

Ag Decision Maker Resources

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SPEAKERS

Speaker 3, Christa Hartsook, Ann Johanns, Olivia Hanlon



Christa Hartsook 00:15

Hello, and welcome to the Small Farms Podcast, a production of the Small Farms Program at Iowa State University Extension and Outreach. Our podcast covers the opportunities and challenges associated with rural life.



Olivia Hanlon 00:29

In this episode, I interview Ann Johanns, Iowa State University Extension and Outreach Extension Program Specialist, and talk about the Ag Decision Maker platform. I'm Olivia Hanlon, Farm, Food and Enterprise Development Extension Specialist, and welcome to the Small Farms Sustainability Podcast. Ann, welcome to the show. Thanks for being on.



Ann Johanns 00:50

I'm happy to be joining you today, Olivia.



Olivia Hanlon 00:53

Could you give our listeners a little bit of background into what the purpose of the Ag Decision Maker website is?

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Ann Johans 01:00

Sure, Ag Decision Maker has a long history of providing farm management materials that are easily accessible to address specific questions in agriculture. The materials on the website focus in several different areas. We have crops, livestock, whole farm, business development, cooperatives, and renewable energy. And within each of those, we have some subtopics that people can kind of drill down to what they're looking for, or we have a pretty good search engine right on the website. And the history of it is that it began as a three ring binder. So is a hard copy full of fact sheets and they call it just the Farm Management Handbook. And it was distributed to our extension offices beginning in North Central Iowa and then across the state and it since has evolved into an online library of materials that are accessible to anyone when they need it.

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Olivia Hanlon 01:52

That sounds great. So who all can benefit from the resources that are on the Ag Decision Maker website?

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Ann Johans 01:59

The focus of the website materials has been for all Iowans in agriculture, specifically our farmers, landowners, lenders, farm managers, Ag instructors, and agribusiness professionals. Anybody who might have some questions on farm management, Ag Decision Maker is probably a good place to start. And while every farm in Iowa is unique — that's something I always say that there's unique aspects to any farm regardless of size — producers still often have common questions. And so the information they find on Ag Decision Maker can provide a base for answers to those common questions and help them form the more specific questions so often we don't know what we don't know. And so Ag Decision Maker is a really good place to start to help answer those base questions and then they can build on that. And that's where our specialists come in. And they can help individualize the information to their operation.

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Olivia Hanlon 02:59

Great. So you talked a little bit about it when you were giving us the purpose of Ag Decision Maker, but could you tell us a little more in depth what types of resources we'll find on Ag Decision Maker?

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Ann Johans 03:09

Yes. So while it's that base information, it's provided in multiple ways. So resources on Ag Decision Maker, they're organized both by subject matter, and then by type of resource and by type of resource, I mean, information files, so basic fact sheets, decision tools, which are spreadsheet calculators, and then media files, so we have videos as well as voiced-over presentations, and then teaching activities. And so those are often used by our ag teachers in high schools and community college classrooms across the state. So we have activities on there, those ag teachers know a lot, but sometimes maybe farm management wasn't their specialty. So we can provide them some resources that their classrooms can use. And then we have the answers on a protected area that ag teachers can then ask to be added to. So there are 430 information files, close to 150 decision tools, or spreadsheets, and then 100 different teaching activities. And I think last count, there are around 50 media files. Some of those might be things that go out of date quickly and so they might be available for a while and then taken down. But I think as of the most recent count, they're around 50.



Olivia Hanlon 04:22

That's awesome. So for those materials, where did those come from?



Ann Johans 04:27

Content on the website has mainly been provided by our ISU Extension and Outreach specialists, both campus based faculty as well as our farm management field staff. The specialists, sometimes they do include other disciplines as well as researchers from our Department of Economics at ISU and then selected articles from other institutions. So we pull from other universities or government organizations for some topics. We've done that as well in the past and then sometimes people want to see a specific specialists or author. And so we do have them listed by author. And sometimes authors like to see the materials they have on the website. And so last I checked, we had over 90 different authors, some of them have since retired, but their materials are still very relevant. And we still support the material that they once provided.



Olivia Hanlon 05:19

That's awesome. So of those resources, what are a couple of your most popular that you have on Ag Decision Maker?



Ann Johans 05:26

So I looked at some of our web statistics and just here recently, what have been the most

popular are surveys done by Iowa State University Extension that are updated annually are regularly regardless of if they've just been released, or it's eight months later, those are often our most popular. Those include the custom rate survey that's released each March, our cash rental rate survey is released each May. And then in January, and kind of the middle of the year, we have our annual estimated costs of crop and livestock production. With each of those, though, we have supporting publications, and so that can help in using that information and scaling it by farm size. Then, the other thing that is really popular right now, as far as downloads go is our Farm Bill Decision Tools. So with each new Farm Bill, we've done educational programs across the state, and then used materials on Ag Decision Maker to help that effort. And the 2018 Farm Bill was no different. And so we have decision tools that help analyze those Farm Bill decisions, basically, between ARC and PLC for ag producers. And I think it's important to note that we update those projections regularly. Because unlike the 2014 Farm Bill program, where producers signed up, and they were kind of locked into that decision, Iowa ag producers, we'll get to that opportunity to reassess that decision here in the coming year. And so it's really important that we keep those tools viable and readily available for them.

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Olivia Hanlon 07:04

Great. So you talked a little bit about those surveys being pretty popular. You guys just recently released the survey on cash rent, could you give us a general overview of what all of that kind of entails?

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Ann Johans 07:16

Yes, it is definitely one of our more popular resources we have. And like I mentioned, it was just released in May, it is a county level survey and we send the survey instrument out each March. And then those results come in. And we have the summary published, usually the first or second week in May. And the survey looks at corn and soybean tillable acres and we break it down by high, medium, and low quality for each county in Iowa. And then we have an average for each county in Iowa. And then at the crop recording district level, we release averages for oats, hay and pasture. So there's a lot of detail. And it's a lot of detail that it's unique for Iowa, we don't necessarily have a repeated survey for other states. There's definitely some rental rate information. But the ISU cash rental rate survey provides more detail than you can find in other surveys. So that's really unique and special for our producers and landowners here in the state. And with half the acres in Iowa under some form of rental agreement. It's a really important topic. So we have lots of materials to support the survey, we really want to make sure that all parties involved in leasing can be educated in their role. And so our leasing page has kind of an overview of lease agreements, things producers and landlords should consider, example lease forms, legal

information, and then we look at specific types of farmland leases as well, such as cash rent, flexible leases, as well as crop share. And just I think I'd really like to share that in July and August, we always have leasing meetings across the state. While those might look a little different for 2020, listeners should know that we will strive to provide the information as best we can in multiple formats, whether that still be in person, we definitely we have some backup recorded videos for those who may not be able to attend or if those meetings can't be held, we will have webinars. And so we'll be pushing information out in the coming weeks. But that information we'll have it available year round, even if we don't have those in-person programs.

O Olivia Hanlon 09:23

Wonderful that is great for our listeners to know. So how can our listeners access some of these resources that we've talked about today?

A Ann Johans 09:30

So everything I've mentioned is found on the website, that address is www.extension.iastate.edu/agdm or it might just be quicker, you can always search for Ag Decision Maker. Oftentimes, if you search for some of those farm management things, Ag Decision Maker, listeners might not realize that that's the resource that they find when they're first searching for a topic but more often than not, it is. And so you could search by the topic or for Ag Decision Maker and then search within the website.

O Olivia Hanlon 10:09

Great. Is there anything we didn't cover today that you'd like to mention before we wrap up Ann?

A Ann Johans 10:14

Oh, I did forget to mention, if listeners want to get the information pushed out to them, we have a free email signup. And that email is only used for Ag Decision Maker and we only use it about once a month, very, very rarely I might send notice of, for instance, last month, or here in the last couple of weeks, we had a webinar, specifically on signing up for the CFAP or Coronavirus Food Assistance Program. And so I did send notice of that because it came up very, very quickly. And so on the left hand side of the Ag Decision Maker homepage, there's a link for email signup, and so they can sign up through that, or we do have a Twitter feed that we use regularly as well as a blog and so on those we highlight updates to the website along with relevant information that comes up

throughout each month. And my parting thought might be that Ag Decision Maker is a resource, but it's often that first step, right? So it's the people behind it, those specialists that are the real resource. And listeners should know that the people behind the website are available for questions on the materials when they can't find the answer they're looking for. And so they can always contact the author of the information or we have an email address, it's agdm@iastate.edu and then we can get that question to the appropriate expert.



Olivia Hanlon 11:38

Great. Well thank you so much for being on again today, Ann.



Ann Johanss 11:42

Thank you for having me.



Speaker 3 11:44

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