

CROP UPDATE

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Two more blinks and the second month of 2010 is over with. Then March is upon us to hopefully signal the arrival of spring. By now everyone is ready for its arrival and that of warmer weather. It's about time in that about everyone living on gravel roads knows that it now only takes a few inches of snow and ten mile an hour winds to blow the access shut and they are snowed in until the plows arrive. Weather like this can't be an attraction for any college recruiter to sell southern athletes on the joy of living in the upper Midwest.

By the sheerest of chances, there is a report that a innovative fellow near Memphis recently constructed an igloo in that icebound town and put up a mailbox signaling that it was the latest home of our dear Nobel Prize Winner, the senator who made much about global warming, oops, climate change. It seems that even states like Texas, Tennessee, and even Florida have gotten enough snow to snarl traffic and send drivers into ditches and fellow vehicles. Thus it seems like Al Gore has disappeared for the winter to leave us shoveling snow instead of mowing lawns or working outside all winter. Maybe his picture will show up on mild cartons soon.

We can be thankful that spring will soon be upon us. The days are getting noticeable longer and more temps will start creeping into the 20s once again. We now have the opportunity to view the Olympic Games on television. The high college sports seasons are past the half way marks and the best can start preparing for the tournaments. And major league spring training is just around the corner. And many of us need to dig into the big seed catalogues that have been arriving to get seeds and plants for the coming season ordered.

Fertility plans
P and K
Nitrogen

Double rowed Corn

Electronic Instruments that can be used to measure cropping environment parameters

What are VAM and soil microbes

Cold Soil Challenges

Finally the month of January is over with and hopefully the coldest weather of the winter is gone. Everyone around here has seen enough snow and subfreezing weather to last for the year and are ready for lots of warm weather and sunshine. Like most who get to clear the yard or

yards, driveways, or lots after the last big snow, I am realizing how much less a person gets done if two or three days a week are spent getting the white stuff pushed or blown out of the way. Those in central Iowa who think they have enough snow need to head to Northwest Iowa or the Dakotas where it looks like the Arctic or Siberia, with their big drifts and miles of roads that are barely passable. After the snow melts we all need to say a word of thanks to the snow plow drivers, equipment maintenance people, and linesmen who gave us a fighting chance to survive the winter. They deserve a break from all the tough work and conditions. Added to that list have to be the construction crews who have helped repair the many buildings that have collapsed under the big snow and ice loads in the past weeks.

After comparing notes with a few colleagues through the fall about developing grain quality problem in this year's corn crop it was not a surprise to receive e-mailed pictures of some of the piles of black corn now being retrieved around the state. The old axiom that rotten corn going into a pile or bin never gets any better over the season still stands. Now the question has to be who will take that grain. There will be some value to it either from an ethanol plant or a cattle feeder, but will there be long-term consequences? Pictures of some of those piles 'went viral' as they circulated to many people on the web. The next issue will be the bins full of corn that remain at risk of going out of condition as and when the weather warms up.

Grain prices are still trending down versus three weeks ago as a number of the fundamentals have turned bearish. The South American crops seem to be in good condition and poised to be larger than in past seasons. The first variable with the size of our 2010 corn crop remains the number of corn acres still in the field across Iowa, Minnesota, and the Dakotas. When you drive from Storm Lake to Omaha and then back through to Sioux City there are many fields still not harvested. In them the snow drifts are up to or over the tassels all along the field margins and two to three feet deep through the field. The recent ice storms were not a help for helping the stalks stand.

Picking Varieties for 2010

A good place to view agronomic information from other states is always the Chat 'N' Chew Café, which is a web site at Purdue that hosts the IPM Newsletters from the cornbelt states. Nearly year round you can get a good glimpse at the different hot and pertinent topics in each of the states. All fall there were many articles on how the ear molds were developing on the ears in the corn crop and the condition of that grain as it went into storage.

The point of discussion in this week's posting from The Ohio State University is advice to growers on how to pick hybrids for 2010 and whether or not to plant hybrids that seemed to be very susceptible to ear molds last fall. Wow, what a loaded question with many different qualifications that can be entered into the answer. What seemed to be showing up, as the ISU grain expert said, was that fuller season hybrids advertised as easily fermentable lived up to that billing and began the fermentation process while still on the plant. Those with softer starch had more problems and those with more hard endosperm resisted fungal invasion better.

Certain genetic families showed more ear mold problems, yet one hates to draw too many conclusions and eliminate high yielding hybrids based on a year in which we were short 500+/- heat units. Maybe there is a long term cooling cycle that has hit.

Across the corn industry the hunt for earlier hybrids by corn growers continues. Typically crop advisors always like to warn growers to not make any wholesale maturity switches, instead to make changes in incremental percentages. After consecutive seasons with cooler than normal seasons and very wet grain at harvest we may have to adjust that advice. Instead we have to tell

growers to select the top performing hybrids in third party plots in their regions and pay more attention than usual to harvest moisture depending on what the drying capacity is in your operation or at the local grain destination and your tolerance to large drying bills. When I sit down and listen to a grower tell me their last field which was planted to a medium full season variety and was harvested before the mid-December blizzard at 36% moisture, then moving to earlier choices looks to be the way to go. If one does have a favorite full season variety that typically yields very well, it should be positioned on one of the better drained, higher phosphate fields and perhaps hurried along with a hormone/liquid phosphate foliar application.

Meteorological Guesses

So how do the different meteorologists' guesses for the 2010 season compare? I have heard in-depth predictions by three different reputable people. The first one's predictions, based on long term cycles and lack of sunspots are for a season with a few more GDUs, a late wet planting season, followed by a warmer and drier summer, and ending with an early frost and a cool, wet harvest season. The second is predicting an El Nino summer that is close to a repeat of 2009 in 2010. The third person, who is also paying close attention to sunspot cycles, is also looking for a near repeat of 2009 in 2010. Which person do you think is right and which one do you place your faith in? The trend looks to be for another shorter season.

One thing that could affect things is the huge amount of snow that has to melt and find a home in the soil, streams or tile lines. Given the unexpected finding that there is now very little to no frost under the deep snow cover, more of it may seep into the soil than we earlier expected.

Iowa Power and the National No-Till Shows

The big Iowa Power Show will be history by the time you read this. Most are expecting a very big turnout for this year's show. People are looking for something to do to fight cabin fever. Unless another snowstorm hits this week the isles could be filled with people. Several companies, Bayer included, are having product intro meetings in conjunction with the show.

With more recent articles telling of the increased incidence of tolerant or resistant weeds and more growers observing that on their or neighboring farms they are relearning what conventional and new products can be used to control weeds.

At the recent National No-Till Conference there were a number of presentations on cover crops. While Iowa growers typically think they are about 100 - 200 miles too far north to use the soil building capability of cover crops there were a few success stories told by growers who have been using them to loosen and build the soil and even to fix a high percentage of their N needs for the coming season. Rye, oats, radishes, and various legumes were among those discussed.