MID-COLUMBIA FARMER'S NEWSLETTER

March 2009

Grain and Rain

The average price of soft white wheat at Portland was $5.68 per bushel, while club wheats averaged $7.24. Barley for the month averaged $100.00 per ton.

Precipitation as reported at the Sherman Experiment Station in Moro was 1.12 inches, which is .01 above normal. The crop year total of 5.83 inches stands at 78.6% of normal.

Selling Your Carbon

Some of you may have received a notice on your email from a Missouri based company offering to enroll you in a program to market your soil carbons from CRP to those companies that need to purchase yours, in order to make up for the ones they are using.

Is it safe? It’s new and it’s different. There is not a lot of information on the program. Here’s what we heard from Russ Evans, a director from the PNW Direct Seed group. Evans notes that the cash offer is tempting but he cautions about the liability. What liability is attached to the contract? If you can’t deliver the carbon offsets, or manage/operate within the bounds of the procedures outlined, then what are the consequences? He also notes that missing is a standard 10% set aside, which offers some assurance to you. And then ask what happens if you have cropping practices in your plans. The example sent is for a Montana ranch and there are no established rates for cropping and CRP in our region, and as reported last month those rates may be very low. If you include land that is cropped, do you qualify for payments under fallow? Are there other willing buyers at this time and how do rates and contracts compare? What’s the length of the contract? Earlier ones went for excessively long periods.

The Chicago Climate Exchange is listed as the buyer, although their present protocol is described as weak and likely will not qualify under future legislated cap and trade policies. AS those come into play, as they appear to do, will you be locked into your current carbon exchange credit or will your agreement force changes in your management in order to continue your credit agreement? What kind of “out” procedures and who has the right to initiate changing or breaking the contract. Will legislative rates exceed your contracted ones and who has access to negotiate your carbon under the newer rules that are expected to develop?

Several experts agreed that there are far more questions than anybody has answers to, but in the short term, after checking for more detail, our best answer is to check for more detail.
COOL Answers

The Country of Origin Labeling rules take full effect March 16, 2009. It affects all livestock producers, including youth raising and selling even one animal for FFA and/or 4H. Basically the rule is to provide for the consumer’s “right to know” so they can judge where their food comes from and whether that country of origination is a place where known rules exist for safe food. The US has those rules protecting food safety.

So for those who sell beef, lamb, swine and goats (and some other products not common in our area) you will need to keep adequate records to show where these animals were born. This will let the retailer know how to properly label the meat. You will soon see all meat products labeled as “Product of USA,” “Mixed Origin” if it was born or raised in another country then finished and/or processed in the US, and “Imported.” Animals in the USA before July 15, 2008 are grandfathered in as US origin.

Both sellers and buyers must keep the records and the buyer at any level may request to inspect records you have to verify the animal’s origin. You do not have to include copies of those records when you sell the animals. A simple note, signed and dated by you will suffice. The note may be simple: “I attest that all livestock referenced by this document and transferred are of ___________ origin.” For most local stock that will cover it. If some stock originated out of the USA, simply indicate that.

Keep a copy with the sales order and maintain your records. If you are buying an animal, you need to receive a similar note stating where the animal was born as you will need this record when you sell the animal at a later date. There is no mandated period of record storage, but you will likely keep a lot of those records with your normal herd records.

Records that can be used for a “verifiable recordkeeping audit trail” are unclear at this time and the Act specifically forbids USDA from mandating an animal identification system to meet COOL requirements. Regular herd records, including some identifying character (ear tag number, brand, tattoo etc), birth weight and or date, birth, receiving, purchase records feed records and breeding stock information will assist you in providing adequate verifiable records.

And like all good bills, there are penalties for non-compliance and while these start with the retailer level, they can be traced back to each level involved in the life of the animal in question.

Local Weather on Your Computer

Growers wishing to collect accurate and timely weather data no longer have to wait for the 11 o’clock news. There is a system of small weather recording/reporting system that is very heavily used by fruit producers, but most grain growers are not as familiar with it.

The system is available at: IFPNet.com This is just the basic page, so you won’t get all the data the system can offer. To get the full effect of nearly 100 stations around the Mid-Columbia, including Moro, Wasco, Bakeoven, Tygh Ridge and Dufur, you need to be registered into the system. You can register by calling Mike Land at the USDA Offices in The Dalles at 541-993-1190. He will set up your username and password and you’re good to go. It’s a great place to get information before you spray.

Garden Time

With more folks returning to “growing your own”, OSU has developed a flyer called, “Growing Your Own.” This practical guide identifies the varieties you have to select from and which ones grow best in what conditions. It contains a slug (not the salt fearing kind) of info on garden management tips to help you maximize the fruits (and vegetables) of your labor. It’s also available on-line under publications at the OSU Extension web page: Oregonstate.edu then select the publication bar on the right side of the page.

If you need that personal touch for help, the Master Gardeners open regular hours starting April 1, on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, from 1 to 4 pm at the Wasco County Extension Office and on Saturdays from 9 am to 1 pm, at the Fred Meyer Garden Center. The Master Gardeners can help you identify pests, diseases and even soil sample your lawn and garden soils.

Produce an abundance? Then haul some of your products to the Farmer’s Market in The Dalles which will begin May 30 and run each Saturday through October 10 at the City Park (5th and Union St). Contact Andy Knight (541-980-4466) for more information and a vendor application.