

March 2009

Calendar of Events:

March

- 27 Dairy Reproductive Seminar, Abbotsford City Hall, 10:30 am**
- 27 Crop Production 101, Abbotsford City Hall, 1 pm**
- 27 Fruit or Vegetable Small Farm Business Workshop, UW-Extension, Baldwin, 8:30 am**
- 28 Horse Pasture Workshop, Northern Foundations Walking Horse Farm, 1 pm**
- 30 Crop Production 101, USDA Bldg, Donald St, Medford, 1 pm**
- 31 Crop Production 101, Greenwood Fire Hall, 1 pm**
- 31 Statewide Cow-Calf Meeting, USDA Service Center, Donald St, Medford, 7 pm**

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UW
Extension

Learning for life

Clark County

Extension Views

ARE COWS REALLY CHEAP RIGHT NOW?

BY MARIA BENDIXEN, DAIRY & LIVESTOCK AGENT

With the low milk prices have come low prices for heifers and cows. Some of these prices sound really appealing. If you are looking at taking advantage of the “cheap cows” we have now how should you decide what price you can reasonably pay and have the cow pay for herself? It is best if you do your homework before heading off to the auction. Here are a few things to consider:

- First, what will it cost you to feed that extra animal?
- What milk price are you getting?
- Do you have room for the animals or will this purchase require more investment in buildings?
- How much labor are you putting into the animal?

Knowing these things can really help you pin point what the animal is worth to your operation. The Center for Dairy Profitability has a spreadsheet that can help you to make this decision. It is called Cowval and can be

found at [http://
cdp.wisc.edu/Decision%
20Making%20Tools.htm](http://cdp.wisc.edu/Decision%20Making%20Tools.htm).

On page 2 is an example of the results it can give you. I have entered some reasonable numbers so you can see what goes into valuing a dairy cow for profit rather than based on market value. After looking at this you can see why the price of cattle is down. Based on the feed costs and labor costs I used, a 50 cent change in the milk price allows you to pay another \$315.00 for a cow and break even. While a 1,000 lb. change in production level is only worth \$14.00 at a milk price of \$11.50. This milk price does include your premiums. To get the maximum benefit from this tool you need to enter your own costs and a milk price you expect to get. When you do enter your costs keep in mind that the feed cost and labor costs are on a per cwt basis.

Of course this is just showing what you can afford to pay if everything



stays the same for the entire productive life of the cow. In reality we know that prices of both feed and milk will fluctuate during the time you have the animal. This tool can help you to determine the monetary risk you are taking by bringing more animals into your operation. Keep in mind that if you need to build a building for these animals you need to include that cost in your analysis as well. In this time of volatile prices it is more important than ever to look at margins and returns, and not just comparing to historical prices. Then you will be able to answer the question “are cows really cheap?”.

VALUE OF A DAIRY COW (CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

(When overhead costs will not change by adding her to the herd.)

Average Per Hundredweight*

Milk Price	\$ 11.50	Cow's Productive Life (months)	42
Feed Costs	\$ 7.00	Production Per Cow (pounds)	20,000
Labor Costs	\$ 2.50	Average Cull Value	\$ 450
Vet, Elect, Marketing, Etc.	\$ 1.50	Average Calf Value	\$ 100
*over her productive life		Interest Rate	6.00%

Break Even Price of a Cow at Various Milk Price and Production Levels

		Milk Price				
		\$ 10.50	\$ 11.00	\$ 11.50	\$ 12.00	\$ 12.50
Milk Sales Per Cow Per Year (pounds)	18,000	\$ 343	\$ 627	\$ 910	\$ 1,194	\$ 1,477
	19,000	\$ 328	\$ 627	\$ 926	\$ 1,225	\$ 1,525
	20,000	\$ 312	\$ 627	\$ 942	\$ 1,257	\$ 1,572
	21,000	\$ 296	\$ 627	\$ 958	\$ 1,288	\$ 1,619
	22,000	\$ 280	\$ 627	\$ 973	\$ 1,320	\$ 1,666

A 50 cent change in the milk price leads to a change in her average value of approximately \$ 315

Break Even Price of a Cow at Various Productive Lives and Production Levels

Milk		Cow's Productive Life (months)				
Per Cow		36	39	42	45	48
Milk Sales Per Cow Per Year (pounds)	18,000	\$ 893	\$ 902	\$ 910	\$ 919	\$ 928
	19,000	\$ 906	\$ 916	\$ 926	\$ 936	\$ 946
	20,000	\$ 920	\$ 931	\$ 942	\$ 953	\$ 963
	21,000	\$ 934	\$ 946	\$ 958	\$ 969	\$ 981
	22,000	\$ 947	\$ 960	\$ 973	\$ 986	\$ 999

A 1,000 pound change in the pounds of milk sold leads to a change in her average value of approximately \$ 16

Break Even Price of a Cow at Various Milk Price and Productive Lives

		Milk Price				
		\$ 10.50	\$ 11.00	\$ 11.50	\$ 12.00	\$ 12.50
Cow's Productive Life (months)	36	\$ 372	\$ 646	\$ 920	\$ 1,194	\$ 1,468
	39	\$ 342	\$ 636	\$ 931	\$ 1,226	\$ 1,520
	42	\$ 312	\$ 627	\$ 942	\$ 1,257	\$ 1,572
	45	\$ 283	\$ 618	\$ 953	\$ 1,288	\$ 1,623
	48	\$ 254	\$ 608	\$ 963	\$ 1,318	\$ 1,673

A one month change in a cow's productive life leads to a change in her average value of approximately \$ 4

DAIRY REPRODUCTIVE PERFORMANCE SEMINAR



Has your herd's reproductive performance improved or declined over the years? If the answer is that it has declined, do you have a plan to deal with

the issue? UW-Extension is offering a program to help you evaluate your management of reproduction on your farm. It will include discussions about nutrition, sexed semen, synchronization protocols, benchmarking for common reproductive measures, and economics of reproductive performance.

Topics and speakers for the seminar are as follows:

- Benchmarking Reproduction and what's new in Sych
Paul Fricke- UW-Madison Dairy Reproduction Specialist

- Sexed Semen how is it being used?
Ryan Sterry-Polk County UW-Extension Agriculture Agent
- Feeding Dairy Cattle for Reproductive Performance
Paul Fricke-UW-Madison Dairy Reproduction Specialist
- What Does Reproductive Performance Cost You?
Maria Bendixen- Clark County UW-Extension Dairy and Livestock Agent

The seminar will be held in Abbotsford at the City Hall Public Learning Center from 10:30 am to 2:00 pm on Friday, March 27th.

The cost is \$15.00 in advance \$20.00 at the door. To register or for questions on the Abbotsford location contact Maria Bendixen at the Clark County UW-Extension office at 715-743-5121.

Dairy Reproduction Performance Seminar Registration form

Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Attending _____

Please pre-register by March 20th. Send registration to:

Clark County UW-Extension
517 Court St, Room 104
Neillsville WI 54456
or call 715-743-5121



DAIRY PROMOTERS TO PRESENT AWARDS FOR LOW SOMATIC CELL COUNT

The Clark County Dairy Promotion committee is once again presenting awards to Clark County dairy producers with a somatic cell count (SCC) average of less than 125,000 for the year. Awards will be presented at the Dairy Promoters Annual Meeting on Monday, April 13, 2009, 8:00 p.m. at Chelsea's in Greenwood.

Producers with a 2008 SCC less than 125,000 need to contact the Clark County Extension Office at 743-5121

by April 1st. Producers need to present proof of their 2008 SCC average.

If interested in attending the annual meeting on April 13th, contact Theresa, Clark County UW-Extension office at 715-743-5121.



MANURE DIGESTERS AND SO MUCH MORE AT THE MIDWEST MANURE SUMMIT

While the idea of on-farm manure digesters and energy production on American farms is a fairly new trend, anaerobic digestion and manure digesters are not new concepts. In Europe, manure digesters have been used on farms for years and are quite popular on farms of any size.

Manfred Faatz, managing director of EBA - GmdH in Triesdorf Germany, has operated a biogas plant on his own 120 cow dairy farm in Germany for nine years. He also conducts training workshops for farmers and industry on biogas production. His workshops include appropriate technology usage,

maximizing biogas production, and the economics of production.

Faatz is scheduled to speak at the Midwest Manure Summit in March. His presentation will focus on the development of the biogas industry in agriculture in Germany. He will provide an overview of technology that is being used in Germany to handle manure for biogas production, the direction the industry is taking, and how the United States could possibly use this model.

To hear Faatz's presentation and learn more about manure digesters and other manure storage and

handling techniques, make plans to attend the 2009 Midwest Manure Summit March 24 and 25 at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin. This two day event features some of the best university and industry manure experts from around the world.

For more information or to register, please visit our website: www.midwestmanure.com or contact the conference coordinators Paul Dyk at 920-929-3170 or Mark Hagedorn at 920-391-4612. This event is hosted by University of Wisconsin-Extension and the UW-Extension Dairy Team.

CROP PRODUCTION 101: JUST THE BASICS

Clark County UW-Extension is offering "Crop Production 101: Just the Basics" this one day session at two different locations to teach you the "basics."

What a farm manager needs to know to make a better informed decision for crop inputs.

Bulletins and information will be provided to help the decision making process. This will be interactive not a lecture. Everyone will have a chance to experience creating facts for their operations during this two hour workshop.

- **March 27, 2009**
Abbotsford City Hall
Council Rm, 1-3 p.m.
- **March 30, 2009**
USDA Bldg, Donald St
Medford, 1-3 p.m.

- **March 31, 2009**
Greenwood Fire Hall
1-3 p.m.

Topics to be discussed by Richard Halopka, Clark County Crops & Soils Agent:

- Nutrients – plant use
- Interpreting a soil sample
PH & lime recommendations
OM the unknown nutrient
P benchmark values
K benchmark values
- The Fast Facts Experience
On the farm nutrients
Crop needs
Crop budget
- Fertilizer Blends

You are welcome to bring soil sample reports with and calculators to do interactive work during the

course of our discussions.

This meeting is open to any producer in the surrounding counties, meetings will begin promptly at 1:00 p.m.

For more information and registration, please contact:

Abbotsford & Greenwood Site:

Richard Halopka
Clark County Crops & Soils
517 Court St, Rm 104
Neillsville WI 54456
715-743-5121

Medford Site:

Sandy Stuttgart
Taylor County UWEX
Rm 103 Cty USDA Ctr
925 Donald St
Medford WI 54451
715-748-3327



STATEWIDE COW-CALF MEETING

March 31, 2009
USDA Service Center
925 Donald Street
Medford, WI

If you are in the cow-calf business here is an event you will want to attend. The UW-Extension



Livestock Team will be hosting a series of beef cow-calf meetings around the state and the session held in our area will be on:

Information to be discussed includes:

- Cost Control for Feed and Fertilizer
- Country of Origin Labeling and Beef Quality Assurance

- Dealing with the Market for Heavier Feeders
- The Economic Value of Cross Breeding

The session will begin at 7:00 p.m. There is no cost for this evening, but **pre-registration is required by March 25, 2009**, by calling Taylor County UW-Extension at 715-748-3327. *The session may be cancelled if not enough participants are enrolled.*

HORSE PASTURE MANAGEMENT WORKSHOPS AND PASTURE WALKS

How to get the most out of your horse pasture.

River Country RC&D is hosting a series of horse pasture walks at the:



- Northern Foundations Walking Horse Farm, W16439 Sjuggerud Rd, Whitehall, WI
- Flower Farm, 6400 Hart Road/ State Road 93, Eau Claire, WI
- Kumferman Farm, 6009 Burnell Drive, Eau Claire, WI.

These workshops will cover the basics of horse pasture management and provide the necessary tools to apply these principles on your farm. These workshops will also help you network with other horse owners from around the area.

Workshop Sessions

- Saturday, March 28, 2009— Northern Foundations Walking Horse Farm
Time: 1:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m.

Topics Covered: How to use composting and other techniques to manage the nutrients in your pasture. We will also cover how to prepare your pastures for spring.

- Saturday, May 16th, 2009— Kumferman Farm
Time: 1:00 p.m.—3:00 p.m.

Topics Covered: How to sample your pasture's soil and use the results to manage your pasture.

Cost is \$25.00 for each workshop.

If interested in attending send your check for \$25.00 to:

River Country RC&D
1304 North Hillcrest
Parkway, Suite B
Altoona WI 54720

For more information about the Horse Pasture Management Workshops contact:

River Country RC&D
19225 Dewey St
PO Box 645
Whitehall WI 54773
Phone: 715-538-4396
Ext 33

Email: mary.anderson@rcdnet.net

INTERACTIONS OF WEED MANAGEMENT AND NITROGEN IN CORN

BY CHRIS BOERBOOM

Weed management is certainly not the most expensive input for corn production. Rather, nitrogen may be the most costly input, but weeds and weed management are linked to nitrogen because of weed competition. The data from this Arlington field study showed that weeds can compete for a significant amount of nitrogen if they are not controlled in a timely manner. The nitrogen removed by the weeds can be replaced to restore corn yield, but the cost of additional nitrogen is

expensive. At the same time, the cost to control weeds with a preemergence herbicide program to prevent weed competition for nitrogen is greater than the cost of spraying glyphosate postemergence. To determine how the costs of nitrogen and weed control programs might be optimized, the corn yield response to nitrogen rates was analyzed for three weed management scenarios using a partial budget.

Assumptions for the analysis were a corn price of \$4/bu, a nitrogen price of \$0.90/lb, a preemergence herbicide

price and application of \$40/acre, and a postemergence herbicide price and application of \$22/acre. Corn yields with the preemergence weed control program and when weeds were controlled at the 4-inch stage were similar in both 2006 and 2007 (Fig. 1 and 2). However, the additional 8 days of weed competition from the 4-inch timing until the 12-inch weed control timing reduced corn yield at the intermediate nitrogen rates. At the 200 lb/acre nitrogen rate, corn yields were similar for all weed control timings.

Summary by: Richard Halopka, Crops & Soils Agent

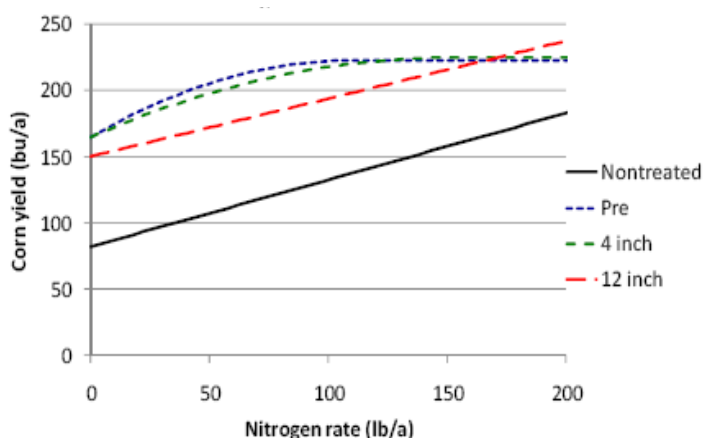


Figure 1. Corn yield response to increasing nitrogen rates when weeds were controlled preemergence or at the 4- or 12-inch growth stage in 2006 at Arlington, WI.

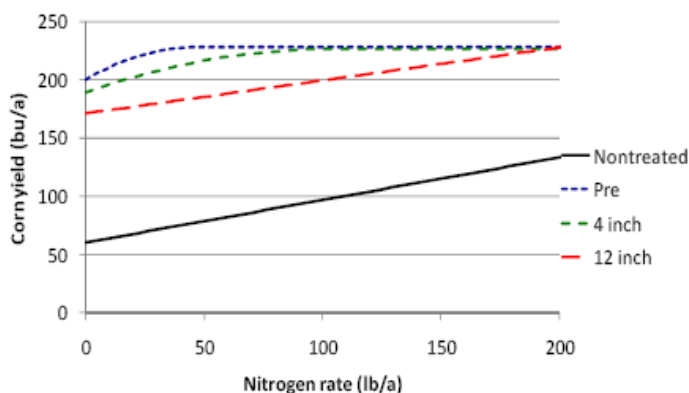


Figure 2. Corn yield response to increasing nitrogen rates when weeds were controlled preemergence or at the 4- or 12-inch growth stage in 2007 at Arlington, WI.

From Chris Boerboom's work of "Interactions of Weed Management and Nitrogen" the additional cost of a pre-emerge herbicide program can return more dollars per acre than additional cost of applied nitrogen to attain the same yield. The cost of nitrogen has decreased to about \$.54/ pound of N and local corn today is about \$3.50/bushel. Now if we apply these prices to Chris's work, pre-emerge spray at \$40.00/acre, \$27.00/acre for 50# of N and 2007 return of 225 bushel yield would equal \$787.50/acre return. Now we'll post-emerge spray 4 inch weeds with glyphosate program so herbicide cost would be \$22.00/acre, \$54.00/acre for 100# of N and our yield would be the same 225 bushels. Next we'll spray when the weeds are 12 inches tall with a post-program cost is still \$22.00/acre, \$94.50/acre for 175# of N and we still have a 225 bushel yield. So our return for the pre-emerge program would be $\$787.50 - \$40.00 - \$27.00 = \$720.50/\text{acre}$, 4 inch weeds would be $\$787.50 - \$22.00 - \$54.00 = \$711.50/\text{acre}$ and for 12 inch weeds $\$787.50 - \$22.00 - \$94.50 = \$671.00/\text{acre}$. Another advantage of using a pre program or using a reduced per-emerge product with an early post program using glyphosate will provide a different mode of action to prevent weeds from becoming tolerant to glyphosate. The statement that corn does not tolerate weed competition is very true. So do we fertilize the weeds or do we produce corn, well we sell corn, not weeds, so bottom line we need to control the weeds and the earlier the better.

POTASSIUM IN FORAGES

By Keith Kelling, John Peters, Mike Rankin, and Don Undersander

Introduction

The potassium (K) content of harvested forage has become an increasingly important issue in recent years. As most dairy producers already know, a high level of K in forages has been identified as the causative factor for milk fever in dry and transition cow diets. Increasingly, buyers and sellers of hay now base purchase decisions on forage tissue K content. Dairy producers are seeking strategies to lower the K content of harvested forage. This trend has caused some to consider practices and expenses not justified based on our knowledge of forage growth and factors affecting K composition.

When are high K diets most detrimental to dairy cattle?

Hypocalcemia results from a deficiency in plasma calcium at the onset of lactation in dairy cows and is the main cause of several severe metabolic disorders. Three weeks prior to calving, it is recommended to have a moderately anionic diet to avoid milk fever and hypocalcemia. It is during this period that low K forages are desirable. Immediately after calving, a cationic diet is essential. Milking dairy cattle can tolerate forage that has a high K concentration during lactation because they can void the excess K in the milk.

How do forage species differ in terms of K concentrations?

All forages, except corn silage, grown on the same ground contain similar K levels at the same stage of maturity. As the data in table 1 indicates, seeding ryegrass with alfalfa did not affect the K concentration of the harvested forage.

National databases of forage composition, such as those in the National Research Council requirements for dairy and beef animals, list lower K concentrations for some grasses than legumes. This simply means that grasses, on the average, are grown on lower K soils. In fact, grasses tend to be more efficient than legumes in their ability to extract K

from the soil. For this reason, grasses will often be at or above tissue K levels reported for alfalfa when grown on soil at the same soil test K level. Adding a grass to your forage establishment mix will usually not result in lower tissue K levels of the harvested forage.

Table 1. Comparison of Forage Potassium levels of legume and legume-grass mixtures, Ashland, 1994

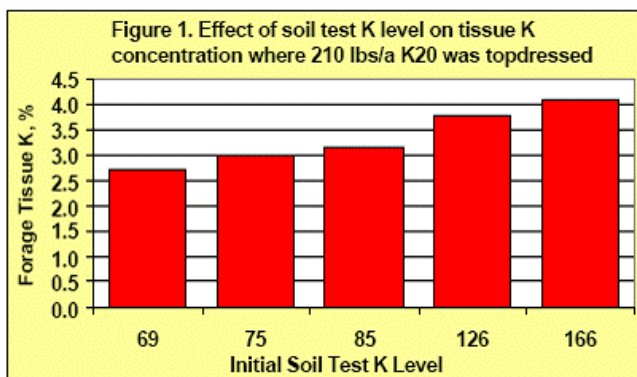
	% Potassium			
	Cut 1	Cut 2	Cut 3	Average
Alfalfa				
Solo	3.82	2.97	2.36	3.05
With ryegrass	3.45	3.80	2.24	3.16
Red Clover				
Solo	3.50	3.77	2.38	3.22
With ryegrass	4.14	3.26	2.56	3.32
Birdsfoot Trefoil				
Solo	3.14	3.22	2.42	2.93
With ryegrass	4.33	2.92	2.86	3.37

Samples from 1994 seeding study, by Mylnarek, et al.

What are some strategies for harvesting forage with reduced K concentrations?

Soil test and add K only as recommended

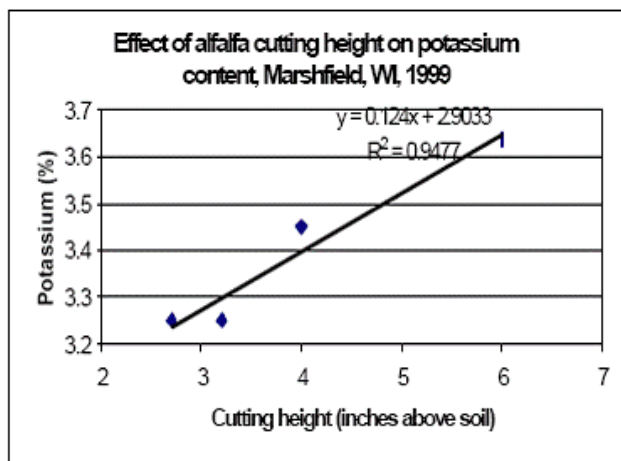
It's well documented that alfalfa will take-up K beyond its needs if high levels of soil or applied K are available. This is referred to as "luxury consumption" and is demonstrated in figure 1 (Kelling and Speth, 1998). Typically, alfalfa yields plateau at about 120 to 140 ppm soil test K. At this level, approximately 200 lbs. of K₂O need to be applied annually as topdress to optimize yield and to maintain soil test levels. Little to no yield response to topdress K is experienced when soil test K exceeds 150 ppm.



POTASSIUM IN FORAGES (CONTINUED)

Cut alfalfa close to the soil surface

Potassium tends to be concentrated more in the stems than the leaves and is even more concentrated in the upper stems (Rominger et. al, 1975). Therefore cutting low to include as much stem as possible will cause the resulting forage to be lower in K as shown in the figure below.



Harvest mature forage for transition cows

As legumes and grasses mature, their K content declines. Alfalfa was found to decline from 2.75% to nearly 1.75% K from late vegetative to one-fourth bloom (Baker and Reid, 1977). Similar work at the UW Marshfield Research Station showed that from late vegetative to full bloom, K levels in alfalfa dropped from 3.21 to 2.08%. At the same site, brome grass from second node to late heading dropped from 3.01 to 2.41% K. Grasses at flowering may have half the K concentration of immature forage earlier in the season.

Harvest rained-on forage for transition cows

Potassium is not a part of any plant compound. It is in the cell solubles and therefore very readily leached from the plant when rain falls between mowing and harvest. In Wisconsin during 2001, 0.6 inches of rain reduced tissue K from 2.55 to 1.90% K.

What if all of my fields test high for K?

Low K forage can be generated on most farms by the above recommendations, however, if all fields test high for K, consider the following program recommended by Cherney and Cherney (2002) to grow low K forage:

- Select a small acreage which will not have manure

applied to it. This can often be some distance from the barn to reduce overall hauling to remaining fields.

- Plant a long-lived grass, such as smooth brome grass or reed canary grass.
- Avoid all forms of K fertilization (No Manure). Grow for two years with no fertilization other than nitrogen to draw down the soil K.
- Use moderate to heavy N fertilization (75-100 lbs/acre/harvest).
- Harvest 2 times per year, first cutting at boot or early heading stage (early to mid June) and mid-September.
- Use grass regrowth for cows close to calving, as it should be lowest in K content. Quality will be adequate for dry cows, not for milking cows.
- If K content of spring grass forage is below 1.7%, consider modest K fertilizer or manure additions after spring harvest (50-100 lbs potash or equivalent).

How do I test forage for K?

Although NIR is a useful analysis tool, the University of Wisconsin recommends wet chemistry mineral analysis for balancing feed rations. Do not buy, sell, or feed forage based solely on an NIR analysis for K concentration. If this is important, spend the extra money to have the determination done with wet chemistry techniques. Use results from NIR testing only as guide to identify very high or very low testing K forages.

References

- Baker, B.S. and R.L. Reid. 1977. Mineral concentration of forage species grown in central West Virginia on various soil series. West Virginia University Agric and Forestry exp. Stn. Bull 657.
- Cherney, J.H. and D.J.R. Cherney. 2002. Grass management for dry dairy cows. Cornell University
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- Kelling, K.A. and P.E. Speth. 1998. Alfalfa response to K rate, source and time of application. Proc.NC Extension-Industry Soil Fertility Conf., St. Louis MO Vol. 14:110-118
- Rominger, R.S. D Smith, and L.A. Peterson. 1975. Yields and elemental composition of alfalfa plant parts in late bud under two fertility levels. Can J. Plant Sci. 55: 69-75
- Wiersma, D.W. and J.B. Peters, 2000. Effect of cutting height on alfalfa yield and tissue K levels. Proceedings of Wisconsin fertilizer, Aglime, and Pest Management Conference. Vol 39:381-386

DEVELOPING A FRUIT OR VEGETABLE SMALL FARM BUSINESS WORKSHOP SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 27

Whether you're a landowner looking for alternative sources of income, just want to grow food for people, or recently started growing fruits and vegetables for sale; make plans to attend the Developing a Fruit or Vegetable Small Farm Business workshop on March 27 at the University of Wisconsin-Extension Office in Baldwin, WI.

UW-Extension is sponsoring the workshop that will be held from 8:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m. This workshop is designed to assist people wanting to grow fruits or vegetables for income, develop plans to make their dreams come closer to reality.

Roger Browne, owner of Rising Sun Farm near River Falls, will be a special speaker for the workshop. He has successfully grown, on 2 acres organic vegetables, U-pick strawberries and

raspberries and range-fed poultry for 30 years. He will discuss his intensive and somewhat unconventional production methods of starting seeds in peat blocks and using hoop houses for season extension. Roger sells produce to co-ops, grocery stores and restaurants.

Developing a berry farm will be the subject of Terry and John Cuddy's presentation. The Cuddy's of Rush River Produce near Prescott have enjoyed growing their 13 varieties of blueberries and managing the U-pick crowds that come to their farm each summer for their healthy berries and their hilltop view.

Other program topics include:
~ Efficient Production Planning; Dr. Brian Smith, UW-River Falls;
~ Enterprise Budgeting and Determining Your Market; Ruth Hilfiker, UW-Extension St. Croix and Pierce Counties

horticulture educator
~ Cash Flow Management; Steve DeWald, Small Business Development Center in River Falls.



"Inadequate planning for the timing of income and expenses is a major reason for small business failures" said Hilfiker. "We'll guide people in using their money and time wisely, whether they're renting a quarter of an acre or own 40 acres."

Pre-registration is required by Tuesday, March 24. To register, contact the St. Croix County UW-Extension office at 715-684-3301 ext. 5, or mail a check payable to the UW-Extension to: Ruth Hilfiker, UW-Extension, 1960 8th Ave., Baldwin, WI 54001. Cost of the program, which includes lunch, is \$20 or \$25 for two people from the same farm.

VINEYARD MAINTENANCE WORKSHOP SCHEDULED FOR APRIL

Are you interested in learning about early spring vineyard maintenance? If so, make plans to attend the April 2 Spring Vineyard School sponsored by the Wisconsin Grape Growers Association (WGGA), Wollersheim Winery, University of Wisconsin-Extension and Agricultural Research Stations.



The workshop includes both classroom presentations and vineyard activities. Classroom topics and speakers include:
~ Insect Identification and Control in the Vineyard; Dan Mahr, UW-Extension insect control specialist

~ Early Detection and Treatment for Diseases; Patty McManus, UW-Extension fruit pathology specialist
~ The ABCs of Growing Grapes in Wisconsin; Philippe Coquard, Wollersheim Winery vintner and owner

Topics and speakers for the vineyard presentations include:
~ Practical Aspects of Vineyard Management; Philippe Coquard, Wollersheim Winery vintner and owner
~ Pruning Grapes: First Year, Second Year, and The Veterans; Bruce Reeve, Wollersheim Winery vineyard manager

The workshop will be held from 9:15

a.m. to 2:30 p.m. at Wollersheim Winery, 7876 State Hwy. 188, Prairie du Sac.

The registration fee which includes a buffet lunch is \$30 for WGGA members and \$40 for non-members. Space is limited and pre-registration is required. Registration can be made by credit card or check. Make checks payable to Wisconsin Grape Growers Association and send payment to Wisconsin Grape Growers Association, 211 Canal Rd., Waterloo, WI 53594.

For more information or to download the registration form visit the Wisconsin Grape Growers Association website at www.wigrapes.org.

DEATH AND LOW MILK PRICES...THE ONLY THINGS CERTAIN

BY MATT ZOSCHKE, CLARK COUNTY LAND CONSERVATIONIST

After last month's article, I was pleasantly surprised by all of the positive feedback I received about my article. As most of you know, the intent of last month's article was not to point fingers at specific farmers; there was liquid and solid manure being spread by all sizes of spreaders on types of cropland (flat, sloping, far from water, near to water, etc.). In fact, I did not take any location notes or call any of the farmers who were spreading manure during the active runoff period of February 10-11, although some of their neighbors did. Instead I wanted to demonstrate that certain times of the year are definitely more risky than others. For those farmers who did not realize the risks associated with spreading during that period, ponder these facts- two basements had runoff water that comingled with manure enter into them and multiple landowners complained about manure runoff on their properties. Good relations with our neighbors are important; especially since there will be more and more non-farming, job-commuting landowners moving into the fringe areas of Clark County. What to do: Plan ahead and plan accordingly. Implement a nutrient management plan and get some assistance identifying "safe" places to stack and spread manure during the winter. We are here to assist you. Asking for assistance from the Land Conservation Department is much better than asking for forgiveness from your neighbor.

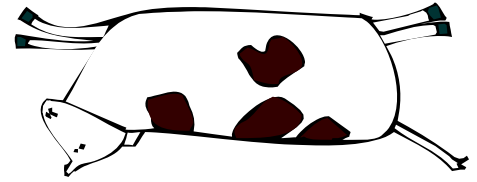
This month's article addresses another neighborly concern. Many of you who called my office expressed concern with the cost of disposal for animal mortalities. Until recently, many farmers were used to prompt and free/ reasonably priced mortality pick-up and

disposal. However, many economic factors have come together causing the cost of mortality disposal to increase to a level that may be too expensive for some farmers to consider. This has left many livestock farmers wondering just what to do.

Recent discussions with some of the farmers I have been working with revealed many mortality disposal practices that may have implications for the biosecurity of the herd and the conservation of our wildlife and water resources. Though dragging off a carcass to the boneyard has been a common historical practice, briefly stated here are some of the "don'ts" when it comes to mortality disposal.

- Don't abandon the animals on the ground surface to decay naturally.
- Don't bury them in mass graves less than six feet deep or in areas with a high water table or in coarse-textured soils that leach easily.
- Don't place them on a rock near the river to attract bear and other predatory animals.
- Don't throw them on the line fence.
- Don't sink them in the river or pond adjacent to your farm.
- Don't throw them in your manure storage.
- Don't place them in an old dug well no longer used.
- Don't burn them in an open pyre. All of these methods can promote biological and disease hazards, surface and groundwater pollution, flies and other biting insects, scavengers (including dogs, bear, coyote, and wolves), vermin, and odor/air pollution. Some of these methods are illegal.

To further illustrate the problems with the "abandonment method," I would



like to relay a conversation I had with a farmer in an unnamed town in the northwest corner of Clark County. I was visiting with this gentleman about nutrient management and he asked me the typical questions about why more farmers aren't doing nutrient management planning and paying attention to soil erosion and how back in the area of the country where he had farmed, every farmer wanted to pay attention to fertilizer, manure and soil on a farm. He expressed concern with the lack of understanding about what he called "the kind of farming that leaves the land better for my boys who are going to get it in the long run anyway." The conversation then progressed into other neighborly concerns like dead animals and how his neighbor likes to place them near the river on a rock and then go out and shoot bear and coyote (that's what he said, honest!) who have gotten used to the free food. What really got him upset was how he had lost a few pastured youngstock from "something.....although I know it was coyotes or wolves" a few years back. This conversation got me to thinking about this "abandonment" procedure and how we may be inviting our larger predators to dine on more than our mortalities. The rock may be bare, but the opportunity for something fresh may only be a trot away!

From a biosecurity standpoint, the best way to dispose of mortalities is to have them picked up by a reputable disposal service within 48 hours after death or

DEATH AND LOW MILK PRICES...THE ONLY THINGS CERTAIN (CONTINUED)

to properly compost them on the farm. So, if you are not going to pay for pick-up and would like to manage your own livestock mortalities, composting seems to be your best choice. Composting kills most pathogens, can be done all year long (even in cold climates), doesn't require expensive equipment, produces few objectionable odors, fits all animal sizes, works with whole or partial carcasses, requires little management and labor, can save some money, and produces a nutrient rich fertilizer that can be applied to "non-table-top" crops.

This article is by no means a complete how-to on mortality composting. Clark County UW-Extension wrote great fact sheet on "Composting Animal Mortalities" when Matt Jorgensen was the Dairy & Livestock Agent. This summer Maria Bendixen will be touching on Mortality Composting during a July field day, so let me plant a seed and get you thinking about this topic right now. Here a couple of key points to remember when static pile carcass composting.

Site Selection: Select a site that is convenient, but since you will not need to visit the site frequently it can be located away from the farm buildings. Locate the compost pile at least 300 feet from all sources of water, including wells and rivers/ponds. Do a quick bucket-auger soils investigation to make sure the soil is not coarse textured (subject to leaching) or subject to high seasonal groundwater. The LCD can assist you with that investigation. Keep the piles away from the production area to minimize biosecurity concerns. Consider prevailing wind direction and neighborhood views- a sometimes

stinky pile of dead animals may not be understood by your commuting neighbors. Site cleanliness is the most important aspect of composting as it deters scavengers, controls odors, and keep the site organized for more efficient pile building.

Pile construction: Use high carbon bulking agents, such as, sawdust, fine chopped straw, or heavily bedded, but dry manure pack. Always keep some bulking agents on-hand for quick pile construction and mixing them together is fine if you are limited on a certain type. If you are near a sawmill or municipality that chips brush, these wood chips will work fine since they tend to be a mixture of soft and hard wood. You should plan on using one pound of bulking agent per pound of mortality. Lay two feet of bulky, absorbent material at the base of the pile. This material will absorb most of the leachate that is produced by the composting process and soak it up before it enters the soil or flows onto a grass filter strip. Next, lay the animal in the center of the pile and lance the rumen. One farmer told me that you might be able to get away without lancing the rumen, but the one time that the accumulated gases bloat and explode the covering off the pile you will never forget again! "Think smell"he said. Lastly, completely cover the carcass about 2-3 feet deep with dry, high carbon bulking materials. From this point, you have two options. Let the pile sit for 4-6 months and then check to see if the carcass has decomposed. If not, turn the pile and add another foot or so of bulking agent. It is also advisable to add moisture at this time if the pile is shedded and not subject to rainfall. This method works well during moist, warm times of the year or for the early spring and early summer mortalities,

but may not produce very good compost when air temperatures are cold. For quicker compost, you can turn the pile every month or when the compost is above 160°F or below 100°F. Be sure to add bulking agent and moisture whenever the pile is turned. Strive for a compost pile temperature between 130-140°F and a moisture content of 55% (or if you grab a handful and squeeze no free water drains out, but moisture stains are left on the palm of your hand). One final hint- warm mortalities will compost faster than cold/frozen mortalities because the temperature is already elevated. Get the mortality to the pile ASAP when it is cold outside.

Land Application: Once the pile is finished (no visible signs of the animal, except for some bones), you can land apply the compost with your box spreader. Be sure to save some of the material for your next pile as this finished compost will serve as the biological inoculant for your next pile and help speed up the process next time. Pick out the bones and discard them in your historic boneyard.

Now, we could discuss the economics of composting vs. pick-up and disposal vs. abandonment. Abandonment is going to be the cheapest method every time, until the hungry scavengers find out where the fresh meat is housed. The Land Conservation Department can assist you in addressing death-on-the-farm. Unfortunately, low milk price is something I can't fix, but I do have three boys that drink more than their fair share of milk each day. Give the Land Conservation Department a call if you would like assistance in siting a mortality compost pile at 715-743-5102.





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