



## Farm Views

### Farm Bill Informational Sessions Scheduled

A series of four informational sessions have been scheduled in Lancaster County to help farm land owners and farm operators understand the provisions in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. There are several new twists in the new bill. The new support system has three parts, Loans, Direct Payments, and Counter-Cyclical Payments. Greg Chewakin, CED of the Lancaster FSA office will explain how these will be administered. Extension Educator Tom Dorn will demonstrate computer software that has been developed by the University of Nebraska to aid with making decisions on whether it would be best to adjust base or update base and whether to update yields. Plan to attend one of the following locations:

- **Lancaster County Extension Education Center, Aug. 22 at 6:30 p.m. and Aug. 23 at 1:30 p.m.**
- **Firth Community Building, Aug. 27 at 8:30 a.m.**
- **Horizon Bank in Waverly, Aug. 28 at 8:30 a.m.**

### Predicting the Last Irrigation

One of the important decisions irrigators must make this time of year is when to shut down the irrigation system for the season. Ideally, you will want to stop irrigating far enough ahead of maturity so the crop will extract as much moisture from the soil as possible, without hurting yield. This makes maximum use of the moisture present in the root zone, minimizes the amount of water pumped and gives you the driest possible soil at harvest time, which minimizes soil compaction and harvest problems.

Research has shown that a **medium season corn** at the beginning dent stage of growth, will take approximately four weeks time and will require an additional 5.3 inches of water to reach physiological maturity (black layer). At the full dent stage, it will take about two weeks to reach maturity and will require 2.5 inches of water.

**Grain Sorghum** requires about five inches of water to reach maturity from the soft dough stage, and two inches of water from the hard dough stage of growth.

**Soybeans** require about 6.5 inches before the beginning seed fill stage or 3.5 inches from the full seed fill stage to reach maturity. (Check seed fill stage by examining the development of seeds in the pods at one of the four uppermost nodes on the main stem that have fully developed leaves. The beginning seed fill stage is when bean seeds can just be detected by squeezing with the fingers in one of the pods. The full seed fill stage is when one of the pods contains full-sized bean seeds.)

An alternative way to look at this would be to figure out on what day a full soil profile would carry the crop through to maturity. The silty clay to silty

clay loam soils in southeast Nebraska hold about 1.6 to 1.8 inches of available water per foot of soil, respectively. If we assume we have a four foot root zone, we have about seven inches total available water holding capacity in the root zone. Research has shown that 60 % of the available moisture in the root zone can be depleted at crop maturity without reducing grain yield. We, therefore, can utilize about 4.2 inches of the available moisture without hurting yield.

Having discussed the above, we can now predict the day when a full profile on a silty clay soil would carry the various crops through to maturity. For a medium season corn, the target date would be when about half of the corn kernels have dented. For grain sorghum, it would occur about one week after the soft dough stage. For soybeans, it would be at, or just before the full seed fill stage.

If you use these guidelines, be certain your soil is at field capacity in the top four feet on the target date. If not, you will need to continue to irrigate until you have applied enough water to have filled the profile. For example, if the soil would have held another 1.5 inches on the target date, it will take a total of 1.5 inches of rainfall plus irrigation, in addition to the available soil moisture to finish out the crop.

Predicting the date of the last irrigation is an important water management decision. You can minimize expense and leave your soil in good shape for harvest without harming yields by following these simple guidelines. To learn more about predicting the last irrigation, ask for NebGuide G82-602 or point your browser to <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/irrigation/g602.htm>. (TD)

## Is Fall or Spring Seeding of Alfalfa Best?

Whether it is best to plant alfalfa in the spring or fall depends on two factors, predominant weed species and soil moisture. If the predominant weed species are summer annuals such as foxtail and pigweed fall planting is best.

If the predominant weed species are winter annuals such as pennycress or downy brome, spring planting may be best. The winter annual weeds can be killed with tillage or herbicides in early spring and then the alfalfa planted into a clean seed bed. Pennycress, downy brome and other winter annual weeds will likely be more dominant in former wheat or alfalfa ground since they have the same growth habit as winter wheat.

The best time for fall seeding alfalfa in eastern Nebraska is during the month of August, **provided adequate soil moisture is available**. As this article goes to press, the outlook for adequate soil moisture is dim. If we do get rain to build soil moisture, don't wait too



Photo courtesy of K-State Research and Extension

long to plant. The latest alfalfa should be seeded in the fall is Sept. 10 in Lancaster County. If planting cannot be completed by that time, it is best to wait for another season.

Alfalfa seed needs to be planted 1/4 to 1/2 inch deep in fine textured soils and 3/4 inch deep in sandy soils for best germination. Regardless of seeding time, it is critical that alfalfa be planted into a firm seed bed. If you leave footprints over 1/2 inch deep when walking across the seedbed, the soil is too loose. Harrowing with the spikes set flat or rolling with a packer will firm seedbeds provided there is some moisture

in the soil. Tillage dries the soil and creates a loose seedbed. If the untilled soil surface is already smooth, no-till planters have been very successful in establishing a good stand of alfalfa.

Before seeding alfalfa, whether you plant in spring or fall, do a complete soil test. Apply and incorporate lime and phosphorus fertilizer, if needed, and be sure to inoculate the seed. One good extension publication is NebGuide G-652, "Seeding and Renovating Alfalfa." It can be picked up at the extension office or accessed on-line at: <http://www.ianr.unl.edu/pubs/Range/g652.htm>. (TD)

### Deadline Approaches to Terminate Oral Farm Leases

Generally, the turnover rate for rental land is very small in Nebraska, averaging about eight percent. This reflects the high level of communication between landowners and tenants and the high regard most landowners have for the ability of their tenant to produce top yields while being a careful steward of the land. Only in a few cases does a landlord terminate a lease because of poor management practices.

Oral (unwritten) leases are legally presumed to be year-to-year leases. A year-to-year lease has no fixed time period and is automatically renewed for another year until proper notice has been given to the tenant by the landowner (or vice versa) that the lease is terminated.

Written leases are in effect only for the period specified in

the lease itself, which may be one year, five years, etc. For written leases, no notice is required from the landlord to the tenant that the lease will not be renewed unless the lease specifically states that notice of termination is required. Unless it contains a renewal clause, the lease automatically terminates at the end of the lease period. The tenant generally has no right to have a written lease renewed unless the lease contains a renewal clause.

If a tenant "holds over" by not leaving after a written lease has ended, the tenant is legally considered to be a trespasser whom the landlord may remove by going to court. If the landowner does not remove the tenant, however, a year-to-year lease is automatically established by implication. If a holdover

tenant begins to work and incurs expenses for the next year's crop, the courts generally have ruled that the landowner has agreed by implication to the tenant's holding over.

The most common legal issue associated with oral farm leases is how a lease may legally be terminated. For year-to-year leases and holdover leases, six months advance notice must be given to legally terminate the lease. However, the lease date (the date from which the six months is counted) is different.

**Oral year-to-year lease termination.** For year-to-year leases, the Nebraska Supreme Court has ruled that the lease year begins on March 1. Notice to a tenant to vacate under an oral year-to-year lease (legally referred to as a "notice to quit") must be given six months in advance of the end of the lease, or no later than August 31.

**Holdover lease termination.** On holdover leases, the lease date is established by when the lease began in the original written lease rather than automatically being March 1. If the original written lease began Jan. 1, the notice to quit from the landlord to the holdover tenant would have to be given at least six months in advance of the end of the lease, or no later than June 30.

To make a lease termination process go smoothly, follow these tips:

- Usually a tenant will know about the termination of a rental contract before the
- see FARM LEASES on page 11*

### Latest U.S. Drought Monitor Map

As of July 30, Lancaster County is in Severe Drought conditions with most of Nebraska in Extreme or Exceptional Drought.

