Farm Views

Private Pesticide Applicator Training Jan. 25, 29 & Feb 10

Five pesticide safety education programs for private applicators are scheduled for Lancaster County this spring. These programs will provide the training necessary for private applicators to become certified to buy and use restricted-use pesticides on land they own or rent or if employed on a farm, on land their employer owns or rents.

Those needing to be certified may do so by attending one of the scheduled training sessions or pick up a home study course at the extension office.

The training schedule is:

- Saturday, Jan. 25 at 8:30 a.m.
- Wednesday, Jan. 29 at 1:30 p.m.;
- Monday, Feb. 10, at 8:30 a.m., 1:30 p.m. or 6:30 p.m.

All training will be conducted at the Lancaster Extension Education Center, 444 Cherrycreek Road, Lincoln. A training fee of $10 will be collected at the meeting. This fee covers development and reproduction of training materials. The fee for the home study course is $20, payable when the materials are picked up. All applicants will receive a bill by mail from the Nebraska Department of Agriculture for their license fee. This license fee of $25 covers the three-year certification period.

Computerized Financial Record Keeping Workshop March 18

After a one-year hiatus, Lancaster County Extension will present the very popular Computerized Financial Record Keeping workshop on Tuesday, March 18, 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. in the Animal Science Building on East Campus.

The concepts covered in the workshop include: Setting up and starting your computerized records; developing a chart of accounts (Quicken calls them categories); entering single and split transactions; reconciling your records with the bank account; having the computer automatically remind you to make entries that are due each month; how to handle and track amortized loans; generating various types of reports; electronic banking; and how to track items and perform tasks that cannot be done well on inexpensive general purpose record keeping software.

The concepts taught are applicable to any of several inexpensive computerized record keeping programs, with slight modifications in procedure. This workshop will be taught hands-on using Quicken 2003 Basic™ in the classroom.

Written step-by-step instruction sheets have been developed and are intended for use in the workshop and as reference materials to take home. Reference materials, lunch, refreshments and a conference parking pass are all included in the registration fee. The registration fee for each workshop is $40 for one person, $47 for two people sharing one computer with two meals and one set of handouts.

Registration will be limited due to space and computer availability on a first-come first-served basis. If the class is filled, a waiting list will be developed in case of a cancellation. If you are interested, please call Lancaster County Extension at 441-7180 and ask to have a brochure, registration form and map sent to you. Registration must be received at the extension office with payment in order to hold a place in the workshop. (TD)

Put Farm Leases in Writing for Legal Protection

A written farm lease allows for adjustments and, in most cases, provides better legal protection than relying on an oral agreement. Many landowners and operators are reluctant to sign a written lease because they think it implies a lack of trust in each other. However, written leases are more complete, can specify a definite lease term and remind the parties about agreement specifics. Signing a written document allows the parties to closely consider each provision and allows for adjustments, if unanticipated conditions arise.

It's best to have an attorney help draft a farm lease. It should be signed by both parties and include a legal description of the leased land, the lease term length and the date the lease begins. A written lease terminates when it expires and there is no automatic right of renewal unless included in the lease.

In Nebraska, the tenant has the right to select the crops to be grown and farming methods used, such as tillage and weed control, unless the lease specifies otherwise. If the tenant fails to perform a required farming operation, the lease should give the landlord the right to enter the property to perform the work and terminate the lease, if appropriate.

The lease can specify the tenant will comply with governmental regulations regarding soil, water and agricultural chemical use or if the tenant is liable for any damages resulting from violation of such requirements. According to Nebraska law, tenants must return land in the same condition they received it, subject to normal wear and tear, whether or not the lease requires this. The lease may require the landlord's permission before improvements are made. A method should be included for specifying either the landlord's share or how the tenant will be reimbursed for the improvements when the lease is up.

According to Nebraska law, tenants must return land in the same condition they received it, subject to normal wear and tear

The lease must specify each party's share of expenses for maintenance, chemicals, repairs, utilities and taxes. Under most written leases the tenant will be responsible for maintenance and the landlord may be responsible for repairs. The lease also needs to specify who is responsible for purchasing insurance and paying taxes. In Nebraska, the tenant is liable for virtually all injuries to third parties on leased land, unless the lease specifies otherwise. Both parties should have liability insurance for protection. The lease also needs to describe how rent will be paid and when it is due.

One disadvantage of written leases is in terms of lease termination. Tenants typically lose the six months notice of lease termination they would receive under an unwritten lease. If Nebraska statutes were modified to be similar to Iowa's, this would remove this legal disadvantage, except for lease termination. (TD)

SOURCE: Dave Aiken, J.D., water and agricultural law specialist, NU/IANR

Check and Aerate Stored Grain

Nebraska Grain Producers struggled to produce a crop this year. The drought reduced yields and set up conditions that made some fields of grain susceptible to mold organisms. As a result, careful monitoring of grain temperature and moisture is even more important this year than normal.

Stored grain should be checked every two to four weeks to ensure that temperature and moisture levels are not conducive to growth of molds and insects. By the time this article will be published, stored grain should be dried to 15.5 percent or less and cooled to between 35–40°F. Insects become dormant at temperatures below 50°F and many are killed below 32°F. Mold growth is nearly zero at temperatures below 40°F.

The university does not recommend taking grain below freezing as this can cause problems later in the spring. If one must aerate frozen grain in the spring when the air is warmer and relative humidity is higher, the humidity in the air can form frost or ice pockets in the grain thus blocking airflow through the pocket. This can result in spoilage when the grain mass warms.

The amount of time required for an aeration cooling cycle to pass through a bin of grain depends on the airflow rate. The cooling time (hours) can be estimated by dividing 15 by the airflow rate, measured in cubic feet per minute per bushel (cfm/bu). For example, 75 hours is needed with an airflow rate of 0.2 cfm/bu. (15/0.2 = 75). Check grain temperature at several locations to determine when the cooling cycle is complete. Grain temperature changes about 50 times faster than the moisture content, so the air's relative humidity is of little concern during grain cooling.

Note: Always cover hatches after grain is cooled for winter storage to prevent any snow from blowing into the bin. Cover fans and ducts when not in use to reduce convection currents that may draw moist air through the grain. (TD)

Add Lime Now for Next Spring's Alfalfa

Acidic soil can inhibit alfalfa growth, but adding lime now to fields that will be seeded to alfalfa next year may improve establishment and increase future yields.

Establishing alfalfa often is difficult because the soil pH is too low. Alfalfa grows best in soils with a neutral pH of about seven. Soils with a pH of 6.2 or lower become acid and alfalfa plants grow slowly and often look yellow.

With a low pH, the alfalfa roots are unable to absorb the necessary nutrients from soil. The nodules on alfalfa roots, which convert nitrogen from the air into nitrogen the plants can use, also have difficulty forming and working effectively in acidic soils.

Most sandy, low organic matter soils as well as more heavily textured soils that have been tilled and fertilized with nitrogen for a number of years usually become acid. Soil tests should be done to determine the pH level. The acid layer of soil sometimes is only a few inches deep so gather a shallow sample only a couple inches deep as well as a normal seven or eight inch deep sample. Test the shallow sample just for pH, but test the deeper sample more thoroughly for phosphorus, potassium, organic matter, soil and buffer pH.

Healthy blooming alfalfa

If the pH is low, the soil needs lime to neutralize the acidity. Neutralization may take some time, so it is wise to apply lime at least four months ahead of planting alfalfa. Normally, the recommended amount of lime is determined using the buffer pH.

Though adding lime to soil is costly, it costs much less than having several years of low alfalfa yields or even a complete crop failure. (TD)

SOURCE: Bruce Anderson, Ph.D., forage specialist, NU/IANR