

Pasta Prices Up? Blame North Dakota

Wet Spring Hurts Durum Wheat Yield

BY BILL WARD
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MINNEAPOLIS — Pasta lovers should be praying for a dry September in western North Dakota.

Yes, North Dakota, which — straight out of the who-knew? file — produces almost two-thirds of the nation's durum wheat, a key ingredient for making pasta.

The wet spring reduced durum-wheat planting by 40 percent, and the price on the commodities market tripled. A damp September would further reduce the quantity — and the quality — of the crop and send pasta prices even higher.

"The harvest could be tough because durum wheat is very susceptible to losing quality if you get a rainfall," said Frank Manthey, who runs the durum/pasta quality program at North Dakota State University.

Most affected will be restaurants whose menus are built heavily around fresh pasta, such as Broders' Cucina Italiana and Broders' Pasta Bar in south Minneapolis.

Owner Molly Broder, who buys 35,000 pounds of durum wheat a year, has been watching prices closely. "It has been creeping up continually, and we don't know when it will stop," she said. "It causes price creep on our menus, which we hate to see but has occurred this year."

While Broder has dealt with a 52 percent wholesale price rise this summer, grocery shoppers have not been hit as hard. Walt George, president of the na-

tion's largest dry-pasta maker, told the Associated Press that prices have risen about 20 percent in recent months, to \$1.48 a pound.

Many consumers have scarcely noticed.

"When I go to the grocery, it does seem like the price of spaghetti has gone up," Manthey said. "But the price of a lot of groceries in general has gone up."

For pasta purists, durum wheat, which is made into semolina flour, is essential.

"It's what really gives pasta its structure, that 'al dente' mouthfeel," said home chef and cooking-class instructor Jen Antila of Minneapolis.

Even a relatively rain-free September will not assure North Dakota farmers of a high-quality crop, Manthey said.

"Oddly enough, if you get a heavy dew, you lose the quality of the grain, and in September, it's not uncommon to get a heavy dew," he said.

(Technical details for the botanically inclined: Moisture reabsorbs into the seed, and the seed coat swells; when the water evaporates, the seed coat does not contract. The grain takes on a weathered appearance and loses flavor.)

After the sharp drop in plantings this spring, the commodities market reacted quickly, said Frayne Olson, crops economist marketing specialist at NDSU. The price per bushel, which had been steady at around \$5 for years, surged to \$15 before eventually leveling off at \$10 to \$12.

"Right now the industry has a wait-and-see attitude," Olson said.

Production will be down regardless.



Jen Antila makes pasta by hand using semolina flour, olive oil, eggs, water and white flour on her front porch in Minneapolis.

After growing 70 million bushels of durum last year, North Dakota farmers might harvest just 25 million bushels this fall — weather permitting. Nationally, the U.S. Department of Agriculture projects the national yield to be down from 111 million bushels last year to 59 million bushels.

While that might prompt further price hikes for fresh and dry noodles and the wheat itself, heat-and-eat items in which pasta is just a portion of the dish have not been affected much.

Among those who won't be affected by a spike is Antila, who buys at least 5 pounds of durum wheat a month to make pasta for herself and her cooking classes.

"It would be hard to give up durum," she said. "I might change the mixture (she blends durum with whole wheat and all-purpose flour) if the price gets really high."

But she won't give up making pasta. "It's a very therapeutic thing to do," she said. "Plus it's just so much fun."

SDFU Seeks Participants For Leadership Program

HURON — South Dakota Farmers Union (SDFU) is seeking participants for the family farm organization's Rural Economic and Leadership (REAL) Development Program to begin this fall.

The REAL Development Program focuses on building rural leaders by conducting learning sessions on public speaking, media training, legislative affairs, leadership training, board membership, parliamentary procedure and other topics.

"REAL can make a real difference in the lives of individuals," said SDFU Rural Development Director Mitch Fargen. "We prepare people to step out and become leaders in their local communities. Whether it's serving on a local board, city council, or in the state legislature, we want to teach people the skills they need to succeed and serve their hometowns."

The REAL Development Program is broken up into three sessions over the next year. The first session begins Sept. 23-24, 2011 at Huron. Session two is scheduled for Jan. 16-17, 2012 at Pierre, and the third and final session will be held sometime in the late spring of 2012. The date and location is determined by the program's participants.

"South Dakotans need to get involved in their communities, and we're helping to facilitate that," Fargen said. "Our state needs true leadership to move us forward and the participants we've had in the past are taking on leadership roles across the state. The program is also a great networking opportunity where participants can meet new people and share ideas."

For more information or to apply for a spot in the program contact Mitch Fargen at 605-352-6761, ext. 116, or visit www.sdfu.org.

A Look At Glyphosate-Resistant Weeds And Crop Rotation

BY RITA BRHEL
P&D Correspondent

Ah, I remember just a few years back when glyphosate, or Roundup Ready, resistance in weeds was considered one of those silly urban myths, thought up by some crop farmer who was inept at controlling his weeds, at least that's what the herbicide manufacturers seemed to be saying as they balked at the idea. Just like Big Foot or the Lochness Monster, they might have said — except that this urban myth has actually proven real in time.

The problem is, for the time it took for crop scientists to establish glyphosate resistance exists and then herbicide manufacturers to wake up, one of the main methods of effective weed control has been forgotten among many of the conventional crop producers. Crop rotation is almost a has-been, a nearly lost art of crop production.

More or less to save its financial butt, pardon my language, Bayer CropScience has started a new initiative to bring crop rotation back into the works. "Respect the Rotation" is intended to reintroduce producers to the age-old concept of integrated weed management. Ironic, since glyphosate was once touted as the "be all-end all" of weed management.

Here's the scenario: Producers, led to believe that glyphosate is actually the "be all-end all" to weed woes, abandoned their top non-chemical tools of



Rita BRHEL

herbicide consultant waved off the idea of resistant weeds. By the time producers began to see the light, they were experiencing reduced yields or even complete fields swallowed up by these weeds that their glyphosate arsenal just would not kill.

Where did that leave companies like Bayer CropScience? Scared to death of a major lawsuit, that's where. Hence, the so-called community service of launching the educational initiative, "Respect the Rotation."

Andy Hurst, product manager with Bayer CropScience, calls the initiative a way to encourage pro-

ducers the proper stewardship of glyphosate. David Shaw, chair of the Weed Science Society of America's Herbicide Resistance Education Committee, calls it something else: "At this point, glyphosate resistance is a reality. Our challenge now is to take steps — to adopt specific practices — that will slow the spread of resistance and possibly extend the lifespan of glyphosate." He's being rather generous with that last bit about extending the use of glyphosate — Bayer CropScience should be breathing a sigh of relief. Shaw didn't come right out and say publicly that glyphosate was to blame, but rather that it might have a chance in the future still.

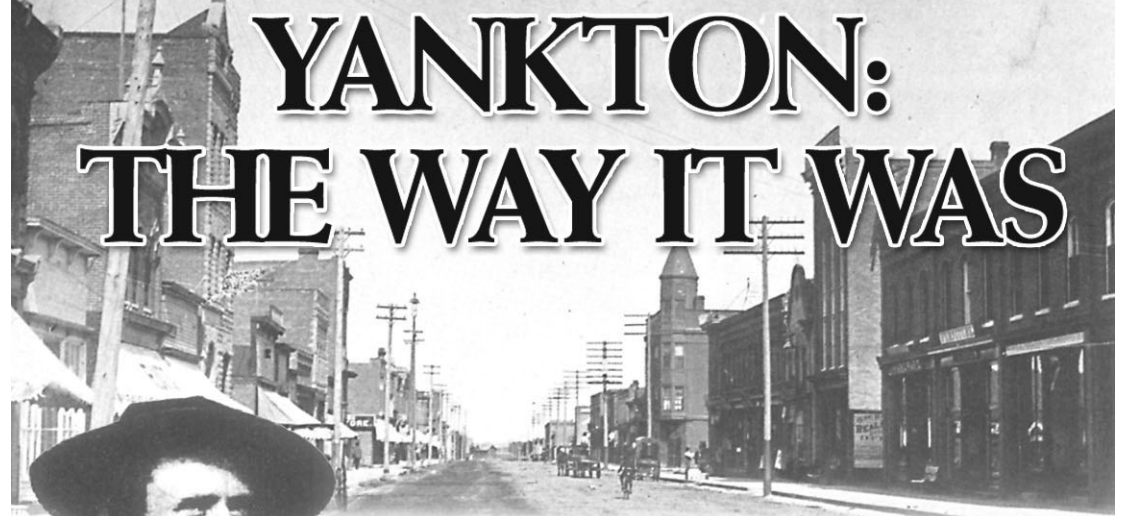
So what's "Respect the Rotation" about? Well, tillage, using various herbicides rather than just one, and, as the name implies, a big part of it is crop rotation. I don't know about you, but I remember the days when farmers actually grew more than one or two crops. Shaw says that, mostly because of the "be all-end all" illusion, many producers abandoned these long-held practices and are hesitant to take

them up again because of the mistaken perception that adopting these management practices will cost growers more — not to mention, a bit of denial that their seemingly oh-so-easy weed control, glyphosate, is actually what is causing the problem!

Here's the truth, though: In a four-year study in six key agricultural states, including Nebraska, researchers are comparing the economics of various weed management practices with the use of glyphosate as the exclusive treatment for weed control. At the end of the third year, the results show that net returns on fields managed with non-glyphosate practices are equal to, and in some cases greater than, the returns on those where glyphosate is used alone. It's all about the yield difference, which no matter how conservation-minded we hope producers are, it really does boil down to what makes the most money. Thankfully, time is proving that the best choice, i.e. most profitable, for producers is actually the right choice.

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By Bob Karolevitz

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