form is the N in when we get excess soil moisture conditions – we might need to adjust for losses from the root zone. Finally, as in all businesses, we need to continually improve. Evaluate how we do each year, consider management options that are more cost effective and, even more importantly now, reduce environmental risk.

Compost Your Yard and Garden Leftovers
Margaret Murphy, Regional Food Coordinator and Horticulture Educator

Composting is a great way to dispose of yard and garden waste and keep it out of the landfill. Components of good composting include: moisture, organic material, soil and oxygen.

Begin with a high balance of nutrients. Nitrogen and carbon are both needed for the soil decomposers to do their job. Materials with a high carbon source include brown materials like leaves, cornstalks, pine needles or twigs. These should be balanced with green materials like fresh grass clippings, vegetable scraps or a nitrogen fertilizer which are a high source of nitrogen.

Composting is most efficient when materials are chopped or shredded as smaller pieces decay faster (although adding a few larger pieces can help with aeration).

Proper aeration of composting materials will increase the rate of decomposition. Microorganisms that break down organic matter need oxygen to survive. To provide adequate oxygen, regularly turn the pile by bringing materials at the center out to the edges. Not turning the pile will slow the composting process and can cause odor problems.

Moisture levels are also important for good composting. If the compost pile is too dry, materials will decompose very slowly. Too much moisture can cause odor problems. The composting material should feel like a damp sponge. If you can take a handful of material and squeeze out more than a drop or two of water, the compost is too wet.

Create layers when building the compost pile. Start with a six to eight inch layer of plant material. Sprinkle water on the materials until moist. Follow this with a one to two inch layer of garden soil or finished compost to supply the necessary microorganisms or decomposers. Next apply a couple of inches of livestock/poultry manure or scatter fertilizer over the surface of the pile to provide the microbes with nitrogen. If using fertilizer, one cup of 10-10-10 or 12-12-12 commercial fertilizer per 25 square feet is a suggested amount. See University of Illinois Extension Building Your Compost Pile (http://web.extension.illinois.edu/homecompost/building.cfm).

Repeat this layering process until the pile is three to five feet high.

The internal temperature of an active compost pile can reach between 120 and 150 degrees F. Compost is finished when it closely resembles soil. It should be dark brown in color and have an earthy smell.

For more information on backyard composting, visit the Iowa State University Extension and Outreach store to download a free copy of Composting Yard Waste (https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Composting-Yard-Waste) and Questions About Composting – Reiman Gardens (https://store.extension.iastate.edu/Product/Questions-About-Composting-Reiman-Gardens).

Call your county offices for specific dates and times:
Monthly Manure Handling Certification Reshows
Pesticide Applicator Continuing Instructions Courses
Commercial Applicator Continuing Instruction Courses
Farm Bill 2014—ARC-PLC Decision Making Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Location and Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 17</td>
<td>9 a.m.</td>
<td>Western Iowa Tech Community College (WIT), Cherokee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 17</td>
<td>1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Primghar Community Center, Primghar</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 20</td>
<td>9:30 a.m.</td>
<td>Iowa Lakes Community College (ILCC), Emmetsburg</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 21</td>
<td>9 a.m.</td>
<td>Spencer Community Theater, Spencer</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nov. 24</td>
<td>9 a.m.</td>
<td>ISU Extension and Outreach meeting room, Spirit Lake</td>
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<td>Nov. 24</td>
<td>2:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Iowa Lakes Community College (ILCC), Estherville</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 2</td>
<td>9 a.m.</td>
<td>Northwest Iowa Community College, Sheldon</td>
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<td>Dec. 2</td>
<td>1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Forster Community Center, Rock Rapids</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 3</td>
<td>9 a.m.</td>
<td>Le Mars Convention Center, Le Mars</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 3</td>
<td>1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>Cargill Room at Western Iowa Tech (WIT), Sioux City</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 4</td>
<td>1:30 p.m.</td>
<td>AEA/Extension Building, Storm Lake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 4</td>
<td>6:30 p.m.</td>
<td>AEA/Extension Building, Storm Lake</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 8</td>
<td>9 a.m.</td>
<td>Expo Center, Pocahontas</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec. 16</td>
<td>1 p.m.</td>
<td>First Presbyterian Church, Sibley</td>
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</tbody>
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Address Service Requested

Don’t Miss!

Nov. 3 Pesticide Testing • Primghar
Nov. 5 Ornamental and Turf Training 3O, 3T, 3OT, 10 • all county offices
Nov. 12 Commercial Ag Training 1A, 1B, 1C, 10 • all county offices
Nov. 18 Passion for Pigs • Orange City
Nov. 25 PQA Plus 2.0 Certification • Cherokee
Dec. 2 Beef Quality Assurance Certification and Assuring Cattle Care
Le Mars, Ida Grove and Emmetsburg
Dec. 4 Beef Feedlot Monitoring Program Workshop • Sac City
Dec. 9 Lamb Feedlot Meeting • Sheldon