

Get that Bromegrass, or Fescue, Fertilized

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Even though it's been dry and warm, we need to take advantage of this nice weather, with unfrozen ground, and get our bromegrass, and fescue too if you have any, fertilized. Fertilizer applied in late fall is more likely to get carried in to the soil by even small precipitation events. Even light snowfall can provide enough moisture to get it into the soil where those grass plants have plenty of roots to grab it and make use of it. If you don't feel like your bromegrass has been responding well to fertilization in recent years, applying it too late in the spring may be one of the reasons. If you aren't fertilizing until March then I can almost guarantee that that's one of the problems. Then if you applied fertilizer and especially if it turned off dry, like the past couple of early springs have been, by the time the fertilizer got moved into the root zone, it was too late to do much good. The second issue that we are running into a lot is low phosphorus and low sulfur levels. If phosphorus levels are below 20 ppm, the nitrogen is just going to act like it's not doing anything. We need to get that phosphorus level up to help the nitrogen do it's job. Sulfur is a bit of an enigma. There are many times that we think we shouldn't see any response from it, yet we do. Just as a minimum, I like to see 25 pounds of phosphorus applied annually and 10 pounds of sulfur. Obviously a soil test would be helpful, especially on the phosphorus side. For nitrogen, 75 to 100 pounds is in the ballpark of what you should apply. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Evaluate Input Costs

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. The current economic farm condition doesn't appear to be showing any rapid signs of improvement which isn't a surprise to any of us. This is the time of year that we are wrapping up one crop year and already getting started on planning for the next. Wheat is in the ground and seed orders are being prepared for spring seeded crops. This is also the time to start looking at your crop budgets for the 2018 year. I want to take the next few radio programs and talk about some areas that we need to take a look at for what appears to be another tight year ahead! As we look at the 2016 Kansas Farm Management Association summaries we can start to get an idea of what the big ticket items are. When we take all farm expenses and allocated them to harvested acres here's the breakdown. Average total cost per acre was \$329. Some of those aren't cash costs, but they are still costs that impact your bottom line. Crop expenses were #1 at \$115 per acre. Next were asset charges which includes things like rent, interest on land notes as well as current, intermediate and long term asset charges with a grand total of \$80. At #3 we have machinery costs of \$68 per acre. #4 was total labor costs at \$46 per acre and remember that far too much labor on farming operations is unpaid operator labor. Closing out the big categories were improvements and other expenses including taxes. These two items together came in at under \$20 per acre. Tomorrow, we'll break down those cash crop costs. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Crop Expenses, Where can we save?

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. When we look at total per acre costs on a farm, the average farm is going to have the largest amount, roughly 35% in cash crop expenses. And of that, 90% is going to be in 3 fairly equal categories: Fertilizer and lime, herbicide and insecticide and seed. There are opportunities for savings in all three of those categories. Fertilizer recommendations are going to change when you go from \$5 corn down to \$3 corn. Optimal yield rates don't change, but optimal return on investment will certainly pull back. Start with a good soil test and don't spend money on what you don't need. You may want to build those soil phosphorus levels, but if you have over 20 to 25 ppm phosphorus it is highly unlikely that you will see a yield response on this crop. Maybe you back off from a build rate and wait a year or two when profitability is hopefully better. Many micronutrients are not needed on most soils. Sure, they may only cost \$5 per acre, but if you can save 5 bucks here and another 5 bucks somewhere else, all of a sudden you've cut costs by 10 to \$20 per acre and then can be big! Do you need to buy ALL of those tech traits? If you are in a good rotation maybe you skip a year on rootworm. Look for the traits you need and if you don't need the whole kitchen sink, don't buy it! There's chaper options. Same thing with herbicides - know what your weed pressure is, work up a prescription and then look for generics to help keep the cost down. Don't cut your throat, but don't waste \$. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Machinery costs and total asset costs

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. Machinery costs and asset charges were the 2nd and 3rd largest per acre crop expenses. Sometimes we don't look at depreciation as a real expense, but we need to. Look at your own operation. \$68 per acre was the average machinery expense in north central Kansas last year. If your machinery expense including depreciation, is over \$100 per acre, you may have a new paint addiction issue. If your machinery costs was well under \$50, you either aren't taking into account everything you should, or you are doing a very good job of keeping old equipment running and probably turning quite a few wrenches yourself. Unless your tax preparer tells you otherwise, this probably isn't a good year to look for new equipment. Asset charges are a tough category. Much of the charge here is actually a non-cash cost. But two parts of it are very real - interest on land notes and rental rates. My next comment goes out specifically to landlords. If you rode cash rental rates up through the good years back in 2013 and 2014, you need to start riding them back down now. Take a look at what you were getting for rent in 2011 and 2012. It may be a good time to return to those levels. If you rent on shares, make darn sure that you are paying the same proportion of expenses as the proportion of the crop that you are getting. In all honesty, most crops shares are not equitable. The landlord is getting more of the crop than they are sharing on costs. I know you don't want to hear that, but it's time to take a serious look at this! This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.

Know your mustards

This is Ag Outlook on 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte, Geary County, K-State Research and Extension Ag & Natural Resources Agent. If you are going to have early season weeds in your wheat, okay, we're talking mustards here, then they are already out there and growing. All of those early season weeds are winter annuals. They are up and growing right now. Quite often wheat producers hear about mustards and too often they think it's just one species. In reality we have five different mustard species. Some are native to Kansas, some are introduced from Eurasia. Some species have developed herbicide resistance, others haven't, and therefore not all herbicides control them the same. What we can see are tansy mustard, flixweed, bushy wallflower, field pennycress and blue mustard. Flixweed and pennycress are very common in our part of Kansas, but we can have all five of them around here. So now that things have slowed down, and we're still having some all too nice of weather, take some time to get out to your wheat fields and start walking them to see what you've got for weeds. If you are finding a lot of little weeds, you may still have some time yet this fall to apply herbicide and fertilizer. Just as I was talking about issues with fertilizing bromegrass to late, we can get the same issues with wheat. To make sure you are ahead of the weeds, and controlling them when they are still small and easy to control, I feel that most years, treatments need to be down by March 1st. Just as with all weeds, once these mustards, and henbit, start actively growing, they will become much harder to control. This has been Ag Outlook on the Talk of JC, 1420 KJCK, I'm Chuck Otte.