Farm & Field

Chippewa Valley Agriculture Newsletter

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Good Day!!

We'll be starting a new year as you read this newsletter. It seems that the years keep coming faster and faster the older I get. When my elders used to tell me that, I thought they were kidding!

All of Wisconsin agriculture, but especially Eau Claire County, lost a leader and friend in December when Doug Mueller lost his battle with cancer. Doug was one of the first farmers I met here over 20 years ago. Doug was never afraid to take an active role in his community whether it was on a local, state or national stage. Please keep Doug and his family in your thoughts.

Make sure you attend one of out three agency meetings in early January. FSA, NRCS, Land Conservation and UW-Extension will be part of the traveling show. We'll be in Augusta on January 8 at Unity Bank beginning at 1:00 PM. We'll be at Unity Bank in Fall Creek at 10 AM and at the Washington Town Hall at 1:00 PM on January 9. See you at one of the sessions!

"Continue to Farm Smarter"

Mahlon Peterson

Mahlon Peterson
UW-Extension Agricultural Agent

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For more Extension Information go to our website:
www.uwex.edu/ces/cty/eauclaire/

Calendar

January

1 New Year's Day
8 Seed Dealer Update – Holiday Inn Campus
8 FSA, NRCS, LCD & UWEX Meeting – Augusta
9 FSA. NRCS, LCD & UWEX Meeting – Fall Creek
9 FSA, NRCS, LCD & UWEX Meeting - Washington
10 Ag Lenders Conference – Menomonie
12 Private Pesticide Applicator Training-Altoona
12 Chippewa Valley Forage Council Annual Meeting
15 Dairy Road Show – Menomonie & Rice Lake
21 Martin Luther King Day—Extension Office Closed
22 Private Pesticide Applicator Training-Bloomer
24 Income Tax Planning Meeting-Chippewa Falls

February

6 Private Pesticide Applicator Training-Cadott
7 Holstein Steer Feeders Meeting
9 Volunteer Leadership Training-Ladysmith
14 Valentines Day
21 Cattle Care Clinics
26 Private Pesticide Applicator Training-Augusta

Please call our office for more details, registration fees, etc.

Something To Chew On . . .

Mahlon Peterson Ag Agent
Eau Claire County

CORN CONFERENCE MEETINGS SLATED FOR JANUARY

The 2008 Corn Conference meetings, sponsored by University of Wisconsin-Extension and the Wisconsin Corn Growers Association, will be held Jan. 10, 21 and 22 in Rice Lake, Johnson Creek and Richland Center.

These conferences are designed to provide technical insight and practical advice to improve on-farm results. The meetings use the latest information available from university and industry research to help producers raise a crop with maximum yield, quality and profitability. The program is an in-depth learning experience with an opportunity to interact with corn production experts and fellow growers.

All three meetings will cover identical topics, which include:
-- The new economics of corn production
-- Marketing strategies for corn producers
-- “Saving a buck” or “Growing another bushel” – What is your approach?
-- Producer tips for successful corn production
-- What the Wisconsin Corn Growers Associations are working on (ethanol, DDGs, etc.).

Sessions start at 9:30 a.m. and conclude at 3:45 p.m. The dates and locations of meetings are:

-- Jan. 10, Rice Lake, Turtleback Country Club, West Allen Street and U.S. 53. To register, contact Barron County UW-Extension office at 715-537-6250.

-- Jan. 21, Johnson Creek, Comfort Suites, 725 Paradise Lane and Interstate 94. To register, contact Dodge County UW-Extension office at 920-386-3790.

-- Jan. 22, Richland Center, Ramada Inn and Whitehouse Banquets, 1450 Veterans Drive, U.S. 14. To register, contact Richland County UW-Extension office at 608-647-6148.

The registration deadline for Rice Lake is Jan. 7. There is a registration fee of $5 per participant. The fee includes a packet of meeting materials, refreshments for breaks and lunch. To register, please contact the UW-Extension office hosting that conference.

For more information, please contact Joe Lauer, 608-263-7438, jglauer@facstaff.wisc.edu.

DAIRY ROAD SHOW OFFERS FARMERS A COMPETITIVE EDGE

Make plans to attend one of the presentations by the 2008 University of Wisconsin-Extension Dairy Road Show Team in January and learn more about gaining a competitive edge in the dairy business.

The topics discussed will be of interest to both dairy producers and industry professionals. The program includes an update on dairy crossbreeding, milking performance in Wisconsin, the Wisconsin Johne’s control program, and dairy nutrition using bio-energy byproduct feeds.

This year's Road Show entitled "Gaining the Competitive Edge - A Dairy Seminar Series" will be offered at 14 locations around the state.
Seminars will be held on:
-- Jan. 8 at Kiel and Lomira
-- Jan. 9 at Casco and Gillett
-- Jan. 10 at Readstown and Sparta
-- Jan. 11 at Dodgeville and Baraboo
-- Jan. 15 at Menomonie and Rice Lake
-- Jan. 16 at Medford and Antigo
-- Jan. 17 at Abbotsford and Plover

The program will be the same at each location. Topics are:

“Dairy Crossbreeding Updates,” covering dairy crossbreeding results from University studies and commercial farms by Dr. Kent Weigel, UW-Extension geneticist and Dr. Randy Shaver, UW-Extension dairy nutrition specialist.

“Evaluation of Milking Performance in Wisconsin,” a review of teat condition, liners, vacuum levels and other milk management issues by Dr. Doug Reinemann, UW-Extension Milking Equipment/Electrical Specialist.

“Wisconsin Johne’s Control Program,” an interactive session about Johnes and the State program available to combat the costly disease by Dr. Elisabeth Patton and Dr. Andrea Foley, both from the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and Consumer Protection.

“Dairy Nutrition Using Bio-Energy Byproduct Feeds,” focusing on feeding byproducts generated by the ethanol and bio-diesel industries to lactating dairy cows by Pat Hoffman, UW-Marshfield Research Station and Dr. Randy Shaver, UW-Extension dairy nutrition specialist.

All meetings will run from 10:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. The fee for the program, which includes lunch and materials, is $25 per person. Registrations are due one week before the seminar you wish to attend.

For additional information, please contact Otto Wiegand at 715-635-3506 or 800-528-1914, or by email at otto.wiegand@ces.uwex.edu.

Xeriscaping: A Timely Idea for Us

Like it or not, our climate is changing.

We can all sense that our winters are milder now than when we were children. Bugs from the south are creeping into our state—and surviving. This includes earwigs, Asian ladybeetles and Japanese beetles. In the past, our cold winters would wipe out these pests.

Our summers are getting warmer, too. Summer droughts are becoming more of the norm rather than the exception. Water rationing in the summer has become a fact of life.

As our water bills continue to rise and summer droughts become more common, it's time for us to get familiar with the term "xeriscaping". A xeriscape is a landscape which uses plants that have low water requirements, making them able to withstand extended periods of drought.

Xeriscaping uses native plants, limits watering to near the home, and uses water conserving practices such as mulching and drip irrigation.

Americans love their lawns, but there is nothing natural about growing large expanses of lawn under irrigated systems. Don't get me wrong—lawn grasses are a useful ground cover. But our expectations will need to change if droughts continue. We need to accept the fact that our lawns, which are native to the cool moist areas of Northern Europe, will naturally turn yellow—and sometimes dieback—in the summer.

One option is to find more drought-tolerant grasses. Research is ongoing to develop native American grasses such as buffalograss, blue gramagrass and fairway crested wheatgrass for use as lawns. Non-native selections of fescues and Canada bluegrass are also being developed.

Of course, another option is to simply reduce the emphasis of turf in our landscapes.

When selecting trees, we need to start taking into account their tolerance to drought. Among the best in this regard are red maple, hybrid elm, Kentucky coffeetree, ginkgo, honeylocust, hackberry, many oaks (bur, red and pin), and hawthorn. Good evergreens include Scots pine, Black Hills spruce, and Colorado blue spruce.

Several shrubs will tolerate heat and drought. These include amur maple, potentilla, black chokeberry, chokecherry, gray dogwood, American hazelnut, cotoneaster, ninebark, fragrant sumac, rugosa rose, Japanese spirea, Indiancurrant coralberry, and wayfaringtree viburnum. Among evergreens, nothing can beat junipers for their tolerance of heat and drought.

Fortunately, many popular perennials tolerate drought. Among the best are purple coneflower, rudbeckia, yarrow, silver artemisia, tall bearded iris, daylily, stonecrop, hens and chicks, snow-in-summer, creeping phlox, lamb's ears, and Russian sage. Numerous ornamental grasses, including fountain grass and feather grass, tolerate drought, too.

So don't worry about drought next summer. Use native plants and xeriscaping principles to have a beautiful low-maintenance landscape.

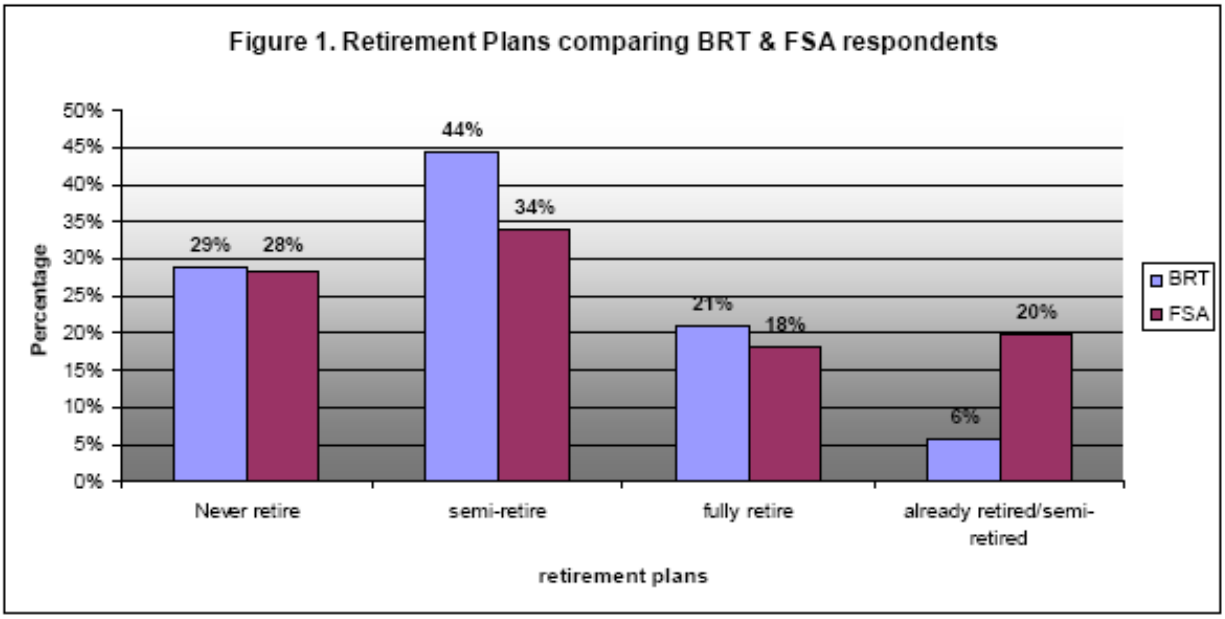
Randy's Rumors . . .

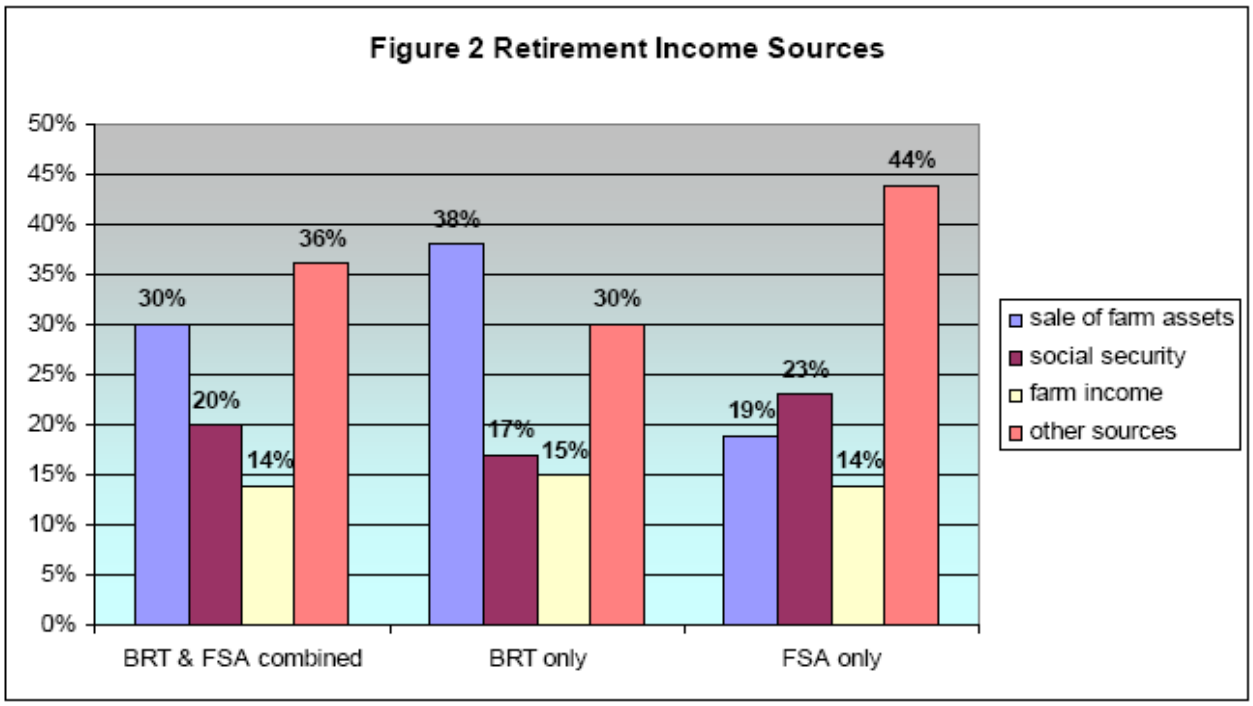
Randy Knapp, Chippewa County Agricultural Agent

Farm Retirement and Succession

In March and April of 2006, the UW Center for Dairy Profitability, with the help of the UW-River Falls Survey Research Center, surveyed 2,587 farmers in the counties of Crawford, Grant, Iowa and Richland to discover the retirement and succession plans in the southwestern corner of Wisconsin. Five hundred eighty-nine viable responses (a 23 percent response rate) were returned and analyzed. This survey is a part of the International FARM TRANSFERS Succession survey. Similar studies have been conducted in seven countries and eight states. The Wisconsin survey used two populations in the survey. The first was the current Brucellosis Ring Test (BRT) list, which contains all farms with current BRT data with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection. The second population included anyone who received a Farm Service Agency (FSA) payment and had a residential zip code with the four counties.

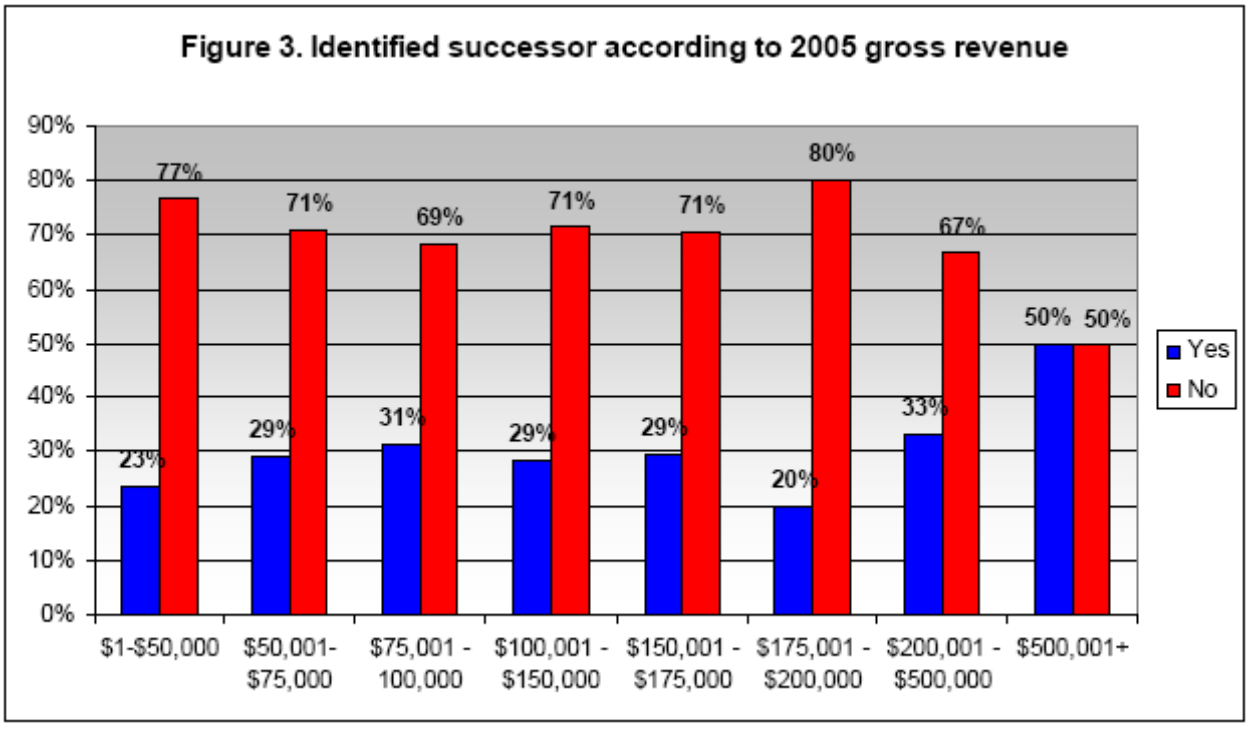
The four county Wisconsin survey suggests a high number of farmers plan to never retire or only semi-retire. Seventy-three percent of BRT respondents indicate they either will never retire or only semi-retire, while 20% of the FSA respondents are already retired/semi-retired (Figure 1). Those who are planning on retiring or semi-retiring indicate they plan on retiring at 65. Given the median age of respondents is 53 years old, this provides 12 years to plan and implement a retirement and at least partial succession plan, depending on their level of retirement plans.



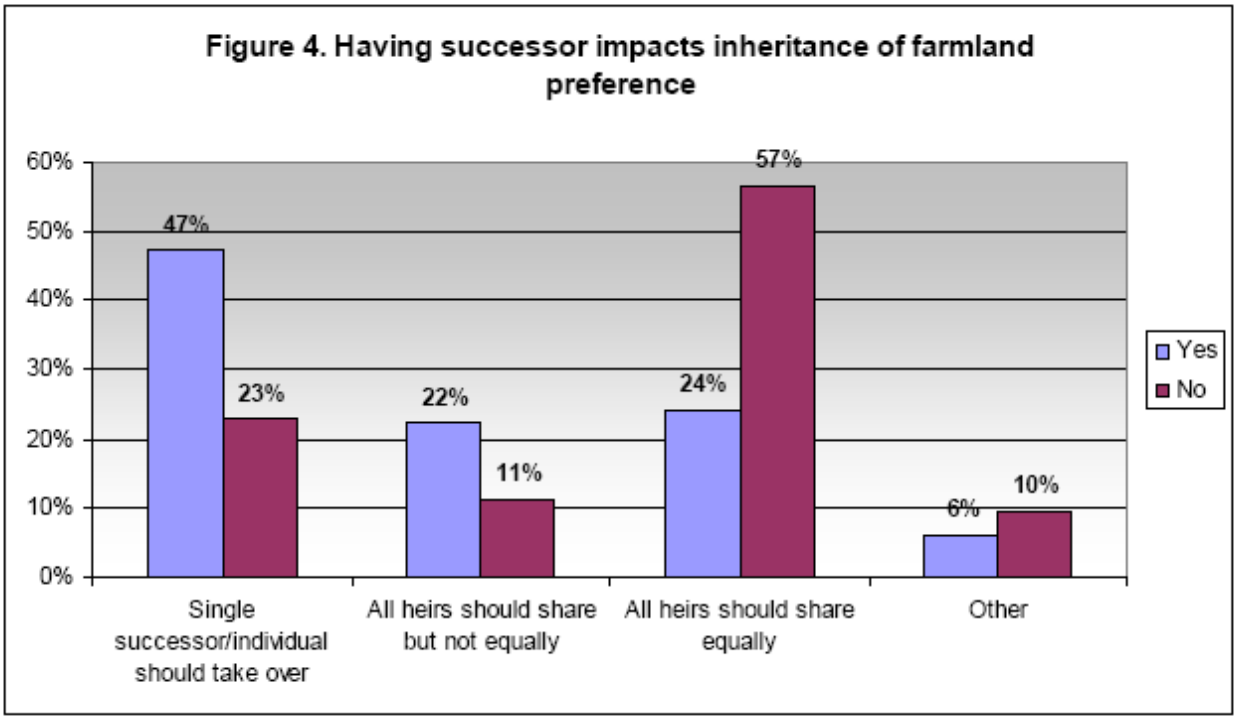


The survey allowed respondents to report with whom they had discussed their retirement plans; options were: family, lawyer, banker, farm consultant, accountant, others, or they could choose "have not discussed with anyone." Of those who indicated they were going to semi-retire, forty-three percent have yet to discuss their semi-retirement plans with anyone. Sixty-nine percent do not plan on moving from their current home.

As Figure 2 shows, those who plan to semi or fully retire will depend heavily on the farm assets or income from the farm business for retirement income.



Sixty-eight percent of the respondents have not identified a successor (Figure 3). Seventy percent of the respondents 51 – 60 years old have not identified a successor. Those reporting $200,001 or higher gross revenue were more likely to have identified a successor than farms generating less. However, it is not until gross revenue is $500,001 or higher that 50% of them answering they have identified a successor.
When asked about preferences for inheriting the farm land, farm house, and non-farm assets – forty-six per-



cent of respondents indicated that all heirs should share equally in the farmland (Figure 4). If an operator had already identified a successor that percentage drops to twenty-four percent. This suggests that almost a quarter of the respondents state that, even though they have identified a successor, the land will be divided equally among the heirs. Depending on the number of heirs and the quality of their relationships, this can have an impact on the successor's ability to maintain control of enough of the farm assets to continue the business.

Summary

The generation of farmers approaching retirement represents a generation with fewer children and whose children have had the benefit of other life choices, perhaps more than any previous generation in history. Consequently, fewer numbers of farm families have children who want or are able to take over the family farm. In past generations, there was more likely someone in the family to take over the farm and carry it into the next generation. These changing demographics have an impact not only on the availability of young people to take over; they also mean that farmers in the older generation may put off making plans for retirement simply because that son or daughter is not there to take over the reins to the operation. A key factor in having a farming successor is the farm's ability to generate adequate income. As the survey results indicate, as the gross revenue increased, there was an increase in the likelihood of having identified a successor. In addition, the older generation's retirement income sources must be identified so that all parties understand what the farm business will be expected to provide, either through continued income or the sale of the farm assets.

As farmers slow down, the usual progression is to sell the livestock and perhaps rent out the facilities and only crop farm; the second step is to rent out the crop land while still living in the farmhouse. If the sale of the land is not needed for living expenses as the farm couple ages, the land will most likely be divided equally among their heirs. As these once viable farming businesses slow down, their capacity to be economic powerhouses in their rural communities decline as well. Research indicates rural communities in the four southwestern counties are still heavily dependent on the agriculture industry for their economic viabilities.

Jerry Jargon
Jerry Clark
Chippewa County Soil & Crops Educator

Ice on Alfalfa

The freezing rains and ice accumulation in parts of Wisconsin have raised many questions about potential ice damage to the alfalfa stands.

The freezing temperatures of the ice do little damage directly to the alfalfa. Temperatures below 15^{o} F in the crown region (1 to 4 inches into the soil) are required to damage alfalfa. Ice damages alfalfa because alfalfa roots need oxygen during the winter. The oxygen comes from air above ground diffusing into soil. A solid layer of ice restricts air diffusion and suffocates alfalfa. This is the common reason for loss of alfalfa in low spots in fields.

The conventional recommendation has been that alfalfa covered by ice for 3 to 4 weeks will likely suffer injury or death. However, sometimes alfalfa will survive much longer under ice depending on a number of factors.

Thus when determining whether or not ice sheets will cause damage to alfalfa stands we must consider whether the ice is in a solid sheet. If the ice is not solid, cracked, or has holes, it will not completely restrict air movement into the soil and result in little to no damage. Additionally, alfalfa stems sticking up through the ice will help create air holes in the ice.

Alfalfa generally had good hardening last fall. This hardening should have created a good environment within the plants to increase their ability to withstand cold temperatures.

Most of the ice created from warmer weather just before Christmas is on top of a layer of snow. The snow layer provides some oxygen to the soil and will allow the ice to break up naturally and develop cracks for air diffusion.

Can anything be done if ice forms on alfalfa fields? Since the ice is on top of snow a large tractor and disc will break of the ice but will also damage the alfalfa, both from physical injury from the disc and from exposure of some crowns to the colder air temperatures.

Some ask about broadcasting fertilizer on top of the ice but this is not a good idea. The thought is that salt in the fertilizer will melt through the ice and causing holes to let air into the soil. However, if the ice is too thick to break up naturally, fertilizer generally does little good because it does not melt all the way through the ice to create holes. Additionally, surface applied fertilizer could be a runoff problem if the fertilizers contain nitrogen or phosphorus, since a rapid melting or a rainfall event would be likely to cause substantial runoff of N and P. For this reason, the current nutrient management standard prohibits most N and P fertilizer applications on frozen or snow-covered soils, except for winter grains. Broadcast applications of potassium, while not prohibited, on an ice cover can also be problematic. A runoff event could cause the distribution of the nutrient to be quite variable and off-site losses would represent an economic loss to producers.

Thus while concerned about the ice, nothing can be done to minimize any potential damage to stands. The fact that the ice is on top of snow is likely to create less, if any injury. All we can do is wait to see what happens.

We should also remember that several years ago, we had ice sheeting across central Wisconsin for 8 or more weeks and fields suffered very little winterkill or injury.

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