

## Of Calendars and Clocks

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Several years ago I had the great privilege to spend a month in West Africa (Senegal). On my first day there my hosts advised me that, "In America your life is run by the clock. In Africa we laugh at the clock." They were absolutely right and while it was a hard lesson to learn at times, it was a good lesson.

Clocks and calendars are inventions of man to try to put into perspective the passing time. But they are an imperfect representation of the natural world. We define a day as a 24 hour period from midnight to midnight. In reality, days are a few milliseconds longer than 24 hours. Because of this there is periodically a leap second added to the "official" time so that universal coordinated time stays in step with the sun.

A solar year, or the time from one vernal equinox (spring) to the next is not 365 days but 365.24219 days, more or less. Which is why we have a leap year once every four years so that the calendar doesn't get totally out of whack! Calendars have been around since the oldest of ancient civilizations. Some were very accurate, some were just okay. But as a species we seem inclined to try to structure time.

We work 9 to 5. We work five days a week. We want what we want 24/7. Think of all the life references that revolve around clocks or calendars. I routinely have homeowners that have problems with houseplants because they watered them by the calendar, not by when the plant needed water. It's Saturday so I have to water my plants. Many of us have been keeping a schedule for so long that even on days off, we still wake up at the same time regardless of whether we set an alarm clock or not!

As a species we also like to celebrate events. We celebrate a new year at midnight on December 31<sup>st</sup>. Which other than being the end of the Gregorian calendar has no other significance to the natural world such as solstices or equinoxes. When something special comes along, like the end of a decade, century or millennium, we decide it calls for an extra special celebration. Unfortunately, as a culture, we also aren't very math, or perhaps calendar, literate.

Anyone over the age of about 25 remembers the big Y2K hoopla as we approached January 1, 2000. Part of the hoopla had to do with whether computers would be able to handle the switch from 1999 to 2000. Like many others I stayed up until midnight to see if the world would shut down. But millions if not billions of people the world over were celebrating the end of the century and millennium because the 1 became a 2. Unfortunately while the celebration was fun, it wasn't the start of a new century or millennium. That was another year off. We start counting with 1, not 0.

20 years later and we went right back to the old Y2K syndrome. We rolled from 2019 to 2020 and many folks were celebrating a new decade, which unfortunately doesn't really start until January 1, 2021 (again, we start counting at 1). If you want to say that you were celebrating the start of the 20s, that's fine, and that would be accurate. But while you are doing that you can also celebrate the start of the last year of the current decade. Yeah, I'm kind of a spoil sport that way. But on the other hand, there are about 40 different calendars in use around the world today. If you don't like the Gregorian calendar, that much of the world uses, you can always look at one of the others. It may have more holidays, or different holidays, that can give you more reasons to celebrate. But you'd better keep a standard Gregorian calendar around just to make sure you don't miss that dental appointment! Happy New Year!!