

“Ag Happenings”

brought to you by

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Jim's Thoughts

I would like to wish each of our customers a Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year. It is a great time to celebrate the birth of Jesus with family and friends.

Winter is a time to reflect on what happened this past year and start making plans to improve your operation for next year. In working with all our customers we have seen cattle prices at an all time record high and at the same time we've seen crop prices go

from record highs to almost record lows, in one year! Agriculture is full of surprises and uncertainty but there is no better industry to be associated with and no better people to work with every year.

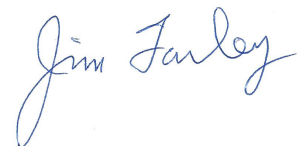
As you plan for this next year be sure to do what you can to improve your beef operation. At probably no time in history have you been able to afford improving your pastures to increase stocking rates and the

gain more than pays the expense. On the other end of the scale our crop farmers are scrambling to figure out crop alternatives that will pay for land, expenses and maybe put a few groceries on the table. I don't think we would know what to do if both crops and livestock did well at the same time!

Either way, it's a good time to think about soil testing. A soil test gives you an indication of which nutrients are low, or out of balance and your soil pH. We have already analyzed quite a few soil samples and I am seeing a lot of low pH's this year. A low pH causes the grass to thin out and the fertilizer efficiency to be reduced by as much as 50%. When soil pH goes below 5.5 we make applications of lime or possibly manure to raise soil pH. Wintertime is the best time to apply lime because lime works slowly and needs to be out and get some rain before the grass greens up in the spring.

If you want to soil sample, you can borrow a probe from us and we'll show you how to take your own samples or we can visit your place and take them for you. Just give us a call to get on the list but remember to call soon before our busy season begins this Spring.

Thanks for your business and have a great year in 2015.



Cattle and Calves

Jim mentioned the beef business in his column and let me take a minute to discuss what these prices mean for our cow/calf producer. First, we are seeing calves sell from just over \$2 a pound to almost \$3 depending on the type and weight. This is outstanding and means we are finally making a profit in the cattle business. This also means that you as a producer should be doing all you can to increase your pounds of weaned calves. What does this mean, pounds of weaned calves?

Well, almost all of the beef producers in this area are cow/calf producers and your income comes from selling cull cows and weaned calves. So if you have a higher conception rate, a high percentage calving rate, low percent mortality in cows and calves, good herd health, excellent gain in calves and cows that gain weight in the after weaning and before calving then you make more money!

Grain producers are taking it on the chin this year with low prices but what that means is low supplement prices for cow/calf producers. In fact this year you can afford to feed a calf in your lot and still make money. At 6 pounds of feed (cost \$0.96) to make one pound of gain (\$2.50) I think you can afford to feed calves grain this year.

That is feeding grain. We know you can afford to pasture cattle a lot cheaper than feeding grain and this is the year to improve those pastures to make money on the gain. Jim mentioned many pastures needing lime, this is the year it pays to lime. A lot of soil samples show a real need for phosphorus and potassium, this is the year it pays to correct fertility problems. We know that for every pound of weeds you control with a herbicide you make 2-5 pounds of grass, this is the year to control weeds. This is not the year to do things the way you have in the

past. Make a new year's resolution that this is the year to take advantage of these high cattle prices by improving your pastures and increasing your weaned pounds of beef per acre.



Small Grain Weeds

There has been a lot of small grains planted over the last 3 months. It is hopeful that the needed rains will come based on all these El Nino reports and maybe we will have a good year with lots of forage. So far the grain looks great and even some dairymen have made an early cutting based on good growth this fall.

One of the things we are seeing this fall with the rains that we have received is that the grain is growing good and so are the WEEDS! Already henbit, shepherd's-purse and mustards are doing every bit as good as the grain and are poised to be a problem. Where you have weeds, you don't have small grain.

We have several good weed control products available and prices are not too bad but with weeds, sooner is always better. It is much easier to control these weeds before they get too big and already henbit is

flowering. Go check out your fields and then give us a call to spray that mess early!

Wintertime Spraying Roundup



Treated

I had this picture in a past newsletter but I want to show you now so you don't forget to spray. This picture shows you a coastal bermudagrass hay field that was treated with glyphosate (Roundup) in February before the bermudagrass greened up. The glyphosate treatment on the left killed out the winter weeds and grasses leaving a clean field for the coastal and a clean first hay cutting. Cost of this treatment is minimal but the results are fantastic.

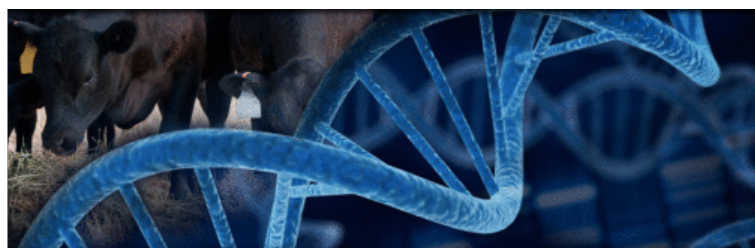
Pecan Vivipary (Sprouting)

The picture to the right shows a mature pecan sprouting in the shell. This has been a common



problem and one that has had growers frustrated. One of the trees in my yard suffered from vivipary while the other three did not. It happens that the one tree with vivipary had larger pecans which is also typical.

Vivipary is caused by stress. Usually we can say that the stress is a lack of water as the tree goes into fall but there are other stresses that can cause vivipary including extreme high and low temperatures in fall. What happens is the nut being in the shuck in a warm, humid environment begins to sprout instead of just opening up. Once sprouting begins the nut is worthless as you probably know if you taste one.



Cattle Genomics

I recently attended an interesting program on Dairy Cattle Genomics and thought you might have an interest in what is happening in that science. Genomics is the study of genetics combined with the study of DNA, including mapping the genome. It is a science that is extremely technical and involves over 3 billion DNA base pairs in every cell. Basically it takes a lot of computer power to study it.

In this meeting we learned how they are now able to take DNA samples from an individual animal and tell you how that animal will perform based on the trait you selected or want. So, if you want to

increase your herds milking ability or reproductive efficiency or even calf size, through genomics you can identify individuals that have those traits. This saves you making crosses and waiting on the calves to see if the traits are expressed. It also allows you to keep the right heifers at birth versus spending money and time growing them out to calving and being disappointed. Look for this science to help our purebred breeds make rapid advancement and improvement.

Row Crop Thoughts

Row crops are not a great subject after this past year. Cotton started out the year with modest prices but as the year continued they dropped low enough for program prices to kick in. Corn and sorghum kept dropping all year and if you raised guar in the past you know the problems getting paid.

All that said we will still plant row crops this next year. Most row crop farmers

have land that is only suited to crops - no fences, rented land, etc. Because it is cropland we have to have a crop to plant and one we hope doesn't lose money. Cotton is still good on irrigated land and some better dryland. Corn silage will work for dairies on irrigated fields. Sorghum will be a challenge since we now have sugarcane aphid but we need feed for dairy



cows. Guar is interesting since we now have a new company buying guar and there are not many crops that make the money guar can on dryland fields. Sesame is an option since the company is well established and sesame is easy to grow and price is fair. Sunflower might be possible but the market is far from us. We have options but producers will have to be good marketers as well as farms in 2015!

Soil Acidification

Jim talked about

low soil pH in his opening comments and many soils in our area have this condition but how does soil pH go

lower? Most of the soils in our area have a

high sand content. Sands have a low to no cation exchange capacity and as a result they can have low pH. Cation exchange capacity refers to a soil's ability to hold cations like calcium, magnesium, ammonium, etc. These cations are + charges and like magnets they are bound onto the negative soil particle. Unfortunately our sands are very weak in cation exchange capacity and so these good cations can be replaced by bad ones

like hydrogen which lowers soil pH.

Unfortunately our nitrogen fertilizers contain ammonium (NH_4^+) which when applied, changes to nitrate and leaves hydrogen behind. These hydrogens cause soil pH to drop over time. We add lime with calcium which then kicks the hydrogen off and so raises soil pH.

