Capital Area Ag Report
April 24, 2014

“Whenever you find yourself on the side of the majority, it is time to pause and reflect.” — Mark Twain

FYI

The Cornell Nutrient Management Spear Program (NMSP) website has several new articles and information:

- Feasible Whole Farm Nutrient Mass Balances for New York Dairy Farms.
- Stalk nitrate test results for New York corn fields from 2007 through 2014.
- The Manager: Managing Manure.
- Red Clover for Quality Forage for Dairies.
- Winter Cereals as Double Crops in Corn Rotations on New York Dairy Farms.

What's Cropping Up?, (March-april 2015) the newsletter from Cornell field crop faculty has the article: Control Glyphosate-Resistant Horseweed in Zone/No-Tillage Corn and Soybeans

Building Strong and Vibrant New York Communities
Cornell Cooperative Extension provides equal program and employment opportunities
Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza is on our doorstep in the Province of Ontario, Canada. This is the time for everyone with poultry to be extremely careful with biosecurity. Whenever owners are seeing unusual mortality or morbidity in their birds they should immediately call the Division of Animal Industry at 518-457-3502. After hours, calls to this number will roll over to the NYS Office of Emergency Management and the dispatcher there will relay the message to someone here at the Department of Agriculture and Markets. After hours callers should be patient and remain on the line. For a factsheet GO TO: http://www2.cce.cornell.edu/docstorage/Documents/Avian%20Influenza%20Local%20Information%20Update%202015.pdf (from NYS Ag & Markets)

Spring is in no rush this year. I will try to have the weather data summarized for the next issue of the Ag Report. I have developed a Crop Rotation Planner spreadsheet to help keep tract and plan crop rotations. After you enter each field and its acreage, it will tally up how many acres are in each crop, as you assign fields to particular crops each year. You can download a copy from our blog at: http://blogs.cornell.edu/capitalareaagandhortprogram/category/field-crops/. Please give me your comments on it. I am finishing up another spreadsheet to balance what is being fed to a dairy herd (or other herd), what is being grown, and the crop storage capacity. If I have time (and a simple design), I will develop a spreadsheet to keep track of field operations and input. Stay tuned.

Grasses and Pasture: Grass maturity is influenced mostly by day-length, and to a lesser degree by temperature. With our very cool spring, grasses will mature a little later than average, but will have less growth than average. This means two things:

- **It is too early to put animals out to pasture!** Let the grasses grow to at least 6 to 8 inches tall (6 for bluegrass more for other species), and then only graze very lightly before moving animals to another paddock. If you do not move your animals from paddock to paddock, wait until grasses are 10 inches tall. If you do not let pastures replenish root reserves, they will have slow regrowth all season long.

- **For high quality hay and forage, harvest based on maturity and not yield.** First cutting will be light this year—blame it on the weather. After harvesting, put down some nitrogen or manure for a better second cutting.

  It is now **too late to frost seed** into thin fields or pasture. If the soil is well drained, you could use a no-till drill. Competition from other plants needs to be controlled (grazing closely).

  In our region, the planting date for new grass seedings continues until mid-May. After that point, there is a risk that soil moisture will not be close enough to the soil surface and the seedling roots will have nothing but dry soil. Be sure the seedbed is firm for hay and pasture seedings. A firm seedbed allows moisture to wick up from below to the surface.

Spring Grains: It has been an iffy spring, but by now spring barley should be planted. We had a couple dry days previously. If it rains and your field is still too wet to plant after 24 hours,
then I will say that the field is not well-drained enough for barley. Oats can tolerate moderately well-drained soil. At this point you should increase seeding rates of spring grains by 1/2 bushel. Since April is almost gone, seedlings will have less time to develop tillers before warm weather arrives. So you need more plants per acre (higher seeding rate) than usual.

**Cover Crops:** Growing cover crops can be a challenge to your crop system, but there are benefits to you in having better crops, more economical nutrient cycling, and soil health. This first picture shows a well-tillered winter rye plant. There are six main tillers and it looks like at least two secondary tillers. Tillering on winter grains occurs in the fall and also in the spring. The next picture shows a nice stand of winter rye. The more management you put into it, the better the results (using a grain drill).

The third picture shows rye that was broadcast after silage harvest. The seeds that landed on rough soil (near the corn plants) and in to cracks, had enough seed-soil contact for germination. The seeds between the rows on smooth soil did not germinate.

Broadcast seed may or may not germinate.

At the Cover Crop field day last week, the rye broadcast by helicopter into standing corn (September 1, 2014) did not do well. The plant population was very poor. The autumn was dry. **My conclusion**—seed needs good soil contact. So, drill it, disc it, or seed it with manure to get a more reliable stand when the weather permits. If you can not get on the field because it is too wet, then a helicopter may be justified.

**Even where there were just a few plants growing, the rye roots noticeably improved the soil structure.** When you dug the soil, it pulled apart in layers—a sign of compaction. Where rye roots were growing, the layers were absent and the soil was aggregated better. That is the beauty of cover crops.
Alfalfa: Alfalfa growth has begun and now is a good time to evaluate stands. In the picture at the top, you can see the plant nearest the shovel is lagging behind in growth. I dug the plant and you can see it in the picture below on the left side. It has black feeding wounds. Diseases enter those wounds and will eventually kill the plant completely. The root on the right (below) looks okay. If the brown areas were soft, then I would suspect Brown Root Rot, a disease that we are trying to monitor here in New York.

Alfalfa can be planted until May 20 in the mid-Hudson valley and May 30 further north.

Corn: Planting A Full-Season Hybrid At The ~1.5 To 2.0 Inch Depth From ~May 15 To ~May 20 Resulted In Maximum Grains Yield is the conclusion from work done by Bill Cox at Cornell. You can read the full article at http://agfax.com/2015/02/06/new-york-corn-fear-planting-early/.

It is hard / impossible to predict what the weather will be once spring finally commits itself to really arrive. In the last few years we have seen late-planted corn out-perform early-planted corn. Two reasons generally contribute to this. Poor early season conditions result in low plant populations. And, July heat and moisture may help or hurt corn pollination. Sometimes early-planted corn pollinates at a more favorable time, and vice-versa. So, my point is not to fret about corn planting. To spread out the risk, simply plant corn when conditions are favorable and let nature do whatever it will do.