



Row Crop Clinic, Applicator Training In Parker

BROOKINGS — SDSU Extension will host a row crop clinic and private applicator recertification training Feb. 5 in Parker at the Parker Community Building. The workshop begins at 8:30 a.m.

The scheduled agenda includes:

- 8:30 a.m. — Registration and rolls sponsored by Farm Credit Services of America
- 9 a.m. — Dennis Todey, SDSU Extension Climatologist, will present the 2013 weather outlook;
- 10 a.m. — Nathan Mueller, SDSU Extension Agronomist, will discuss "Managing Crops in Dry Years";
- 11 a.m. — Ron Gelderman, SDSU Extension Soil Specialist, will discuss "Managing Soil Nutrients Following a Drought";
- Noon Lunch is sponsored by Cargill and CFC Central Farmers Cooperative;
- 1 p.m. — Connie Strunk, SDSU Extension Plant Pathology Field Specialist, will present "Crop Disease Update";
- 2 p.m. — SDSU Extension Field Specialists will provide private applicator training;
- 4 p.m. — Complete Certification Requirements.

The row crop clinic runs from 8:30 a.m.-2 p.m. There is no charge for the private applicator training, which runs from 1-4 p.m.

If you need accommodations for a disability to fully participate in any of the programs/activities, contact the SDSU Extension Regional Center in Sioux Falls at 605-782-3290.

Draining Wetlands Could Cost USDA Benefits

LINCOLN, Neb. — Nebraska farmers are urged to talk with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) officials before draining any wet areas or bringing new land into production. NRCS State Resource Conservationist Shaun Vickers says farmers are under tremendous economic pressure to produce crops, which may cause growers to consider altering wetland areas to make them more farmable.

As farmers prepare for the upcoming planting season, they should be cautious with draining, altering or filling wetlands in their fields, says Vickers, since their eligibility for USDA farm program benefits could be at stake.

"If you have a wet area which you're considering altering, come in and talk to the NRCS staff. We can do a wetland determination to know if that area is a wetland or not and keep you in compliance with your current conservation plan," says Vickers. "The ramifications of altering wetlands can be significant in terms of the potential for losing USDA financial assistance and also in the amount of time that it takes to resolve unapproved alterations."

Since the 1985 Farm Bill was passed, there have been provisions in place to protect wetlands and highly erodible cropland. Farming a wetland under natural conditions is not a violation. However, Vickers explains, "Draining, tiling, altering or filling a wetland for the purpose of producing an agricultural commodity causes the farmer to become ineligible for USDA program benefits." Vickers says, "It is better to find out where your USDA defined wetlands are located and the potential consequences of altering them so as to avoid confusion later."

Some maintenance activities are allowed; however, producers should be careful to make sure the extent of the original manipulation is not exceeded. "The best thing to do is check with your local NRCS office before taking action around wetlands," says Vickers.

Vickers says producers shouldn't wait to visit with NRCS conservation staff. Some eastern Nebraska counties have several wetland determination requests already on hand, so the earlier communication begins, the better.

Landowners are also encouraged to visit NRCS staff about voluntary conservation programs that provide farmers payments for preserving or restoring wetlands. Landowners benefit by retaining ownership and access to their land. They no longer try to farm marginal cropland, and have possible income opportunities from recreation, grazing or haying. During 2012, over 4,000 acres of wetlands were restored across Nebraska with NRCS assistance.

For more information about wetlands, conservation programs or compliance issues, visit your local NRCS field office or www.ne.nrcs.usda.gov.

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

With more than 8,000 feathers, the typical chicken has enough nature-given insulation to keep itself warm during even the coldest of winters, as long as it's able to find a dry spot out of the wind.

"Adults have down feathers as well as chicks, and they're distributed on many parts of the body," said Richard Brzozowski, coordinator of the Applied Poultry Science Training Project and a University of Maine Extension backyard poultry specialist. "The birds will typically fluff themselves up and can withstand colder temperatures than humans can."

Misguided poultry owners will keep their birds locked up in an airtight shed during this time of the year, to keep their birds warm, which is not only unnecessary but can also lead to health problems, Brzozowski says. And unless the temperature will stay below zero for a prolonged period of time, he never recommends using supplemental heat to prevent frostbite.

"It's amazing how many fires are caused by heat lamps in poultry houses," Brzozowski commented.

Besides, "it's not good for birds to be going back and forth between the two different levels of temperature," he added.

Chicken coops need ventilation with outside air. While it's important to prevent drafts, stale air combined with the humidity from the chickens' body heat and a buildup of manure will cause disease. A cold, dry, and clean building is better for poultry than a warm one.

Bedding should be dry and changed whenever the odor of the manure becomes noticeable. Brzozowski says wood shavings are more absorbent than straw, dry grass, or dry leaves but to avoid cedar chips, as some poultry owners report respiratory problems in their birds, as well as pine clippings, which can give eggs an off flavor.

Nest boxes and roosts should be provided, to allow for chickens' natural tendencies.

"It's really interesting that the birds will move together at night to combine their heat and then move apart as the dawn nears," Brzozowski said.

If chickens aren't using the roosts, try a different design or height, or simply add more roosts to give more choice. Not using provided nest boxes also indicates a problem. Maybe the boxes are too small or not at the right height.

"If you start getting a lot of floor eggs, you are going to get food safety issues," Brzozowski said. "If you are getting a lot of floor eggs and you are selling eggs, don't sell your eggs, even if washing them."



PHOTO: RITA BRHEL

All chicken housing should have year-round access to an outdoor area, whether free range, a chicken run or poultry yard, or an enclosed wire flight. Outdoor runs should be built in a well-drained area. Plastic wind-break material on the fence can provide some protection from wind as well as reduce drifting of snow. Gravel can help with mud.

"With rain or melting snow, these areas can get very muddy," Brzozowski said. "Wet feet and cold temperatures can cause frostbite. If frostbite is severe enough, they may lose their feet."

In addition, predation tends to increase in the winter when there is less natural prey available for raccoons, foxes, opossums, and other poultry-eating wildlife and when rodents tend to congregate in poultry houses to scavenge for feed on the floor. It's important for poultry owners to trap rodents and record their numbers, as well as consider electric poultry netting for outdoor areas and even trained livestock guard dogs.

It may seem easier to keep poultry inside during the winter, but in confinement situations, chickens have a tendency to peck at one another, which can lead to cannibalism, Brzozowski says. This can be more of a problem in flocks where birds are molting.

"The condition of the flock is very important," Brzozowski said. "It's important that they be healthy. It's important that they be fully feathered. It's important that they stay active."

He suggests adding a source of entertainment to the coop, such as cabbage or apples. Hay bales work well, as they provide something to hop onto, scratch through, and peck at. As with anything, there are some precautions — any food items need to be cleaned up to prevent infection with botulism and moldy hay should be avoided.

Poultry, like all birds, need continuous access to clean water. Winter poses the problem of ice. Some poultry owners get around this by changing water

multiple times each day. Others find a heated waterer to be worth the cost. There are other creative ways, Brzozowski says, from converting a five-gallon bucket into a nipple waterer using an aquarium heater to using portable solar energy sources rather than electricity.

For owners of ducks and other waterfowl, it's important to provide swimming water in the winter as well as warmer months. The swimming water should be separate from the drinking water, changed often, and allow easy access in and out of the tub, Brzozowski says.

Nutritionally, poultry need to change their feeding requirements in cold weather to maintain their body heat.

"I don't usually recommend using cracked corn, because it will reduce your eggs, because it has less nutritional quality," Brzozowski said, but "with winter, they have an increased need for scratch grains like cracked corn, because they have an increased need for energy and there are less foraging materials available."

Instead of cracked corn, poultry owners can add whole grains like wheat and millet to their commercial ration. Kitchen scraps can still be fed as a supplement. Whether in warmer months or colder months, whether birds are laying eggs or not, these supplements — kitchen scraps, corn, whole grains — should not replace the commercial chicken feed, as these do not have the same nutritional quality will then affect bird health and egg production, Brzozowski says.

"Chicken feed mash is complete feed. They need no supplementation, not even oyster shell for calcium," he added. In fact, if not laying eggs, chickens should

be switched from a layer ration to a chick grower ration to prevent kidney damage from too much consumption of calcium.

While turkeys and waterfowl stop laying in the winter, chickens can be tricked into going back into production, Brzozowski says. The solution to keeping chickens laying through the winter is the amount of light the birds are exposed to: Chickens come into lay with increasing day length and go out of lay with decreasing day length. Chickens need at least 14 hours of daylight — whether actually daylight or simply having a light on in the coop — per day to induce egg-laying, but no more than 16 hours, as this promotes cannibalism, Brzozowski says. It doesn't matter whether the added daylight hours are in the morning or night.

Finally, some breeds of poultry are simply more cold tolerant than others. Heritage breeds tend to less susceptible to the effects of cold, especially with egg production, but some heritage breeds are more prone to frostbite.

"You can use Vaseline on the comb and wattles to insulate the comb and wattles from the extreme temperatures," Brzozowski said. "More practical, there are different breeds with smaller combs. Switching to pea combs might be the best decision."



- LUNCH & LEARN -

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