

Red Flag Warnings

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. One day recently the national weather service had issued a "red flag warning". I happened to be around some friends and one of them asked me what a red flag warning was. The short answer is that it means that the fire danger is very high and if a fire gets started it may be very difficult, or impossible to control. Obviously during periods of extremely high temperature and extreme drought, fire dangers can be quite high. So what, at this time of year, causes a red flag warning to be issued? Around here, red flag warnings are most likely going to be issued in the late winter and early spring. If we are having periodic snow or rain, the mulch layer close to the soil surface will likely still be moist and that reduces the flammability of that dry vegetation. But at the time of the red flag warning being issued, we'd gone several weeks with no precipitation. The soil surface was dry and so was all the vegetation. So we have all the precursors in place for a high fire risk. All that's missing are the final three elements. First of all is a forecasted wind speed over 15 mph. Winds over 15 can make it very difficult to control a fire. Next, the temperatures were forecast to be near or above 75 degrees. Warmer fuels catch fire more easily. Finally, relative humidity was below 25%. All of these together mean a fire will be difficult to control. So when you hear a red flag warning, please be very careful. Don't start fires, don't burn trash and PLEASE, don't throw smoking materials out the car window! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Keep the Wheat or Graze it Out?

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. A local producer called me up the other day wanting to know if he was thinking crazy because he was considering putting yearlings out on wheat in a few more weeks and letting the cattle graze the wheat out. I assured him that he may be crazy, but we couldn't prove it by this however. Wheat is a great forage. If you aren't wanting to harvest it for grain you can stock it fairly heavily, graze it out and get some pretty cheap gain. The forage quality of wheat pasture is very high. In the late winter, early spring, crude protein can easily be in the 20 to 30% range. As the plants grow through the spring this will drop to 12 to 15% by heading and on down to 9 to 10 percent by soft dough. Dry matter digestibility is very high early in the growth phase, around 80 percent but can still be around 60 percent by soft dough. This is high quality forage. Because of this very high quality, it may be of benefit to also have some free choice prairie hay especially early in the spring grazing period. Since you will be grazing out the wheat you can stock at a pretty heavy rate, basically about 1 acre per stocker and possibly even just 3/4 acre per head if the wheat is growing really fast. There are a couple of things to be on the lookout for when you do this. The first is bloat. Certainly never put hungry cattle straight into a wheat pasture setting - it's just asking for trouble. Fill them up before you turn them out and then keep an eye on them. You can also utilize Rumenin or Bovatec to minimize bloat risk. The other problem is grass tetany. For this reason I'd recommend using a mineral supplement with 6 - 8% magnesium. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Green up Fungicides

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. In recent years there has been increasing interest in applying fungicides, often with herbicide and/or fertilizer, at wheat green up. The intent being to protect the wheat plants from early season wheat diseases like tan spot, powdery mildew, even overwintering leaf rust and maybe even some speckled leaf blotch. University researchers have spent many years looking at this. They looked at full rates of fungicides, half rates of fungicides, split applications at various times in the vegetative stages of growth after winter dormancy.

Invariably they have found consistently lower levels of all fungal leaf diseases. They have found that the plants look better and have more healthy leaf tissue. What they also found was that none of this equated to increased yields. All of the better looking plants early in the season didn't mean diddly squat when the combines rolled through the fields at harvest. This shouldn't be a surprise to anyone. We know that over 75% of the yield of a wheat plant comes down to the health of the flag leaf. Sure, we need a healthy plant that is well established in the fall with good tillering and adequate nutrition. After that we need temperatures that aren't too hot during grain fill and most importantly we have to keep the flag leaf healthy. The economics of wheat production in 2017 are going to be tough. I can not recommend spending money on an early season fungicide application. Save your money now. Monitor the disease situation and as we move along towards flag leaf emergence, boot and heading, be prepared to spend money on an application that can make a difference! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Weeds are Indicators

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. I had a phone call last week from a farmer, from another county I might add - don't want anyone thinking I'm talking about them. His question was a pretty typical one - he was describing a weed in his pasture and for a few moments I felt like I was on the psychic weed ID network. Fortunately he was able to give me just enough pertinent information that I was able to tell him what the weed was. In typical fashion he was very concerned because it seemed to be spreading to more and more of the pasture. In this particular case he didn't say it, but they often do, "it's taking over the pasture." Weeds rarely take over a pasture - okay sericea lespedeza will but that's an exception. Most weeds are opportunists. They move in where they are given a chance. Now when I say that they are given a chance, it's a nice way of saying, the pasture is being mismanaged. If you have a bluestem pasture that is not overgrazed, it is difficult for most plants that we call weeds to get started. Weeds need bare ground without a lot of competition around to get a foot hold. Often we place feeders or salt of mineral right inside the gate, because that's where it's easy for us. So these areas get trampled down and weed seed comes in on hay or stuck in the mud in the tires. We gave the plants the opportunity to get established. Sure, we can get this ranchers weed problem under control with herbicides. But that will be a temporary fix if the management isn't changed. So don't think of weeds as THE problem. Think of weeds as the indicator of a problem and the real problem must be fixed! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Dealing with Herbicide Resistant Weeds

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. We had a great meeting last week on dealing with herbicide resistant weeds. One of the key points that was brought out was that herbicide resistance will continue to be an issue with virtually any group of herbicides we use. So it becomes more and more critical that we use combinations of herbicides that provide multiple modes of action. Then we hopefully follow up the next year with a different crop where we use herbicides with completely different modes of actions. One of the reasons we got into the issue with glyphosate resistant weeds was because we bought whole hog into the Roundup Ready technology. We planted roundup ready corn and depended completely on glyphosate for our weed control. The next year we planted soybeans, and again relied totally on glyphosate. We put such a selection pressure on the weed populations that the only individuals left to grow were naturally resistant to glyphosate. We just can't do that any more. Which means we need to use wheat in rotation and maybe, gasp, even sorghum. We budget more for our herbicides because we need to broaden what we use. We maybe even consider getting out and walking our fields and pulling or cutting out the escapes so we reduce the seed production of some of these pigweeds that can produce a half million seeds per plant. It may even come to the point, and I'm not promoting this just yet, of going back to cultivating fields occasionally. Life is a circle and what goes around comes around. Never say never, and start working now on your weed control plans for 2017. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.