Momentum continues with second grant program

BY KAY SHIPMAN

Momentum continues with second grant program

The Illinois Farm Bureau Board wants to keep up the momentum,” said Lyndsey Ramsey, IFB associate director of natural and environmental resources. “Directors were impressed by the level of collaboration and the water quality knowledge gained.

They want to continue farmer involvement in how IFB takes this issue seriously.”

IFB again will award $100,000 in grants to county Farm Bureaus to develop and implement local nutrient, soil health and water quality projects.

“Our goals are the same — to move the needle on water quality,” Ramsey said. She noted the program’s flexibility allows county Farm Bureaus to determine local needs and develop programs to address those. “We want to see a variety of projects because no one-size-fits-all solution will work everywhere. We want what will work in their county.”

This year, 30 county Farm Bureaus and numerous local partners implemented 15 projects in 32 counties. Collaboration remains an important part of the grant program, Ramsey said.

New this year, county Farm Bureaus applying for second-year funding must specify matching funds and/or in-kind services that will be contributed by the county Farm Bureau and its partners. County Farm Bureaus that didn’t receive a grant are not required to include matching funds and in-kind services, but may do so.

Another change is the announcement timing and awarding of money. Both occur earlier with an Oct. 31 application deadline and Nov. 30 award announcement. Moving the program ahead will allow county Farm Bureaus to spend funding earlier in the year, which is good for those planning winter events, Ramsey noted.

County Farm Bureau applicants also need to plan how farmers’ data, if collected, will remain confidential and how programs will be publicized and information shared.

“A lot of counties successfully collected data, and we want to standardize that.”

See Grant, page 2

Trade focus of Leaders to Washington trip

BY DEANA STROISCH

The trip also includes a visit to the Australian Embassy, where participants will discuss the benefits of TPP. The group also will meet with key administrators in USDA.

The leaders will meet with members of Illinois’ Congressional delegation and the state’s U.S. senators. In addition to TPP, the group will push for passage of the 2016 Water Resources Development Act.

The group comprised of farmers throughout the state includes Marc Lamczyk, a third-generation farmer in Franklin County. He works for the University of Illinois Extension. Lamczyk said he has never been to the nation’s capital and was encouraged to attend by his Farm Bureau manager. He said he hopes to learn how things work on Capitol Hill.

Megan Dwyer, who grew up on a corn, soybean and beef farm in Henry County, will also participate. She serves on the Henry County Farm Bureau board and as chairwoman of its education committee.

“I wanted to participate to get a more personal look at how the Farm Bureau works with legislators to accomplish goals and build relationships with policymakers,” she said. “I hope to convey that even though we are the minority, we have a strong voice, and are educated and informed on the issues.”

Other trip participants include: Ali Masood, Peotia County; Keith Mussman, Kankakee County; Keith Poole, Ogle County; Walter Wallace, Macoupin County; and board directors Michele Aavang and Dale Hadden.

For trip updates, follow #L2DC on Twitter and visit farmweeknow.com.
Quick Takes

FARM SAFETY WEBINARS OFFERED — Celebrate National Farm Safety & Health (NFSH) Week by participating in a series of seminars provided by the AgSafe Network.

Scheduled for Sept. 18-24, NFSH features the theme of "Agricultural Safety: A Legacy to Be Proud Of." The first, hourlong webinar at noon Sept. 19 will focus on topics of respiratory protection needed in dairies and other agriculture.

Other webinars include noon Sept. 20, a look at the National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health Total Worker Health program; noon and 1:30 p.m. Sept. 21, transtoxing a farm operation and keeping youth safe on farms; noon and 2 p.m. Sept. 22, soil safety in continuous work areas; and 10 a.m. and noon Sept. 23, call 811 before you dig and equipping agribusinesses with tools to optimize employee health.

To register, visit agrisafe.org/nfsweek2016.

BE MINDFUL OF MANURE SAFETY — With har- vest beginning, manure application follows, so it’s a good time to remember manure safety, said Rich Gates, University of Illinois professor and Extension specialist.

“Manure is a valuable fertilizer, will release toxic hydrogen sulfide and methane gases that can be lethal. It is important to remember the key safety rules when agitating and emptying manure stores,” Gates said.

Rules include taking steps to promote ventilation; removing trapped, possible animals from buildings or near- by downwind structures; starting the agitation slowly and watching for any harmful effects.

Gates added livestock farmers should never enter an enclosed manure store without appropriate precautions. “Be mindful that you can be overcome with a single breath if concentrations are high,” he noted.

Check out two fact sheets, “Safe Manure Removal Poli- cies” and “Manure Storage Entering Procedures” at web.extension.illinois.edu/agrsafety.

CHICAGO GAINS B20 TRUCKS — Trucks hauling cargo in and around Chicago’s rail yards and ports are now some of the cleanest vehicles on the road today, thanks to the delivery of 11 new drayage vehicles that run on biodiesel.

The new vehicles feature diesel particulate filters and meet the delivery of 11 new drayage vehicles that run on biodiesel. The new vehicles feature diesel particulate filters and meet stringent nitrogen oxide (NOx) emission standards.

The upgraded, more fuel-efficient vehicles are owned and operated by GeD Integrated, a member of the B20 Club sponsored by the Illinois Soybean Association (ISA) checkoff program and American Lung Association in Illinois to recognize Illinois-based fleets running on 20 percent biodiesel blends.

The trucks were purchased through a $451,773 grant from the National Clean Diesel Fueling Assistance Program made possible by the Diesel Emission Reduction Act (DERA) of 2010. The program is designed to help get fleets to voluntarily upgrade to cleaner emission vehicles or technologies to help reduce pollution in high-priority areas.

Weed Warriors post successful year

BY CHRIS ANDERSON

FarmWeek — It’s a climb by heat, humidity and mud, a troop of 40 Weed Warriors completed its second successful season with nary a palm branch identified.

Members of the Armstrong, Eureka, Flora and ROWVA FFA Chapters invested nearly 674 hours scrounging 9,185 acres of corn and soybean fields through August as part of GROWMARK Inc.’s weed scouting program. They scouted fields owned by friends and family as well as those identified by GROWMARK member companies Evergreen FS, Illini FS, South Central FS and West Central FS.

The program focuses on early weed identification to miti- gate yield loss, but Weed Warriors also get hands-on soil and crop judging experience.

For Armstrong FFA’s Christian Hudson, the program proved the best of both worlds. He even turned the experience into a marketing degree, "I took part because I’m thinking of a career in agronomy,” said the high school senior. “I help my grandpa (Phil) on the farm. I like doing hands-on work.”

Hudson scouted at least a half-dozen fields weekly for 15 weeks. He completed the task single-handedly at times, but also scouted with his grandpa and dad, Leon.

“It’s a great program. It helped me get my foot in the door for an agronomy career,” said Hudson, planning to con- tinue his education at a junior college in fall 2017.

Karen Jones, GROWMARK cooperative affairs and communica- tions specialist, deemed the program’s second year a suc- cess. The biggest change for Weed Warriors involved filing electronic scouting reports, which translated into more timely reports and more stu- dents submitting them, she said.

Weed Warriors found no Palmer amaranth. Scouting for the prolific weed remains a pro- gram focus because the aggres- sive weed germinates through- out much of the growing sea- son, producing more than 400,000 seeds per plant. Aaron Hager, University of Illinois crop sciences professor, who receives scouting reports and collaborates with Weed Warriors, noted frequent men- tions of marestail and velvetleaf.

“We know pigweed and waterhemp are glyphosate resistant. Marestail is probably resistant. But why verify this year? It’s been reported in Iowa and Minnesota, too. Theo- retically, it could be resistant,” said Hager.

“We challenge for weed con- trol moving forward includes not only glyphosate concerns but also three or four additional herbicide classes,” Hager noted.

“The good news we know how to win. If we can keep Palmer seed numbers down for three or four years, we can con- trol it. But we need people like Weed Warriors in the field,” said Hager.

“Some year farmers plant corn, this year they plant soybeans, the weed managers need to think of things that change every year,” Hager added.

For more information, contact Ramsey at lanrasy@ilfb.org or call 309-557-3279.

‘Apted’ lawmaker views specialty crops, seed tech

BY CHRISTINA NOURIE

State Rep. Elaine Nekritz, D-Northbrook, recently visited her adopted farmers in Winneba- go and Boone counties. Nekritz, a longtime Illi- nois Farm Bureau adopted legislator, schedules a day each year to tour farms. Her visit started at the Franseen family dairy goat farm near Poplar Grove, then moved to Van Laar’s Fruit Farm in Capron.

Crossing the border to Clinton, Wis., the rep- resentative visited Dairyland Seed Research Inter- national. Under parent company Dow Agro- sciences, it conducts seed research and provides genet- ics and technology research for corn, soybeans, alfalfa and silage.

During the tour, Nekritz learned about the research being conducted in seed technologies and how different seed varieties maximize yields, and protect crops from weather, diseases and pests. Technology also helps farmers run a profi- table, sustainable operation.

During lunch at Copper Falls in Clinton, for those changes,” she said.

Information distributed last week to county Farm Bureaus included a list of potential projects, but Ramsey stressed those are suggestions and other ideas are welcome.

“It was clear IFB made a contribution that filled a void in cash-strapped Illinois,” Ramsey said of the first nutrient stewardship grants.

For more information, contact Ramsey at lanrasy@ilfb.org or call 309-557-3279.
Consumer conversations

Tips for talking about farms, ag

BY KAY SHIPMAN

FarmWeek

Farmers love to talk about their equipment, crops, livestock — even the weather. But to a nonfarmer, those conversations may sound like a foreign language.

The second Illinois Harvest Dinner offered 100 professionals in education, nutrition, medicine, government, food service and food retail conversations with farmers last week. A backdrop of cornfields and machinery, and a meal of Illinois-grown foods on the Conrady/Titus Family Farm near Elkhart provided an ideal setting.

FarmWeek asked some of the farmer representatives their tips for talking about farming with consumers.

Illinois Farm Bureau Director Dale Hadden, Jacksonville: • Find out their level of understanding about agriculture. Are they close to agriculture or several generations removed? • Explain at an elementary, basic level. Engage them with questions. Hadden uses that tactic while conducting farm tours for grade school students. • Help them understand the level of technology in today’s agriculture — something few people understand.

Thomas Titus, Logan County farmer and one of the U.S. Farmers & Ranchers Faces of Farming and Ranching: • Relate to the individual as a fellow parent or consumer and build on that relationship in the conversation. • Listen to and try to understand their concerns. Then relate a story about your own farm. For example, if someone expresses concern about antibiotic use in livestock, a farmer could talk about consulting with his veterinarian to provide care. • Focus on the point of the conversation and what you’re trying to accomplish.

Mark Raube, Pontiac High School senior and FFA member: • Explain that everything they eat comes from a farm or a field.

• When students ask what they can gain from a high school ag class or FFA, tell them about the skills you learn, the experiences and opportunities not available anywhere else. • Explain at a very basic level so they understand the concept of putting a plant into the ground, and the harvest of plants and care of animals.

Illinois farmers join nonfarmers, who work in health care, education and government, for food and conversation last week on the Conrady/Titus Family Farm near Elkhart. (Photo by Kay Shipman)

EPA 319 grant to fund erosion control in northwest watershed

BY KAY SHIPMAN

FarmWeek

Rock Island County farmers and landowners recently gained new resources to help reduce soil erosion in the Copperas Creek Watershed.

The Rock Island County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) announced a 319 grant through the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA). The grant, which uses federal EPA dollars, is earmarked for structural practices, SWCD Resource Conservationist Richard Stewart told FarmWeek.

The 46,000-acre watershed experiences “severe streambank erosion” of the creek that feeds into the Mississippi River, Stewart explained.

The SWCD obtained funds for streambank protection with peak stone toe construction, filter strips, sediment basins, grassed waterways and grade stabilization structures.

SWCD staff also will work with participating farmers to ensure practices, such as conservation tillage or cover crops, on cropland above the structure would ensure its usefulness for the expected number of years, according to Stewart.

After crops are harvested, SWCD staff would like to make site visits with interested farmers. If the number of applicants and proposed practices exceed available funding, proposed sites and practices will be ranked, Stewart said.

One byproduct of the grant program will be a learning experience for Augustana College students and faculty. The college is partnering with the SWCD to monitor the creek water to assess the practices’ impact, Stewart said.

For more information or for an application, contact the Rock Island SWCD at 309-764-1486, extension 3 or email riswcd@rockislandswcd.org.

#CleanWaterIL takeaway

• Agriculture needs to own this (nutrient) issue. • Target for progress, meaning focus more on watersheds having trouble for quantifiable results.

• Research is needed for conservation structures to reduce phosphorous and nitrogen losses.

• More collaboration. It can’t be just a farmer on his own — consumers, agribusinesses, government, environmentalists — get everybody around the table.

— Illinois Farm Bureau Young Leader Committee Member Chad Bell, Mercer County
BY DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

Mark and Sara Mitchell, Illinois Farm Bureau Young Leaders from Verona (Grundy County), balance quite a busy schedule.

Mark works as the general manager for a construction equipment rental company, Sara sells crop insurance, and they both run a hog operation and help out on Sara’s parents’ (Dave and Pam Brockman) cattle and grain farm.

But even with all that on their plates, the Mitchells place an emphasis on their involvement in IFB and Young Leaders.

And they were rewarded for that effort recently as the Mitchells won the YL Excellence in Ag Award. The prestigious award recognizes county Young Leaders who may not be full-time farmers for their efforts in agriculture and leadership achievement.

The Mitchells received the honor during Ag Day at the Illinois State Fair.

“We’re honored to represent Illinois,” Mitchell said. “In applying for the award, I think it opened our eyes to what we’ve done so far, and pushed us to do more.”

Sara currently serves on the Grundy County Farm Bureau Board, while Mark last year was named chairman of the county YL Committee.

“What drove me (to seek the YL position) was going through the Farm Bureau ALOT (Agricultural Leaders of Tomorrow) program,” he said. “I really can’t say enough about it (ALOT). It’s a phenomenal program.”

The Mitchells and other Grundy County Young Leaders took it up a notch with local programs.

“Young Leaders, I think made some strides this year,” Mitchell said. “We have a great group.”

Grundy County Young Leaders conducted their second ag legislative tour, hosted an ag breakfast and held their first YL Ag in the Classroom golf outing.

The Mitchells, who have been in Young Leaders four years, plan to remain very involved in that and other IFB programs.

They also hope to become more involved in the farming operation. They currently own a herd of purebred Yorkshire and Chester sows raised farrow-to-finish with an emphasis on show pigs.

“Our niche is the hogs,” Mitchell said. “We’re currently trying to buy land to be more vested in the grain operation.”

The Mitchells live just a few miles from Sara’s home farm in Grundy County.

Overtime rule takes effect Dec. 1

BY DEANA STROISCH
FarmWeek

More than 190,000 Illinois workers will be eligible for overtime under updated rules from the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).

President Barack Obama directed DOL to update the regulations, last changed in 2004, defining which white-collar workers receive protection under the Fair Labor Standards Act’s (FLSA) minimum wage and overtime standards.

The changes take effect Dec. 1.

1. Here’s a look at what farmers need to know.

Q: What changes under the new rule?

A: The changes increase the salary level employees must earn to be exempt from overtime under the FLSA. The current salary threshold is $455 a week, or $23,660 annually. The new threshold will be $913 a week, or $47,476 annually.

The changes take effect Dec. 1.

Q: Who will be affected?

A: Employees currently making between $23,660 and $47,476 annually, and classified as exempt, and therefore currently ineligible for overtime, will now be eligible for overtime.

Q: How is agriculture affected?

A: Agriculture is not significantly affected, according to David Lubben, an attorney with Davis and Campbell, a Peoria-based law firm. Employ-
Winner sees Young Leaders as bridge to next generation

BY DANIEL GRANT
FarmWeek

Illinois Farm Bureau Young Leaders represent more than just a program to Grant Strom of Knox County.

The third-generation farmer, active in Young Leaders for more than a decade, sees the program as a vital link between generations in the 100-year-old IFB.

Strom discussed the importance of the Young Leader program recently after he and his wife, Kristen, won the IFB YL Achievement Award, which recognizes extraordinary accomplishments in farming and leadership.

They received the award at the Illinois State Fair.

“We have a great group of older generation Farm Bureau members who have been very active for a long time,” Strom said. “But we’re always concerned about getting the next group of leaders.”

“A strong Young Leader program is where that starts to really cultivate the next generation,” he continued. “It’s important to bridge that gap in generations, and make sure we’re passing on the skills and opportunities to the younger generation.”

Strom followed that path as he built his farm operation and leadership skills.

He got involved in YL his junior year of college, started farming full time in 2003 after graduating from the University of Illinois and won the YL State Discussion Meet in 2010.

Strom currently serves as president of the Knox County Farm Bureau Board.

“I hope all ag people of Illinois understand how important Farm Bureau is in shaping policy for farmers and putting our story and voice out there,” he said. “I think it’s extremely important.”

A connection with consumers and lawmakers could be even more important in the future as shoppers want more information about food production, while farmers continue to face more public scrutiny and regulatory pressure.

Strong leadership also remains important to survive tight economic times in farming.

Fuel dispenser manufacturer first to sell only E25 pumps

BY DEANA STROISCH
FarmWeek

Wayne Fueling Systems, a global fuel dispenser manufacturer, recently announced plans to only sell pumps compatible and UL-listed to E25 by end of the year.

“We are pleased to be the first manufacturer to offer E25-listed dispensers as standard to our North American dispenser product offering, reflecting the growing interest from our customers to prepare for any and all necessary changes to the fueling infrastructure in the future,” said Tom Cerovski, Wayne vice president of products and services.

Wayne Fueling Systems noted that 90 percent of dispensers in the industry are only certified to dispense E10 fuel. Illinois has more than 300 E85 stations.

The Renewable Fuels Association and Illinois farm groups applauded the news.

Illinois Farm Bureau beefed up the organization’s support of renewable fuels last year during its policymaking process. It also helped shape American Farm Bureau Federation’s policy. The policy supports, among other things, “standardization of all new gasoline dispensers to be UL-certified for a minimum of E25 and adoption.”

Illinois Corn Marketing Board Vice Chairman Paul Jeschke called Wayne’s move “a huge potential deal for Illinois corn farmers as well as all corn farmers across the Midwest.”

He listed a number of ethanol’s benefits from its cost to environmental benefits, such as reduced emissions.

“We’re very happy knowing that all the pumps that they’re going to be selling and putting out there will have this capability of being able to dispense at least an E25 blend of ethanol,” he said. “At this time, ethanol is by far and away the cheapest source of octane the fuel companies can use.”

Jeschke, who also serves on the National Corn Growers Association’s ethanol committee, said many national agriculture groups have been talking with automakers for years about how to meet consumer demand for high-performing vehicles while also meeting emissions and Corporate Average Fuel Economy requirements by 2025.

Making it difficult: The Environmental Protection Agency doesn’t believe the infrastructure exists to handle higher octane blends that come from ethanol, he said.

Jeschke said a coalition of agriculture groups, including Illinois Corn Growers Association, has been working on a solution. Many gas pumps will be replaced before October 2017, he said, when credit card readers must be equipped with chip technology. The group hopes gas stations will replace their pumps with ones capable of dispensing midlevel blends.

“Right now is probably the most stressful and challenging times I’ve had to deal with,” said Strom, who has been farming full time 13-plus years and recalls selling corn as low as $1.90 per bushel and beans for just $5.25.

“We’ve dealt with extremely low prices before,” he continued. “It was all about LDP (loan deficiency payments) at that point,” he continued. “But we had low input costs. High production costs really make things tight (in the current situation).”

Strom grows corn, soybeans and some wheat, and operates a 20-head Angus cow/calf operation near Brimfield with Kristen and other family members. The couple has three children, Gavin (6), Layla (5) and newborn, Georgia.

“We feel blessed and thankful (to win the Achievement Award),” Strom added. “It was a great self-evaluation of us through the application process.”

Participants of the award program are judged on their management, innovation and self-initiative as displayed through their farming operations. Leadership ability, and involvement and participation in county Farm Bureau or other civic, service or community organizations also are major factors in selecting the top young producers.

Grant and Kristen Strom (Photo by Catrina Rawson)

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Ron Moore, Belvidere, Boone County: The week’s July temperatures helped push corn and soybean crops along nicely. Most of the early-planted corn has already turned black. Both crops appear to be 7 to 10 days ahead of normal. Some of the later-planted corn has made good progress. We talked to a last week plan to start harvesting corn by the end of this week. DD120 ear rot has started to show up in some fields with the worst being 5 to 10 percent of those field being affected. Some beans harvest still appears to be seven to 10 days away. Early results from silage harvesting have tonnage levels running from 25 to 30 tons per acre. Stay safe.

Leroy Getz, Savanna, Carroll County: I had 1 inch of rain Wednesday. Heavier rains of 3 to 4 inches were reported along the west and across the Mississippi Valley, which is now already running very high. Corn was already stressed with the 80-degree temperatures. Most has now black layered at 2,780 growing degree units. Soybeans are maturing or dying, whichever, but they are losing their leaves fast. Corn chopped last week reported 35 tons per acre on highly populated fields. We baled about 60 acres of fourth-cutting hay and may do more.

Ken Reinhardt, Seaton, Mercer County: A few started on Day weekend. Low humidity levels sure help out. Back to reality Tuesday with high humidity and hot temperatures, but at least crops and the ground are drying out. A Stark County farmers started last week with upper 30s and 1 inch of moisture, but, good yields. Beans are still pretty green with some starting to change colors as they begin to mature. Another inch or more of rain Wednesday night ended field activity for the rest of the week.

Tom Ritter, Blue Mound, Macon County: Fortunately, the corn still seems to be in good condition after the last week’s rains. We got a gully washer a week ago and then additional storms were forecasted all week. We received 1.5 inches of rain Wednesday night. The Sandwich Fair was last weekend, and that event also marks the end of fair season and summer.

Ryan Frieders, Waterman, DeKalb County: Soybeans are in quite a hurry, with corn and soybeans finishing up grain fill with some hybrids. Corn silage harvest has begun and tonnage per acre has been reported as very good. We received 1.15 inches of rain Wednesday night. The Sandwich Fair was last weekend, and that event also marks the end of fair season and summer.

Steve Ayers, Champaign, Champaign County: Labor Day conditions of 82 percent corn and soy crops and the ground are drying out. A few more dry days are needed. Several fields of hay were机能 late to sprout damage vary from field to field. The soybeans still close to a month off. Most beans are not turning other than some April-planted beans. Most beans seem to be maturing earlier due to diseases. Local closing prices for Sept. 8 were nearby corn, $3.06; nearby soybeans, $9.89; new-crop soybeans, $9.45.

Steve Ayers, Champaign, Champaign County: We listened to the rhythm of the falling rain from the wee hours of Thursday morning until noon Thursday for a total of 1.2 inches with more rain Friday. As we look at Illinois closing conditions this week, we have a remarkable 85 percent of the soybeans in good to excellent condition. This is the highest rating since 2004, just beating out the 2014 previous record for Labor Day conditions of 82 percent corn and 78 percent soy. It just reinforces USDA estimates of record corn and soy crops. Seed corn harvest is in full swing, and some farmers are cutting end rows and testing drying systems. Next week, Sept. 17, the Illinois football team will score its third victory against the Western Michigan Broncos. Let’s be careful out there!

Dave Steward, Toulon, Stark County: We had perfect weather and a big Labor Day weekend. We had 1 inch of rain in August, we received our first rain in September, ranging from .9 of an inch to 1.2 inches Thursday. Local cornfields are in the R5 growth stage or dent stage up to R6, or physical maturity. The milk line was 20 percent of the way down the kernel on the least developed corn. Cornfields are turning from green to brown rather quickly. Some local soybean fields are still in the R6 or full seed stage. Others are at beginning maturity or R7. A few fields are reaching R8 or full maturity. Parts of many fields get mowed out earlier due to diseases. Local closing prices for Sept. 8 were nearby corn, $3.13; January, $3.28; soybeans, $9.47; January, $9.55.

Lerry Getz, Savanna, Carroll County: I had 1 inch of rain Wednesday. Heavier rains of 3 to 4 inches were reported along the west and across the Mississippi Valley, which is now already running very high. Corn was already stressed with the 80-degree temperatures. Most has now black layered at 2,780 growing degree units. Soybeans are maturing or dying, whichever, but they are losing their leaves fast. Corn chopped last week reported 35 tons per acre on highly populated fields. We baled about 60 acres of fourth-cutting hay and may do more.

Brent Clair, Loraine, Adams County: Funny how we start picking corn on the dry side, and now all of a sudden it wants to rain almost every day. We did get a gully washer this Friday (Sept. 2) that left close to 5 inches of rain in some areas. Fortunately, the crops are still as they should be standing tall. Corn is drying down fast at the average rate of a point a day. A few of the bigger operations are starting to get some of the early-planted varieties in. I have seen some fields that are almost close to cutting (not SDS fault either), and some are still as green as midsummer. I’m sure the next time we talk, most will have at least tried some to make sure the combine is ready.

Ron Haase, Gilman, Iroquois County: After a range of 8.5 to 9.5 inches of rain in August, we received our first rain in September, ranging from .9 of an inch to 1.2 inches Thursday. Local cornfields are in the R5 growth stage or dent stage up to R6, or physical maturity. The milk line was 20 percent of the way down the kernel on the least developed corn. Cornfields are turning from green to brown rather quickly. Some local soybean fields are still in the R6 or full seed stage. Others are at beginning maturity or R7. A few fields are reaching R8 or full maturity. Parts of many fields get mowed out earlier due to diseases. Local closing prices for Sept. 8 were nearby corn, $3.13; January, $3.28; soybeans, $9.47; January, $9.55.

Ron Moore, Roseville, Warren County: We started chopping silage last Tuesday and got 3 inches of rain Wednesday afternoon and evening. It will stop harvest for a few days. We combined two loads of corn to open up the silage field. The moisture was 25 percent, and yields were about where 103-day corn should be. Good, but not on record. The beans are now starting to turn yellow, and it won’t be long until we have a good idea of yields. Our cattle are homesteading the pastures now, and we will move them to an auction next week.

Jeff Guyander, Jerseyville, Jersey County: Slowly but surely, the sound of the combine can be heard in the air. Widespread harvest is still a few weeks away in the lower 20s and fuller season a few points wetter than normal. We should be good to go with more in the forecast couldn’t be any better with areas being great and others pretty common in the same field. Soybeans are turning yellow and ready to go and ready to harvest here in the West. We have lost most of their leaves, but still needing a week or so to get them out. Soybean harvest is one of the biggest operations and one like things will keep getting busier for a while.

Tom Ritter, Blue Mound, Macon County: Harvest started last week, but at a very slow pace. Corn and soybeans have moved to the field yet to my knowledge. Local closing prices for Sept. 8 were nearby corn, $3.13; January, $3.28; soybeans, $9.47; January, $9.55.
BY CHRISTINA NOURIE
State Rep. Jaime Andrade, D-Chicago, and his family spent a summer day learning more about agriculture in McHenry County. McHenry County Farm Bureau adopted Andrade in 2014 and visited him for a district tour last year. This marked Andrade’s first visit to McHenry County. He brought his wife, Karen; their two young children, Emily and James; and his mother-in-law, Martha. The visitors first stopped near Union at fifth-generation Bauman family dairy, which is more than 100 years old. Andrade and his family learned how the cows are cared for, fed and milked. The Baumans helped the representative better understand the challenges of a dairy operation and how the milk is marketed and sold.
Several McHenry County Farm Bureau members joined Andrade and his family for lunch and conversation. They also presented the representative a Friend of Agriculture award and thanked him for his support.
Sweet corn and wheat production served as the next topics during a stop at the John Bartman family farm. Andrade and his family drove a combine and harvested wheat. The representative was very impressed with harvest technology. The visitors also picked sweet corn, which they took back to the city, from Bartman’s field. Bartman explained how he markets his sweet corn and that some well-known Chicago restaurants have purchased his corn.
CONSERV FS near Marengo was the final stop. Andrade learned cooperatives are owned by their customers, and the staff explained ag co-ops’ role in the farming economy by providing services that help increase yields, protect crops and maintain profitable farms.
The Andrades enjoyed their day in the country and hope to return during harvest. The McHenry County farmers appreciated the representative’s time and an opportunity to become better acquainted with him and his family.
Christina Nourie serves as the Illinois Farm Bureau northeast legislative coordinator.

Considerations for 2017 corn crop nitrogen inputs

BY DAN MAGGART
Corn growers will best meet production goals for 2017 when all yield-limiting factors are uncovered and in sufficient supply to meet production goals. Mismanagement can limit yields, reduce profitability and contribute to negative environmental impacts.
Nitrogen residing in soils as applied fertilizers and N mineralized from organic matter is subject to the dynamics of soil moisture and temperature, and must be managed as a system of interacting factors.
Land grant university recommendations are research based and provide a firm foundation for nitrogen recommendations that are considerate of positive economics, while offering our industry a framework for nutrient applications that are defensible. By understanding N supply and demand dynamics, we understand N supply and demand can limit yields, reduce profitability and contribute to negative environmental impacts.
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Land grant university recommendations are research based and provide a firm foundation for nitrogen recommendations that are considerate of positive economics, while offering our industry a framework for nutrient applications that are defensible. By understanding N supply and demand dynamics, we understand N supply and demand can limit yields, reduce profitability and contribute to negative environmental impacts.
Commodity price decline weighs on farmer minds

After months of improved producer sentiment toward the U.S. agricultural economy, the August Purdue/CME Group Ag Economy Barometer showed declining commodity prices are weighing on farmers’ minds. Farmer sentiment declined sharply to 95 — a 17-point drop from the July reading. The Index of Current Conditions fell from 93 in July to 80 in August, while the Index of Future Expectations dropped to 102 from July’s 121.

In its August crop production report, USDA indicated record corn and soybean yields are expected this fall. If that’s the case, carryover stocks for both crops will grow, potentially resulting in the lowest corn prices in a decade. “What is somewhat surprising is that more producers expect input prices to rise in 2017 than decline,” he said. “This was especially true for crop protection products as nearly one-third of respondents expected prices to increase for herbicides, insecticides and fungicides. The long-term trend for crop input prices to rise seems to be leading to skepticism regarding prospects for input prices to decline, despite the lack of profitability among crop producers.”

Visit purdue.edu/agbarometer for the full report and to sign up for monthly barometer email updates.

Weed management plans can provide key to catch escape artists

BY DANIEL GRANT

It appears farmers in Illinois and surrounding states have a growing problem, literally, when it comes to weeds. The spread of herbicide-resistant weeds and other hard-to-control varieties continues to pop up around the state.

“I’ve been driving around Illinois and I see more and more weeds on top of soybeans,” Dave Johnson, soy herbicide product development manager/North America Crop Protection, said at the Farm Progress Show in Boone, Iowa. “It seems to be getting worse.”

And for farmers who became accustomed to weed control programs focused on glyphosate, the fix may not be an easy one. More and more farmers, particularly in the southern U.S., resumed hiring bean walkers or “chopping crews” to help control pesky weeds.

“If farmers are not managing for (herbicide) resistant weeds, they should,” John said. “They need to utilize all the strategies they have available.”

One key to success for a weed management plan involves getting off to a clean start. Johnson recommends farmers use a preplant burn-down (with multiple modes of action) or even tillage to control weeds early each season.

“You want to get beans to canopy weed-free,” he said. “If you can do that, generally the field can be weed-free the rest of the year.”

Using narrow rows also can help soybean fields produce a canopy earlier in the season to help reduce weed pressure.

At the Farm Progress Show, Bayer promoted its Wipe Out Proven, will be a game-changer to help control phytophthora. (Photo by Daniel Grant)
Food recalls spike as testing improves

The U.S. experienced a double-digit increase in food recalls in the second quarter of 2016 due to tighter regulations and contamination recalls. As a result, the companies saw a 167 percent increase in U.S. Food and Drug Administration testing enabled companies to detect food contaminants faster, creating more complex regulation and more recalls.

A report suggested enhanced testing will improve food safety while some classes of foods, even food intended for cooking. The U.S. experienced a double-digit increase in food recalls in the second quarter of 2016 due to tighter regulations and contamination recalls. As a result, the companies saw a 167 percent increase in U.S. Food and Drug Administration testing enabled companies to detect food contaminants faster, creating more complex regulation and more recalls.

BY DOUG ANDERSON

Fifty-four antique tractors from three states joined the Wayne County Farm Bureau for the 8th annual Wayne County Antique Tractor Drive held on Labor Day.

Beginning and ending at the Wayne County Fairgrounds in Fairfield, proceeds from the event support the Wayne County Ag in the Classroom program.

This year’s route headed south out of Fairfield, touring Zurline Enterprises. The group then traveled south and east, making its way to Barnhill where it stopped at Shreve’s Farm Market for lunch.

During lunch, owner Mike Shreve spoke about the pumpkin farm, corn maze and retail store that make up the enterprise. During lunch, drivers gave a brief history of the tractor they were driving.

Departing from Mount Erie, the tractors headed east and north, stopping at Rush Farm for a homemade ice cream. The length of the route was about 30 miles.

George Smith presented the Earl Smith Memorial Award to the oldest driver, 86-year-old Bob O’Daniel of Fairfield. The Youngest Driver Award was presented to 16-year-old Austin McWhirter from West Salem.

Jackie Knackmus Jr. from Vincennes, Ind., earned the Oldest Tractor Award, driving a 1936 Allis Chalmers RC. Participating drivers voted to give the Most Original, Unrestored Tractor Award to Ron Pearce of Rinard, Ill., who drove a 1949 Farmall M. Joe Aldridge of Hawesville, Ky., collected the Farthest Driven Award, having traveled 127 miles to participate in the drive. All winners received a 1/16 scale antique toy tractor.

Sponsors included 4-R Equipment, Albion Equipment, Hercules Johnson Implement, LeMond’s Carter Limited and McLean Implement. Walt Townsend of Geff donated the award for the most original tractor.

Doug Anderson serves as Wayne County Farm Bureau manager.

Tractors drive for agricultural education

Tractors head north of Barnhill during the 8th annual Wayne County Tractor Drive. Sponsored by the Wayne County Farm Bureau, 54 tractors participated in the nearly 30-mile drive. (Photo by Doug Anderson)

Questions.
Chances are your acreage yields plenty of them.

As an FS crop specialist, I stand behind every bag of seed I sell. That’s because I’m more than a salesman. I’m trained, certified, and completely dedicated to your success. My job is to work with growers to ensure their acreage performs like never before.

Ready for increased yields on your ground? ASK ME HOW.

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Food recalls spike as testing improves

The U.S. experienced a double-digit increase in food recalls in the second quarter of 2016 due to tighter regulations and improved testing methods.

According to a report by Stericycle Expert Solutions, genome testing enabled companies to detect food contaminants faster and in a wider range of products. As a result, the companies saw a 167 percent increase in U.S. Food and Drug Administration contamination recalls.

Regulators also reduced the acceptable level of pathogens in some classes of foods, even food intended for cooking. The report suggested enhanced testing will improve food safety while creating more complex regulation and more recalls.
Soybean acres could grow next year; seed industry prepared

BY DANIEL GRANT

FarmWeek

Farmers looking at $9-plus beans and corn around $3 might adjust their planting mix a bit next year.

Penton Agriculture’s Farm Futures latest producer survey, released recently at the Farm Progress Show, shows farmers currently are leaning toward planting a record amount of beans next year.

Growers next year could plant 84.4 million acres of beans, up nearly 1 percent from this year’s record, according to the survey.

The potential boost to bean acres could come at the expense of corn and wheat plantings. Red ink could nudge farmers to trim corn plantings by about 1 million acres next year to 93.1 million.

Meanwhile, wheat seedings next year could slip for the fourth consecutive year. The survey pegs wheat planting at 49.1 million acres, down 3.4 percent from this year.

If an acreage shift develops next year, Jeff Hartz, director of sales/marketing for Wyffels, believes it mostly will occur in fringe corn states.

“Corn acres usually remain pretty consistent in the heart of the Corn Belt,” Hartz told FarmWeek at the Farm Progress Show.

Regardless of the acreage mix, the seed industry should be prepared to meet most farmers’ needs in 2017.

“We’re going to be in real good shape on the seed side,” Arthur said. “The crop is looking very good.”

Arthur and Hartz noted the seed industry continues to expand its lines and develop more hybrids to benefit growers and consumers.

For example, Arthur looks for the planting of high oleic soybeans to possibly double next year due to increased demand. Farmers who grow high oleic beans could see about a 40-to-50-cent premium.

As for seed prices, Hartz believes the market will be mostly steady next year with some variability in prices depending on supply and demand in different areas.

“I expect prices will stay pretty flat,” Hartz added. “Although, there could be pockets where new products may be a little higher (priced), while (prices) for some existing products could be lower.”

Agriculture’s sprint to the finish includes 2017 plans

BY CHUCK SPENCER

In an election year, Labor Day traditionally kicks off the sprint to the finish line for Harvest operations. In many ways, the tradition of the post-Labor Day time frame is really marking the beginning of an agriculture cycle.

Crop harvest is either beginning, or the start date has been set on most farms. Harvest celebrations are part of the beginning of school and fall community activities. Agricultural demonstration plots showcasing seed productivity for next year’s crop varieties have been evaluated and seed orders for 2017 are being formulated.

Much of our focus is on the beginning of harvest and ordering agricultural supplies for the next growing season.

Equal in our focus should be our plan to execute sustainable practices for this harvest and next year’s growing season.

Are nutrient evaluations scheduled for your fields, and do you know if this year’s crops can be harvested in a timely manner using the nutrients we applied for their healthy growth?

Have you and your crop specialist chosen times to take these soil samples to know your nutrient levels and develop a plan if you are going to use cover crops this fall?

What about conservation practices for each field and the post-harvest plan for assuring soil and water management from now until spring?

If your plan is to apply fall fertilizer, do you have nitrogen stabilizers ordered, and have you reviewed the success stabilizers provide in profitably keeping the nutrients in the field ready for the crop next spring?

Sustainability teamwork is what makes successful plans happen. Crop specialists are gearing up for this harvest season with the same enthusiasm as operators of combines, auger wagons and trucks hauling grain.

Conservation practices, nutrient management, water management and plans to make the most of this fall’s opportunities need to be part of our management actions now.

Profitability is the highest priority of farm operations. All of our goals include profitability in farm management plans, while implementing sustainable practices.

Profitability ensures we will be celebrating farms in the future that have been sustained by the same families for more than 100 to 150 years.

Endure, the GROWMARK Sustainability initiative, views farm profitability as a key element of all cropping and sustainability actions.

We need to be the trusted team member of farmers working to achieve profitability and sustainable farming practices. Using the 4R approach to nutrient stewardship (right rate, right source, right time and right place), soil testing for nutrient levels, and implementing conservation and water management practices can all prepare your farm for a productive and profitable 2017.

Chuck Spencer serves as GROWMARK executive director, corporate and government relations. He can be reached at cspencer@growmark.com.

Milk prices continue to climb

The Class III price for milk adjusted to 3.5 percent butterfat for the month of August was announced at $16.91 per hundredweight.

This represents a one-month improvement of $1.67 from the previous month’s announcement. In the past three months, milk prices have jumped more than $4.

The last time dairy farmers saw milk prices approach $17 was December 2015.

The strong fresh cheese market and schools opening for business have been the primary demand drivers for the bullish trend in milk prices.
Corn and soybean export sales are the second largest on record. While large soybean export sales have become commonplace because of Chinese demand, corn export sales should be a bonus for the marketing year. But the size of new-crop ending stocks is loading capacity. In 2014-15, corn/soybean export shipments were the highest combined shipment of the September crop report. There’s little reason to price new crop at these levels. There will be more difficult for the Agriculture and Supply Ministries to change policy back to the world. .5 percent at any time. But for now, the trade seems to have turned its attention to other factors. Planting of winter crops around the world lies ahead.

Corn/soy exports booming

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Corn Strategy

- 2015 crop: Remaining old-crop inventories should have been put on a basis contract tied to May or July 2017 corn futures, or sold in the cash market. Plan to hold the basis contracts well into 2017 before you close them out. At the moment, the technical outlook points to better price potential than the fundamental structure. If you have farm-stored bushels, consider pricing inventories if December futures move into the middle $3.40s.

- 2016 crop: Consider utilizing a basis contract to satisfy cash flow needs, and/or to avoid commercial storage while retaining the opportunity to realize higher prices. If that isn't an alternative and you need to make a sale by harvest, use a rally to the middle $3.40s on December futures. It may be late winter before another good marketing opportunity develops.

Soybean Strategy

- 2015 crop: The market has given you opportunities to wrap up needed old-crop sales. But if you still have bushels you need to move, use this rally to get it done. Another alternative would be to use a basis contract tied to May 2017 futures.

- 2016 crop: We don't plan any sales until after harvest. If you need to price soybeans before it wraps up, use this rally. A basis contract is an alternative as well.

Fundamentals: Details of the September crop report will help define where the final production estimate might end, and bushels the market will have available this year. A couple of private firms have projected yield potential under last year's, creating some doubt about the big crop. Meanwhile, the soybean trade is more interested in demand, and the potential size of new-crop ending stocks. If new supply/demand estimates drop them to 300 million bushels, it would ensure downside risk has been severely diminished until end users feel sure a large South American crop is coming.

Wheat Strategy

- 2016 crop: Egypt's shifting import policy is starting to fade from importance. But because they are a major importer, their disruption will be somewhat of a drag on prices. Meanwhile, fund liquidation could lift prices in the short term. Use a rally to $4.25 on Chicago December futures to wrap up needed old-crop sales. Realize it is going to be a long-term process to get prices turned higher again.

- 2017 crop: Steadily declining prices going into planting are adding to the discouragement to plant wheat. There’s little reason to price new crop at these levels. That will make it more difficult for the Agriculture and Supply Ministries to change policy back to the world. .5 percent at any time. But for now, the trade seems to have turned its attention to other factors. Planting of winter crops around the world lies ahead.

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Helping farmers realize dollar values of conservation

Precision Conservation Management (PCM) is a new agriculture program created by the Illinois Corn Growers Association in association with Illinois Farm Bureau, the University of Illinois, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and 30 other partners. PCM's objective is to increase adoption of conservation practices on farmland in the Mississippi River basin. Illinois is the first state to implement the program with Kentucky to follow.

Currently, 12 Illinois counties are included in PCM, which is divided into three regions: East-Central (Champaign, Douglas, Edgar, Ford and Vermilion counties), North-Central (Livingston, McLean, Tazewell and Woodford counties), and Sangamon Valley (Christian, Macoupin and Sangamon counties).

Those counties were selected because of opportunities and interest in water quality issues. Those watersheds are highlighted in the Illinois Nutrient Loss Reduction Strategy (NLRS) as “priority watersheds,” indicating a potential to significantly reduce nutrient loss.

Demonstrating greater adoption of nutrient best management practices is necessary to help avoid agriculture regulations. PCM helps farmers maintain freedom to operate by accelerating adoption of voluntary conservation practices, demonstrating continuous improvement in nutrient loss reductions, and providing critical information to policymakers to implement a better support structure that is both meaningful to farmers and effective for water quality improvements.

What separates PCM from similar conservation efforts is our dedication to understanding and addressing key risk issues farmers face when considering conservation practices. PCM takes a hard-nosed, quantitative approach to making conservation decisions, helping farmers better understand and manage the financial, management, labor and time commitments required to successfully implement conservation practices.

USDA granted $5.3 million to the PCM program to support farmers enrolled in NRCS programs. However, PCM is not exclusively for farmers participating in NRCS programs. It also offers benefits and services through our private agricultural and conservation partnership.

PCM is a program created by farmers for farmers. It is a data-driven program that collects cooperators’ agronomic and conservation information into a secure, encrypted web-based farmer portal. Farmer data is always secure, confidential and only used to promote our cooperators’ best interest. Data is only shared in an aggregated, anonymous way to demonstrate continuous improvement.

PCM cooperators work with a PCM specialist from their region to develop a resource analysis and assessment plan. This will include field-specific information on conservation concerns, best management practices and cost-saving programs that address conservation concerns, and a financial analysis that compares the cooperator’s current management with alternative, nutrient saving practices. Specialized doc will be available for on-one consultation, offering direct assistance and professional practice assessments.

The East-Central Region has hired the first precision conservation specialist. The North-Central Region hopes to have a specialist by the end of the year with Sangamon Valley having a specialist in 2017.

East-Central and North-Central currently have enrollment coordinators and are enrolling farmers into the program. Data is logged in the Farmer Portal on precisionconservation.org.

What do the presidential candidates know about agriculture?

It’s been almost 150 years since two men who had farmed squared off against each other in a presidential election, and it may never happen again. But candidates don’t need first-hand experience to understand the needs of farmers and ranchers or to appreciate the work they do. As President Eisenhower said, “You know, farming looks mighty easy when your plots are a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the cornfield.”

What do the 2016 presidential candidates know about agriculture? Democrat Hillary Clinton attended school in Park Ridge, Ill., where the general headquarters of the American Farm Bureau Federation once was located. Clinton is the last known to be a farmer, or farm issue as a young person.

Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump feels at home in Manhattan — that’s the borough of New York City, not Manhattan, Kan. — where he negotiated real estate deals.

He was criticized by a primary opponent for having “New York values.” New York State has thousands of farms producing a wide variety of agricultural products on about a quarter of the state’s land, so the value of agriculture must not be overlooked in the Empire State.

In the nation’s history, some candidates arrived on the campaign scene with a good knowledge of agriculture and a strong desire to win the farm vote. President Truman not only tried his hand at farming, but was a county Farm Bureau president as a young man. His rural background helped him defeat a more citified Thomas Dewey. President Carter’s family owned a peanut farm and warehouse at Plains, Ga.

In the election of 1868, both Republican and Democratic candidates had been farmers. Democrat Horatio Seymour preferred farming to holding political office and is said to be the only presidential candidate ever com-pelled to run against his will. Convention delegates drafted him over his strong objection. He lost to Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, who farmed for several years near St. Louis before the Civil War.

Presidential candidates run on party platforms that always include agriculture. Whoever is elected will be advised on agricultural matters by the secretary of agriculture they appoint to their cabinet. President Franklin Roosevelt had Henry A. Wallace to steer the farm economy through the Great Depression and Dust Bowl.

 Ezra Taft Benson was secretary during both of Eisenhower’s terms. President Reagan, who understood the importance of agriculture as former governor of California, relied on John Block and Richard Lyng.

Congress drafts farm legislation, so it is a plus to have men and women in the House and Senate with farm backgrounds. Sen. Mike Johanns, who received American Farm Bureau’s Distinguished Service Award this year, grew up on a farm, and served as secretary of agriculture under George W. Bush and senator from Nebraska before his retirement. But there are few like him in Congress anymore.

Perhaps the most we can hope for is that presidential candidates are willing to listen to farmers and ranchers and realize that the federal government doesn’t have all the answers. Eisenhower again said it best.

“Some people speak of the role of government, however, is that of partner with the farmer — never his master.”

If this year’s candidates know little else about American agriculture, they should learn that much.

Stewart Truelsen, a food and agriculture freelance writer, regularly contributes to the Focus on Agriculture series.