



## Farm Views

# Sorghum seminar features marketing and production tips

A one-day grain sorghum seminar will be held on March 2 at the Gage County Fairgrounds in Beatrice. This meeting is designed to provide sorghum producers with the latest information on production and marketing strategies. The following topics will be presented: Marketing Outlook and Pricing Strategies, Sorghum's Value Added Markets, New Food Uses, Check-Off Program Update, Maximizing Profits Through Rotation and Fertilizer Management, Update on National Programs, Biotechnology in Sorghum and Weed Management with New Technology.

Registration at the door is \$5.00 and includes a sorghum pancake feed. Program sponsors include the Nebraska Grain Sorghum Producers Association, Nebraska Grain Sorghum Board and UNL Cooperative Extension. For information, contact Nebraska GSPA, 471-3552; Gage County Extension, (402) 223-1384; or Lancaster County Extension, 441-7180. (WS)

# Computerized financial record keeping



Lancaster County will be the site for two computerized financial record keeping workshops this spring. A beginning-level workshop will be held on February 25 and an advanced-level workshop on March 10, both at the UNL Animal Science Building on East Campus in Lincoln. Both workshops will begin promptly at 9:00 a.m. and end at 4:30 p.m. Lunch will be served.

The workshops will be presented in a hands-on teaching style with participants actually performing the tasks being demonstrated throughout the day. The concepts covered in the beginning level workshop include: Setting up and starting your records, developing a chart of accounts (categories) income and expense transactions, entering single and split transactions, generating various types of reports, organizing transactions by enterprise, retrieving profit/loss enterprise reports, handling term loans and reconciling your records with the bank statement.

The concepts covered in the advanced level workshop include: Saving time by printing checks on the computer (which automatically makes the ledger entries), handling non-cash transactions (inventory shifted

between enterprises), handling pre-paid expenses in a cash accounting system, tying transactions to tax schedules to save time on tax preparation, how to handle depreciation schedules, generating a balance sheet, handling lines of credit and using the memo field to track expenses that cross enterprise and category groups (such as expenses associated with a particular piece of equipment that may be used in multiple enterprises).

The concepts taught are applicable to any of several inexpensive computerized record keeping programs, with slight modifications in procedure. These workshops will be taught hands-on using Quicken 2000 Basic in the classroom. Registration will be limited, due to space and computer availability, to a first-come, first-served basis. If you are interested, please contact the extension office and ask to have a brochure and registration form sent to you. Registration fee for each workshop is \$30 for one person, \$37 for two people sharing one computer with two meals and one set of handouts and \$45 for two people at one computer with two meals and two sets of handouts. Registration must be received with payment to hold a place in the workshop. (TD)

# Prescribed burning school

A workshop on Prescribed Burning of Grasslands will be held Friday, March 24 at 9 a.m. Participants will be instructed on how to conduct a safe burning of their CRP acres. A demonstration burn of a CRP field will be held in the afternoon or the following morning, conditions permitting. Representatives of the Lancaster County NRCS office will be present to answer questions relating to the procedures and rules for converting to the new Conservation Reserve Program. (WS)

# Drought entering 2000 growing season

Though unwanted, the news is Nebraska officially is in a drought.

Soil moisture levels in dryland acres are almost as low as those that created the 1930's Dust Bowl. The state has received just less than half of its normal precipitation since September, with some areas receiving less than one fourth. The long-term spring forecast calls for below-normal precipitation.

This won't be the year to try and break yield records; just getting an average crop may be all most dryland producers can hope for at this time. They must consider the fate of their winter wheat, what they will plant this growing season and use every moisture-conserving practice available.

\* Winter wheat conditions. By early to mid-March, winter wheat should be evaluated as to whether the stand is sufficient to produce even a moderate crop. Wheat planted last fall in fallow with a hoe drill should be in fair condition, but there are exceptions. Wheat planted into soybean stubble, however, may be marginal or even non-existent. If the stand is inadequate, the crop should be destroyed in March. The best method is to use herbicides

(Roundup or similar products) to keep crop residue present to prevent wind and water erosion and save soil water. Check soil moisture levels at planting time to determine if there is enough moisture to plant a crop such as sorghum, sunflowers, proso millet or corn. For western Nebraska it is usually recommended to have at least three feet of soil moisture and good crop residue at planting time before planting dryland corn.

\* Plant a drought-resistant crop. Of Nebraska's three main row crops, grain sorghum requires less water than either corn or soybeans. Under dry conditions, grain sorghum literally "rolls" with the punches—its leaves curl under drought stress and the plant can go into dormancy for several weeks. Even if the plant withers, growth resumes after a rain. However, the dormancy means yields may be reduced and grain may be immature at frost. Frost also is a grain sorghum risk factor in the northern and western parts of the state because of their shorter growing seasons.

An age-old rule-of-thumb is to plant grain sorghum instead of corn if three feet or less of soil moisture is present at planting time. Use a probe to determine soil moisture levels.

Corn, the most moisture-sensitive crop of Nebraska's three main crops, also has been the most widely planted in recent years, as most of the state in the 1990's received average or above average precipitation. Corn, if stressed too much at pollination, will not produce grain even if it gets rain later. Soybeans also stop growth under moisture stress and the indeterminate types will resume growth when it rains; they do require adequate moisture at pod fill to ensure yield. Soybeans probably should be limited to those areas which have annual precipitation of 24 inches or more.

\* Reduce tillage passes. With each tillage pass through a field, one-third to one-half inch or more soil water is lost. Tillage may dry the soil out to the depth of tillage. Two to three inches of soil water can be easily lost per year from tillage; that may translate into 20 to 30 bushels of corn or grain sorghum lost in yields.

\* Reduce plant populations. Determining how many seeds to plant per acre depends on soil moisture and crop residues. The more soil moisture and crop residues, the more seed can be

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# Selecting an alfalfa variety

Extension Forage Specialist Bruce Anderson recently shared the following information in his Forage Minute radio spot. I felt it was timely information.

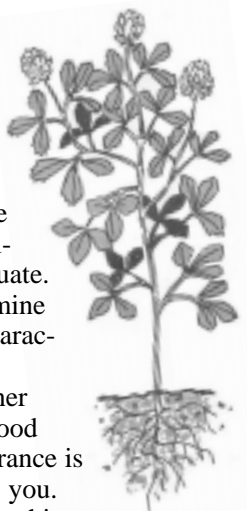
Selecting the right alfalfa variety to plant is a big decision. It's a decision that affects your production for the entire life of your stand. Today's top alfalfa varieties out yield those your parents planted by 15 to 20 percent and they last longer besides. Seed of good varieties will cost more than the cheapest seed, but it quickly repays that cost with more hay for more years.

So how do you pick out a good alfalfa variety? I follow a three-step approach that looks first at yield, then pest resis-

tance, winter hardiness and other characteristics and lastly, seed price. Begin selecting your next alfalfa variety by identifying 12 to 15 top yielding varieties from yield tests in your area. Make sure these tests cover at least two growing seasons to help evaluate winter hardiness. Your local extension educator can help by using our newest extension circular about alfalfa varieties and by checking last year's yields from variety tests across Nebraska.

From this list of varieties, pick out those that resist important diseases. I think all alfalfa varieties you plant should be resistant or highly resistant to the diseases anthracnose and phytophthora root rot, which

often shorten stand life. Also check to make sure winter hardiness is adequate. Next, determine if special characteristics like slightly higher quality or good grazing tolerance is valuable for you. Finally, from this smaller list, compare seed price and service from your dealer and pick the best deal. Follow this procedure and I'm confident you will be happy with your variety decision and find it time well spent. (TD)



# Y2K dust bowl has arrived

Most of the state has had no significant moisture since September. This means agricultural producers must begin planning now to grow drought-resistant crops. Irrigators must begin preparing their irrigation systems for pre-season watering; the soil moisture profile is so low that without some moisture before planting, summer irrigation could never keep up with the crop's demands.

University of Nebraska climatology data indicates there is just 1 to 1 1/2 inches of available moisture in the top four feet, most of that in the top 12 inches. This means that soils

currently hold about 10 percent of what could be made available to growing crops; moisture stress typically begins when this threshold drops below 50 percent. This means if dryland crops were exposed to these conditions during the growing season, they would be dead.

Sorghum is going to be the best bet for agronomic success this growing season. Based on 100 years of climatological data, there is just a 10 percent likelihood that enough moisture will fall from now through the end of the growing season to produce an average to above-average yield on dryland corn

and a 20 percent likelihood for soybeans.

Precipitation deficits average four to six inches across the eastern two-thirds of the state since the beginning of September. This dry pattern is projected to continue April-June. If these forecasts do bear out, moisture during the growing season will need to be at least 10 inches above the historical average to counteract the lack of rainfall since mid-September.

SOURCE: Al Dutcher, Ph.D., state climatologist, NU/IANR. (WS)