

## Every Growing Season is Different

### AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

I started helping my Mother in the garden before I was in kindergarten. Granted, at that age my help amounted to planting larger seeded garden crops, which I'm sure I over-planted and Mom had to go back and thin out later after everything germinated. But at that age I was already learning to watch the weather and the seasons and realized very quickly that no two years were alike, especially two consecutive years.

By the time I was 14 or 15, I was in charge of the garden and doing it MY way. I'd plant a few different crops, I moved the garden to a new location. I decided what to plant and when (okay, Mom was still coaching me) but I was also in charge of fertilization, pest control, weed control (of course) and harvesting. Every year was still different. Looking back on it I wished that I'd starting keep a log and taking notes a whole lot sooner. Yes, even then I was tracking planting dates and harvest totals, but I had to for my 4-H gardening project!

During college and the early years of my career my gardening was far more sporadic. Most of my gardening was done vicariously through all of you. I was tracking the weather and I knew what insects and diseases were around by the questions you'd all be asking. But time and space really limited how much gardening I could do myself. I was always tracking the weather closely, but that's just me. About twenty years ago I started growing garlic and about ten years ago I started getting really serious about it, and equally serious about my garden record keeping.

Record keeping at the start of the garden season (or field cropping season) is easy. It's a new year. It's exciting. Remembering to write down what was planted when and where it was planted is a piece of cake. But as the season moves along notes of insect and disease, or weed problems, becomes less fun. When there were wind storms, or heavy rains, or drought and heat and when you had to irrigate, really need to be tracked. Once harvest starts that record keeping can become drudgery, especially if the harvest winds up not being good. But all those notes, merged in with weather and pest data, become part of the picture. Each year, and the data from each year, becomes a series of pictures that you can refer back to so that you can remember what you did, and what you'd wished you had done given those conditions. No two years are alike, but these journals can give you hints of what to maybe do, or maybe not do.

Last fall the Climate Prediction Center was forecasting a warm and dry fall and winter, possibly extending well into the 2022 growing season. I planted my garlic at the usual time and into good moisture. A lot of my garlic showed fall growth, which it frequently doesn't do, because of that warm weather. But that fall growth used up precious moisture. I didn't water the garlic in late November or early December, and in hindsight, I should have. I'll remember that in the future. When it finally did start to rain this spring, it rained, a lot, in May and June. Probably the worst time for both the garlic and the onions. I lost a lot more plants than normal to rots and my yield was off nearly 40% from past years and what I was expecting. It was disappointing, but I sure did learn a lot!

But one bad year hasn't deterred me from gardening (and this year's not done yet!) I'll probably plant more garlic next year and just as much of everything else next spring. Next year will be different and I'll have different challenges. But I've got history and my records to refer to and I'll continue to record what happens, what I did and the outcomes of those decisions.