



PBT Farm and Ranch Management

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Partnerships Improve Noxious Weed Control

One of the significant values of having a professional farm manager is to help maintain a high level of noxious weed control. In pastures, the main culprits are musk thistles and sericea lespedeza. In cropland, it is typically bindweed and johnsongrass which can get out of hand and limit production.

Noxious weeds are segregated into a special class of “bad boy actors” because they spread easily, they are hard to control, and they are very aggressive and competitive. In this article, let’s discuss bindweed and johnsongrass from the standpoint of landowners working together with tenants to get desired results.

In farm lease agreements, noxious weed control is addressed apart from annual weed control. Normally, in share crop leases, landowners pay for a share (typically 1/3) of any herbicide that is applied to control weeds in a growing crop, excepting burn-down products such as Roundup in no-till situations. However, as noxious weed control requires a more aggressive and more costly control program, we work with tenants to develop a special plan for attacking noxious weeds.

In Kansas, most counties have a Noxious Weed Director who specializes in knowing how best to control noxious weeds. They are from the start involved in this plan development because of their expertise and because they provide access to reduced-cost herbicides.

Bindweed is a deep-rooted perennial plant which easily comes back year after year even if the top portion of the plant is killed. Preferred herbicides for bindweed target the entire root system. Once that is achieved and the roots are dead, then the battle focuses on controlling the new plants that emerge each year from the massive seed bank that has built up over the years. Bindweed seed stays viable in the soil for at least 20 years, so it is a never-ending process to manage these new plants, even though the deep-rooted mother plant has long been eliminated.

Johnsongrass is a little easier to get a handle on because its roots and rhizomes do not go all that deep (compared to bindweed) and the seeds do not stay viable in the soil as long. It, like bindweed, needs to be burned down and controlled before it has the opportunity to produce a new seed crop.

In most cases, and according to the lease agreement, we work with the tenant and come up with a detailed plan which spells out all parties’ responsibilities. It may be that the tenant will provide 100 percent of the herbicide application and the landowner will pay for the herbicide or some other combination of expense sharing. It may be that the Noxious Weed Director will take the lead on control with that expense shared in some fashion.

In any case, noxious weed control is a serious enough battle that it requires a partnership of all parties involved to achieve the long-term desired results.

Waterway Maintenance is Important



We have discussed in past newsletters the importance of soil conservation practices which include terraces, pipe outlets, diversions, and conservation tillage. A key component of most of these is the actual waterway which handles the high volume of water as it leaves the various structures and moves it on downhill to its end tributary.

Waterways are designed and constructed to handle a calculated volume of runoff from a sloping section of the field. The main purpose of the waterway is to slow down the runoff and spread it out over the width of the waterway channel. As wa-

terways are seeded to a perennial grass such as brome or fescue, little erosion of the waterway channel occurs.

What can happen to a waterway which reduces its useful life are two things: not harvesting the grass in the waterway and driving in a waterway in a repeated pattern or trail.

As the purpose of the waterway is to slow down runoff water, it consequently becomes a depository for suspended soil that is leaving the field in faster moving water. If waterways are not mowed or harvested annually, the soil can be deposited in taller grass in a pattern which encourages gullies to form. Mowing helps soil deposits get spread out in more of a uniform fashion over the width of the flat-bottomed waterway.

Properly managed and fertilized waterways serve an additional purpose of providing hay for livestock producers. We do not realize a huge income stream from the hay crop as waterway berms are not harvested, and there is a significant "inconvenience factor" to harvesting a narrow winding waterway.

Driving in a waterway in a consistent, repeated pattern which would create a trail leads to gully formation in those tire tracks. This is one of the things we watch as we inspect farms with waterways. Once a gully starts to form in a waterway, it is hard to correct the damage. Therefore, emphasis is placed on good preventative management of waterways for the sake of long-term preservation of farm value and farmability.

Year-End Planning Can Minimize Taxes

Agricultural landowners should consider doing income tax planning before the end of 2021. As a general rule, a basic tax management strategy is to avoid wide fluctuations in taxable income. Relatively uniform income from year-to-year results in the lowest income tax over time. Three of the tax management strategies commonly used include:

- prepaying / delay paying expenses
- deferring income
- making capital purchases or improvements

As your farm managers, we help you achieve your tax planning goals by timing expenses and income from your farm. We can also develop a plan for needed capital improvement expenses such as irrigation well repairs, terrace construction, fence building, or field leveling. Just let us know if we can help in any way.



CRP Can Be Harvested

It has been a drought year (again) for many Kansas counties. Farms with CRP grass can get authorization to harvest a portion for hay by contacting FSA and NRCS. In drought designated counties, there is no payment reduction, but in other counties, a 25% payment reduction applies.

On our farms, if there is a payment reduction for hay harvesting, there would need to be an offsetting rental payment by the tenant or whomever is getting the hay. NRCS guidelines protect wildlife and the CRP from damage.



Grain Marketing Strategy

One of the key reasons agricultural land owners employ farm managers is to take care of marketing the crops. As there are so many alternatives to just when and how a crop is marketed, many people just feel more comfortable hiring a professional farm manager to accept this responsibility. Without a foundational grain marketing strategy in place, it can be a frustrating, anxiety-inducing, and self-deprecating process.

One of the main components of developing any marketing strategy is to avoid the attitude of, "I made a mistake!" in whatever the decision was to market grain or to not market grain. This unhealthy attitude can really be discouraging and subsequently prevent sound decisions from being implemented in the future. With a well thought out marketing strategy in place, there will always be a justifiable reason for whatever the grain marketing decision is, and the attitude of, "I made a mistake!" is avoided.

Certainly, we are not implying that a well thought out marketing strategy will always reward us with being able to sell at the very top tier of the market offerings. If anyone actually had that ability to predict when markets would peak or fall, they would not be doing anything except 'playing the board' (speculating in commodity futures contracts). Our strategy is centered around (1) observing historical market trends, and (2) analyzing current supply/demand projections. The goal is to be selling in the top one-third of a commodity's trading range.

Some strategies include the "breakeven" calculation which determines at what commodity price one will achieve their target level of profit. The old saying of "You will never go broke by always taking a profit" has several fallacies which we recognize.

Very seldom do we sell all of a crop at one point in time. Sales are broken up into segments whereby a percentage of expected or actual production is priced. When prices are historically high, a larger percentage may be priced. In times of low commodity prices, a smaller percentage, if any at all, would be priced. Naturally, with grain storage prices at elevators running in the \$.04/bushel/month range, the after-harvest strategy will be taking that expense into account. Back in the day of high interest rates, we also needed to account for the 'opportunity interest lost' expense in making delayed pricing decisions. Sadly, not so much any longer.

One of the biggest challenges facing many people who market crops is avoiding the attitude of trying to guess the markets. As stated earlier, it is impossible to do with any certainty. What we do is analyze the prices offered "today." Then, answer the question, "Is this a price that will achieve our strategy goals?" Once the decision is made based upon sound information, never look back and say "I made a mistake."



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Spider Mite Damage to Corn



In our last issue, we discussed the damage to wheat by 'wheat curl mites' which carry the devastating disease wheat streak mosaic virus. In corn, a different microscopic mite also presents a problem, especially in southwest Kansas.

An article on the Kansas State University Department of Entomology website states, "In southwest Kansas fields, where mites have historically been a problem, pre-tassel treatments of a selective miticide (e.g., Comite) may be justified. This is true particularly if the weather pattern is expected to be hot and dry, and corn borer pressure is expected to be heavy enough to require a broad spectrum insecticide treatment. Field history and past experience appear to be the only way to establish whether or not this practice will be advantageous.

Preventive treatments generally are not recommended in areas where mites are not found before tasseling, or where corn borer treatments are not anticipated.

Later in the season (after tassels have emerged) mite populations justify control when large colonies of adult females with eggs and young cover extensive areas along the midribs of the bottom one or two

leaves and mites are beginning to colonize other leaves on the plant in significant areas of the field. Like many crops, corn seems to be most susceptible to significant yield damage during the reproductive stages, from tasseling through soft dough.

Coverage is critical to achieving effective mite control. The easiest way to increase coverage is to increase the gallonage applied per acre. Aerial application studies in Texas and Colorado indicate significantly improved mite control at 3 gallons of spray per acre when compared with 1 or 2 gallons, and noticeable improvement with up to 5 gallons per acre. Typically, more than one application is required - check to ensure most eggs have hatched prior to a second application. Resistance management should be an important consideration in mite control strategies in areas where mites are a perennial problem. The number of effective miticides is limited, and mites are noted for their ability to develop resistance.



Please refer to the most recent version of the Corn Insect Management Guide for treatment options."

You can read the full article at <https://entomology.k-state.edu/extension/insect-information/crop-pests/corn/spidermites.html>.

Is Ag Losing Political Clout?

As we watch the shift in population moving away from rural areas and agricultural livelihoods (2020 Census data), we wonder if shifting political powers will negatively impact the ability to maintain a profitable rural and agricultural standard of living and culture.

As landowners, we need to realize that politicians tend to lean toward their self interest when push comes to shove. Consequently, we must be engaged with our own representatives so that the story of a vibrant agricultural and a valued lifestyle can be shared with counterparts who are at the table but who may be on a different side.