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Ochiltree County Crop Profitability Conference goes virtual Jan. 7 15th annual event offers crop market outlook

All Ochiltree County crop producers are invited to a virtual online crop budgeting and market outlook meeting hosted by the Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service office in Ochiltree county on Jan. 7.

This meeting has been conducted annually in Ochiltree County for over 15 years now, but this year it has to be a virtual meeting due to the virus. It is a great meeting for producers to see the latest budgets for the major crops grown in the area based on current market outlook and variable and fixed production costs. This hopefully will help them begin to determine the crop mix on their respective farms.

The registration fee is \$10 per participant. The Zoom video conference application will be used. In order to receive a conference link, attendees must register by 5 p.m. Jan. 5 by contacting AgriLife Extension's office in Ochiltree County, 806-435-4501. Information on how to download and use Zoom will also be available.

The program will start at 9 a.m. and feature AgriLife Extension specialists Justin Benavidez, Ph.D., and DeDe Jones, both from Amarillo, presenting enterprise budgets and the market outlook for all major crops for 2021.

Master Irrigator is an award-winning intensive irrigation management training presented by North Plains Groundwater Conservation District. Graduates are armed with knowledge and skills that will help them maximize their return on investment while minimizing water use.

Register now for the 2020 class!

March 24

Agronomics

March 31

Irrigation Scheduling

April 7

Systems

April 14

Systems & Special Topics



Learn more and apply now at

www.northplainsgcd.org/masterirrigator

Applications are accepted until March 13, 2021 or until the class is full.



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QuickBooks Desktop Training for Farmers and Ranchers goes live

AgriLife Extension offers record-keeping program online

QuickBooks Desktop Training for Farmers and Ranchers Is now online. Producers needing to learn better record-keeping practices no longer have to wait for a workshop in their area.

The primary goal of this QuickBooks Pro 2020 training course is to help farmers and ranchers improve their financial recording-keeping and analysis capabilities, which will allow them to make better management decisions.

The online course fee is \$55. The class material and format are very similar to the two-day live classes, but the electronic version is broken up into 10 different learning modules with several videos per module. This allows participants to stop and start as needed and work at their own pace.

Each section of the course uses real-world examples to focus on core financial practices such as basic accounting principles, understanding forms and registers, creating accurate financial statements, setting up customers and vendors, and using billing, purchasing and inventory management options. Participants will learn to enter transactions into the program and analyze costs and profits.

While the examples used in this course are tailored for farmers and ranchers, anyone can take this course if they are interested in learning how to use QuickBooks Pro.

To access the course go to: <https://agrilifelearn.tamu.edu/product?catalog=AGEC-006>

Ag Pesticide Applicator Update

2021 Covid 19 (Coronavirus) Pandemic

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
COMMISSIONER SID MILLER

During the Covid 19 pandemic and the rise of positive cases across the state, the Texas Department of Agriculture (TDA) is extending this exemption of agriculture Continuing Education Unit (CEU) requirements. To address the CEU's and licensure requirements for Ag Pesticide applicators, the TDA will work with the ag pesticide applicators and CEU course providers of Texas during this critical time. Licensed applicators with expiring licenses or needing CEU's will be allowed to renew their license even if they have not met their CEU requirement for their current licensing period through December 31, 2021. Due to the restrictions of meetings in place by the Governor and many cities, many CEU events have been canceled.

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The TDA will work to insure all the state's pesticide applicators are able to acquire their licenses and required continuing education courses in a safe and effective manner during this time frame. Once the restrictions have been lifted and courses are scheduled again, applicators will be required to obtain their required CEUs for their respective license classification for each licensing period. By allowing a CEU exemption, this will allow the applicators to maintain their ability to perform pesticide applications for pests, weeds, insects etc., without disrupting daily business functions. Applicators are encouraged to complete online courses even if online courses were completed the previous licensing period.

COMMERCIAL, NON-COMMERCIAL AND NON-COMMERCIAL POLITICAL APPLICATORS

For licenses expiring in 2021 **ONLY**: TDA will exempt commercial, non-commercial and non-commercial political applicators who have taken online or correspondence courses within the last year. The TDA Rule 7.24 (t) (2) does not allow for online or correspondence courses to be taken 2 years consecutively. In light of the unusual circumstances due to Covid 19 (coronavirus), the TDA will allow online or correspondence courses to be taken in consecutive years. This exemption will be for the current 2021 licensing period. Commercial, non-commercial and non-commercial political pesticide applicators are required to obtain 5 CEUs per licensing period.

PRIVATE APPLICATORS

For licenses expiring in 2021 **ONLY**: The TDA will also exempt private applicators from the TDA Rule 7.24 (v) (5). This rule does not allow a private applicator to acquire more than 10 CEUs through correspondence courses. During this quarantine time frame, private applicators will be allowed to acquire **ALL** of their CEUs through correspondence courses (online). Private applicators are required to obtain 15 CEUs per 5-year licensing period.

Feeding Hay to Reduce Waste

Dr. Vanessa Corriher-Texas A&M AgriLife Extension

On many farms, hay feeding losses are as high as storage losses. Some hay losses during feeding can be expected with any feeding system, but the amount of loss varies with the system used. The major objective for any feeding system should be to keep losses to a practical minimum level, thus permitting animals to consume the majority of hay offered at feeding.

Feeding losses include trampling, leaf shatter, chemical and physical deterioration, fecal contamination, and refusal.

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Feeding in only one area can cause excessive sod destruction, usually creates muddy conditions, often results in heavy spring weed pressure, and can result in soil compaction and/or ruts in the field. Frequently moving the feeding area allows manure to be spread more uniformly over the field and therefore improves soil fertility in bare or thin spots, while reducing the severity of sod damage.

Key concepts regarding hay feeding:

1. Hay quality should be matched to animal needs.
2. When animals are fed outside, a well-drained site should be selected to reduce feeding losses.
3. Hay stored outside should be fed before hay stored inside; other things being equal, high value hay stored outside should be fed before low value hay stored outside.
4. Putting a barrier between animals and hay will help reduce feeding losses. Hay racks/rings can be particularly effective.
5. Forcing clean up of hay by animals which have low nutrient requirements before feeding more hay can help reduce hay waste.

Conservation Reserve Program (CRP)

Justin Benavides, Ph.D.,-Texas A&M AgriLife Extension-Amarillo TX

The Farm Service Agency is opening Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) enrollment December 11, 2020 - February 28, 2021. CRP is a land conservation program in which in exchange for an annual rental payment, enrolled farmers agree to remove environmentally sensitive land from agricultural production. Enrolled farmers also agree to plant species that will improve environmental health and quality. CRP contracts are typically 10-15 years in length, with the end goal of improving water quality, preventing soil erosion, and reducing loss of wildlife habitat.

The enrollment requirements from FSA state that land must be cropland (including field margins) that is planted, or considered planted, to an agricultural commodity four of the six crop years from 2013-2018 and be physically and legally capable of being planted in a normal manner. In order to be eligible that cropland must additionally meet one of three criteria:

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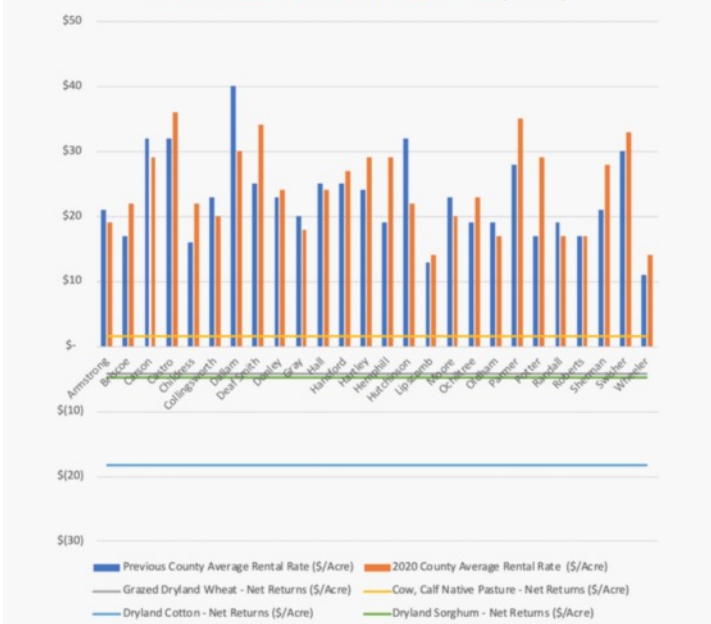
- Have a weighted average Erosion Index of eight or higher;
- Be expiring CRP acres or;
- Be located in a national or state CRP conservation priority area.

While land may be eligible for enrollment, eligibility does not necessarily mean acceptance. Acceptance of land into the CRP is largely a function of the land's Environmental Benefits Index (EBI) and the producer's bid into the program. For example, certain practices make acceptance into the CRP program more likely, though those practices may prove more costly to establish while not actually changing the rental rate. Upon the conclusion of the enrollment period, FSA ranks all bids into the CRP program based on a combination of the EBI and bid. Land meeting a certain threshold within the ranking is accepted.

CRP Payments

In return for establishing conservation practices on enrolled land, FSA provides rental payments to producers. FSA rental rates vary based on the county and practices established on a given set of acreage. Producers may estimate the maximum rental rate by working with their local FSA office and bid that rate or lower. Lower bids increase the likelihood of acceptance, though you do receive lower payments.

CRP Average County Rental Rates 2020 and Expected Returns Above Variable Cost for Various Enterprises, Texas High Plains (\$/Acre)



The economic 'brass tacks' of the decision to enroll in CRP is whether or not current crop production offers a higher net return than the CRP rental rate bid. A few factors go in to this determination. The first factor to consider is the rental rate compared to the returns above variable costs for different enterprises. Consider the figure to the left.

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As you can see, the average county rental rate for CRP exceeds the net return above variable cost for all enterprises included. In fact, returns from CRP exceed the commodity offering the second-highest returns by approximately seven times on average. These comparisons are slightly off, as prices for commodities have changed substantially since Agrilife posted the 2020 budgets. For example, the price of cotton lint in the budgets for Agrilife District 1 is listed at \$0.66/lb. That price was set in November 2019; the price now sits around \$0.70/lb. Though the 2020 price of wheat set in 2019 (\$4.62/bu.) was for a crop which has been harvested, the price for the 2021 crop will likely be substantially higher. In fact, the price of Kansas City Wheat for July '21 currently sits at \$5.72/bu. Conversely, calf prices are lower than expected when the budgets were set in 2019.

This comparison is slightly skewed in a second way as the returns above variable costs for production are being compared to average revenues from CRP. Unlike the persistent rumor that pops up in some outlets from time to time, CRP is not a 'payment to do nothing' and depending upon the practice selected there may be significant cost to establish CRP acreage. This is where the difficulty in addressing complex programs in a short blog post arises. There are too many combinations of CRP practices to address in a short-form piece. Needless to say, establishment of CRP acreage on land that is currently being farmed will require some investment up to 50% of the cost of establishing those practices may be shared with USDA. After amortizing the initial investment over the 10-15 year CRP contract, enrolling in CRP may still yield higher net returns than cropping/running cattle.

I highly encourage you to evaluate this decision for yourself. Crop prices are currently higher than earlier in the year, but some of that may be due to outsized purchases from China. Whether those purchases continue to buoy prices, or continue to occur at all is unknown at this point. There are certainly other fundamentals at play, and it is important to remember that CRP is a guaranteed set price for a minimum of ten years. Most importantly though, it is vital to visit your FSA office to understand all the aspects of CRP enrollment as there are provisions like emergency haying and grazing that I have not even touched.

Energy Supplementation of Stocker Cattle on Wheat Pasture

Britt Hicks, Ph.D., Area Extension Livestock Specialist-OSU Extension, Guymon, OK

Grazing stocker cattle on winter wheat during the fall and winter months can provide cost-effective gains. Wheat pasture is succulent, palatable and nutritious. Both the energy and crude protein content of wheat pasture are high. Wheat forage will commonly contain 75% TDN (total digestible nutrients) and 25 to 30% crude protein during the fall and early spring grazing period. Both the energy and crude protein content of wheat pasture are high. Wheat forage will commonly contain 75% TDN (total digestible nutrients) and 25 to 30% crude protein during the fall and early spring grazing period. However, there are times when providing supplemental energy on wheat pasture may be beneficial.

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Supplementation of cattle grazing wheat pasture is of interest to 1) provide a more balanced nutrient supply and feed additives such as ionophores or bloat preventive compounds, 2) substitute supplement for forage where it is desirable to increase stocking rate in relation to grazing management and/or marketing decisions, and 3) substitute supplement for forage under conditions of low forage standing crops.

Two ionophores (monensin and lasalocid) are available for wheat pasture stocker cattle. Both, if delivered at the proper dosage, increase weight gains of growing cattle on wheat pasture by 0.18 to 0.24 lb/day more than that of the carrier supplement and improve the economics of supplementation programs. Poloxalene is the only product labeled for bloat prevention. Although monensin is not a true bloat preventive compound like poloxalene, studies have shown that it does decrease the incidence and severity of wheat pasture bloat.

This article will review two different strategies for providing energy supplements to growing cattle on wheat pasture. One strategy is to hand feed a small package (target intake of 2 lb/day or 4 lb every other day) monensin-containing energy supplement to provide a more balanced dry organic matter to crude protein ratio in the total diet. A summary of five OSU trials showed that this strategy consistently increased daily gain by 0.42 lb with a supplement conversion of 4.72 lb of supplement per lb of increased weight gain which will often be profitable. The supplement increased profits by \$15 to \$31 per steer depending on supplement cost and profit potential of the cattle.

It is recommended that this supplement be manufactured as a small pellet consisting of about 82 to 90% corn, milo, wheat middlings and/or soybean hulls as the source(s) of energy. To meet mineral and vitamin needs, the supplement should contain 2.25 to 2.75% calcium, 1% phosphorus, 0.7% magnesium, 0.75 to 1.25% salt, 60 ppm copper, and a minimum of 10,000 IU of added vitamin A. It should also contain 90 to 100 mg of monensin per pound. This supplementation program does require close management. Feeding the supplement every other day may increase the likelihood that some cattle could eat more than the desired amount of supplement. The primary challenge in using this supplementation program is one of having good management and enough time to be a good observer of what the cattle are doing.

A second strategy is to feed energy supplements in larger amounts (about 0.75% of body weight) to increase stocking rate during the fall/ winter grazing period and to have more cattle on hand for spring graze-out of wheat. In a three-year OSU study, a high-starch, corn-based supplement and a high-fiber byproduct feed-based supplement were compared. The high-fiber energy supplement contained about 47% soybean hulls and 42% wheat middlings, and all supplements contained 40 mg/lb of monensin. The supplements were hand fed six days per week at a level of about 0.75% of body weight. Non-supplemented, control cattle had free-choice access to a high-calcium (16%) commercial mineral mixture throughout the study.

During the study, mean daily supplement consumption was 0.65% of body weight which increased daily gain by 0.33 lb and allowed stocking rate to be increased by one-third. Type of supplement did not influence daily gain, supplement conversion or the substitution ratio of supplement for forage. However, the cattle seemed to prefer the high-fiber supplement and consumed it much more readily than the corn-based high-starch supplement. Generally, the cattle consumed the high fiber supplement in a matter of 10 to 30 minutes in the morning. In contrast, the corn-based supplement was eaten during at least two feeding periods during the day (morning and mid-afternoon). From a feed and bunk management standpoint, this difference in the supplements is extremely important on days of inclement weather (rain, snow, etc.). In addition, the potential for acidosis is much less for the high-fiber supplement.

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Supplement conversion with this strategy was approximately 5 lb of supplement per lb of increased gain per acre. This conversion was substantially less than conversions of 9 to 10 that have traditionally been used in evaluating the economics of energy supplementation programs for wheat pasture stocker cattle. In summary, research illustrates that supplementation strategies that 1) result in a more balanced nutrient supply, 2) provide feed additives such as ionophores or bloat preventive compounds, 3) result in substitution of supplement for forage when it is desirable to increase stocking rate in relation to grazing management and/or marketing decisions, and/or 4) decrease production risk with respect to average daily gain, offer opportunities to increase profitability of wheat pasture stocker cattle operations.

What Do Consumers Want These Days?

Every year a national survey is conducted of food consumers to assess their preferences. Some of the more notable findings of the most recent survey were:

- > Sales were up about 1% over the previous year.
- > Smaller portions are being consumed and fewer people go back for more.
- > Plant-based alternatives continued to increase in volume sold but their market penetration (of total meat, poultry, and alternatives) is still small.
- > More hybrid vegetable/meat blends have come on the market.
- > Time-saving meals are now more important to more consumers. Even fewer meals are cooked at home than before.
- > Sales continued to grow for products labeled organic, grass fed and/or no antibiotics ever. But consumers trust such claims only moderately.
- > Signs in stores are the top means (surpassing print sources for the first time last year) of finding price specials.
- > The vast majority of consumers buy just a few cuts at a time.
- > Consumers under 40 years of age are not as confident in their ability to prepare new cuts and in predicting how they will taste after they cook them.
- > Supermarkets continue to be the primary source of meat and poultry.
- > About of 40% of consumers have ordered groceries but only about 20% have ordered meat or poultry, mostly processed and ground products.
- > Buyers, particularly younger, are influenced by labeling, especially regarding nutrition, food safety, animal care, and environmental impact. These were important to from 40% to 60% of survey respondents.
- > About two-thirds of meat and poultry buyers want to know how and where animals were raised. And they want that information on packages, the product's website, and social media. (You may agree or not whether the latter is a good source.)
- > Approximately ½ think animal agriculture does not adversely affect the planet, if done properly. Younger people were more likely to disagree.

NOTE: This survey was conducted before the pandemic arrived, so it was not influenced by its effects.

(Power of Meat, Published by the Foundation of Meat & Poultry Research & Education and The Food Industry Association)



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