

Something To Chew On . . .



Mahlon Peterson Ag Agent
Eau Claire County

How Important is the Extension Office to You?

Again this year, Eau Claire County is facing a major budget crisis. It is estimated there will be more than a 2 million dollar deficit for 2010.

The County is looking at a number of ways to address this budget crisis from reducing programs, freezing wages and/or eliminating positions just to name a few.

Starting on July 1, 2009, there will be an Internet accessible survey available to all county residents. The purpose of this survey is to apply a numerical ranking to all the department/programs within the County (both mandated and non-mandated). These rankings will indicate the importance of the department/programs to the residents of Eau Claire County. The rankings will then help the County Board determine which department/programs will receive available funding.

Your support of the Extension Office during this economic struggle is vitally important for the continuation of the programs and services provided to our clientele. Please take a few minutes to answer the survey and let the County Board know how important Extension programs and services are to you.

The survey can be accessed at <http://www.co.eau-claire.wi.us/>.

There will be two other opportunities to voice your opinion on the upcoming budget process at Public Input Sessions:

July 30 in Augusta at 6:30 PM

August 13 at L.E. Phillips Senior Center at 6:30 PM

Thank you for your continued support of the Extension Office.



Advice from the Old Farmer

- ☺ Keep skunks and politicians at a distance.
- ☺ Your fences need to be horse-high, pig-tight and bull-strong.
- ☺ A bumble bee is considerably faster than a John Deere tractor.
- ☺ Life is simpler when you plow around the stump.
- ☺ Words that soak into your ears are whispered . . . not yelled.
- ☺ Meanness don't jes' happen overnight.

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Eau Claire County*

RECENT NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT SURVEY RESULTS

I recently completed a follow-up survey with 20 Eau Claire County property owners who developed their own nutrient management plans in 2007.

The 20 people surveyed farm a total of 4,158 tillable acres. Forty percent (8 herds) of the farmers had dairy operations (787 head) while 80 percent of the farms had beef animals (1144 head) on the farm. Three of the farms were in the hog business (520 head) and 20 percent of the farms had horses (48 head) on the farm.

Survey results continue to show that writing nutrient management plans has been a positive experience for the farmers and for their farms. In many cases, the written plan affirms the past practices followed on the farm were on target. The phosphorus based plans have not been problematic for the farmers and they have ample spreadable acres for manure from their operations.

All producers report using manure on more acres annually as well as using less starter fertilizer on their farm's corn acreage. All of the producers report they feel their nutrient management plans will provide long-term positive effects for their farms and the environment.

Peterson and Gary Osborne from the Eau Claire County Land Conservation Division have partnered in these producer written plans for more than 10 years. Plans have been written to 190 producers over the past ten years and over 40 percent of the producers

have updated their plans annually.

UW-EXTENSION SAFETY PROGRAM ADDRESSES HIGH RISK DAIRY WORK ACTIVITIES

With over 13,000 dairy herds in Wisconsin, it's not surprising that each year injuries occur when individuals are working with dairy cattle. On a daily basis there are over 1 million cows to be milked, fed, and moved in a barn or out on pasture. Research has shown that working in close contact with dairy cattle and other large animals is a significant risk factor for non-fatal injuries on Wisconsin farms.

Often, injuries result when workers are working in close contact with animals. In some cases, lack of understanding of basic principles of animal behavior leads to an injury.

For individuals growing up around dairy cattle, animal movement principles may seem like common sense. However, as more employees are working on Wisconsin dairy farms there's a need to train employees on the safe movement of animals to help prevent injury to themselves.

Members of the University of Wisconsin – Extension Dairy Team are excited to announce the release of two new educational modules that focus on farm workplace safety. The modules cover safe cattle handling and skid steer loader operation and are targeted at the growing number of hired employees who are so vital to the state's dairy industry.

"This safety program is designed to

be integrated into existing educational programs and training as we teach workers about basic production practices. Keeping employees safe should be part of any producer's plans to manage a productive and profitable operation," according to Aerica Opatik, UW-Extension Kewaunee County agriculture agent.

The educational modules address the two most significant injury issues dairy producers and their employees face based on studies done in cooperation with Wisconsin producers – injuries related to animal handling and machine operation. The educational modules will be widely incorporated into ongoing UW-Extension dairy production and management programming.

The Skid Steer module addresses seven major topics of machine operation through an electronic presentation that can be tailored to meet the needs of individual audiences. This module includes hands-on activities that are important for adult learners. Topics addressed are identifying machinery hazards, understanding basics of skid steer loaders, safety alerts, pre-operation inspection, safe operation, and starting/operating/shutting down skid steers

The Skid Steer module recently won the National Association of County Agriculture Agents (NACAA) Communications Award in the Learning Module Category.

The cattle handling module addresses safe animal handling, which is a major risk factor that makes

large animal-related injuries common in dairy farming. The module also uses a customizable presentation, handouts, DVD, and hands-on activities for learners. Topics addressed include unique ways in which cattle see and perceive shadows and other potentially frightening things that make their behavior unpredictable; flight zones in dairy cattle needed to safely move animals; monitoring animal stress from handling; and training for parlor workers.

Both modules are available in English and Spanish. The modules have been successfully pilot tested and evaluated in Wisconsin and will be available world-wide through UW-Extension and the Babcock Institute in October 2009. To obtain ordering information, please contact Zen Miller at zen.miller@ces.uwex.edu or 920-832-5119.

It is also important to help youth learn about safe handling practices as many youth will work on farms during the summer and exhibit dairy cattle at fairs. The Wisconsin Meat Animal Quality Assurance (MAQA) program teaches youth in the beef, sheep and swine projects about quality assurance, good management practices and ethics. Contact your local UW-Extension office or Agriculture Education Instructor for meetings that are in your area. Key points in safe cattle handling:

- Most animals respond to routine; be calm and deliberate. Their size and bulk make them potentially dangerous.
- Avoid quick movements or loud noises. Cattle have nearly 360-degree panoramic vision. A quick movement behind cattle may startle it. Cattle also have sensitive hearing and can detect sounds that human ears cannot hear.

- Be patient; never prod an animal when it has nowhere to go. Cattle paddles make a sound similar to a baby rattle and that is enough sound to help direct the animal.
- Always have an escape route when working with animals in close quarters. Alleys and chutes should be wide enough to allow animals to pass, but not wide enough to let them turn around. Be sure to have gates well secured as gates falling on individuals have resulted in fatalities.
- Most animals tend to be aggressive when protecting their young; be extra careful around cows with newborn calves. Bulls of breeding age are very dangerous. Use special facilities for them and practice extreme caution when handling them. Never trust them or assume they are tame. A bull will use his head for defense. A bull's head can wallop a punch of knocking a grown adult unconscious.
- For farms that employ youth workers under the age of 16, working with cows with newborn calves (umbilical cords attached) and bulls are considered hazardous activities and are subject to federal law.
- Keep young children away from animal handling areas.

Further information on safe handling of dairy cattle and other agricultural safety resources can be found on a new website by the University of Wisconsin Center for Agricultural Safety and Health. Please visit <http://fyi.uwex.edu/agsafety> for further information.

MANAGING IN DIFFICULT TIMES: PROFITABLE PRACTICES FOR TOUGH TIMES

When times are tough -- when commodity prices are low, when there is drought or a shortage of feed, for example -- farmers often ask: "What are the most profitable practices under these conditions?"

The answer usually disappoints those who ask it because practices that maximize profitability when "times are good" are the same practices that help maximize profits (or in many cases minimize losses) when "times are tough."

"I think this surprises people because, when times are good, one can achieve a satisfactory profit level without using all of the profit maximizing practices," said Tom Kriegl, Farm Financial Analyst, Center for Dairy Profitability, University of Wisconsin-Madison/Extension.

"When times are good and profit margins are generous, people may become complacent and adopt practices that seem convenient or appealing even though the practices reduce profitability. When these practices become routine, it is easy to think of these less profitable practices as essential."

It's also important to recognize that the components of a practice that contributes to profitability can change. For example, feeding the least cost-balanced ration (compared with feeding an unbalanced ration and without regard to cost) is a practice that helps maximize profits or minimize losses under all conditions except one -- when revenue fails to equal or exceed variable cost. However, the components of the least cost-balanced ration can vary radically as

prices of the ingredients and the product change.

We must also recognize that tools that maximize profit can be underused. For example, feed testing, milk testing, soil testing, and record keeping and analysis are all tools that can help maximize profits. Yet, some managers pay for these tools but ignore the information these tools provide. Misusing or not using such tools will actually detract from profitability.

In summary, the practices and tools that contribute to profitability are similar in both good economic times and bad. However, the way managers implement these practices and tools may change. To maximize profitability, managers must pay attention to details and make adjustments to these practices to fit their circumstances. Following are more specific comments about adjustments.

- ◆ Analyze, measure, test and monitor. You can't manage what you can't measure.
- ◆ Review all of your practices – including financial and production.
- ◆ Return to the basics – the practices that serve best in most conditions.
- ◆ Focus on input-output relationships.
- ◆ Pay attention to details.
- ◆ Eliminate wastage wherever you can whether it is reducing feed spoilage or the avoidance of spilling manure on the road where it does no good.
- ◆ Use decision making tools such as those provided by UW-Extension.

- ◆ Monitor your cost of production on a regular basis. On many farms it should be done monthly.
- ◆ Focus on the controllable larger expense items first. Even among dairy farms that raise much of their feed, purchased feed is usually the largest cost item. Other cost items that rank high for most dairy systems in most years include depreciation, labor, repairs and interest. When costs are categorized in a different way, the cost of raising or buying replacements is also a very large cost. The same is true for all the costs associated with raising feed. Don't get over focused on the smaller costs without having these larger costs under control.
- ◆ Defer or pass up capital investments unless they are really needed now. However, if your debt is low, you intend to farm for several years, and you have cash reserves or a good credit rating, you might find bargains for capital items and interest rates. Even then, limit capital purchases to items that really are needed in the long run. An item like a low cost labor efficient milking parlor could fit into the need category even now.
- ◆ It is appropriate to time capital investments for tax management purposes, but few if any capital investments can be justified on tax benefits alone.
- ◆ Make sure your debt is productive debt—debt that supports investments that will pay for themselves in a reasonable time frame.
- ◆ Check opportunities to refinance for lower interest rates but make

sure that refinancing costs don't nullify the reduced interest rate. If refinancing converts your interest rate from fixed to variable, be aware of what that could mean.

- ◆ Take advantage of government programs such as MILC.
- ◆ While one needs to survive the short run to have a long run, don't lose sight of the long run.
- ◆ While many farm families routinely minimize family living costs, that isn't the case for everyone. Consequently 2009 would be a good year to reduce or defer large discretionary family living expenses such as new cars or houses.
- ◆ Maintain adequate two way communication with your farm staff (whether paid or unpaid) to ensure proper training and functioning of and to minimize turnover of the labor force. To access more information and/or tools to help analyze your situation, link to the Extension Responds web page at: www.uwex.edu/ces/ag/farmingindifficulttimes.html

For assistance in making these tough decisions, contact our office, your Farm Business and Production Management Instructor in the Technical College or the DATCP Farm Center at 1-800-942-2474.



Greenhouse Gossip . . .

Erin LaFaive

Eau Claire County Horticulture Educator



Horticulture Office Insect Report

This month the Eau Claire County Extension Office has had reports of rose chafers, colorado potato beetles, bean leaf beetles, and one report of springtails.

Rose chafer's

skeletonize leaves of roses, grapes, raspberries and other cultivated trees and shrubs. They are attracted to blossoms as well especially rose and peony blossoms.

Cheesecloth draped over plants helps to keep the chafer's off the plants. Birds and small mammals can die from eating these insects. Chemicals such as acephate, bifenthrin, carbaryl, cyfluthrin, deltamethrin, imidacloprid, lambda-cyhalothrin, and permethrin effective against rose chafers.



Rose chafer

Springtails are very small insects (1-3 mm). Because of their tiny size they are usually detectable when they congregate in large numbers. Springtails prefer an outdoor environment with decaying wood, leaf litter, or rich soils. If these favored environments are near the house they can make their way into the house through cracks and crevices. The best way to control these insects is to destroy their breeding site and to dry out the area they are found in. Landscape and household insecticides are effective against these pests however they will persist until the breeding site is removed.



Bean Leaf Beetles

The host plants are snap and lima beans, peas, soybeans, and leguminous weeds. They become mid-May to early June when the weather warms. These beetles are difficult to control without chemicals. Floating row covers can help but be sure the edges are firmly secure so the beetles don't crawl under. Organic pesticides effective against these beetles include Rotenone, pyrethrum, neem and chemical pesticides include carbaryl and permethrin.



Sources

- *Colorado Potato Beetle*, by K.A. Delahaut. A3678
- *Springtails*, by Phil Pellitteri. XHT1039
- *Deciduous Tree and Shrub Disorders: Skeletonizing by Rose Chafer*, by R.C. Williamson and C.F. Koval A3122.
- *Bean Leaf Beetle*, by Karen Delahaut. X1131.



Larvae and adult Colorado potato beetles devouring leaves from a potato plant.

Colorado potato beetles are pests of potatoes, eggplant, and tomatoes. They are leaf chewers and can do serious damage. The best way to control these pests is beginning looking for them in early May or after

potatoes has emerged. Handpick the adults and brush off the bright orange eggs found on the underside of the leaves. Use the organic insecticide Bt (*Bacillus thuringiensis* var. *tenebreonis*) specifically labeled for beetles. Another organic pesticide is spinosad. The beetles are becoming resistant to the chemical carbaryl

Jerry Jargon

Jerry Clark

Chippewa County Soil & Crops Educator



Start Scouting for Soybean Aphid Now

Soybean aphid has been around for the past nine years. Some years, populations stay low and cause no harm to our soybean crop. Other years, the populations explode quickly and cause significant damage to the crop and lower yields. The soybean aphid has been found in a few soybean fields already this year. Count numbers are low now, so keeping tabs on the population is a must to prevent outbreaks.

Start spot-checking seedling soybeans at the V2 stage and continue checking through pod fill. The aphid can be found on growing points and new leaves of early vegetative soybean plants. As soybean plants mature from late vegetative through reproductive stages, soybean aphids can be found on all plant parts. Although most common on undersides of leaves, they also occur on stems, petioles and upper leaf surfaces.

The soybean aphid is small (1/16 inch), pear-shaped bright green to yellow aphid with dark tips on the cornicles (two tube-like structures or "tailpipes" on the tip of the abdomen). The best way to identify soybean aphid is to use a 20x magnifying lens. Soybean aphids may be winged or wingless, or a combination of both on plants during the summer. Winged soybean aphids have a black head and thorax with green/yellow abdomen.

Aphids tend to build up more heavily on late-planted fields and no-till fields, so check late-planted fields closely. Moisture stress also favors aphid population growth and adds to yield risk.

Scout more intensively, beginning at late vegetative growth stage soybeans (V5) and calculate average aphids per plant on 20-30 plants per field, from a sample covering at least 80% of the field area. Check the entire plant; at this stage, aphids move from the top of the plant to the middle or lower areas of the canopy. Check the undersides of leaves, petioles and pods.

Take note of the presence of winged aphids, high predator activity like Asian ladybeetles, and/or diseased aphids. These are all signs that the population may be in decline and/or may leave the field shortly. Scout these same fields again within a few days to note if populations are increasing or decreasing.

The timing of an insecticide application is crucial. Use an action threshold of 250 aphids per plant. This action threshold should be based on an *average* of aphids per plant over 20-30 plants sampled *throughout the field*. Regular field visits are required to determine if aphid populations are increasing.

In replicated research trials, the 250 aphids/plant threshold has worked well in R1 to R5 soybeans. Spraying at R6 or beyond has not been documented to increase yield. Insecticide application to fields with soybean aphid populations below the economic threshold of 250 aphids/plant is not advised. The economic threshold of 250 aphids/plant is set below the economic injury level, or 'break-even' point, where pest density causes yield losses equal to the cost of control.

UW entomologists are studying natural enemies that occur in Wisconsin and are also collaborating in a regional research project on importation biological control. The goal is a significant reduction in aphid numbers. The Asian aphid parasitoid *Binodoxys communis* is the first candidate for classical biological control of the soybean aphid and has already been released in several North Central states.





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Farm & Field Newsletter

Chippewa Valley Agriculture Newsletter

*A newsletter designed to meet the needs of farmers and agribusiness professionals
in Eau Claire and Chippewa Counties.*

Published monthly by the Eau Claire County Extension Office, Altoona, Wisconsin

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