



Spring Wheat Insurance Deadline Is March 15

BROOKINGS — Spring wheat can be insured in all counties in South Dakota. In 2012 there were 2.2 million acres of wheat insured in South Dakota across classes at a cost to growers and landowners of \$32 million.

The most common type of insurance was Revenue Protection, explains Matthew Diersen, SDSU Extension Risk/Business Management Specialist.

"Revenue Protection covers against yield and price risk. The most common level of yield coverage was 70 percent - slightly below that of corn and soybeans," Diersen said. A fact sheet from the Risk Management Agency (RMA) is available at http://www.rma.usda.gov/fields/mt_rso/2012/2012wheat.pdf. This gives an overview of wheat coverage for South Dakota.

Because the deadline to make any changes is March 15, Diersen says, early March is the critical time to evaluate insurance coverage. February is the price discovery month for spring wheat coverage. The average during February of the Minneapolis Grain Exchange (MGE) September HRS Wheat contract determines the projected price. Visit <http://igrow.org/agronomy/wheat/> to see a table with a recent history of those prices.

For more details, visit igrow.org/up/resources/05-1001-09-2012.pdf to read Chapter 9, Insuring Wheat in South Dakota, of iGrow Wheat: Best Management Practices for Wheat Production in South Dakota.

Diersen encourages those looking to insure and market spring wheat and other spring crops to use the spreadsheet "2013 Risk Calculator" at <http://www.sdstate.edu/econ/extension/index.cfm> to find the best combinations of insurance coverage and hedging levels.

Soil Health Workshop Set For Beresford

VERMILLION — A Soil Health Workshop is open to the public and will be held March 20 at the Southeast SD Experiment Farm, 29974 University Rd, Beresford.

The Natural Resources Conservation Service representing Clay, Minnehaha, Turner and Union County, along with the Southeast SD Experiment Farm, are hosting this special event where you can get the latest scoop on what's critical about soil health now.

The morning's agenda will feature remarks from soil health professionals, including remarks from an area farmer on how to nurture healthy, high-performing, productive soils. You'll hear about how healthy soils can reduce production costs, improve profits, maintain or improve soil quality and retain soil moisture in periods of drought.

The day starts at 9:30 a.m. with registration and runs through noon. For more information, e-mail jeffrey.loom@sd.usda.gov or laurie.fritsch@sd.usda.gov or call (605) 624-7060, Ext. 3 or (605) 356-3308, Ext. 3.



PHOTO: RUTA BRHEL

The Cost Of Grain-Drying

Producers Looking For More Efficient Methods To Dry Their Harvest

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

With rising inputs, volatile markets, and now what appears to be a multi-year drought forming, crop growers will be doing all they can to improve yields, save costs, and widen their profit margins.

One area to look into is post-harvest grain-drying.

The best grain-drying happens in the field, and pending a cool, damp summer, most years' growing seasons are able to suck out much of the moisture from the grain by middle to late October, says Kenneth Hellevang, agricultural engineering professor and Extension engineer for the North Dakota State University in Fargo, N.D. Yet, there's often a little grain-drying left even on the most ideal years to ensure that bugs and disease don't ruin the yield in the bin.

"We're seeing a lot of interest in natural-air drying over the last several years," Hellevang said. The main difference between natural-air drying and the traditional set-up is the lack of supplemental heat, which uses more energy and therefore costs more.

"Natural-air drying, if properly designed and managed, is the most energy-efficient drying," Hellevang said. "Adding heat increases drying and shrink cost."

In fact, over-drying can put a dent of more than \$4,000 in a farmer's profits each season, he adds. Over-drying occurs in less efficient or poorly managed systems.

"Typically, the low-speed centrifugal fan moves the most air flow per horsepower through corn, so is the most efficient," Hellevang said.

Natural-air drying is very efficient in the spring, as soon as the average overnight temperature rises

above 40 degrees Fahrenheit, Hellevang says. However, natural-air drying is not efficient or even effective on very wet grain or at outside temperatures typical of November through March. That's why producers need to be skilled in managing supplemental heat dryers.

"The energy to remove a pound of water is less at higher temperatures and lower air flow rates," Hellevang said. "Use the maximum temperature

excessive grain temperatures and creates a more uniform grain moisture content coming from the dryer."

Tom Dorn, Lancaster County Extension educator with the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, Neb., says the best way that producers can detect overheating is by using a probe to check for heat spots with a temperature difference of more than 10 degrees Fahrenheit from the average bin temperature.

Growers without a probe can look for condensation forming on the outside surface of the bin roof on a cold day or a musty odor inside the bin. The best solution to overheating is stirring, but the aeration fans can also suffice. Or, Dorn says, producers are better to market the grain early than to over-dry it. For grain that is

above 15 percent moisture, the best management practice is to reduce the heat and continue to dry it.

"Half of the equation in preventing spoilage in stored grain is getting the grain cool and keeping it cool," Dorn said. "If you can't get it as dry as you'd like, at least keep it cool."

When using the higher temperatures, cooling may be needed in a different bin.

"In-storage cooling requires rapid cooling and cooler initial grain temperature to limit condensation," Hellevang said. "Slow cooling saves more energy, but storage problems typically occur near the bin wall."

There are limitations, though. It's important to let the grain dry as much naturally in the field, because there really is no cost savings to trying to dry out very wet grain in the bin.

"Dry when it is warmer if possible, since it takes more energy to dry at colder temperatures," Hellevang said.

"Natural-air drying, if properly designed and managed, is the most energy-efficient drying. Adding heat increases drying and shrink cost."

KENNETH HELLEVANG

that will not damage the grain."

The next most efficient system is low-temperature drying, in which the air temperature is increased only incrementally as much as is needed to reduce grain moisture. Hellevang recommends increasing air temperature only five degrees Fahrenheit at a time, and then to use a controller to keep the bin at the minimum effective temperature. However, he warns, as with natural-air drying, low-temperature drying only works well until outdoor temperatures approach freezing.

Overwintering grain-drying requires more heat. The maximum drying rate can be obtained with a shallower bin depth, and temperatures can go up to 160 degrees Fahrenheit, but stirring is a must to protect grain against over-drying.

"Using a higher temperature on the wettest grain reduces energy consumption," Hellevang said. "A grain turner or inverter reduces over-drying, moisture variation, and excessive kernel temperatures. Increasing the grain flow rate reduces

Commentary

Surprise! Nebraska Turkey Plant Closes Its Doors, Again

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

Shockingly, the turkey plant in Gibbon, Neb., has gone bankrupt. I'm being sarcastic.

Actually, it's not shocking. The plant first closed in 2008, citing high feed and fuel costs. Around 200 workers were immediately out of jobs. It was a big deal.

But then in 2010, as all rural communities in the Midwest hope for after a major place of employment closes, someone took a chance and borrowed \$100,000 and reopened it. The national economy, not completely turned around, was a heck of a lot better in 2010 than it was in 2008 and hope filled the air, both for Gibbon's local economy and Nebraska's turkey industry. But

there is a reason why some businesses make it through recessions and others do not, and high costs certainly can contribute, but they're likely not the only reasons.

The plant reported a total debt of \$4.4 million with assets only totaling \$2.5 million. One bill left unpaid was for \$1.45 million. It was so hit-and-miss at the end that the plant apparently didn't pay its electric bill and the electricity was shut down at the plant for a month. Not paying electricity? That's when you know your bank balance is getting out of control, because electricity for a plant no doubt costs a lot but it's not the biggest bill they're getting. So just think of how many bills weren't getting paid.

Well, I guess we know — \$4.4 million worth.

Of course, it's hard. It's hard to see busi-

ness dreams go up in smoke. It's hard to lay off employees and contribute to the hardships in their lives and the local economy, although this time around, it was only about 50 workers, but still 50 people who are now out of work. It's hard for the state turkey industry to lose part of its infrastructure.

But, there must have been some mismanagement somewhere. Just as with our small family farms, there can be some really rough, tough times in agriculture but not every farm goes under. It's about adaptation and resilience and persistence and dedication, and especially about setting goals and learning from our mistakes and not doing the same thing over and over, despite it not working, because we want it to work. Wanting something to work doesn't make something work.

In the Dirty '30s, farmers had to learn new ways of managing cropland and grazing to reduce erosion to manage not only the huge dust storms but also to weather the drought. It doesn't mean that the Great Depression at the same time didn't contribute to their situation, but it was those farmers willing to stick it out and learn and grow who were able to stick it through.

In the 1980s farm crisis, a lot of farmers went out of business but not all. Around the turn of the century, a lot of hog operations went out of business but the farmers who made it through aren't necessarily producing hogs now. They changed and adapted.

Through every drought and flood and hailstorm and bottomed-out market and economic recession, through every hard point in production agriculture, there are farms and an agribusinesses who make it

out — some stronger than others — and those who don't. The difference is in how they manage their businesses, how they make decisions, how they cope with unexpected curve balls.

In my humble opinion, while it's awesome that the plant re-opened, it was done too soon after the first closing. The first closing wasn't given enough due time to evaluate what happened there. It was almost assumed — of course, I can't know for sure — that waiting for the recession to lift a little bit would be enough.

It is hard to see farms and businesses go bankrupt, but there is a reason. We should be finding ways to help these farmers and businesses make better choices, but if they don't make it, we shouldn't be too quick to resurrect them again without reflection and careful planning.

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