

CROP UPDATE

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We now find ourselves in the period of early spring. The worst of winter is hopefully over with and the tallest snow banks have now melted down to being only 4 to 5 feet deep, geese are winging northward nearly every evening, drainage ditches and streams water levels are now in retreat, and farmers are in the final stages of preparing for the upcoming growing season. In the past week there were many planters being transported on the roads and they were moved from snowed-in storage sheds to farm shops for final preparations. So in anywhere from two weeks in the most optimistic guesses to six weeks if the 'fog day' predictions are right, corn planting may begin.

So which meteorologist's guess as to spring weather will be correct? So far all three are telling that the upcoming GDU accumulation is likely to be on the low side of normal, possibly nearly as cool as in 2009. That is scary to the growers who had to harvest their wettest grain and use the most gallons ever. As a result we find ourselves wanting to be proactive without being over-reactive. Earlier hybrids seem to be what most growers have lined up and most are still looking for whatever steps they can use to push the development of their crops along. Some of those management steps and products have been sleuthed out and field tested with good success. Most growers are also selecting slightly earlier soybean varieties so they can have that crop out of the field when corn harvest starts.

The gnashing sound hear over on Saturday was likely the chant of "Rock- Chalk-Jay-KerThink" as the bird from Kansas ran into the UNI Panthers down in Oklahoma City. It seems a team of kids from Iowa, Minnesota, Illinois, and Wisconsin met and outplayed the team of longer, taller, and more heavily recruited athletes from the Big 12. It was one of the best games with the best outcome many UNI, ISU, and U of I fans have seen in years. Hopefully a big delegation of fans from Iowa can make the trek to St Louis that weekend on their way to another two victories. Go Purple. My youngest daughter who attends UNI called and asked for ticket money so I have a vested interest in the outcome.

More on South America

Farmers I work with asked me to relate a few more tidbits from my recent trip to Brazil and South America. So I will try to do so.

As to Brazil, upon me asking I was told that about 80% of the farmers are still trying to pay off last season's loans. Expensive inputs, lack of decent roads that lead to a \$3/Bu basis, cost of controlling insects and diseases, and the currency exchange rates have made it difficult to may money. Having a severe drought over the southern states was also a big handicap in 2008/09. Corn prices are still too low to make money raising corn and the cost of transporting the additional bushels just does not make raising corn attractive. What it has caused is contracting of acres in the intensively cropped areas onto the better soils, with a portion of the poorer ground being planted into trees or sugar cane.

Cane production has increases across the country with most acres being either in Mt or Parana. With sugar prices being high and the excessive rains season curbing production they are

in the mode of trying to coax as many tons are possible from each acre. The acres can only expand as much as they have high dollar plants with which to process the ethanol and granulate sugar. Currently 100% of the new cars are flexed and able to run on either gasoline or ethanol. The ethanol was discounted about 40% from gasoline with gas selling at \$4.50 to \$5.00/gal.

I was given the chance to attend several major field days where topics such as GPS, self leveling and radar equipped booms, fertilizer efficiencies, and new crop protection products and varieties were discussed. That sounds familiar. Their adaption of maturity group of their soybean varieties takes a while to understand. The field day was near Rondonopolis, Mato Grosso at about 12 degrees south Latitude. They plant from a late Group 10 down to a mid Group 7 variety. Their tracking showed that the new TMG late Group 7s were going from planting date to being ready to harvest in 98 to 100 days. One new development was that SCN and root knot nematode populations have gotten increased to the point that they are causing major problems. Race shifts from 3 and 14 have moved them into Races 3+ and 14+, so some of the older sources are no longer adequate and they need to change tactics.

With an 8 month long growing season where from 60 to 110 inches of rain might fall this season and no snow, timing of planting and harvest season is different than ours. When I was there the corn crop ranged from just planted, to 6" tall, to just tasseling, to being ready to harvest. The bean crop in MT was about half harvested and yields were going to be good, yet about 3 to 5 bushels less than crop forecasters were predicting. Too much cloudy weather and the metabolic cost to the plant to detoxify some of the pesticides were predicted to have a bearing on the productivity of the crop.

I then spent time with crop researchers and producers in plots and in the fields down in Parana. That area contains the #2 and #3 bean producing states. About 40% of the crop had gotten planted late due to too much rain, which was a big switch from the very droughty conditions they had the previous year. Most growers had sprayed three to four times for rust, but they had problems either with not being timely with the applications or formerly effective products not being effective. The severity of the disease was somewhat astounding. When we walked through the bean fields it reminded me of the old "Charlie Brown" character named Pig Pen. Remember when he walked around a big cloud of dust always followed him. For us where ever we walked a big red cloud of rust spores billowed behind us. Even your arms felt greasy from the spores. The beans were at mid to late R5 and leaf loss was at 50 to 75% already. It brings into question yield predictions about the size of the bean crop.

We then slipped into Argentina to visit with people and see the crops there. Last year is was extreme drought while this year too much rain has been the problem, as El Nino was the rule. They are further south and the heart of the principal grain producing area is akin to Memphis TN. Their corn and bean crops looked very good with most of the beans either near final pod fill or just beginning to show the yellowish color of maturity. The pod counts on the beans looked good and they are looking forward to good yields in a few weeks.

Most Iowa growers would like visiting the country. There are cattle grazing in many fields and pastures. Cattle prices are now good and the people love their beef. It seems that many more of the lay people still know where their food comes from and are not afraid to say so. The ag producers fervently disagree with many of the policies of their criminal government as just as in our country too many people are on the government dole and want things at reduced prices or free to them without working. Sounds familiar.

My wife and two of the kids flew down and met me in Buenos Aires. The six of us toured BA and they saw their first Tango Show. Our families met up for a few days and we then

traveled to the North West Andean provinces of Tucuman, Salta, and Jujuy. Each were very scenic with various levels of economic activity. Raising crops, mining, producing wine, and tourism are important to them. Many of the towns in the region were founded in the 1580 to 1610 time frame, so buildings and histories were old. In one very old town of Humahumauaca, Jujuy the little Incan people were involved with crafts. When you got off the bus kids of 6 or ladies of 70 rushed to sell you coca leaves to chew to ward off altitude sickness. It was definitely different than what we see here.