

# REPORT



## FARM BUSINESS MANAGEMENT NEWSLETTER

January 2004



### Happy New Year!

My best wishes to all of you and your families. Thank you for being a part of Riverland's farm management education program for the past year. I am looking forward to another productive year.

### Coming Up: Opportunities to Learn More

(Note that classes and meetings will not be conducted as scheduled if the local schools are closed because of weather. If in doubt, please call before leaving home.)

- \* **Tuesday, January 20, 8 a.m. Marketing Meeting**—This is the one we were snowed out of last month. For one hour, we will discuss Basis and Cost-to-carry. We meet at the Ostrander Farmers Co-op Elevator office.
- \* **Tuesday, January 20, 1 p.m. at the Spring Valley Library, Agronomy Issues with Lynn Lagerstedt**— Lynn is the owner of FarmTech Crop Services in Adams. He will answer all of the following questions, and much more:
  - Should protection genetics decide the hybrids you plant?
  - Does convenience dictate your pest protection program?
  - Whose soil recommendation do we follow?
  - What do we do about high-priced nitrogen?
  - How can we scout for pests most effectively?
- \* **Tuesday, February 10, 1 p.m. at the Spring Valley Library, Crop Insurance with Gary Hachfeldt, extension educator**— What kind of crop insurance should I have? How much should it cost? How do I decide?
- \* **Tuesday, February 17, 8 a.m. Marketing Meeting**— Ostrander Farmers Co-op Elevator office.
- \* **Tuesday, March 2, 1 p.m. at the Spring Valley Library, Farm Transfer & Estate Planning, Gary Hachfeldt, extension educator**— It is never too early or too late to think about what you own and how to make sure it is used the way you want it once you are gone.
- \* **Tuesday, March 16, 8 a.m. Marketing Meeting**— Ostrander Farmers Co-op Elevator office.

## Comparing Hybrids

I have never been particularly adept at livestock judging. I can tell a very good cow or pig from a very bad cow or pig, but choosing the best animal from among two very good ones gives me trouble.

How do you tell a good corn hybrid from a bad one? Sometimes it is obvious, but most of the time we are trying from among hybrids that are good and very good.

Riverland Community College at Albert Lea (Barry Kurtz, instructor) has conducted corn yield demonstration plots since 1974. They have kept track of a lot of data. From year to year they have shown that the difference between the best hybrid in their plots and the worst hybrid in their plots has ranged from 26.9 bushels per acre in 1975 up to 67.2 bushels per acre in 1998. This means that choosing the wrong hybrid could cost you from a quarter to a third of your crop.

If you, like me, can just tell the very best from the very worst, there is advantage in that. Records show that if you can pick from the top 25% of all hybrids instead of from the worst 25% of all hybrids, then you can cut your losses in half. So, instead of losing from 25% to 33% of your crop to a big mistake in hybrid selection, you reduce the cost of your mistake down to a 12% to 16.5% yield loss.



Try not to be too hard on yourself. Sometimes the best variety one year is not a good choice the next year due to changing weather, insect or disease conditions. I recommend that you do some studying of your analysis report. Are your yields

always close to the top of the range? If not, why not?

Avoid making the big mistakes. Find out what works in your area and on your farm and go with those strengths.

## The Biggest News— Mad Cow

(I wrote this, so don't blame anyone else. Wayne)

The single case of Mad Cow disease found in Washington is sweeping the media. How bad will it be? We don't know yet. I have been hoping for some big news in another part of the world to take the media attention away from reporting something that we know little about. This would give the industry and government some time to adjust. Here are a few questions and the answers about Mad Cow disease or BSE (Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy) that have come up.

### *What causes Mad Cow disease?*

Mad Cow disease is thought to be caused by a particular type of protein called a "prion". A prion is not a virus, but has some traits of a virus. It is not a bacteria and cannot be spread like the flu, a cold, or through contact. Prions are found in animal with Mad Cow disease, but how prions may cause Mad Cow disease is not understood.

*What is Mad Cow disease?* It is called Mad Cow disease because cows that have the disease often stumble and fall (you've seen the video) as the disease progresses. The disease causes a deterioration of the brain as very small lesions form on the surface of the brain. Mad Cow disease is not Alzheimer's and it is not Chronic Wasting Disease. Some of the characteristics of these diseases are common to Mad Cow disease, but they are not the same disease.

*How dangerous is Mad Cow disease to humans?* The disease in humans is called variant Creutzfeldt-Jacobs disease. It is relatively difficult for humans to get this disease. Humans must somehow get the prions into their systems by eating infected animal tissues. Meat (the muscle portion) and milk do not transmit the prions that cause the disease. Only the brain and spinal column contain the prions, so people who get infected must somehow ingest part of the nervous system of the animal.

### *What is the likelihood of being infected through eating meat?*

In the United Kingdom, almost 200,000 cows were found to be infected by Mad Cow disease, while only about 170 people have died from the disease. The chances are low, but that's bad enough.

### *Can infected meat be made safe by cooking?*

No. Prions are almost indestructible. Only extreme heat (industrial temperatures) over long periods of time will break them down. A researcher claims to have found a way to heat and pressurize meat to make it safe, but that has not been proven necessary or cost-effective.

### *Can other animals get Mad Cow disease?*

This disease is evidently confined to mammal. Dogs, cats, fox, coyotes and the vermin walking around the farmyard are susceptible. So far, poultry seems to be totally immune.



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## Preliminary 2003 Yield Report

**2003** yields of corn and soybeans registered all over the map, depending on where the thunderstorms happened to bless you, or not.

I did a little tabulation during tax estimate season for some of you. Let's see how close we are to an overall average when we see the area analysis in March.

So far, on just over 2000 acres of corn, the average yield is 151.9 bushels per acre with a range in yield from 90 bushels per acre to 175 bushels per acre. Soybeans on just under 2000 acres average 23.97 bushels per acre, with a range in yield from about 20 bushels per acre up to 45 bushels per acre.