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Cooperative Extension

Your county extension office

Shawano Ag Newsletter

University of Wisconsin Cooperative Extension

May/June 2015

Greetings!

Spring is here and many of you are already in the field prepping for this year's growing season. This will be a short newsletter, as I have little to report in terms of upcoming programs. However, I do want to highlight a few of important issues…

Wisconsin Act 377 (aka IOH) is now in force. The Act established the maximum weight per single axle at 23,000 pounds. Total gross weight per vehicle or combination of vehicles is determined by the distance between the foremost and rearmost axle of a group, as well as the total number of axles. An easy to understand table of maximum gross weights can be found at http://www.dot.state.wi.us/business/ag/weight.htm.

Lack of snow cover, cold temperatures and moist soils this winter have resulted in **alfalfa heaving across the county, particularly in the east**. It is imperative that you scout your fields early, as decisions regarding tearing up some fields may need to be made. I have included a piece by UW-Extension forage specialist, Dan Undersander, to help you gauge the viability of damaged fields. Additionally, some wheat fields did not overwinter well, so keep an eye out for winterkill.

Avian influenza was confirmed in six flocks (as of press) across the state. It is essential that all commercial AND backyard growers of poultry monitor their flocks regularly and practice good biosecurity protocols. Sick or dead birds should be reported to DATCP at 1-800-572-8981 . I have included an informational sheet on the disease. More information can be found on DATCP's website. The avian influenza strain currently detected in the United States causes no apparent human health concerns. Poultry products (meat and eggs) are safe to consume when prepared properly.

Shawano County Forage Council will begin monitoring the alfalfa growth the first full week of May. **PEAQ stick readings** from across the county will be posted on the Shawano County Extension website at http://shawano.uwex.edu, as well as the Ag Extension Facebook page at https://www.facebook.com/uwex.shawano.ag.

Lastly, I will be working with a group of agents on **two important research studies**—optimal alfalfa seeding rate and cost of manure transport. Information on both studies is included in this newsletter. If you are interested in participating in either study, give me a call.

Have a safe and productive planting season!

Jamie

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Heaving in Alfalfa Fields

Dan Undersander
University of Wisconsin

Heaving is problem in some alfalfa stands each year in the Midwest. Heaving occurs on heavy soils that have high moisture contents. Repeated freezing and thawing causes soil expansion and contraction that pushes the tap-rooted plants (and fence posts) out of the soil. The need to push against something is why grasses with fibrous root systems are not affected by heaving and older alfalfa stands (with larger taprooted plants) are more affected by heaving than younger stands.

Where heaving is observed, first dig a few plants to determine if the taproot is broken. Plants with broken taproots will likely green up and survive for a short time and then die when weather becomes warm and the soil dries. The length of time before plant death will depend on the length of taproot above the break and will range from greenup only (if tap root broken three to four inches below the soil surface) to sufficient growth for first crop (6 to 8 inches taproot) to growth until first dry spell (8 to 12 inches taproot).

Fields with over 1.5 inches heaving will likely have broken taproots and will also suffer significant damage from harvesting equipment. These fields should likely be terminated immediately.

Fields with 1 inch or less heaving are likely to have unbroken taproots and may be salvageable for at least the current year. These fields will likely have delayed greenup. The best recommendation is to do nothing to the stands now. Do not go over the field with a roller or cultipacker in early spring to push the crowns back into the soil. This will likely to do more damage than good. Plan on harvesting these fields later than normal (25% bloom) and to raise cutter bar at harvest sufficiently to clear crowns. Natural settling should occur during the year and, if plants are reseated, stands should survive until next year. Stands entering the winter with elevated crowns are likely to suffer above average winter injury and kill.

Heaving is always worse in soils with good moisture content. The most practical method of reducing heaving in future years is to leave some residue on the soil surface over winter. Residue reduces heaving by insulating the soil and reducing the number of times freezing and thawing occurs. Fields not harvested last fall will usually have less heaving that those with fall growth removed. Heaving in future years can also be minimized by having good internal and surface drainage. Tiling may reduce heaving problems depending on the depth of the tile. Planting a grass with the alfalfa has been shown to reduce, but not eliminate, heaving of the alfalfa in the stand. There no indication of genetic variation in alfalfa varieties for difference in heaving, even the 'fibrous rooted' types.

Avian Influenza (bird flu)

A highly infectious virus that infects domestic poultry, such as chickens, turkeys, quail, and pheasants, and wild birds such as geese and ducks.

6 ways to protect your birds

1. **Keep your distance**
   Restrict access to your property and keep your birds away from other birds.
2. **Keep it clean**
   Wash your hands thoroughly before and after working with your birds. Clean and disinfect equipment.
3. **Don't haul disease home**
   Buy birds from reputable sources and keep new birds separated for at least 30 days.
4. **Don't borrow disease**
   Do not share equipment or supplies with neighbors or other bird owners. If you must borrow, disinfect it first.
5. **Know the warning signs**
   Early detection can help prevent the spread of the disease. Check your birds frequently. If you find a sick or dead bird, don't touch it.
6. **Report sick birds**
   Don't wait. If your birds are sick or dying, call your veterinarian or notify DATCP at 1-800-572-8981.

Bird flu spreads quickly by direct bird-to-bird contact. Viruses can be carried by manure, tools, equipment, vehicles, egg flats, crates, clothing and shoes. Migratory waterfowl can also carry the disease.

What are the signs of bird flu?

- Lack of energy or appetite
- Decreased egg production and/or soft-shelled or misshapen eggs
- Swelling of the head, eyelids, comb, wattles and hocks
- Purple discoloration of the wattles, combs and legs
- Runny nose, coughing, sneezing
- Stumbling or falling down
- Diarrhea
- Sudden death without any clinical signs

If you find a sick or dead bird, don't touch it, report it.

Domestic birds: WI Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection
Division of Animal Health—www.datcp.wi.gov
1-800-572-8981

Wild birds: WI Department of Natural Resources
1-800-433-1610

Upcoming Research Studies—Looking for Farmer Partners!!

Cost of Handling Liquid Manure on Wisconsin Dairy Farms

Do you know the cost of handling the liquid manure on your dairy farm?
Would you like to know how your costs compare to similar sized farms?

The University of Wisconsin's Center for Dairy Profitability and UW-Extension are conducting a study of liquid manure handling costs on Wisconsin dairy farms. The study will begin this spring and continue into the fall manure hauling season.

Participating farmers will commit to providing:

- General information about their farm (size, manure handling system)
- Information about the equipment used in manure handling on the farm
- Information on labor inputs: hours devoted to manure handling and the labor costs/hour
- Estimated density of the manure
- Cost of custom services purchased to handle manure.

Participating farmers will also commit to recording pieces of data as they handle/haul manure for a period of time, usually about one week. UW-Extension County Agents will assist in gather and enter participating farmers' data into the tool and database.

The participating farmers will be provided an individual report on their costs of liquid manure handling as well as a benchmarking report to learn their costs compared to other farms' costs.

Alfalfa Seeding Rate Study

The Wisconsin Alfalfa Yield and Persistence (WAYP) project (2007-2014) has revealed that most Wisconsin farmers are planting alfalfa at rates of 15-17 lbs. of seed per acre at the time of establishment. The most recent alfalfa seeding recommendations suggest that Wisconsin farmers should be planting 12 lbs. of PLS (*pure live seed*) per acre to maximize plant establishment and overall yield.

Each participating farmer will seed their alfalfa field according to their own existing production practices. The partnering agriculture agent will be responsible for collecting general alfalfa agronomic management information, as well as the following field data

- Just prior to digging and counting the alfalfa plants (*30 days after planting* and *5 months after planting*), agents will estimate the % cover for each of the following items: 1) alfalfa, broadleaf weeds, grass weeds, companion crops, and bare ground.
- Agents will dig plants in 5 to 10— 1 sq. ft. areas across the field 30 days after planting and 5 months after planting.

If you are interested in participating in either of these studies, please give me a call at (715) 526-6136.

Your time commitment for the manure cost study is estimated at approximately 3 hours.
Your time commitment for the alfalfa seeding rate study is estimated at approximately 1 hour.

All information collected during these studies will be compiled and reported in aggregate (as a group, not individual farms).