



# U.P. Ag Connections Newsletter

May 2017

Agricultural News from MSU Extension and AgBioResearch

Volume 21 Issue 5

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### ***What can you do to ease the current income squeeze from low farm commodity prices? Here are a few ideas from the crop side:***

**Fine tune your fertilizer/manure program**—If you think soil testing isn't that important, think it over again. A systematic whole-farm soil testing program is the backbone of a good crop nutrient plan. Without soil test report information, you can only guess what's going on regarding fertilizer needs. We recommend a maximum of 20 acres per soil test. This may seem like 'overkill', but soil variability can be surprising, even within a larger field that looks uniform. Testing fields on a 3-year schedule is suggested. The cost is low, around \$0.34 per acre each year, based on 3-year sampling schedule and 20 acre max per sample. The information you gain can help you make good fertilizer decisions. It may allow for reduction in nutrient rates if nutrient levels are adequate or high. It may call for increased nutrient application leading to higher yields and quality at an economic rate. Keep the end result in mind.

Utilizing a custom blended fertilizer based on soil test information instead of a pre-blended fertilizer (such as 19-19-19) at a 'traditional' rate based on past practice can reduce your outlay for unnecessary nutrients. Several reputable and dependable ag soil testing labs are available, including the MSU Plant and Soil Testing Laboratory. Do the soil testing yourself or get your ag supplier or consultant to do it for you. Collection of a quality, representative sample is important. You can find instructions at the MSU soil lab website (<http://www.spnl.msu.edu/>) or contact your local MSU Extension office. The main thing is to get it done and use the information.

Lime, if needed, is the first place to spend at least some of your nutrient budget. Correcting low soil pH will make existing soil fertility more available to crops. Lime is not a 'no-brainer'. It must be spread as accurately as possible and incorporated thoroughly to the intended depth. If not incorporated, lime application should be limited to not more than one ton per acre annually.

If you have a large enough volume of stored manure, get a manure sample tested for nutrient content. There can be significant difference from farm

to farm. Utilize your manure resource strategically as an important part of your fertilizer program. Some farms underutilize manure because of the time and money used to haul it, or maybe because a spreader isn't available. Compare the value of the manure nutrients with the costs associated with hauling and spreading. On-farm composting can reduce manure volume and concentrate nutrients.

**Review your seeding rates**—Each 2,000 corn seeds planted per acre increases seed costs \$6.88 per acre using a per bag seed cost of \$275. At a corn price of \$4.30 per bushel, an additional 1.6 bushels per acre yield would be necessary to cover the increased seed cost. Depending on your past seeding rate, you might be able to reduce it a little and save a few dollars. Other ways to reduce corn planting costs are switching genetics and opting for fewer traits.

Seeding rates for small grains can also be fine-tuned. Traditionally, we have used the old 'bushels per acre' approach: oats – 3 bushels per acre, winter wheat and spring barley – 2.5 bushels per acre. For oats, barley and wheat, a seeding rate of 1.3 – 1.5 million seeds per acre (28-34 seeds per square foot) is a better goal. test weight and genetics result in differences among varieties in seed count per pound. Oat seed can range from 12,000 to 17,000 seeds per lb. If seed counts are not readily available, do your own. Weigh an ounce of seed on an electronic scale, count the seeds and multiply by 16 to get the number of seeds per pound. At planting, figure 10-20% loss due to less than 100% germination and stand establishment losses.

**Spray your own crops**—If you have your own sprayer and are confident that you can do a good job in a timely manner, eliminating the application cost of custom spraying over a few hundred acres can save you money. You can also shop around for the best deal on pesticides.

**Carefully consider the risks and benefits of spending money on 'miracle products'** - Look for unbiased research to support the claims made by companies marketing new products. They may work well for you, or maybe not.

Have a safe & successful growing season this year.

*Jim Isleib, MSU Extension Educator<sub>1</sub>*

Michigan State University

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## Plan now for corn silage success, Part 1: Hybrid Selection

By Jim Isleib, Extension Educator

*Hybrid selection, crop nutrient planning, and flexible harvest management planning early can pay off at harvest and feeding time*

Most farmers that feed corn silage already have a plan for 2017. A thoughtful review of your plans for corn silage could have a positive impact on your results. Hybrid selection is a big part of planning for a good corn silage year.

The days of selecting your corn silage field because it's the poorer looking part of your total corn acres are pretty much gone. Much more attention is now given to the potential silage characteristics of corn hybrids. Corn hybrid trials for silage quality characteristics provide excellent selection tools. Michigan State University Extension bulletin E-431 "[2016 Michigan Corn Hybrids Compared](#)" contains results of corn silage and grain trials throughout all 5 maturity zones within our state. Good corn hybrid comparison information is also available from the University of Wisconsin "[2016 Wisconsin Corn Hybrid Performance Trials](#)", Purdue University "[2016 Purdue Corn and Soybean Performance Trials](#)" and from other Great Lakes region land grant universities.

A combination of results from replicated and un-biased trials such as University testing programs, information from seed companies, and results from on-farm strip trials, if available, should all be used when making seed selections.

Characteristics of most importance include:

- **Hybrid maturity:** Longer season hybrids generally result in higher silage yields. If a full-season harvest is expected, then a maturity 5-10 days longer than the relative maturity of hybrids selected for grain harvest is appropriate. However, if early harvest for silage, or potential harvest for grain is a strong consideration, then a shorter season silage hybrid should be used. Widening the *harvest window* by including silage hybrids with a range of relative maturity can provide farmers with more flexibility to chop the corn at its optimum moisture content. It will also improve the chances for better pollination if dry weather occurs during tasseling and pollen shed.
- **Yield and quality:** Silage yield is commonly reported in terms of dry matter (DM) per acre and as 'wet' yield (65% moisture). This allows for fair comparison between hybrids harvested at different whole-plant moistures. Yield and quality go hand-in-hand when selecting corn hybrids for silage. Quality characteristics can be complicated. Most Michigan State University dairy

nutritionists agree that neutral detergent fiber (NDF) is a key quality component of corn silage hybrids. This number is an indicator of the digestibility of fiber in silage produced from a hybrid, with lower NDF indicating higher fiber digestibility. Normal range of NDF has been estimated from between 37.6 – 49.6 (source: [dairyone.com/](#)). If corn silage NDF on your farm is poor in a given year, the problem can be addressed by grouping cattle and feeding appropriately. High producing cows benefit most from increased fiber digestibility, with increased dry matter intake and milk yield response. Lower digestible fiber corn silage can be fed to low production cows, or dry cows far off from freshening. Feed testing and consulting with your dairy nutritionist or local MSU extension dairy educator can help while planning.

- **Agronomic traits:** Keep in mind that some traits relating to insect and disease resistance may be less important in corn intended for silage than in corn intended for grain. Herbicide and corn borer resistance will remain important. Corn rootworm resistance may not be as important, since corn is often planted following alfalfa on Michigan dairy farms, with resulting lower pressure from corn rootworm during that year. This is due to the anticipated earlier harvest date. Take a look at the 2017 version of '[The handy Bt trait table for U.S. corn production](#)' compiled by MSU field crop entomologist Dr. Chris DiFonzo, Pat Porter, Texas A&M University and Kelley Tilmon, The Ohio State University. Drought tolerance is also important on coarser textured soils, or where soil moisture may be depleted.

Taking the time now to review silage corn hybrid information from a variety of sources can help you fine-tune your hybrid selection for improved silage yield and quality, and reduced risk. Content for this article was adapted from '[Corn Hybrid Silage Selection](#)' by Jeff Coulter, University of Minnesota and '[Hybrid selection](#)' from Corn Agronomy, University of Wisconsin Extension.

Part 2 of this article will focus on crop nutrient and harvest planning.

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# The MSU Extension **Lawn & Garden Hotline** has officially switched to Spring and Summer hours:

**9 am to noon and 1 pm to 4pm—Monday through Friday except holidays**

The MSU Extension Lawn and Garden Hotline is accessed by dialing the toll free number 888-678-3464 and pressing 1 at the prompt.

## *Cottage Food Law Workshops*

This workshop combines the business and food safety aspects of preparing and selling cottage foods safely and successfully under the Michigan Cottage Food Law. Learn what foods can be legally produced, how to label and sell them. Workshops are taught by MSU Extension Educators.

Ironwood May 23 from 6:00 – 8:00 pm

To register: <https://events.anr.msu.edu/event.cfm?eventID=68E15314FB487501>

For questions or more information contact Michelle Walk, MSU Extension at [walkmich@msu.edu](mailto:walkmich@msu.edu) or 906-635-6368



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## *DNR Forest Health Highlights*

Magical Roger Mech and others have produced another annual Forest Health Highlights. A must-read for those with even an inkling of interest in current Michigan forest health issues. This link also provides information about specific pests, too. [http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-30301\\_30830---,00.html](http://www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,4570,7-153-30301_30830---,00.html)

Additionally, the MSAF forest health page has Forest Health Highlights archived back to 2002 (minus a few years). <http://michigansaf.org/ForestInfo/Health/MainHealth.htm>

## U.P. Cover Crop Field Day

May 25th, 2017 11:00– 1:00 pm CT

Brock Family Dairy Farm, south of Carney on US 41

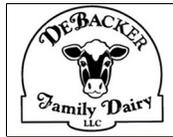
### Event includes:

- Steve and Jake Brock share first hand knowledge of using cover crops on their dairy farm
- Tour the MSU Cover Crop Research Plots
- Receive information from local seed dealers on cover crop seed for purchase
- Free Lunch!

### Thank you sponsors:



Project **GREEN**



If the weather is poor, location will move to Belgiumtown Restaurant  
W4346 Belgiumtown Rd. Stephenson, MI 49887

Questions or concerns:  
Monica Jean, MSU Field Crop Extension Educator  
(906)786-3032 or atkinmon@anr.msu.edu

## Bull Soundness Exams offered in Chatham, May 30

It is time to start thinking about scheduling your bull for a breeding soundness exam to ensure he is READY for the upcoming breeding season.

During the last 5 years of testing by Michigan State University's College of Veterinary Medicine, 19.4% of bulls tested have not passed their BSE. Open cows mean lost income. Feeding bulls that are not performing is a waste of money. Some producers have been lucky and have not had issues with infertile bulls. But those with non-performing bulls have learned the hard way that they lose profit.

Dr. Renee Coyer of Thompson Veterinary Clinic will be taking over the breeding soundness examination program from MSU-CVM. She will be available to test all bulls previously tested by MSU-CVM across the U.P. for \$60/bull.

**MSU Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center  
Tuesday, May 30th**

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## ***Farm Finance Management—Getting Started***

Frank Wardynski—MSU Extension Educator

Many beginning farmers get started in the business because of their passion associated with the production phase of agriculture. Too often, new farmers focus on production management and neglect the financial side of the business. Unless a beginning farmer has a huge savings of cash or can supplement farm losses with off-farm income, the farming operation needs to be profitable to be sustainable.

Farmers should start with a good accounting system and a beginning balance sheet. The farm accounting system does not need to be complicated or sophisticated. Many beginners start with a hand written system. Michigan State University Extension has a publication, [Farm Records Book for Management \(Bulletin-E1144\)](#) that is comprehensive and understandable.

For producers that prefer computers, there are many accounting software programs designed for small business. These programs work well for small farming operations. They are general in their design so the producer will need to build their own list of expense and income account categories. Farmers with more intensive financial accounting needs can find software specifically designed for agriculture. [Michigan State University offers accounting services](#) in the form of a software program with support from campus specialists and local educators.

Regardless of the accounting procedures that a producer decides to use, they need to keep track of receipts and invoices. This can be easily done with a simple filing system

with folders for each month of the year. Simply placing receipts and invoices into the monthly folder and recording transactions into a ledger with pertinent information of date, transaction number such as check number or deposit number, vendor, transaction amount and the account category the transaction will be assigned.

Farmers that implement a good accounting system will find that filing taxes is much easier than a poor or nonexistent system. A good accounting system will also aid in evaluating farm profitability.

Farmers starting a new business should develop a beginning balance sheet. The balance sheet is a listing of all the assets and liabilities of the business. Subtracting the value of liabilities from the value of assets is the net worth of the business. Another balance sheet should be completed at the end of the fiscal year. Comparing beginning and ending year balance sheets will show producers their change in net worth.

At the end of each year, net profit taken from the accounting system and analyzed with beginning and ending balance sheets will determine farm profitability. Farmers can find help with analyzing farm profitability and their financial management practices by contacting a Farm Business Management Educator with Michigan State University. My responsibilities have recently changed and part of time is now spent working on farm business management. If you are interested in an individual meeting, please contact me, Frank Wardynski, MSU Extension Educator at 906-884-4386 or [wardynsk@anr.msu.edu](mailto:wardynsk@anr.msu.edu).



### **Stephenson FFA Alumni Consignment Auction**

Sunday, May 7th  
Noon

**Held at former Machalk's Fence  
River Road, Stephenson, MI**

**For more information:**

Barry Wehner (906) 753-4192  
Donna Buechler (906) 753-4146

## ***Save the Date!***

**MSU Upper Peninsula Research  
and Extension Center**

## **Field Day**

**Saturday, July 29th**

***More details to come in June newsletter!***



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N Townline Road, go 2 miles North to Sale Yard

### 2017 Spring Feeder Cattle Sales

All Sales are on Fridays @ 12 pm  
May 12th

Preconditioned cattle will be sold first on April 21st, proof  
required

- Pre-conditioning program strongly recommended
- All feeders must meet proper TB & ID requirements
- Request cattle be brought in the day before sale
- Bred cattle & breeding bulls may be sold at sales
- Steers in question will be sold as bulls

Sale Barn Telephone (989) 732-5732

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The Upper Peninsula Research and Extension Center facility houses a small grain quality lab that can test grain for various parameters. The lab focuses specifically on malting barley for malt production, but can test moisture and protein on other grains as well. If you have a grain analysis need, contact the lab and see if it can help!

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### Classifieds

2500 small square bales, excellent quality, early June cutting. 200 round bales about 350lb, good quality, Bruce Crossing 906-827-3827

## Market Report

Choice Steers	\$114—\$125 per 100 lbs.
Holstein Steers	\$85—\$102 per 100 lbs.
Hogs	\$61—\$68 per 100 lbs.
Lambs	\$140—\$180 per 100 lbs.
Cull cows	\$50—\$65 per 100 lbs.
Calves	\$75—\$130 per 100 lbs.
Goats	\$150—\$175 per 100 lbs.

### Breeding and Feeder Animals

Grade Holstein cows \$1000—\$1500/head

Grade Holstein bred heifers \$1500—\$2500/head

### Feed Prices across the U.P.

	Avg. \$/cwt	Avg. \$/ton	Price Range
Corn	\$9.60	\$192.00	\$145-244
Soymeal	\$22.14	\$442.75	\$360-552
Oats	\$9.40	\$188.05	\$170-230
Barley	\$9.63	\$192.50	\$140-240
Average price/100 wt. for 1 ton lots			

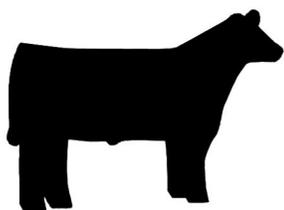
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## Registration now open for The North Farm Short Course Series

The North Farm is hosting a series of short courses starting in May on topics designed for market gardeners, small farms, and skill-seekers interested in gardening and farming. These workshops are an in-depth exploration of farming fundamentals and best practices taught by multiple instructors.

Come to MSU North Farm for four afternoon-long learning sessions with an emphasis on hands-on activities so you can practice what you learn in class with other farmers and gardeners.

**COST: \$30 for each course/\$100 for all 4 courses**

**Farm rate for multiple attendees from one farm - \$45 for each course/\$150 for all 4 courses**

Refreshments and snacks are provided.

**REGISTER AT [WWW.MSUNORTHFARM.ORG](http://WWW.MSUNORTHFARM.ORG)**

Questions?

Contact Abbey Palmer at [palmerab@msu.edu](mailto:palmerab@msu.edu) or 906-439-5058

### SOIL HEALTH

Sunday, May 21 · 1-6pm

Everything you do as a farmer or a gardener is linked to soil. Learn about the physical, biological, and chemical aspects of soil as well as practical soil-building techniques in this get-your-hands-dirty survey of soil health with experts from MAEAP and MSU.

### PERENNIAL FRUIT CROPS

Sunday, June 4 · 1-6pm

From familiar raspberries to “novel” types like goji berries, perennial fruits are gaining popularity with market gardeners and farmers alike. Find out about variety selection, establishment, and cultural practices – including growing in high tunnels – for growing berries in a northern climate with MSU educators on perennial fruit crops.

### ORGANIC SMALL GRAINS

Sunday, July 9 · 1-6pm

The North Farm is conducting research trials in organic small grain production to identify challenges and opportunities in the Upper Peninsula. Come see the research plots, talk with researchers and growers, and discuss some of the realities of growing organic grains in northern climates. Topics will include plot establishment, weed management, pest and disease challenges, and variety selection.

### INSECTS ON THE FARM

Sunday, August 13 · 1-6pm

Insects are important players on the farm – though often thought of as pests and parasites, insects are active in soil health, as pollinators, and even as pest control. Understanding insects in the context of your whole farm ecosystem will help you make informed decisions. Learn best practices from MSU educators on integrated pest management (IPM), native pollinators, and bees.

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***If you do not wish to receive this publication, please contact Michelle at [colema98@msu.edu](mailto:colema98@msu.edu) or (906) 439-5114***

### **Calendar of Events**

- |        |   |
|--------|---|
| May 23 | Michigan Cottage Food Law Workshop—Ironwood (6—8 pm)        |
| May 25 | Cover Crop Field Day—Steve Brock Dairy Farm (11 am—1 pm CT) |
| May 30 | Bull Soundness Exams—MSU UPREC                              |

### **The North Farm Short Course Series (each event running 1—6 pm)**

- |           |                       |
|-----------|-----------------------|
| May 21    | Soil Health           |
| June 4    | Perennial Fruit Crops |
| July 9    | Organic Small Grains  |
| August 13 | Insects on the Farm   |

