

## *CROP UPDATE*

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The end of the 2010 year is nearing and how would everyone and anyone classify what type of year it was. Politically there was major statement made in November in the congressional elections as we took a step back to the right. Economically, the deep recession that has affected most of the country is being felt somewhat in the western Midwest, but not to the degree it is on both coasts and in the rust belt states. If you want to work and have much mental ability, you can have your choice of jobs. Agriculture-wise, the ever expanding middle classes in countries such as China and India finally found out that increasing their meat consumption was to their liking and their leaders did everything they could to try to satisfy that need by facilitating the purchasing of U.S. grains in record volumes. Hungry people riot and overthrow governments and well fed ones don't. Thus we find our grain markets much higher than anyone predicted early last summer, which is great for sellers of grain and farmers who delayed their marketings. Individuals in the livestock sector who were finally getting into break even territory now have to get extremely creative again in their inelastic businesses.

So what can we expect from 2011? It is one step closer to 2012, which holds mysteries such as the reported end to the Mayan calendar. If the official church did alter the calendar to the extent that it is thirteen months off, next fall could be exciting. I will be among the group of people who will be paying close attention to weather and crop conditions around the world to see how things are progressing as to food supplies around the world. Years ago we all listened to the predictions by such notables as Carl Sagan and Walt Disney that we would have flying cars and would be able to get information instantly from around the world. Well we now have the internet thanks to Al Gore, but my kids' cars still have not sprouted any wings, unless you can count how they still break down and become money pits. Just remember to be careful what you wish for, it may come true.

John Baize

The BRT group from near Grinnell that supplies fertilizers and other products held a major conference last week near Iowa City. One of the speakers was John Baize, who holds a major feed grain position where he is able to observe and measure grain usage by most of the major grain exporters. He showed a series of graphs that clarified and described the growth and progress in a number of the more populated countries that have increased their U.S. grain consumption. Of course that included the BRIC countries, meaning Brazil, China, India and Russia. Each of them are becoming more developed and have an increasing middle class due to expanding economic activity. Three of the four also have an expanding population that offers a labor supply to man the many new jobs being created. What he saw was that the populations of China and India were going to soak up any increased grain production from the U.S., but that due to the fact that we really don't have any new acres to bring into production other than any CRP acres. That was going to raise prices for the grains and subsequently meat supplies. So far the only country that has enacted strict quotas on the percentage of grain they could sell on the world market was Argentina. That basically is their way to fund their large DHS type system.

Dr. Arden Anderson

Another speaker was a medical doctor by the mentioned name. He grew up on a dairy farm in Michigan and earned degrees in agronomy and then a Phd in Biophysics before receiving his medical degree. What he and his colleagues hope to achieve on a large scale is to clarify and to more greatly publicize to the public how closely the fields of medicine and food production should be linked. Modern culture places food production and soil health on one end of the spectrum and medicine and health care on the opposite pole. Now how often does that thinking happen in livestock production? Every cow calf, hog producer or poultry man/woman knows that their animals can only be as healthy and productive as their diet allows. We know human health care and medical costs have skyrocketed the past decade as a higher percentage of the population is in worse shape. They continue to think they can visit the doctor or take a pill and return to a healthy condition. That hasn't and won't happen. Instead they need to get active and eat better, meaning that the food has to contain more of the nutrients the bodies need. Tissue and grain tests prove that today's plants often don't contain the amount of minerals they are supposed to. Dr Anderson described the current status of fertility programs and how they can be improved. For us that starts with learning how to keep our corn crop alive beyond August 1<sup>st</sup> and SDS out of our soybean crops. That involves good fertility programs and tissue tests to verify cellular levels.

Another very notable speaker was a top notch soil microbiologist. He described his work which involved examining the world below ground and around the roots of corn and bean plants and what caused them to stay healthy or to get diseased.

### Fertility Programs

Over the past season I have written about the changes that are needed or should be added to soil sampling and analysis programs. What we advocate is getting a more complete analysis run on every 4<sup>th</sup> - 6<sup>th</sup> soil sample to test for micronutrient levels. The most important seem to include sulfur, manganese, boron, zinc and copper. If a red flag goes up with one or more samples from a field, then ask that the remainder of the samples from that field be retested for the micros. It is very common to find three or four of these being low to very low. In retrospect the adoption of NPK fertilizer programs and fewer acres receiving manure, deficiencies of those micros was inevitable. Being satisfied with grid sampling without base saturation and micro levels can lead to serious yield problems and lack of information with which to base corrective action. It currently looks like all fertility programs should be followed by a tissue sampling program to see how closely the plants are adhering to the prescribed nutrient levels. One major fertilizer group in the upper Midwest now has 11 years worth of sampling data and thousands of samples to demonstrate how the nutrient levels have trended downwards the past decade.

### Planning for 2011

The seed reps in their respective areas have been very busy with many farmers in the midst or final stages of their seed buying decisions. From what I am hearing more farmers are asking their dealers about each hybrid's rating on Goss's Wilt. I hate to keep hammering on that disease, but after viewing the crop from the air and seeing yield reports from fields that got hit hard, until we know more about the disease and how it will act in a moist Iowa we have to be cautious with it and plant hybrids that have a certain level of genetic resistance.

New tools that are available include a test kit from Ag Diagnostics that will give a cross reaction to verify if Goss's is present. There may also be a product that could provide the nutrition to keep infected plant alive to complete grain fill and minimize yield losses.

The final thought in this planning phase is that each grower needs to think on a microbial level about each of his fields and the disease pressure each of them was under this season. If SDS or early corn plant death was a problem, a Fusarium infection was likely involved. Then the pertinent question is what needs to be done to reduce the potential Fusarium problem in next year's crops. One or two Fusarium species attack soybeans while the APS disease guide lists at least eight species attack corn plants. The best plant health maximizing plan that can be constructed now would be to choose a hybrid with good plant health, supply a decent P level, apply a biological health maintenance product such as SabrEx, and use an early applied micronutrient mix whenever tissue tests verify nutrient shortages. Any in-furrow mix containing a pseudomonas mix would also be very helpful. Getting the planter set up with liquid in-furrow attachments this winter or spring will be important. Such a program is going to require lots of work and tissue testing, but with high grain prices it should be financially rewarding to those with the mental acumen to stay on top of everything.

Remember that we are still the major grain exporter in this increasingly hungry world and we need to increase our abilities to maintain that position. That won't happen by wishing it.

Have a Merry Christmas and enjoy the time with your families over the holidays.