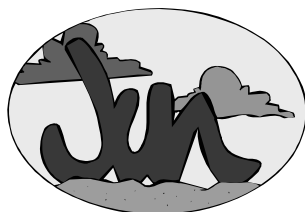


Agronomy Notes

Capital Region Extension Agronomy Team

Edited by Jeffrey Graybill & Tina Gross

**2006**

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'Emergency' Forage Planning

As I write this article, the atypical weather patterns this spring are fresh in my mind. Hopefully by the time this newsletter is published, moisture conditions will have significantly changed for the better. As a result of the current dry conditions, a few calls have been received related to planting alternative forage crops. When dry condition forage production is considered, the first crops that come to mind are sorghum type plants, including grain sorghum, forage sorghum and sorghum sudangrass hybrids.

In recent years, the introduction of highly digestible, high yielding forage sorghums and sudangrass crosses have introduced many forage producers to an alternative crop that is more than an emergency forage crop. These crops will perform well in dry conditions but have the potential to really produce high quality forage under optimum growing conditions too. Early June is an ideal time to establish these forage crops for both dry and normal growing conditions.

A brief review of agronomic production issues related to sorghum sudangrass production for forage follows. Select for high forage quality characteristics. Digestibility of hybrids with brown midrib genetics is important for highest forage quality levels. Plant anytime after soil temperatures are above 60 degrees for rapid seedling development. Seed at 65 to 70 pounds of seed per acre and plant at a depth of 1/2 to 3/4 inch. Do not plant too deep!

Weeds will rarely out-compete the development of sorghum sudangrass hybrids. Because of multiple harvesting, weeds are rarely a problem so no herbicides are needed after establishment. High fertility levels are necessary for optimum yields. Phosphorous and potassium requirements are similar to those of forages used for corn silage. Sorghum-sudangrass hybrids are also significant users of nitrogen. One hundred pounds of nitrogen is recommended at planting and a second application of 100 pounds of nitrogen following first cutting is recommended for high yield potential. Base the second application on moisture levels and yield potential.

Harvest stands when they reach 3 to 4 feet in height. These plants will grow rapidly and if not managed on time, can quickly attain 5 feet or more. Do not let these stands get ahead of your planned cutting height. Under optimum growing conditions, second cutting may be ready for harvest in as little as 25 days. Mow at a cutting height of 3 to 4 inches to encourage rapid regrowth. Do not harvest stands less than 2 feet in height.

This crop contains high levels of moisture and will require wide windrow management to ensure rapid dry down. The shorter the time period from mowing to harvest, the better the quality of the forage. This crop is an excellent choice for haylage or baleage production.

Short first cutting yields due to limited moisture this spring have set the stage for the potential for long term forage inventory issues. Early June seedlings of sorghum sudangrass hybrids can serve as a forage stretcher in case these dry conditions continue. Establishment up to July 4 is possible.

Paul Craig, CCA
Dauphin County

2006 Corn & Soybean Contest

Penn State, PA Corn Growers and the PA Soybean Board are again sponsoring these contests. Winners receive prizes and valuable production information. – See how your yields compare to others in the state! Information, rules and entry forms are available at your Extension office. Registration deadlines are July 1st for Corn and August 31st for Soybeans.

BETTER CROPS AND PROFITABILITY

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June 2006

Crop Insurance Update

Required Record Keeping

When planting is completed, most producers have some catching up to do with their farm records. Remember, if you chose to have protection by optional insurance units (usually by separate farm serial numbers), you committed to keep written farm management production records by crop for each unit. The production records should include input costs, acres and yield data.

File Notice of Damage Timely

The policies for most crops require notice of damage to be filed within 72 hours of discovery, by insurance unit, with your crop insurance agent. If loss is anticipated, notice of damage must again be filed at least 15 days before harvesting begins and again within 15 days, of the earlier of, when harvesting is completed or the calendar date for the end of the insurance period (i.e. 12/10 for grain corn and soybeans). **NEVER DESTROY EVIDENCE OF A DAMAGED CROP** until authorized by a loss adjuster.

\$1.0 Million in PA State Grants for 2006

Producers' discounts for 2006 premium were recently announced by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture. When the \$1.0 million of grant funds are applied to producers net premium costs, it will result in a discount of approximately 8% for most producers with buy-up policies. The actual discount is calculated from the gross premium before federal subsidy is applied. The effect of applying the discounted amount to the net premium, after federal subsidy, results in an effective discount from 5% to 10%, depending on the coverage level selected by each producer.

Performance Numbers

2006 enrollment is similar to 2005 (about 15,000 policies). In 2005, loss payments totaled about \$15 million resulting in a producer benefit/cost ratio of 1.80. Over the past 5 years, crop insurance provided PA producers \$104 million of additional net income (over and above premium cost) with a benefit/cost ratio of 3.93, in addition to the \$1.2 billion of protection in force.

**Gene Gantz,
USDA/RMA,
717-497-6398**



Crop Management Thoughts

Probably the most challenging aspect of growing crops is the selection of pesticides. Over the last thirteen years of service to the farmers of Lebanon, I have answered numerous questions and inspected many fields where a pesticide was misapplied, resulting in injury to the crop or failure to control the targeted pest. Selecting a pest control product is difficult but not so technical that a person willing to devote a little time to understanding products cannot make informed decisions.

I believe the Agronomy Guide is the most under used piece of literature developed. The guide is a "go to" reference that I use regularly when discussing products with producers. Many of the tables contained in the guide list products and their effectiveness on weeds, and in my opinion are the most accurate references. The guide also contains cultural information for those who prefer to use research based recommendations developed from trial history at Penn State University. Some recommendations have not changed since 1914. Granted, the print is small and it does take some searching to find the information that applies, but once a person learns their way around, it is easy to follow. Nothing fancy or pretty, just the facts are contained in the guide. The guide does not always agree with industry and thus may result in some heated debates.

Today, information from industry, popular press and Extension has put many producers on information overload. The Agronomy Guide is a great source for back to the basic recommendations with proven results and integrity. In many cases, I serve as an interpreter of the guide if some areas are unclear. In summary, use the Agronomy Guide for all your crop input needs!

Part of crop management is dealing with industry representatives. Some industry representatives have little background in crop production. By being sure your reps are Certified Crop Advisors (CCA's) you may reduce the risk of misinformation. I have had my certificate for fifteen years and feel the program is needed to ensure accurate information is provided to the producer. The program forces individuals to keep abreast of new technologies.

Extension can no longer make regular farm visits and can only respond to calls from producers requesting individual trouble shooting assistance. Producers need to coordinate information input

from all sources. This means successfully coordinating information from: Extension, seed, fertilizer, and chemical reps as well as many others. Trying to sort out information gathered from several sources can make your decision making process very difficult. In short, why not invite all your important representatives to the kitchen table at one time to discuss crop inputs and practices that will keep your farm profitable? It wouldn't be a bad idea to have your nutritionist on hand as well. Don't forget to make notes and go over important records with these folks. Remember, many of them are essential sources of information, in addition to offering products and services.

If you need assistance with any crop management decisions, please know that Extension educators are available. At this time of year, I am in the field much of the time, but will return your call if you leave a message with a time to call back. I look forward to seeing you at a field day this summer.

**Del Voight, CCA
Lebanon County**

Park the Plow

Are you looking for ways to lower your diesel fuel bill? Do you wish the day was longer so you had more time to get more things done? Well, keep your eyes and ears (and mind) open because help is on the way!

Park the Plow for Profit is a new no-till assistance program that is gearing up to start later this year. The objective of the program is to further encourage the adoption of no-till cropping in the lower Susquehanna Valley, specifically Adams, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Lancaster, Lebanon and York counties. This is the area covered by the Capital Resource Conservation and Development Area Council, who are the administrators of the project. Participating conservation districts will be coordinating the implementation of the program. Penn State Cooperative Extension has provided educational programs for no-till cropping for many years and will continue to provide information to farmers through organized events and individual assistance.

Park the Plow for Profit was designed to address the barriers of adopting no-till, including equipment costs and the need for knowledge of how to make it work in your cropping system. The need for technical knowledge to make the transition to no-till successful will be included in the form of cost sharing for a Certified Crop Advisor (CCA) to develop

a transition plan for the acreage signed up in the program. A fundamental principle of this program is that no-till farming has to be done by managing a total cropping system in order to be successful. Decisions about crop varieties, manure and fertilizer application, pest control tactics, crop rotations and the use of cover crops must be made, while realizing that no-till systems are not the same as tilled systems without tillage. A plan for transitioning to no-till will be developed by a CCA, for which the farmer will receive eight dollars an acre toward the service.

To address the cost issue of converting to no-till, there will potentially be a ten dollar per acre incentive made available for other expenses that are involved, such as equipment, cover crop seed or to offset risk from adopting the practice.

Farmers that are successful in no-till know that no-till works best when it is continuous. Consequently, continuous no-till is a fundamental goal of this program and participation in it means that a grower will need to commit the acreage to no-till for five years.

No-till cropping is a very cost effective soil erosion control practice and has always been a way to reduce fuel use. Now, more than ever, we face supplies of petroleum being tighter and more expensive as world consumption continues to grow. There has never been a better time to conserve. *No-till: save fuel, save time, save soil.*

**John Rowehl, CCA
Cumberland County**



New Electronic Newsletter

The Penn State Crop Management Extension Group (CMEG) is pleased to announce a new Email newsletter. The newsletter will come out weekly during the growing season to keep producers abreast of crop conditions in the state. Timely advice and recommendations in the areas of crop production, insect and disease management, and herbicide use will come straight to your PC each Wednesday morning. Readers can subscribe electronically to the newsletter by sending an email message to: lac8@psu.edu with CMEG Newsletter subscription in the subject line of the email.

Calendar Dates

May 30th **Small Grains Field Day**, PSU Agronomy Farm, Rock Springs, PA.
10A-2:30P. Contact Greg Roth 814-865-2543 or 814-863-1018.

June 26th **Organic Small Grains Field Day**, Joel Steigman Farm, Mountain House Rd., Halifax.
9A -12 noon. Field observations will emphasize Organically Certified Spelt Production. Visit a de-hulling and flour milling operation on the Steigman Farm. Contact Paul Craig at 717-921-8803.

June 27th **Amish No-till Field Day**, A.K. & John Stoltzfus Farm, 214 Peach Bottom Rd., Peach Bottom 9:30A-2P. Lunch provided. View no-till tobacco, corn and alfalfa.

June 28th **Nitrogen, Manure and No-till Field Day**, PSU Landisville Research Farm, 1446 Auction Rd. Manheim. 9A-3P. CCA and NM Credits. No-till and manure handling equipment demos, commercial exhibitors & lectures. Cost: \$3 in advance, \$5 at event. Contact Lancaster Co. at 717-394-6851.

June 29th **Amish No-till Field Day**, Pequea Planter, 561 White Horse Rd., Gap. 9:30A-2P.
Lunch provided. View no-till crops established into rye at varying heights, no-till attachments, etc.

June 30th **Ag Industry Field Day**, Penn State Landisville Research Farm. 9A-2:30P.
Contact Dave Johnson at 717-653-4728.

July 6th **Whole Farm Strategies to Balance Nitrogen and Minimize Ammonia Emissions**,
Scott Kreider Farm, Quarryville. 9:30A-3P. Lunch provided. Contact Lancaster Co. 717-394-6851.

July 14th **Cedar Meadow Farm Field Day**, Holtwood. Steve Groff Family, Rodale Institute & Penn State,
Cover Crops, Forage Radishes, Soil Health. Contact Bill Curran at wcurran@psu.edu or 814-863-1014.

July 19th **No-till Field Day**, Milton Hershey School, 9A-3P. NM and CCA credits, Regulatory updates, Manure & No-till equipment. Contact Dauphin Co. Conservation Dist. 717-921-8100 before July 17th.

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