Jan - Feb 2000

Agrimanagement's Newsletter

Your Next Newsletter

We are attempting to publish a newsletter issue several times each year. Often in the past, we have distributed short notes to those of you with a specific crop. Due to the many crops with which we work, we believe that a regular newsletter throughout the year will give you the best information resource.

If you have any story ideas please let us know.

Newsletter@agrimgt.com

Inside this issue:

Crossing Over to 2000

Welcome to the year 2000. This year begins again as we each prepare for another season. It is interesting for us at Agrimanagement to look back through 34 years of business together. Don wishes to thank each of you personally for the opportunity of serving your variety of production needs in each of the past 24 years.

Each of you also have your own milestone remembrances. Often, reflecting on the past hurdles we've met and triumphed over give us a renewed hope and confidence in the future. We hope each of you feel the same excitement we feel when looking forward to another season.

Some notes on U.S. History and agriculture at the turn of the century:

- The population of the US was 76 million people.
- The average yearly income was $1011.00.
- A loaf of bread was 3 cents and a bushel of wheat sold for $1.25 (1919).

Currently, perhaps the most important statistic is that less than 2% of the US population produces foodstuffs for a population of 280 million residents and export throughout the world. The abundant and varied delicious, quality food is one of our great blessings in this nation, thanks to the American production system.

So where will the hope and answers come from for the next 10, 20 and even 50 years? We can only rely on our knowledge of the past. Each year farming continues and we, as growers, producers and consultants, learn more about the process pf producing the best commodities.

We look forward to serving each and everyone of you throughout the growing season, advising in all areas of production.

Nematode Management

In 1999, Agrimanagement carried out sampling on a variety of crops to detect injury suffered from nematodes. We sample crops throughout Central Washington: potatoes, mint, onions, apples, and pears. We believe it is very important to keep accurate field records of nematode history and treatment inputs. Such records allow you to better manage pests and understand which crops will be most productive in those fields. The research community continues to look for better ways to treat nematodes, both through fumigation and non-fumigant control products.

As some of you may have heard, Eden Bioscience, on of the primary private Nematology Laboratories of Northwest has ceased to take nematode detection samples. There are several companies which Agrimanagement can use in the N.W. who offer services centered on microscopic detection techniques which we believe are very important to proper pest control.

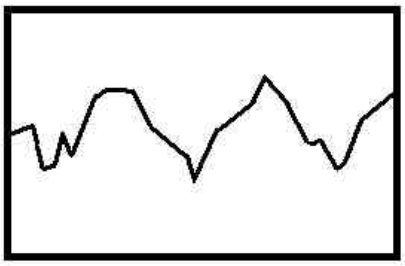
Notes from Winter Meetings

This year we have attended some very informative meetings. Among these meetings was the 2000 Mint Meeting.

Several speakers presented important information to the growers we serve. Mr. Dan Stainbrook of Farm Credit Services, Spokane, WA, offered a commodity review and outlook. He stated that currently most commodities are being overproduced and supply must be reduced in order to increase profitability.

As and illustration he cited the hog industry. Hog producers need to recognize their over-production and greatly cut back on herd size and feeding numbers. Over-production was once a problem in the Cattle industry. Following the period of 1983-'94, the cattle industry readjusted production, leaving the industry with supply and demand more in balance.

In the **Potato** business, he indicated that the trend is toward fewer growers while maintaining the current overall acreage. Secondly, we should expect to see more alliances at all levels to achieve economies of scale. One of the tools now being used by potato growers is



Revenue Insurance (See the section entitled Risk Management).

The second commodity group he reviewed was the **Dairy** industry. The last two years have been good to the industry, but the next eight months may be below break-even. The demand for dairy products has been driven by the demand for cheese. Americans are eating about 10 acres of pizza a day. However, production is also increasing, with about 70,000-100,000 new cows entering production this year.

The review of the **Apple** industry in 2000 is projected as more profitable, but there is still a large amount of acreage of young orchards entering full production. China is still recognized as a big force on the international scene. Those producers that are vertically integrated will have the advantage.

Mr. Stainbroo reminded us that Washington State still has only 50% of **Wine grapes** acreage in production. In this country, premium wine consumption is now exceeding jug wine consumption.

A second interesting report was presented by Mr. Jim Burgett, President of I.P. Calison & Sons, Chehalis, WA. He stressed, to continue to compete in a global market, producers need to maintain a benchmark quality, characteristic of Northwest Mint Oil. There continues to be significant production from Indian and Canadian sources. Perhaps one of the most sobering numbers is that the annual demand for peppermint oil is around 8 million pounds, while producers hold an estimated 4 million pounds in grower's and dealer's inventories.

Labor and Industries Changes

One of the issues that concerns us the most at Agrimanagement is the issue of new ergonomic regulations proposed by the Department of Labor and Industries. We have publicly taken the position that this is one more layer of bureaucracy that we do not need. Certainly, attention to this issue merits consideration from all employers, but we do not believe a new layer of government red tape is the answer. Over a year ago we wrote to the director of L & I for Washington State, with copies of the letter to other state officials.

Unfortunately the current process is well underway and there is little chance that it will end without government legislation. Our only solution may be to moderate the impact.

Short of scrapping the current Ergonomics legislation, we support HB2387, a bill proposed by Rep. Jim Clements, 14th District. This bill would suspend the Department of Labor and Industry's rule-making abilities. It would further force L & I to undergo a four-year pilot program which would require itself and one other state agency to follow the proposed rules.

We foresee these proposed regulations as being very onerous to Orchardists, Vineyards, and Hop Farmers. As an industry we do not need any further government regulation.

GPS Soil Sampling

As some of you may know, we have participated in several efforts to define a suitable and economic advantage from generating Geographical Positioning System (GPS) data and field descriptions. During the last few years we have identified different production zones within a field for separate sampling. In fact, this is simply a more knowledgeable extension of our variability studies which we have offered for 30 years. Recently, we have used aerial photography; to examine color, infrared and vegetative index (chlorophyll reflectance) characterization. In 1999, for the first time, we conducted soil sampling in a field based on harvest yield monitoring information.

One extension of GPS field data is the ability to develop separate fertilizer recommendations throughout the field through a variable fertilizer spreading system.

In late 1999 we commenced a relationship with a local GPS services provider. This now gives us the capacity to map field boundaries or describe special features within a field area. While sampling this winter, we used this technology in soil sampling projects.

If you have a special interest in how Agrimanagement is using GPS, or if you desire field boundary mapping please call Don Jameson or Scott Stephen.

Current Asparagus Research

Agrimanagement continued our research in Asparagus during the 1999 growing season. We choose to focus on three areas of research: stem minor control, management of fertilizer applications, and a study of cover crops in asparagus.

The first area of research, stem minor control, was a focus of Garrett Henry, our Integrated Pest Management Coordinatior. Garrett continues to believe that one of the emerging pests in the production of asparagus is the stem minor. One of the ways he is looking to control this pest is by studying the life cycle of the organism. In the past year he began to track the movement of the stem minor fly. As a continuation of this research, we will continue to observe this pest during pest management scouting.

Our second area of research focused on helping to manage fertilizer applications to asparagus. We looked at many individual nutrients especially, N and K while monitoring the balance of Na and Cl in plant tissue. During the year, we developed a new sampling program to monitor these levels in asparagus. Based roughly on our current Apple and Grape Leaf Analysis programs we took 3-4 samples of Asparagus fern throughout the growing season. We will continue to provide this nutrient assurance monitoring in 2000. It is our belief that the primary factor to maintaining plant vigor is the management of water supply and less on the N supply; given that a 4000 lb crop would remove less than 25 lbs of N /acre. Hence, our continued emphasis on coupling soil moisture monitoring, fern mineral analysis, and traditional pest management scouting.

The third area of research in 1999 was a Western SARE grant project to study the benefit of different cover crops. With assistance from a local grower we studied the use of cover crops to reduce wind erosion. A synopsis of the research follows.

Spring application of manure to the control field area. A typical wind control practice.

"We found the use of cover crops improved soil structure … reducing susceptibility to harvest caused soil damage."

Asparagus Cover Crop Research

Sometime in early March, the full report of this research will be available on the Western Region SARE website at:

Http://wsare.usu.edu/

You can also contact the Western Region SARE:

wsare@mendel.usu.edu

The basic premise of this research was to determine if the planting of a cover crop in March could protect the soil surface from wind blown erosion, when compared to the conventional practice of spreading manure across the field. A wide variety of cover crops were used including cereal grains and peas.

A standard application of manure on an asparagus field is 15 tons of feedlot manure per acre. When a grower applies a layer of manure to a field they increase the overall N supply available to the crop. However, this application can often result in a level of N, 10 to 15 times that used by the crop.

This experiment used a wide selection of cover crops including peas and spring varieties of oats, barley, wheat and triticale. Each of these covers was chosen because it has early spring growth, large root system, and low cost. The field was mapped and each cover crop was planted in a separate area. These crops were planted from a front mounted 5' drill box on a tractor pulling a rotovator that shaped the beds. The seed was thus spread and incorporated in a single pass.

The cover crops were moderately established two and a half weeks later. The growth of the peas, barley and triticale sample areas was relatively equal. The oat and spring wheat emerges more sparsely and showed slower growth.

By selecting peas as a cover crop a grower has the ability to maintain weed control via *Trifluralin*. In addition, peas have the ability to fix small amounts of organic N into the soil.

The cover crops were treated and killed 3-5 days before lay-up. Because of the large amount of excess N from manure treatments of past years in the soil, residual soil samples did not show a measurable gain in N from the peas in comparison to other crops.

Observations during spring and summer asparagus harvest showed less scaring damage in areas with cover crops. Also the soil helped to provide increased soil structure protection normally suffered during harvest within picker's walking paths.

If you have any questions, please check out the full report and/or give us a call at the office.

CHECKOUT OUR NEW WEBSITE: WWW.AGRIMGT.COM

Risk Management

A session on Risk Management was presented by Mr. David Paul, Director of the Spokane Regional Office, USDA, Risk Management Agency, at the 2000 Mint Meeting. They are currently offering (2000 growing season) a pilot program to lower the losses on mint production. We were able to get extra packets of the information at the meeting for those of you who were absent.

This concept is very interesting and we believe it merits consideration in an industry suffering through a time of narrow profit margins. Any time you can limit risk it should be considered. This program is currently in place for potato growers and has been widely accepted in the industry.

Just to Note: The broad subject of Risk Management was the theme of our seminar in late May of 1999. Because we see recognize the value and opportunity in the wide array of insurance products now available, we have enclosed a summary sheet with this newsletter showing the availability this program throughout commodity production.

Agrimanagement's Mission Statement

Agrimanagement is an agricultural consulting company that provides production services, independent of product sales, to farmers and orchardists. Our main objective is to enable growers to be more efficient and achieve higher profitability. We achieve this by applying ag-science principles and techniques to address the needs and problems of the modern farmer. Our reputation is based on providing reliable, objective, timely, and affordable services adapted to individual client needs. We maintain a high level of professionalism and respect the proprietary nature of the information we collect and analyze.

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