Cornell University
Cooperative Extension

Capital Area Agricultural & Horticulture Program Staff

Sandra A. Buxton
Farm Business Management

Aaron Gabriel
Crops and Soils

Tom Gallagher
Livestock Production & Marketing

Steve Hadcock
New Farmer / Market Development

Chuck Schmitt
Commercial Horticulture (Greenhouse, Nursery, Landscape)

The Ag Report is produced by Aaron Gabriel

Capital Area Ag Report
May 8, 2014

"Success based on anything but internal fulfillment is bound to be empty." — Martha Friedman

Announcements

Thursday, June 5th, , 1 pm – 3 pm—FIELD DAY: Early-Season Corn Pest Management—at Fidler Brothers Farm, Fidler Rd., Delanson (Fidler Rd. is off Weaver Rd, just south of the Weaver/Rte 7 intersection). *Getting corn off to a good start, managing insects, diseases, weeds, and birds.* Discussion led by Aaron Gabriel, Cornell Cooperative Extension. RSVP is appreciated by contacting Aaron at 518-380-1496 or adg12@cornell.edu. **Pesticide Recertification Credits.**

Wednesday, June 11, 6:30 pm—On-Farm Hay Management Meeting—Conditioning Hay With A Macerator & Using Hay Preservatives— at (Don) Skott Farm & Equipment, intersection of Quaker and Grove Side Rd (Co Rte 109). Demonstration of the Macerator 6610 (made by AgLand Industries, Inc) which super conditions hay with its roller mill system to speed up drying time by one day with the proper weather. Also see and discuss propionate hay preservative applicator and use. RSVP appreciated and for questions contact Aaron, 518-380-1496 (call or text), adg12@cornell.edu. RAIN OR SHINE. **DIRECTIONS:** *From Rte 7 in Pittstown,* go north on Co Rte 109 (Groveside Rd.) for 2.1 mi , farm is on the left at Quaker Rd.; *From State Rte 67 in Buskirk,* go south on Co Rte 103 (Buskirk/ West Hoosick Rd) after 2.5 mi, turn left then right to stay on Rte 103; continue 1.4 mi, then turn right onto Co Rte 109,

Weather Data, May 6, 2014

	Rain			GDD 86/50		GDD 41		GDD 48	
Location	Past Week	This Month	Since April 1st	Past Week	Since April 1st	Past Week	Since April 1st	Past Week	Since April 1st
Whitehall	0.7	0.6	3.4	25	155	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!	#DIV/0!
Argyle	0.4	0.6	2.6	30	160	45	477	730	1365
Jackson	0.0	0.3	2.5	33	150	41	196	94	102
Easton	1.3	1.2	4.1	35	182	54	210	109	118
Alb. Airport	0.7	0.3	2.7	36	190	45	254	163	178
Guilderland	0.0	0.0	0.3	38	178	42	218	122	130
Castleton	1.0	0.4	3.0	39	184	46	258	167	182
Hudson	1.1	0.5	3.1	45	207	47	277	186	206

Roughly 700 GDD (base 41) for alfalfa to reach 40% neutral detergent fiber, the target for dairy quality feed.

Growing Degree Days (86/50) for corn growth stages:

Emergence – 100 to 120 GDD
Leaf development 65 GDD each

Long Woods Rd.; continue 0.8 mi and bear left to stay on Co Rte 109 / Groveside Rd.; continue 1.7 miles to Quaker Rd. intersection and farm is on the right.

FYI

- **The results of the 2012 Ag Census are online at http://www.agcensus.usda.gov**. There is a lot of interesting information (by county across the nation) about farm size, where farm numbers are increasing and decreasing, etc.

Crops & Soils…Aaron Gabriel

Corn: Corn planting is beginning. Soil temperatures have peaked at 50° at the warmest part of the day. Soil should be warming up more according to the forecast.
Yes, weather has a large impact on the final yield, **BUT** it is all the little details of growing the crop that all add up to what you will get this fall. There are also lots of products and management practices. So, make the effort to leave a test strip or two for comparing. For a few

hundred feet, lower and/or increase the fertilizer rate; change your planting speed; try some deep tillage for a section of a field; or whatever it may be. Take the time to compare practices so you can have information to use next year.

How has your weed control been? If you seem to have the same weed species each year, then take the time to implement a plan. Do you need to rotate crops? Do you need to rotate the herbicide chemical family? If you have summer weed problems, like bindweed/milkweed/ horsenettle, then plant those fields last, so that you can get into them during mid-summer for a post-emergent application for better control.

Black cutworm trap catches have been high in PA and the Midwest. This is tricky pest since it is migratory and usually has spotty infestations. However, typically, the same fields get the worst infestations. Since you will not have time to check every field every week, monitor that field or two that usually gets this pest and follow up with rescue treatments as needed. Seed-applied insecticides give only partial control of this pest.

Forages: I checked a field where the grass was killed by snow mold this spring. And there are other reports of winterkill in new seedings (2013). **We have one week left to plant hay crops.** The goal is to get good seed-to-soil contact. You can accomplish that with a no-till drill; no tillage and a brillion seeder in the right soil conditions (presses the seed into the soil); a light tillage operation before planting.

Grass growth is speeding up and should take off if the weather turns warm as it should. Right now, the seed head of orchardgrass is still in the crown of the plant, but it will shoot up soon.

My philosophy of when to take first cutting grass is to harvest during the first good weather window, once the seed head is 5 inches above the soil surface. That way when you mow, you will be cutting off the seed heads. To find the seed head, you will have to cut the grass shoot lengthwise and look for the tiny seed head in the middle of the grass shoot.

I emailed Jerry Cherney (Cornell forage agronomist) about seeding rates and coated seed. He did a bunch of work with coated seed and has found that coating seed may help seedlings, and that is certainly does not hurt. Current seeding rate are generous. So 12—15 lbs of alfalfa seed is more than sufficient—provided you have good seeding conditions. The same is true for grass seed. So, planting a reduced numbers of coated seed compared to raw seed should be okay, if you have good seedbed preparation, good seed placement, good seed-to-soil contact, low weed pressure, proper nutrition, adequate moisture. **Calibrate your seeder** since some coated seed may flow 30% faster than uncoated seed.

An interesting question was asked last night at the Hay Management Meeting. This person has little use for over-mature hay (first cutting in late-June or July). So, if we get a ton of rain when we should be harvesting first cutting, can we just mow it down and leave it in the field? Then take a nice "second cutting". The answer is yes. It may seem like a waste, but leaving a harvest to decompose in the field is good for the soil; and prevents a headache of what to do with a lot of awful first cutting; and it gives more second cutting, since speed up the regrowth of second cutting by not waiting for first cutting to get over-mature before you can harvest it.

Pastures: Pastures are growing. Fertilize only if you will be able to get the extra growth grazed or harvested. Graze down no lower than 4 inches for grasses (3 inches for bluegrass) so that plants can recover quickly for the next grazing.

Low Cost Parlor Considerations

By: Sandy Buxton, CAAHP

During the PRO-Dairy's Winter Dairy Management class this year, David Kammel from University of Wisconsin gave some great insight into some items which farm managers should consider when budgeting and planning for an upgrade in milking facilities.

The general goal is to alter and improve a facility to reap better milk quality and labor savings through efficiency (more cows/hour milked; milk pounds harvested/hour).

The producer will need a plan AND be willing to think outside the ordinary. There are lots of examples of parlors being created for low investment. One of the tricks can be to treat it as a 'starter house' and don't try to get all of the 'bells and whistles' you want immediately but focus on growing into them – buy them when the new system has generated some savings or earned some cash.

Some of the barriers to work around include:

keeping the parlor close to milk house to minimize investment in moving equipment

keep manure headed to current manure collection facility

equipment dealer may not be 'on board' for used or retro equipment.

Some of the tips and hints Dave talked about were very interesting. Converting a tie-stall barn into a parlor and holding area usually involves examining the support post set-up. The holding area often fits between the posts down the barn and the exit alley is run down the outside section, either as a single or double return.

The parlor then has several choices depending on barn configuration: dig out the end of stall barn and insert parlor (either centered or off-set) which may involve moving some posts; add a section of barn to install parlor in new area and run pipes back to established milk house or set in a cross-ways parlor in the barn and add a structure to hold the holding area allowing the stall barn to be used for calves, heifers, maternity group or something else.

Some of the decisions are based on what the barn plan looks like now, where the cows will be housed in the future and how manure or water can be handled. While not easy, structural cross beams can be used to support or raise a ceiling or hay mow floor especially if the haymow is no longer be used to store hay.

When a farm now has a holding area, they also need to install a crowd gate. Lots of these can be very simple designs utilizing shower curtain-like set-up or door tracks and a garage door opener. All should include some type of sound item – like a bell or buzzer so the cows learn to connect sound and action. Some gates are sweep gates, driving the animals before them. Others are potentially electrified with a fence charger.

Regarding the actual milking system in the parlor, there is still a fair amount of flexibility that can impact price: Milk line location (high line or low line), Receiver group location (in milk house or in parlor), Milking Unit storage and cleaning (in milk house or parlor) and whether Automatic Take Offs (ATO) are reused, purchased or upgraded.

The price for a parlor where very little equipment moved out of the milk house is much less than the one where everything changes. Additionally, David referred to these parlors as 'dry parlors' because aside from washing down manure and walls, very little water actually needed to be dealt with in the parlor, no clean-in-place units.

Other issues include a plan for lighting (need lots of it), ventilation (make sure you draw outside air into the parlor and then exhaust into the holding area), the ability to heat the parlor to prevent freezing usually just when parlor is not in use since the cows generate plenty of heat

when present, washable walls and ceiling, sliding doors or curtains to shut parlor off from the rest of the building, and cattle handling site.

David's 'Rule of Thumb': 20-25 cows/hr in tie-stall should be able to upgrade to 40-45 cows/hr in parlor pretty easily.

He has worked on parlor re-do's where the farm spent $20,000-70,000 for 120-150 cows and used them very happily for years. The amount spent depends on how much the farm does itself vs. hires out. So a cost of $40-50,000 should be a reasonable estimate to start bantering around.

Looking at the possible savings this type of modernization could provide a dairy farm, David had a few numbers. The economic impact of reducing labor by 4.24 minutes/cow/day at $12/hr equals over $309/cow/year. The labor savings coming from reduced milking parlor time, less effort to feed, handle manure, maintain stalls and handle the cow.

I ran a more conservative number and said if a farm reduced their milking time cow interaction by 2 minutes per cow per day, an 85 cow farm would save over $12,410 in a year. Just 2 minutes/cow/day – 1 minute/milking! The payback on this type of change would be phenomenal!

So think about making a change using a phase-in plan. Working on taking steps and upgrading to the next step when money is available. This could be the system to help you make the next leap in your business.

If you are interested in more of this information, please contact me at 518-380-1498 to talk about it in more detail and pencil out some numbers.