



Comments from Pete

Hello everyone,

I hope this newsletter finds everyone in good spirits and FREE of SNOW! As I write these comments the last week of March, we just had one of our bigger snowfalls of the winter. I don't know about you, but I am tired of winter, and was really enjoying the warmer temps and green grass.

Well, by the time you get this, it will almost be April, and our thoughts should be focusing on planting. This newsletter contains several articles that might help your management decisions this spring from when to plant to the new Government programs.

Hope you enjoy it! And as always, if you have questions or problems, please contact me at 309-467-3789 or E-mail at fandel@illinois.edu.

Be Safe!!

Pete Fandel, Unit Educator, Crop Systems

In This Issue . . .



- *Woodford County's Yields*
- *ACRE Program*
- *Don't Work Fields Wet or Expect Soil Compaction*
- *Spring is Here - Be Alert!!*
- *Corn Planting Date: Has it Changed?*
- *When To Test Your Drinking Water*

Farm Tractor and Machinery Safety Certification June 16, 17, 18 & 19, 2009

The Farm Tractor and Machinery Safety Certification program will be offered again this year. This program is designed to train youth between the ages of 14 and 16 in proper tractor and machinery operation and safety.

The Child Labor Act prohibits hiring youth less than 16 years of age in certain jobs, which are considered hazardous. Farming is considered one of those jobs. Children may work on their parent's farm without violating this law. However, if a child under 16 is hired to work on someone else's farm, then they are in violation.

If a child between the ages of 14 and 16 years of age wishes to work on someone else's farm, they must first be certified. Woodford County Extension will be offering this training and certification on June 16 and 17 from 1:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m., and June 18 and 19 from 9:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. at the Woodford County Farm Bureau Building.

There is a fee of \$25 to cover the cost of materials and lunch on June 18 and 19. If you know of any youth that needs to be certified, please have them call the Woodford County Extension Office at 309-467-3789 to register for this course. Deadline for registration is June 12, 2009.



Woodford County's Average Yields

The United States Department of Agriculture has released its county-level data for the 2008 crop year. Woodford County had the second highest county average corn and soybean yields in Illinois with 206 and 54 bushel per acre yields respectively. Our previous record county corn yield was last year with 204bu/acre. This is the first time in history that Woodford County had back-to-back county average yields over 200bu/acre. That is an amazing feat considering our higher county average corn yield before 2007 was 187bu/acre.

Our soybean yield at 54bu/acre was not only the second highest in the state, it was the second highest county average as well. It was only one bushel per acre off of our record yield from 2006 of 55bu/acre.

In 2008 Woodford County planted 162,800 acres of corn and 100,600 acres of soybeans. If you take the average yield times the acres of that crop times the average price so far this year, the value of 2008 production in the county would be \$151,940,140

If you would like more information on county average yields, you can visit the USDA's National Agriculture Statistics Service website at nass.usda.gov.

ACRE Program

A fundamental change in commodity title programs in the 2008 Farm Bill resulted in the creation of the new Average Crop Revenue Election Program (ACRE). ACRE is a revenue-based support program that effectively acts as a put option on state-level revenue for each program crop. Starting with the 2009 crop year, producers of program crops will have the option of electing coverage under ACRE, or defaulting to support under the existing suite of commodity programs. This choice will be made on a FSA farm basis. The decision can be deferred to future crop years, but if a farm is elected into the ACRE program, the decision is irrevocable. Thus, once elected, the farm will be covered by ACRE throughout the life of the current Farm Bill which goes through the 2012 crop.

As a producer you should take a serious look at this new program. If you would like more information on the ACRE program, please contact the Woodford County Extension office at 309-467-3789, or visit the following website: http://www.farmdoc.uiuc.edu/manage/newsletters/fefo09_04/fefo09_04.html

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS WOODFORD UNIT

117 W. Center
PO Box 162
Eureka, IL 61530

Professional Staff

Cynthia Baer, Director
Pete Fandel, Educator
Cathy Blunier, Educator
Gwen Buchanan, Coordinator

Office Support Staff

Cindy Johnson
Jan McKay

Extension Council

Jennifer Adams
Bruce Bonetto
Bruce Brown
Bill Davison
Bob Janssen
Sarah Kath
Kathleen Knoblauch
Jean Kraus
Dawn Maloney
Ryan McHenry
Debbie Miller
Emily Miller
Jack Pfaffmann
Bill Royer
Bill Schulz
Dana White

USEFUL WEBSITES

University of Illinois Extension

<http://www.extension.uiuc.edu>

Pest Management Crop Development Bulletin

<http://www.ipm.uiuc.edu/bulletin/>

Farmdoc Website

<http://www.farmdoc.uiuc.edu/>

Illinois Farm Regulations Website

<http://www.extension.uiuc.edu/ezregs/>

Woodford County Extension Office Hours

8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Monday thru Friday

Phone: (309) 467-3789

Fax: (309) 467-6034

Email: woodford_co@extension.uiuc.edu

Visit us on-line at www.extension.uiuc.edu/woodford

If you need a reasonable accommodation to participate in any of our programs, please contact the Woodford County Extension Office at (309) 467-3789.

Don't Work Fields Wet or Expect Soil Compaction

In just a few weeks, many farmers will be out in their fields, tilling their soil and beginning to plant their cornfields. While the itch of spring may be too hard to resist for some farmers anxious to begin field work, don't yield to the temptation, warns Bob Frazee, University of Illinois Natural Resources Educator. If you begin field work too early, you run the risk of excessive soil compaction on soil that is still too wet. Substantial yield reduction due to compaction can be expected; compaction reduces drainage; causes denitrification; and limits the availability of oxygen to the roots.

The most obvious preventative measure is to avoid, if at all possible, both heavy wheel traffic and tillage of soils that are too wet. In many years, the greatest amount of soil compaction is caused by the very *first* trip across the field in the spring, whether this may be applying pre-plant anhydrous ammonia or starting spring tillage. Although the soil surface is dry, and you may even see wind erosion occurring, usually only the top one-inch or so of the soil profile is dry. The rest of the soil profile is usually still saturated with water and is very susceptible to compaction. Allowing the soil to dry for just one or two more days can significantly minimize compaction problems for the rest of the season.

Twenty years ago when farmers tried to work in fields that were too wet, they got *stuck*! However, with today's high-powered tractors and large dual tires, farmers can actually run their equipment through some areas of their fields where water may still be standing. The resulting puddled soil, reduced infiltration and drainage, and poor plant growth are not necessarily the fault of the equipment, but the blame should probably go to the operator for operating the equipment when soil conditions are not fit.

Recent University of Illinois studies have shown that deep soil compaction, below the depth of tillage, persists for many years and is expensive and often impractical, if not impossible to remove. Thus *preventing* soil compaction from occurring is the key. The following recommendations should be considered in order to minimize the severity of compaction in a wet spring:

- Keep out of fields whenever they are wet!
- Reduce the number of tillage passes.
- Reduce surface pressure by using wide tires, duals, or tracks.
- Minimize tractor weight.
- Maintain minimum tire inflation.
- Space wheels to follow the same path by using a controlled traffic system.
- Avoid over-sized equipment.
- Keep wagons, trucks and other unnecessary equipment out of the fields.
- Combine field operations into one trip, such as applying herbicides and liquid fertilizer.
- Improve soil drainage by installing surface and sub-surface drainage systems.
- Consider adopting a long-term no-till farming system.

Spring is Here - Be Alert !

As the temperatures begin to rise, planting season will begin. This means that farm equipment will frequently be traveling on the roads in rural areas. During the next couple of months pay extra attention to slow moving vehicles.

Collisions between farm vehicles and automobiles can happen in a variety of ways. The most common scenario is the left-turn collision. It happens when a farm vehicle is about to make a left-turn, meanwhile, a motorist behind the farm vehicle decides to pass. Twenty-two percent of all farm related accidents occur in this manner. Keep in mind large farm vehicles, like semi-trucks, may need to take wide left turns. The operator may need to swing to the right before making the left turn because they need the extra room to get lined up with the farm gate or driveway. The operator may not be able to see what is behind them until they are already into the turn. To avoid an accident, a motorist should never assume that a farm vehicle that pulls to the right side of the road is going to turn right, or is letting you pass. Try to make eye contact with the operator before you attempt to pass. They will usually let you know their intentions with a hand signal. If you cannot see the operator, check the right side of the road for any places that the vehicle might turn, such as, field gates or driveways.

The rear-end collision is also very common, it results in 20% of all farm vehicle accidents. In Illinois 2,341 such accidents occurred in the past seven years, according to the Illinois DOT. These accidents are usually "catastrophic" due to the speed difference between the two vehicles. It is easy to misjudge the speed of a farm implement. Most farm vehicles are not designed to travel at speeds greater than 25 miles per hour. At that speed they are required by law to have a Slow Moving Vehicle emblem on the rear-most implement. Keep in mind that if you are driving at 55 mph and come upon a tractor that is traveling 15 mph, it will only take you five seconds to close a gap the length of a football field. So remember, as soon as you see a farm vehicle start applying the brake.

Many collisions also occur when motorists pass a farm vehicle. Some farm equipment is extra wide or extra long, which motorists don't consider when they plan to pass. To avoid these type of accidents, do not assume that the farmer can move aside to let you pass. The shoulder may be soft, wet, or steep, which can cause the farm vehicle to tip, or the shoulder may not be able to support the weight of the farm vehicle. When passing, make sure you can see the farm vehicle in your rear-view mirror before you attempt to get back into your lane.

Remember, when traveling on rural roads to stay ALERT. Enjoy your drive, even if you have to follow a farm vehicle traveling 20 mph for two miles, it will only add 6 minutes to your trip. That is about the same time as waiting for two stoplights.



Corn Planting Date: Has It Changed?

It's late March and many farmers have been anxious about the cool wet weather and are wondering when they will get into the fields. One question that I seem to get every year is "When should I start planting corn?" Older long-term planting studies by the University show that the best time to plant corn is the last week of April, but new data is starting to show that date may be a bit too late.

Several factors influencing the corn planting date include the following: work load/acres to cover, soil conditions, and bragging rights. In addition, what is best for the plant? Is what is best for the plant, best for yield? And has that changed over the years with the changing hybrids?

In the late 1980's a planting date and population studies for corn were conducted at U of I research centers at Monmouth (NWRC) and Urbana. April 25 was found to be the optimum planting date with the hybrids used then. Since that time there have been many changes in hybrids as the corn-breeders have selected for improved seedling vigor, cold germination and disease resistance. Additionally, there have been changes made in the seed treatments that offer more protection to the seed and seedling from diseases and insects, especially in colder soils.

To revisit the question of the corn planting date using the hybrids of today, corn planting date and population studies were conducted at U of I research centers around the state starting in 2005. The studies were conducted on tilled soil following soybeans. Not included in this summary of the yield data was the first planting date at NWRC in 2005, which had 97% of the plants killed with an early May frost.

Averaged across the 6 location/years, the highest corn yield was when corn was planted on April 15, with less than 1 bushel difference +/-5 days of that date. The maximum corn yield of 229 bu/acre (bpa) was 2 bpa more than that planted April 25, which was the optimum planting date when the study was conducted 15+ years before. While this is not a large difference in yield potential, it does indicate that the advances in genetics and seed protection of current hybrids can allow them to be planted earlier than was possible several years ago.

From the data, it appears that the planting date and corresponding rates of yield loss have moved 10 days earlier than previous work done over 15 years ago. While much of this shift to an earlier planting date can be attributed to improved genetics and seed treatments, are there other factors that may be contributing to this earlier planting date?

Warmer soil temperatures and accumulation of Growing Degree Days (GDD) are possible factors allowing for earlier planting. The soil temperatures for March, April and May under 4 inches of bare soil for the 3 years of the study averaged 52.8°F compared to 51.3° for the previous 10 years. The average date in April for which the monthly GDD reached 110 (the average needed for emergence) was 19th for this study compared to the 16th for the previous 10 years. (For NIARC the average for 05-07 was April 18 and April 22 for 95-04) These two measurements indicate the conditions at planting time were somewhat warmer than earlier years, and possibly two or three days of the 10 day earlier planting date may be attributed to warmer soils. It is still probably fairly safe to say that the advances in the seed industry can allow for planting a week earlier than previously shown in northern Illinois.

So how early can I plant corn? The data show that there is not a lot of yield drag planting the first week of April. However, the yield losses per day are approaching 1 bushel per day when planting is earlier than that. Additionally, these yield averages do not include the 1 out of 6 location/years that the corn planted late March was killed. Other locations for this study in Illinois also have had corn at the late March/early April planting date damaged or killed by a late frost.

While more location/years will improve confidence in the data, what can be concluded this far? If soil conditions are favorable, be ready to take advantage of the improvements in today's hybrids to withstand more cold soils than those a few years ago.

When to Test Your Drinking Water?

Spring is the ideal time for homeowners with private wells to be testing their drinking water to ensure it is still safe to drink. The heavy rainfall and flooding we've been experiencing over the past month may result in a greater potential for pollutants to contaminate your drinking water due to leaching of harmful materials into the soil, a deteriorating well casing, and surface water flow into a dug well system reports Bob Frazee, Frazee, University of Illinois Natural Resources Educator.

If you have a *private* water supply, you are responsible for the quality of water that your family drinks. That's why it is important to test your private water supply at least once a year, and more often if problems arise. If you get water from a *public* or municipal supply, you have more protection, because these supplies are tested on a regular basis. Still, you may need to test your water because it is possible that corrosive water, water that erodes metal fixtures, can cause pipes in your home to leach contaminants and metals into your water supply.

In recent years, pollutants have contaminated a number of private water systems in both urban and rural areas. Some of these pollutants include nitrate from septic systems, fertilizer, livestock wastes, pesticides, industrial chemicals, and gasoline from underground storage tanks. Many people no longer take their drinking water for granted. Instead of assuming tap water is safe, many homeowners are now regularly testing their drinking water.

Contaminated water does *not* always look, taste, or smell differently than safe drinking water. The following guidelines describe conditions in which water testing may be advisable:

Private or Public Supply: Consider testing water from a private or public supply if:

You have recurrent incidents of gastrointestinal illness that cannot be explained.

Water has an objectionable taste or smell.

Household plumbing contains lead pipes, brass fittings or lead-solder joints.

You are considering installing water treatment equipment.

You want to check the efficiency and performance of home water-treatment equipment.

Water leaves scaly residues and soap scum or decreases the cleaning action of soaps.

Pipes or plumbing show signs of corrosion.

Private Supply Only: If you have a private water supply, also consider testing if:

You are buying a home or wish to evaluate the safety & quality of the water supply.

Water stains plumbing fixtures and laundry.

Water appears cloudy, frothy, or colored.

Pumps, chlorinators and other water-supply equipment wear rapidly.

Someone in the household is pregnant or anticipating a pregnancy.

The household includes infants less than 6 months old.

You have a new well and want to evaluate it.

The well does not meet construction codes.

You have a sand-point well, or a large-diameter dug or bored well.

The well is less than 50 feet deep and one of these conditions exists: (1) the soil is sandy, or (2) bedrock or sand and gravel is less than 10 feet from the surface.

The well is in an area where you have mixed or loaded pesticides, spilled pesticides or fuel, or have had a backsiphoning problem.

The well is in or close to a livestock confinement area.

The well is within 50 feet of a septic tank or 75 feet of a septic absorption field.

The well is located near an operational or abandoned gas station or fuel storage tank.

The well is close to a retail chemical facility, gravel pit, mining operation, landfill, junkyard, factory, dry-cleaning operation, road-salt storage site or heavily salted roadway.

According to Frazee, private well owners should test their water supplies for coliform bacteria and nitrate at least once a year. For additional information on water testing, go the University of Illinois Water Quality website, www.wq.uiuc.edu, click on "Publications" and download the free, 4-page pdf file on "Testing Home Drinking Water". More frequent testing is recommended if any member of the household is pregnant or less than 6 months old. If you suspect pesticide contamination in your private water supply, contact your county Department of Public Health for a list of laboratories best suited to test for pesticides.