**Ballard County Ag Newsletter**

**February 2025**





While we are still stuck in winter, it’s time to start thinking about the wheat crop and everything that needs to be done in the next six weeks. I attended the Winter Wheat meeting in Hopkinsville last week and while nothing was earthshattering there were several presentations with some good reminders.

Test weight was a big discussion and unfortunately we are really at the mercy of weather during harvest time. Some varieties are definitely better than others with holding on to test weight but if the mature grain gets wet and then dries out you will lose test weight -- often a pound or more per wetting event. Obviously, early harvest will help but not everyone is equipped to handle wet wheat. Fungicide applications for Fusarium Head Blight, help to a certain degree but will not remove the risk of damage from lowered test weight. Make sure test weight is a consideration in your variety selection.

Over fertilization with Nitrogen causes many more problems than it helps. Researchers at UK have been looking at liquid N sources verses dry N sources along with Nitrogen with nanocarriers, another name for slow release nitrogen. In the first year of the studies last season, no matter the source,wheat yields increased with increased N up to 100 pounds per acre. Over that rate no yield increases were significant. Liquid N was just as good as urea or any of the treated products with all having similar yields. Just like with corn this past season, wheat does not care which N source it gets as long as it gets enough. I am partial to liquid N, just because I think you can do a more accurate job with application, but if you can do a good job spreading a dry product let price and time be the deciding factor. Split applying the nitrogen greatly reduces the risk of N loss to the environment. An early spit application can help tillering if the stand is a little weak.

You need a total of 100 lbs of N for a conventional wheat field and 110 to 115 for a no-till wheat crop. Some of the N gets tied up in crop residue. Over these amounts and you are going to start seeing standability issues and down wheat causes all sorts of problems. Be more careful in corners and end rows to avoid double applications.

Rye grass is a big concern as most of it is getting resistant to much of the chemistry that we have historically used. We are going to have to start using residual herbicides at pre-plant to help control ryegrass. The addition of metribuzin can also help and we include metribuzin safety tolerance ratings in our wheat variety trials. There are big differences in varietal response to metribuzin with some varieties showing almost no damage and others being severely damaged.

Finally, Fusarium Head Blight is always the big concern not only because of yield loss but mostly because of the quality concerns and the huge reductions in price that can occur at the elevator. Most of the newer fungicides, Maravis Ace, Caramba, Prosaro, Prosaro Pro, Sphaerex and Double Nickel gave much better head scab control and reduction in DON level that older fungicides like tebuconozole (Folicur). Let the price and company programs determine the fungicide you use as all of the newer products are comparable in control. Mid- flowering is still the best time for the application and it is better to be a few days too late than a few days too early. I know those of you with a lot of wheat acres don’t have a choice, but late is better. Let’s hope for cool, dry weather during grain fill as the wheat price is not causing much optimism right now.

**In a Tough Year, Where can we make Cuts?**

This year stacks up to be a tough year on the farm. Commodity prices have fallen much faster than input costs. If the new government payments come through, they will help some but until the money is there don’t count on it. I recently read an article on Ag Web titled “Crop Consultants Offer Their Top Tips To Reduce Input Costs.” While interesting, it really didn’t make too many recommendations.

We can reduce fertilizer rates and not impact yield. Just by going back to the UK recommended rates for P and K, you will not see a yield reduction. Our rates are determined by field studies on Ky soils and still have a little extra added in. You can cut your overall nitrogen rates by 15 or 20 lbs. per acre just by side dressing your corn. Spend your money on lime and getting your pH right. With the correct pH much more fertilizer is naturally available.

Limit soybean seed treatments to early planted soybeans, lower wetter fields and fields where you know you have problems getting a stand. We just don’t see as much return when planting soybeans into warmer soils. Weed control is much more important when we need higher yields. Poor weed control can reduce yields in a hurry. Think about limiting fungicides and increase field scouting. Fungicides are almost always profitable when you have a disease problem. They become much more of a flip of the coin for just plant health applications. One late season application is much more cost effective than early season and multiple fungicide applications.

There are just not that many areas that you can cut. You could look at limiting inputs on known poorer areas of the field. Field edges and borders around trees are never going to produce like high yielding areas of the field. Use Precision Ag when you can. The way to make Precision Ag pay is to limit inputs in poor areas and increase them in areas that will use them. Our initial ideas were to bring every area of the field up to good levels, we now know that those poor areas are poor for a different reason not from lack of inputs.

**Spring‑Calving Cow Herd**

***Get ready for calving season this month!***

* Have calving equipment, supplies and labor ready for the spring calving season. Some supplies which may be needed are: eartags and applicator (put numbers on eartags now), tattoo pliers and ink, record book, scales for calf weights, iodine for calves' navels and colostrum supplement. Calving equipment (puller and chains, etc.) and facilities should be ready and clean.
* Overall condition of the cow herd should be evaluated. Cows losing weight now are more likely to have weak or dead calves. These cows will likely be a poor source of colostrum milk for the newborn calf. Feed cows, if necessary to keep them in good body condition. Cows need to calve in a BCS of 5, minimum, to expect them to rebreed in a timely fashion. Calve you heifers a little heavier, BCS of 6.
* Heifers may begin head-start calving in early February. Move them to a clean, accessible pasture, away from cow herd and near facilities so that calving assistance can be given. Cows may start calving later this month. Signs of calving are relaxation of pelvic ligaments, enlargement and swelling of the vulva, and enlargement of the udder. Expect calving difficulty if (1) calf's head and two feet are not visible, (2) only the calf's tail is visible, and (3) the cow has been in labor for 1½ hours. Be sure calf is being presented normally before using calf puller. Recognize situations that are beyond your capability and seek professional help as early as possible. Calves that aren’t breathing should receive assistance. Try sticking a straw in nostril to stimulate a reflex or try alternate pressure and release on rib cage. Commercial respirators are also available. Calves should consume colostrum within 30 minutes of birth to achieve good immunity.
* Record birthdate, cow I.D., and birthweight immediately (use your Beef IRM calendar). Identify calf with eartag and/or tattoo. Registered calves should be weighed in the first 24 hours. Male calves in commercial herds should be castrated and implanted as soon as possible.
* Separate cows that calve away from dry cows and increase their feed. Increase feed after calving to 25-27 pounds of high-quality hay. Concentrate (3-4 lb. for mature cows and about 8 lb. for first-calf heifers) may be needed if you are feeding lower quality hay. Supplementation may have a beneficial effect on date and rate of conception. It’s important time to feed a beef cow after calving. Thin cows don't come into heat very soon after calving. We must have cows in good condition, if we plan to breed them early in the season for best pregnancy rates, especially on high-endophyte fescue pastures.
* Sub-zero weather can mean death for newborn calves. During extremely cold spells, bring the cow(s) into a sheltered area as calving approaches to protect the calf. Be prepared to warm-up and feed newborn, chilled calves. Calving in mud can also cause problems.
* Watch for scours in newborn calves. Consult your veterinarian for diagnosis, cause, and treatment. Avoid muddy feeding areas so that cows' udders won't become contaminated and spread scours. Don't confine cows to muddy lots.
* Replacement heifers should be gaining adequately to reach target breeding weights by May 1. Be sure that their feeding program is adequate for early breeding.
* Start looking for herd sire replacements, if needed.

**Fall-Calving Herd**

* Breeding season should end this month – maybe Valentine’s Day. Remove bulls and confine them so that they regain condition. Be careful not to over feed. Bulls need to be kept at a BCS of 5-6.
* Consider creep feed or creep grazing (wheat, etc.) to supply extra nutrition to fall-born calves which may have to depend solely on their dam’s milk supply for growth. They are not getting much except their dam’s milk now (i.e. there is nothing to graze). February/March is the worst time of the year for fall-born calves.
* Provide windbreaks or clean shelter for calves.

**General**

* Increase feed as temperature drops. When temperature falls below 15 degrees, cattle need access to windbreaks. For each 10 degree drop below 15 degrees, add three pounds of hay, two pounds of corn, or six pounds of silage to their rations.
* Provide water at all times. Watch for frozen pond hazards. If cattle are watering in a pond, be sure to keep ice “chopped” to keep cattle from walking on the ice and, possibly, breaking through. Keep automatic waterers working.
* You should be feeding a mineral supplement with adequate magnesium to prevent grass tetany (~ 15% Mg) now. The Hi-mag UK Beef IRM mineral can be used now.
* Control lice. Watch for signs such as rubbing.
* Begin pasture renovation. You can overseed clover on frozen or snow-covered pastures.

**Frost Seeding Tips**

***Dr. Chris Teutsch, Dr. S. Ray Smith, Dr. Jimmy Henning, Forage Extension***

Legumes are an essential part of a strong and healthy grassland ecosystems . They form a symbiotic relationship with *Rhizobium* bacteria in which the bacteria fix nitrogen from the air into a plant available form and share it with the legume. Clover also increases forage quality and quantity and helps to manage tall fescue toxicosis. In the past, the positive impact of clover on tall fescue toxicosis has always been thought to simply be a dilution effect, but [new research from the USDA’s Forage Animal Production Unit in Lexington](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cmRuhhZp0Ho&t=838s) shows that compounds found in red clover can reverse vasoconstriction that is caused by the ergot alkaloids in toxic tall fescue. The primary compound found in red clover is a vasodilator called Biochanin A.

Clover stands in pastures thin overtime due to various factors and require reseeding every three to four years. There are several techniques for reintroducing clover into pastures including no-till seeding, minimum tillage, and frost seeding. Of these techniques, frost seeding requires the least amount of equipment and is the simplest to implement. Frost seeding is accomplished by broadcasting clover seed onto existing pastures or hayfields in late winter and allowing the freezing and thawing cycles to incorporate the seed into the soil. This method works best with red and white clover and annual lespedeza. It is NOT recommended for seeding grasses or alfalfa.

Figure 2. Frost seeding is accomplished by broadcasting clover seed onto closely grazed pastures in late winter or early spring. Using GPS guidance helps operators maintain equal spacing between passes and consistent speed. *(Photos by Chris Teutsch)*



*Frost Seeding Tips*

* *Control broadleaf weeds*..
* *Soil test and adjust fertility*.
* *Suppress sod and decrease residue*.
* *Ensure good soil-seed contact*.
* *Seed on proper date*.
* *Use high-quality seed and adapted varieties*.
* *Legume mixture for Kentucky*. In Kentucky, a good mixture for renovating pastures with is 6-8 lb/A of red clover, 1-2 lb/A of ladino or intermediate white clover.
* *Use correct seeding rate.*
* *Inoculate legume seed*.
* *Check seed distribution pattern*..
* *Use GPS guidance to maintain a consistent distance between passes and speed*.
* *Control post-seeding competition*.

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Nutty Sweet Potato Biscuits

Ingredients:

* 1 cup all-purpose flour
* 1/3 cup whole wheat flour
* 1 1/2 teaspoons baking powder
* 1/2 teaspoon salt
* 1/4 teaspoon ground cinnamon
* 1/4 teaspoon ground nutmeg
* 1/3 cup chopped walnuts
* 1 cup mashed sweet potatoes
* 6 tablespoons sugar
* 1/4 cup butter, melted
* 1/2 teaspoon vanilla
* 1 tablespoon milk

Directions:

1. In a large mixing bowl, combine flours, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, nutmeg and walnuts. Set aside.
2. Combine sweet potatoes, sugar, butter, vanilla and milk; add to flour mixture and mix well.
3. Turn out onto a floured surface; gently knead 3 or 4 times. Roll dough into ½ inch thickness. Cut with a 2 inch biscuit cutter and place on a lightly greased baking sheet.
4. Bake at 450°F for 12 minutes or until golden brown

Source: *Plate it up! Kentucky Proud Project.*

100 calories; 4g fat; 2g saturated fat; 5mg cholesterol; 210mg sodium; 14g carbohydrate; 1g fiber; 4g sugar; 2g protein.