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

Producers and other agriculture professionals know that they face a variety of decisions related to the 2014 Farm Bill—officially known as the Agriculture Act of 2014. Here are some resources to getting educated on the decisions that need to be made, deadlines, and future educational events.

On September 29, 2014, the USDA-Farm Service Agency (FSA) announced upcoming decision periods and deadlines. These are related to Price Loss Coverage (PLC) and/or Agriculture Risk Coverage (either County or Individual) (known as ARC-County or ARC-Individual) for the following:

- **September 29, 2014 to February 27, 2015:** Owners have a one-time opportunity to reallocate a farm’s base acres or update yields.
- **November 17, 2014 to March 31, 2015:** During this period, 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.
- **Mid-April 2015 to Summer 2015:** ARC/PLC Enrollment—the period when producers sign contracts to participate in ARC/PLC for 2014 and 2015 crop years.

The good news that we learned on September 29 is that the first deadline is February 27, 2015. We certainly do not encourage producers to wait until the “last minute” – there is adequate time for everyone to become educated about these programs.

There are many on-line resources for producers to start self-education on the ARC and PLC programs. We highly encourage producers spend time with resources and decision tools to learn about the programs and choices available. Following is a list of some recommended on-line resources and the links.

**ISU Ag Decision Maker Farm Bill site:**
www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/adcma/html/farmbill.html

This link is the portal to where all resources and meeting announcements will be gathered. In particular – at this time – we would like to highlight a tool intended to assist producers in analyzing the choice to update base acres and yields. The opportunity to update allows a realignment between the farm’s current production pattern and the payment formulas for commodity programs. For some farms, the base acreage and yields were determined with data from the 1980s and much has changed since that time. An acreage update will move base acreage to more closely match current plantings. The yield update could provide larger payments, based on larger yields. This decision tool is designed to help Iowa farmland owners with the base acre reallocation and payment yield update decisions. Most of the information required to use this tool (2009-2012 planted and considered planted acres, current base acres, and current CCP payment yields) has already been mailed by the USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) to farmland owners and operators. Other required information (actual farm yields 2008-2012 on a planted acre basis) will have to be recovered from farm and other agricultural records. The owner or operator can compile the yield per crop per year, but not submit the yields to the FSA county office until yield software becomes available in the fall of 2014. Here is the link to the base allocation decision tool: www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/crops/html/a1-35.html

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.

**USDA-FSA Website:** The Farm Service Agency (FSA) has a page that provides more connections to official information and decision tools. That link is: www.fsa.usda.gov/FSA, look under Programs and Services, ARC/PLC Program.

**University Extension Resources:** We recommend two other university extension websites with vast information about the 2014 Farm Bill. The University of Illinois provides links to fact sheets, webinars and decision tools – these can be found at:
Meetings: We are working with USDA-FSA offices in each county to schedule meetings that will provide some basic 2014 Farm Bill education. These meeting will be held in November and December and meeting dates, times and locations will be publicized and posted on county extension websites and on Ag Decision Maker www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm. The ISU Farm Management team is working on materials (handouts and presentations) that we believe will be appropriate education tools for producers. We emphasize that we do not attempt to make recommendations or tell producers what to do or what the “best” decision will be. Our goal is to educate producers about decisions they need to make, 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.

Swine Producers Should Prepare for Fall and Winter
Dave Stender, Swine Program Specialist

There is a possibility of a repeat of last year’s propane prices. According to a letter sent out from the Iowa Secretary of Agriculture Bill Northey this summer, there is a gas pipeline that is no longer available for propane. The pipeline provided approximately 13% of Iowa’s annual use and 38% of Minnesota’s annual use. According to Northey, increased rail movement of propane is challenging due to limited capacity and already high demand from other sectors. In the letter he reminded producers to make sure propane supplies are full going into the fall season to take advantage of early buy/booking programs, to consider expanding on-site capacity, and to communicate early and regularly with propane suppliers.

Now is also a good time for swine producers to complete winter preparations for their swine facilities.

1. Start with the fans. Blades and shutters should be cleaned. Check to see that deflectors and discharge cones are in good repair. Correct tension on belts and see that winter covers are ready to put on unused fans.
2. Inlets should be checked to see if they are properly aligned and not locked shut. Make sure the manure pump ports are sealed so the inlets work more effectively. Leaks will decrease inlet performance. Also look for leaks in the curtains. Make sure the curtains are not sagging or have gaps. There should be a 2-3” overlap at the top plate. Holes need to be repaired and the curtain ropes should be in place and tight.
3. Check to be sure that the soffits are clear of debris. If the facility has doors on the north or west soffit they should be closed before the snow flies from the northwest.
4. The controller should be adjusted for winter. The set point should not be set less than 1.5 F bandwidth on variable speed fans, the curtain cycle (ON plus OFF) should be at least 2 minutes, and the furnace OFF setting should be at least 2 F below set point. Make sure to adjust the emergency thermostats and clean your temperature probes. All probes must be working correctly for the system to function normally. The controller uses average temperature of probes to run to the ventilation, heating and cooling system.
5. Remember to check the emergency backup system to make sure it is functioning properly. Avoid a disastrous death loss catastrophe if there happens to be a power outage.

Prevention is key and checking the working order of all systems is the key part of prevention. Contact Dave Stender, ISU swine field specialist with your comments and questions concerning swine production: cell phone, 712-261-0225 or dstender@iastate.edu.

Beef Programming
Beth Ellen Doran, Beef Program Specialist

Fall is here – county fairs are over, crops are maturing, calves will soon be weaned – and for extension, a new year of research and programming starts.

Two “final chance” workshops will be offered to help producers attain their Beef Quality Assurance certification and prepare for a packer inspection. During the workshop, participants will complete two of the required protocols – handling of non-ambulatory animals and humane euthanasia. No pre-registration is required, and there is no charge to attend the workshop as this program is supported by the Beef Check-Off.

Beef Quality Assurance Certification and Assuring Cattle Care Workshops
Tuesday—December 2, 2014

9:30-11:30 a.m. • Plymouth County Extension Office
Le Mars, Iowa (lower level of Le Mars Convention Center)

2–4 p.m. • Rec Center, Ida Grove, Iowa

Feedlot Forum 2015 will usher in January. This year’s forum focuses on new frontiers. Kristina Butts will lead off the day with a discussion of ag policy and the impact of the 2014 Farm Bill on beef producers. Kristina is executive director of legislative affairs for the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association. Working in Washington, D.C., she has her feet in the fire every day for beef producers. Other presentations will feature changing corn co-products, what’s coming in animal welfare, managing feedlot risk in uncertain times and market outlook.

Feedlot Forum 2015
Thursday – January 22, 2015
Terrace View Event Center – Sioux Center, Iowa

The Iowa Beef Center staff is currently working on a one-day, hands-on workshop for late winter. The workshop is part of a risk management grant designed to help producers manage various
kinds of risk – production risk, marketing risk and financial risk. One part of the grant has involved revising the Beef Feedlot Systems manual. Many producers have used the previous version of this manual to compare various kinds of feedlot facilities, such as open lots, open lots with shelter, deep-bedded mono-slopes and deep-pit barns. The new version has been expanded to include variations on each of these kinds of facilities, deep-bedded hoop barns, a special section on manure management, other considerations in choosing a facility and of course, financial analyses.

For cow-calf producers, the big decision may be whether to retain your calves or sell them in an upcoming feeder calf auction. To say the least, feeder cattle are selling at record high prices!

At the time of this writing, Iowa feeders weighing 500-550 pounds sold for $294/cwt. or $1470 gross. The 600-650 pound steer calves were bringing $243/cwt or $1458 gross. These numbers would suggest that it would be better financially to sell the lighter calf rather than background for 50 days at 2 pounds per day gain.

This doesn’t mean that backgrounding will never pay for itself. Researchers involved with Iowa Beef Center found that calves certified as vaccinated and weaned at least 30 days sold for $6.15/ cwt more than calves that were not vaccinated and not weaned.

Hence, one way to add value to the feeder calf is to consider consigning to a pre-conditioned feeder calf sale. This fall and winter, there will be a number of pre-conditioned feeder cattle sales in NW and West Central Iowa. If this is the route you plan to take, calves will need to be managed to meet the sale specifications, which include having been weaned a minimum of 30 days, dehorned (if horns are present), castrated (if a bull), treated for internal and external parasites and vaccinated for specific diseases by your local veterinarian.

Once all this is done, the calf will have a green-tag put in its ear, and the vet will provide a pre-conditioned certificate that will accompany the calf and be provided to the new owner. A stepped-up protocol (the pre-conditioned, gold tag calf) is similar to the requirements for the pre-conditioned green-tag calf, except that the many of the vaccinations are boostered and the calf must have been weaned 45 days.

This brings up a point that I want to clarify. A green-tagged calf is NOT the same as a pre-conditioned, green-tagged calf. Pre-conditioning means that the calf has been weaned the prescribed number of days, is bunk broke and has a certificate from the attending vet to prove this. The green-tag refers to the rest (dehorning, castration, internal/external parasite treatment and vaccinations). Make sure you know and realize the difference!

And last, but not least. Congratulations to all of our Northwest Iowa 4-H’ers who exhibited beef at both the Iowa State Fair and the Clay County Fair! They brought home their fair share of purple ribbons and a number of blue ribbons in the feeder calf, market animal and breeding heifer competitions. This is positive proof that the future of the beef industry in Northwest Iowa is indeed bright!

Expected Corn Drydown
Paul Kassel, Crop Field Specialist

Corn grain drydown in the field may be a big issue this fall. There are many factors that will affect rates of corn drydown. Some of those factors are obvious – like hybrid maturity, and the amount and duration of sun and wind activity. Also the amount of rainy days will affect the rate and amount of grain drydown – since little or no grain drying occurs during rainy conditions.

Grain drydown is like any other air drying activity – it requires heat to lower the relative humidity and air movement to assist the drying process. One way to estimate the drying power of the air is to use Growing Degree Days (GDDs). The use of GDDs to estimate corn drydown is not a perfect predictor, but it gives a general idea of the potential for field drydown.

Table 1 shows the expected GDDs for northern Iowa. Info on GDDs for 2009 is also listed, since the fall of 2009 was a challenging fall for field drying and harvest. One bright spot in the 2009 data shows one week in November that equaled the typical GDD accumulation for mid-October.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>normal</th>
<th>2009</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/25 – 10/1</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/30 – 10/8</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/8 – 15</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>10/15 – 22</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>26</td>
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<td>10/22 – 29</td>
<td>35</td>
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<td>10/29 – 11/5</td>
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<td>11/5 – 12</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>11/12 – 29</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>8</td>
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Generally, it takes 30 GDDs to lower grain moisture in the field each point from 30% to 25%. Field drying corn from 25 to 20 percent requires about 45 GDDs per point of moisture. Sources of information on GDD requirements for rates of field drydown do not all agree. For example, some Ohio information shows that GDDs needed for one point of field moisture loss ranges from 22 to 29 GDDs/point.

Information from a field study by R.L. Nielsen from Purdue shows that rates of grain drydown can be 0.75 to 0.50 point/day in late September and early October. However, rates of field drydown usually slow considerably once mid-October occurs.

Much of the corn crop in northwest Iowa reached maturity on about October 1. Corn grain moisture is usually about 30% once corn reaches black layer maturity. Therefore, the potential for a lot of field drydown of this year’s corn crop is not real high. It will take some unusually warm late October weather to achieve high levels of field drydown.

For more resources and decision tools, visit Ag Decision Maker -- www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm/decisionaid2all.html.
Hotlines Available For All
Iowa Concern (800-447-1985)
Farm On (877-BFC-1999)
Teen Line (800-443-8336)
BETS OFF (800-BETS-OFF) (800-238-7633)

Hotlines Available to Iowa Residents Only
Families Answer Line (800-262-3804)
Hortline (515) 294-3108
Iowa Healthy Families (800-369-2229)
PORKLine (800-808-7675)

Precision Ag Youth Field Days
September 2-5, 2014 • Calumet

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