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Observations

If Spring is one thing it is unpredictable. This is one reason it is always beneficial to have a well thought out plan of attack. The reason I say that is no matter how large your operation it seems everything needs to be done all at once. The good thing is most of our equipment can do quite a few acres per day so it doesn't take as long as it used to take. The dilemma I see people struggling with today is how to balance correct timing of the application with the perceived savings by doing the work ourselves. All too often, we incorrectly assume the money we save by doing it ourselves will outweigh any possible losses incurred by missing the timing window for optimum control.

Let me use a couple of examples. Most of the customers I consult with on a regular basis are long done streaming fertilizer. Most of the recommendations we made were applied in December, or early January. Why so early you ask? Here's why. The decision to use additional fertilizer comes usually from a soil test. That test will define where in the soil profile your fertilizer is located. That soil test needs to be taken when you least want to be out in the field punching holes in the ground, late November or December. The reason you put on additional fertilizer is to get it in position to do some good for the plant when the demand is highest and most critical. Where are the plants roots now? How fast are they growing? On fields planted relatively early, first half of September, they are already in the bottom of the second foot. In order to have any chance of getting fertilizer to the bottom of the second foot in time to do any good, you need to have it applied early enough so any additional rainfall will facilitate the movement of the N and S to a place the plant can utilize it. This can happen relatively easily because fertilizer in the Nitrate form, NO_3 , is soluble enough do just that. Fertilizer in the Nitrite form NO_2 , is unconverted therefore unusable by the plant. Most nitrogen converts when soil temps are 54° or higher. The later the application is made, the less likely you are to accomplish the mission. Remember, roots follow moisture not fertilizer. One other reason for the early application is during December and early January the cost of liquid fertilizer is quite often at its historic low point for the year. You can easily save \$30 to \$40/ton over an early spring application. My point here... having a plan and executing it are critical to the health of the crop. So, the relevant question here is this—it's not an issue of how much money you spent playing fertilizer catchup, but when you spent it! A custom guy can stream 1000 acres in a day, for a cost of \$8.00/acre. If it cost you \$4.00 an acre to do it yourself, a month and a half late, how much money did you actually save? I can make a pretty strong case for not very much. Late spring temperatures are warmer which means increased risk of volatilization, chances for rain are less, and the plant is growing rapidly, both above ground and below. Will streaming help small wheat? Almost always. Will it help big wheat? Yes, but it has to be done at the proper time. March is not the right time.

If you find yourself in the position of being behind the curve with fertility, why not consider getting the nutrients into the plant another way, through the vegetation. I mean after all, with wheat in the late tillering stage and about to joint, why not, it's time to spray for broadleaves anyway. If you need 50#s of N, this strategy won't work. You have made a serious mistake in executing your plan. Do not put yourself in this position. Foliar feeding wheat has a long history and research has proven it can be done very successfully with little pain involved. Okay, if we are limited to how much foliar we can put on, so be it. Typically, you do not want to exceed 50% of the spray solution with fertilizer. So, bump your application rate up from 5 gallons to 10, or even 20 gallons per acre. At a 10-gallon rate you can put in 5 gallons of solution 32 or better yet, 25-0-0-3. 25-0-0-3 won't burn the leaves like 32 will. Five gallons on 25-0-0-3 will add 12.5#s of N and 1.5#s of S right into the plant. Once the nutrients are in the plant, they will get to the roots just fine. Plus, it will enhance the activity of most herbicides you are using. Bottom line here... know where your nutrients are! Check them often. Know what your crop's nutritional requirements are at each stage of development, and most of all have a plan, execute the plan.

Speaking of a plan, when do you do your budget? Most of you do it at the last minute. Soooo... if you are going to spend money on fertilizer why not spend it at the right time! What do I mean? I mean why not take advantage of the lowest prices of the year and pre-buy a portion of your anticipated needs? If you are spending \$100,000 in May and paying in June, why not consider the purchase in December or January when fertilizer prices are low and you can save a considerable amount of money. Everyone's circumstances vary but the math is pretty easy to figure out. If the interest rate is 6% and you are borrowing \$100,000 for six months it cost you \$3000 in interest. So, you have to save more than \$3000 in the cost of your fertilizer right! In January that is fairly easy to do. Some fertilizer guys will tell you it doesn't work that way... find another one! It works just fine. This year you would have doubled the money you spent on interest.

Alfalfa Meeting March 5th, 2018 was a hit!

Many thanks to our presenters early this month. Dr. Don Miller did a wonderful job of explaining the merits of Low Lignin Alfalfa and the research and application of Salt Tolerant Alfalfa. His takeaway point on the Salt Tolerant products was to avoid getting confused between true salinity tolerance and soils with high pH, and highly alkaline soils. They are not the same animal. When soils are above 8.4 pH there is not much we can do about growing alfalfa. The salt tolerance was developed by recurrent selection, conventional breeding techniques selecting tolerance from elite lines of Alforex products.

Butch Brogiotti from Crop Production Services gave a great presentation about how to fertilize alfalfa effectively and the control of weeds in an alfalfa crop. His 32 years of experience really opened some eyes about soil health and management strategies. He made the point that many of our wells, and to a lesser extent our Bureau water has higher than normal sodium content. He gave our guests some management ideas to consider regarding both treating the water and neutralizing the soil pH so water and nutrients can actually penetrate the soil and be more beneficial to the plants.

Corey Ashbeck gave us a brief presentation on micro-nutrients and how beneficial they can be to alfalfa. Buford Howell did a great job of outlining the newest products in the Alforex lineup and we visited about their application in the Columbia Basin. This meeting was very successful. We will repeat it next year a little earlier in the year. I apologize for the timing, spring came ripping around the corner and caught many of us deep into the throws of spring work preparation.

Additions

What do I mean, additions? Well, we have had several requests for meters on our chemical shuttles. We listened and we can now offer you bottom pull metered measuring for those tough metering jobs that require more precise measurements. The best thing about these is the "No Touch" attribute. No more sloppy measuring, personal protective equipment, containers to clean, splash in the wind, and blow off the truck, etc., etc. These metered pumping systems do about 20 gallons per minute, hang right on the cage of the shuttle and are totally enclosed. Viton seals, chems and fertilizers no issues at all. CT-6 high flow pump, cage tank bracket, 8' suction hose, 12' EPDM discharge hose and nozzle valve w/ SEM10ft meter. They are normally \$1514. each but the company we buy them from is having a spring sale now, all in all done \$654.00. It may not be that critical for the Round Up but what about the Paraquat next fall? Purchasing chemicals in bulk shuttles usually saves you at least \$1.00 per gallon. Think about the liability associated with your present system, and how you can limit that once and for all.

Do a Google search for a chemical premix tank called the "Handler". I saw my first one in action last week and it was pretty cool. It allows you to shove a 2 ½ gallon container of chemical down inside the tank onto a razor-sharp cutting device that evacuates the product in the premix container from the bottom without opening the containers top. Then, while the jug is still on the evacuator you can turn a valve and rinse the jug instantly before you remove it from the premix tank. No lids in the tank, no foil paper all over, and you have a very clean jug to recycle when you get home. This is a sweet deal. Shoot, it could almost make spraying fun.

Cattlemen: Cereals Provide the Best Spring Grazing Option

We get a lot of questions about grazing options for cattle. By far the best spring grazing results come from fall planted crops. Just think about that for a minute. The fall planted cereal, no matter which one, will have a bonafide 45-day head start over anything spring planted. Most winter cereals suited for grazing are fairly dormant, but when they break dormancy they grow quickly. Triticale and some ryes provide great grazing tolerance. Adding a forage brassica is a good idea just because it produces a lot of dry matter early in the fall while the cereals are getting established. Begin grazing when the plants are 6" to 8" tall. For optimizing the field capacity, move the animals across the field quickly using a hot wire. This allows the just grazed portion to recover so you can come back on it later. If you have the ability, add some fertilizer between grazing cycles but be careful. Give the plants at least 8 days to metabolize any additional nitrogen that might create issues of Nitrate poisoning. Adding an annual rye grass can be beneficial also. It is very fast growing and complements the cereals. One other option to enhance grazing in the spring is to stage your plantings. This way the cattle have access to forage cereals at the optimum stages of development to maximize weight gains and you can stretch the season for the best results.

These forage systems can be very vegetative. Many times, growers don't get their animals out grazing fast enough. When cereal forage gets too mature the quality of the forage declines rapidly. If managed properly the quality of these forages can be quite high allowing stocker calf gains of 2 to 3 pounds per day. Cereal forages can also support the higher requirements of a cow in early lactation without the need for supplementation. If properly managed 2 to 4 AUM's per acre can be grazed in the Columbia Basin. If you are considering a cover crop over the winter, this is the only thing that makes much sense to me. You just have to have access to cattle to recover your costs. This is especially true on non-irrigated land.

Are Clovers Worth Including in the Pasture?

One of the best summaries of the benefits of clover in grass pastures was presented 33 years ago by forage scientists Joe Burns and J.E. Standaert at an international workshop. Burns, a forage agronomist with the USDA ARS in Raleigh N.C. and Standaert, an economist at North Carolina State University summarized 38 different research reports from 19 states. I am going to summarize the results. In these reports there were 42 experiments where there was a direct comparison of beef cattle weight gains between a grass plus legume pasture and a pure grass pasture with N fertilizer applied. Of those trials 90% reported improved average daily gains for the beef cattle in the mixed legume-grass pasture compared to the monoculture grass. The average boost in Average Daily Gain was 18%.

In the 38 studies reporting total gain per acre, the grass plus clover pastures also produced 18% more beef per acre on average. However, the enhanced gain per acre was much more variable and not reliable. Only half of the studies resulted in a real improvement in beef productivity per acre, 27% resulted in no difference and 23% resulted in a significant drop in gain per acre.

The study went on to say the selection of the right grass and clover combination make a difference. The grass plus clover tends to be riskier in regions with more variable rainfall, poorer soil conditions and hotter and more subtropical weather. The clover can fill in holes in the grass and reduce weed competition, that is hard to measure.

The alternative to growing clover is the use of Nitrogen fertilizer. There is a cost associated with this also. The study concluded that clover used in pastures in cooler climates have a better chance of success than in warmer climates. The use of Nitrogen in place of clover is most successful in circumstance where N costs are lower rather than higher.

Mixtures of grass and clover generally enhance individual animal performance and usually sustain animal productivity per acre at levels that are similar to or slightly better than grass pastures fertilized with N. The economics of using grass plus clover pastures varies from site to site, but the chances of profitable clover use are greatest when growing cool-season pastures, a stand life of three or more years is expected, and N prices are moderate to high.

Are clovers worth it? Usually but not always.

A substantial portion of this item was derived from an article in Hay and Forage Grower, by Dennis Hancock.



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Welcome Kevin Starring

We want to introduce Kevin Starring to you. Kevin has a long history in the area just north of Connell in Adams County. He managed the seed division for Union Elevator and was later Superintendent of all outside operations. He brings a lot of experience to our business and we hope you will come in and introduce yourself to Kevin soon.

Time to wrap it up—Remember our summer grower appreciation meeting and BBQ this year is **June 7th, 2018 at the Kahlotus Grange Hall**. Meeting begins at 1:30 PM. BBQ 4:30 PM. Our featured speaker this year is Kevin Duling of KDI Marketing. Kevin is a marketing genius. He manages marketing for some of the biggest farms in the PNW. What would you pay to have a professional watching the markets 24 hours a day just for you? Yes, the markets are open 24 hours a day. Didn't know that did you! He can do that for you! Come and hear Kevin in person. Hear his forecast for wheat pricing going forward in a time period that is by definition uncertain. Ever heard of NAFTA, TPP, bilateral trade agreements, KORUS, USDA estimates of world supply and demand? He has all the tools. He can help you with one of the functions of your business where you may be lacking! Remember what we said about doing what you love very well and outsourcing the things you don't do so well. I know for a fact, most of you do a mediocre job at best at your marketing. We hedge all of our seed, every kernel, and we buy it from you, that is why I know you can use some good advice. Most of your marketing plans are based on the theory of "when I need money, I sell." Come and listen to Kevin, he has the unique ability of putting marketing into context; this meeting will be worth the trip, plus Craig has planned a grand meal, and I do mean grand! Grand is defined this year as beef and sea food. Other speakers will be announced as they confirm their schedules. Watch for your invitation in the mail.

What a world we live in—got to love it! Dana and Craig