

AGNOTES

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whether or not to participate in the ACRE program. Producers are encouraged to contact their local FSA office to make an appointment to enroll in either ACRE or DCP. Additional information about these programs or any other FSA program may be found on the web at www.fsa.usda.gov.

Wheat, Barely Scab Alert System Available

BROOKINGS – The U.S. Wheat & Barley Scab Initiative has launched a new email and text-message alert system capable of warning farmers about wheat and barley scab outbreaks.

South Dakota Cooperative Extension Plant Pathologist Larry Osborne said that the system delivers risk information about Fusarium head blight, also known as scab, directly to the cellular telephones or inboxes of producers who are subscribed to the free service.

Alerts go out as soon as local experts make updates to the forecast commentary. To subscribe, enter your contact information at the following website:

http://scabusa.org/fhb_alert.php. Osborne has the primary responsibility for keeping the commentary up to date and for making sure that growers in South Dakota get the best information as soon as it is posted.

"Fusarium head blight, or scab as it is commonly called, is well known to farmers in both South Dakota and North Dakota," Osborne said. "The fungus that causes scab reemerged in the late 1980s to threaten spring wheat and barley crops in the region, and unfortunately, the disease has become a fixture in the state ever since."

Osborne said that the disease has spread to winter wheat production areas within the last 10 years.

"Since 2004, scientists in South Dakota and other states have provided commentary on the Fusarium Head Blight (Scab) Prediction Center's website," Osborne said. "We do this in order to help growers and crop managers interpret disease-risk maps available online, but now we are giving producers the opportunity to request a service more tailored for their personal needs."

The website Osborne mentioned is available at this link: www.wheatscab.psu.edu. Plant pathologists at South Dakota State University and several other institutions developed the scab-risk prediction site. It provides site-specific, computer-generated maps to alert farmers when optimal weather conditions make scab development likely.

With Backs Against The Wall, Dairy Farmers Eye The Exit

BY ERIC D. LAWRENCE
McClatchy News Service

DETROIT — Andrew Hagenow grew up with milk in his veins.

But after the prices Hagenow and other farmers received for their milk plunged to levels not seen in years, the fourth-generation dairy farmer from Rockford, Mich., sold the bulk of his herd last year for beef. It was a decision he said was necessary — but one he has struggled with personally.

"I didn't want to see our cows go like that," he said of the herd that started with two registered Holsteins his grandfather bought 75 years ago. "They represented a lot of who I am. I've always ... seen myself as a dairy farmer, and that's not the case anymore."

While Hagenow plans to continue crop farming and may enter the specialty beef market, he will no longer be a part of the dairy business, which represents the largest part of Michigan's \$71.3 billion agriculture industry.

Ryan Bumpus, a 30-year-old dairy farmer from Waldron, Mich., said his wife sometimes asks why they continue farming. He admits it's been a struggle. When milk market prices tanked last year to the same level as 1980, he borrowed nearly \$67,000 to stay in business on his farm near the Ohio state line.

"There was a while I didn't want to get up and milk, because what was the point?" he asked.

Bumpus, like other dairy farmers across the country, had to adjust last year to a dramatic drop in the prices farmers were paid for dairy products. Consumers benefited from \$1 a gallon or more declines in the price of milk at the store.

But among dairy farmers, the plunge in milk prices to \$13.20 per hundredweight — a standard measurement for milk prices — was not offset by federal price support and payment programs.

That forced those farmers to make some dramatic business and personal decisions.

When his father retired because of health issues and with milk prices still weak, Hagenow opted to sell his 79 milking cows, keeping only his youngest stock.

He said he is getting out of the dairy business and doesn't envision a return. The stress, he said, was devastating.

"It's been sad, but in a way, it's been a relief," Hagenow said. "You're on edge thinking everything could come crashing down production-wise."

"I don't care what job it's in," he added. "If you're losing money by actually doing it, it's not worth killing yourself."

The close connection dairy farmers have with their herds and the desire to maintain a business many of them learned from their fathers and grandfathers can make change especially difficult, even as financial pressures mount.

That stress is "deadly for the generational farmer" and hits dairy farmers especially hard, said Dr. Michael Rosmann, executive director of AgriWellness, an Iowa-based nonprofit that provides mental health assistance to dairy farmers.

"That is a very heavy load to carry around if you feel like you're letting down your forebears."

Earlier this year, a dairy farmer in Copake, N.Y., used a shotgun to kill his 51 milking cows and then himself in his barn on a farm founded by his father.

The farmer, 59-year-old Dean Pierson, left no explanation. But speculation swirled afterward among dairy farmers there that low milk prices had added to his burdens and played a role in his death.

Farmers, like others in rural communities, tend to suffer in silence when stressed because of a cultural aversion to seeking help or counseling, according to mental health experts. Some agricultural-

ly intensive states have statewide hotlines dedicated to farmers in crisis. Michigan does not.

If milk prices tumble again, Bumpus says he'll be in financial trouble.

Last year, he borrowed about \$15,000 from his father and took out \$52,000 in loans using his house and cattle as collateral.

The man who owns the land Bumpus farms even let him continue farming six months rent-free.

"It was a favor to help me stay solvent and in business," Bumpus said.

While he was able to continue farming, Bumpus said he doesn't think he can take another year like 2009 because he has nothing to borrow against.

"All the chips are on the table, I guess," he said.

Bumpus' experience is not unique. "Last year, prices were so low most farmers were borrowing money to keep operating," said Wayne Prichard, who heads the Michigan chapter of the National Farmers Organization, a bargaining group for farmers.

Prichard, who has about 80 cows on a farm in Burlington, Mich., said he lost \$40,000 last year.

Those losses followed two years of very high prices for milk. The average price farmers in Michigan were getting for milk in 2007 was \$19.64 per hundredweight, which is equivalent to 11.6 gallons of milk.

The average in 2008 was \$18.84, and by 2009, it had dropped to \$13.20, according to the Michigan Milk Producers Association.

At the same time, milk prices for consumers in Detroit were also dropping. In November 2007, prices in retail outlets averaged \$3.59 per gallon, eventually dropping to \$2.32 per gallon in July 2009.

Retail prices for whole milk so far this year in the Detroit area have averaged \$2.52 per gallon, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Despite the fluctuation in prices, the volume of milk produced in Michigan has been rising steadily for decades, from 4.6 billion pounds in 1970 to almost 8 billion pounds last year. Those increases came as the number of dairy farms has decreased.

The overall price plunge for farmers has been blamed in large part on an oversupply of milking cows and the global recession that curbed demand for milk exports as well as for high-end dairy products in this country.

Although milk prices dropped, feed and other costs of milk production remained high.

Farmers said their losses came despite government programs that pay them a direct subsidy using a formula based on the fluid milk price in the Boston market and other programs that allow the government to purchase storable dairy products — like cheese — when prices are low.

Dairy products are split by category, with fluid, or beverage-quality milk garnering the highest prices.

Paul Anderson, senior vice president/chief credit officer for GreenStone Farm Credit in East Lansing, acknowledged that dairy farmers lost money last year.

But he pointed out that the industry itself is cyclical. Farmers who planned well in years when prices were high were in a better position to weather the financial storm, he said.

"We viewed 2009 as an aberration in the market," said Anderson, whose company is Michigan's dominant agricultural lender.

Still, Ken Nobis, president of the Michigan Milk Producers Association, who also owns a farm near Lansing, said no one expected prices to drop like they did in 2008 and 2009, when prices at times dropped \$5-\$6 per hundredweight below the cost of production.

Ag Dept. Tightens Food Safety Net For Poultry

BY ANDREW ZAJAC
McClatchy News Service

WASHINGTON — Poultry processing plants will have to cut back on the incidence of chicken and turkey carcasses that test positive for the toxic bacteria salmonella and campylobacter under new rules aimed at preventing tens of thousands of food-borne illnesses each year.

The new standards, unveiled Monday by the U.S. Department of Agriculture, are projected to

result in 39,000 fewer cases of campylobacter infection and 26,000 fewer cases of salmonella poisoning, Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a telephone call with reporters.

The two pathogens are the largest reported causes of food-borne illness in the U.S., according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Previously, the government did not have a poultry standard for campylobacter, which is most commonly found in unspiced

meat, chicken and turkey. It can result in fever, abdominal cramps and diarrhea, and in some cases, death.

And the existing salmonella standard will be tightened for chickens and turkeys.

Salmonella is responsible for an estimated 1.4 million cases of food poisoning annually, including more than 500 deaths, CDC figures show. It is most commonly associated with poultry, but also can occur in produce

and many other foods.

"The new standards announced today mark an important step in our efforts to protect consumers by further reducing the incidence of salmonella and opening a new front in the fight against campylobacter," Vilsack said.

Brian Mabry, a spokesman for the USDA's Food Safety Inspection Service, acknowledged that Monday's action, which applies only to poultry, will not put a huge dent in sal-

monella poisonings. But he noted that much of the nation's food supply is outside the purview of the Agriculture Department.

"This is something we can do, so we're doing it," Mabry said.

Apart from meat, poultry and egg products, most food is regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Legislation that would significantly expand FDA food safety authority awaits passage in Congress.

AGFACTS

Spring Challenges: From Manganese To Spider Mites

BY STEVE SUTERA
Extension Educator

WINTER WHEAT

— fields need to be monitored for potential diseases. Our recent cold and wet weather conditions may have stressed our wheat and set it up for possible disease infections.

The winter wheat is well into jointing and nearing the early boot stage. Tan spot often shows up in wheat on small grain rotations. First consider that the crop needs to be at some risk before a fungicide treatment will pay for itself. And second, be aware that there is some increased risk of crop injury from herbicide-fungicide tank mixes.

Leaf and stripe rusts are brewing in southern U.S. If the south winds continue to blow our direction, we might be in for some higher-than-normal incidence of these diseases this year. There are reports of early, though very low levels of stripe rust in Kansas and Nebraska.

The varieties of Art and Overland have been reported to be affected by the stripe rust in Nebraska but it's too early to say how they might perform overall. The SDSU Extension Plant Pathology Small Grains page can be found at: http://plantsci.sdstate.edu/planthealth/sm_grain/index.cfm.

MANGANESE

— may be needed on soybeans. Ron Gelderman, SDSU Soils Lab Manager recently provided some information on this issue.

There have been many questions in regards to the possible need for manganese (Mn) and application of Roundup to soybeans. Many of these questions originated

from the work done earlier in Indiana. Researchers found that a Roundup variety was more effected by the Mn deficiency than the conventional variety.

Gelderman reported that none of the SDSU trials with Mn have shown a response from soybeans. From their research they have concluded that we have few if any Mn deficient soils in the state.

Bob Hartzler, a weed scientist from Iowa State University, addressed this topic and his conclusions fit the data and observations obtained in the SD research. He wrote a fact sheet called "Glyphosate-Manganese Interactions in Roundup Ready Soybean." It can be found online at www.weeds.iastate.edu/mgmt/2010/glymn.pdf.

BIOLOGICAL INOCULANTS

— and other products were evaluated in a research project conducted at SDSU in 2009. These products were applied to soybeans to see if they improved growth and yield. SDSU tested a number of products marketed in 2009. The study was partially supported by the South Dakota Soybean Research and Promotion Council.

The yield was not significantly influenced by any of the products tested. In addition, any additive effect of using all the products together was not significantly different from the check.

Stop in or give me a call at 589-3531 for a list of products tested and other details of the study.



Steve Sutera

SPRUCE SPIDER MITES

— become active now as silver maple leaves are expanding. Spruce spider mites are cool season mites meaning they are active in the spring and fall, not during the summer heat according to John Ball, SDSU Extension Forestry Specialist. The mites will go dormant once the temperatures consistently reach into the mid 80's.

While the mites will begin feeding soon, the damage to the needles, bronzing and browning, does not typically show up until summer just as the mite populations begin to decline.

Treatment options are very limited for homeowners, horticultural oils and insecticidal soaps being the two most common. These are really suppression treatments, not eradication, and the webbing often prevents these pesticides, particularly the soap, from penetrating. They should be applied now and then another treatment next week, about 7 to 10 days after the first treatment to kill the mites as they hatch from eggs.

Be aware of the cautions to the use of these products, particularly for spruce, as applications of oils or soaps can result in the loss of blue or silvery color to the foliage. You can make a blue spruce, a green spruce, very quickly, so read and follow label directions very carefully.

The other common spray has the active ingredient acephate but this kills more than mites and sometimes has limited effectiveness. Insecticides containing this active ingredient are also becoming difficult to find in our state, Ortho Systemic Insect Killer is the most common and only a few distributors in the state still have this product on their shelves. Acephate should also be applied in two treatments spaced 10 days apart.

AG MATTERS!
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YOUR VIEWS

Lavish Farm-Subsidy Program Hides Some Of The Money Trail

Every few years Congress reauthorizes the nation's lavish farm-subsidy programs. Just as regularly, the politicians vow to cut back payments to wealthy farmers.

But regrettably little ever changes.

The Environmental Working Group, a longtime advocate of a more reasonable distribution of farm aid, says 62 percent of the subsidy pot last year went to only 10 percent of the farmers. Those proportions have changed little in recent years.

Ken Cook, chief of the Environmental Working Group, says recipients "are well dug in."

That's for sure. What's worse, in the last farm bill from 2008, Congress slipped in language that makes it tougher to follow the money trail.

Previously, Cook's group could file freedom-of-informa-

tion requests and which recipients got aid through business entities they had set up and how much they had received.

But Congress approved language banning the release of some data because of privacy concerns and directed the Department of Agriculture to track the information in a different way. So Cook's group wasn't able to publish a list of recipients and how much subsidy each business entity received.

The time for writing the next farm bill won't cycle around for a few more years. These programs should have been pared back long ago, and now the nation's fiscal situation has radically worsened. At the very least, there's no reason to continue doling out most of the public subsidies to the wealthiest operators.

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