

# Agricultural Newsletter

UW-Madison College of Ag & Life Science  
University of Wisconsin-Extension



## Are you a price maker or price taker?

Kevin Schoessow  
Area Ag Development Agent  
Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn Counties

This was the question asked of participants recently at a direct marketing of agriculture products seminar. The point here was that price takers are those producers who take whatever price they can get, while price makers are able to set their price depending on the market.

By in large, most farmers are price takers. Not necessarily because they want to, but because they have little or no choice. This is especially true for farmers if they are producing commodities such as corn, soybeans, milk, and livestock. On the other hand, farmers who have the opportunity to be price makers are generally selling non-commodity production that is in relatively high demand or commodities that have some value added.

According to Dr. Rami Reddy, UW-Extension Direct Marketing Specialist, price makers are distinguished from price takers in several ways. First, if you are a price maker you most likely have unique or special products. This can be real or perceived. An example of this might be Lake Superior Farms naturally raised choice Angus beef, or Healthy Fields Farm: super sweet locally grown sweet corn, guaranteed fresh picked. Second, price makers have excellent people skills and are very creative sellers. They know how to build customer loyalty, and are very good at meeting customer needs. A price maker also takes time to figure out what the market wants and tries to fill that niche with a product that fits their skills and interest. Finally, price makers tend to be creative, practical minded business people willing to take a risk.

While Dr. Reddy was speaking to a group of individuals who were mostly small growers selling at farmers markets or roadside stands, I couldn't help but relate his price maker vs. price taker comparison to larger more conventional farm businesses. Can a farm selling commodities with little or no product differentiation take advantage of some of the price maker concepts?

There must be price maker strategies that apply even to commodities. Or at least, so I thought.

Let's start with the product. What is unique or special about your product? Think like the buyer. What motivates them to buy from you? If it is price alone, than producing the lowest cost commodity is important. Do you know your cost of production? If quality is important, than what can you do as a commodity

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## **Representing Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn Counties:**

Kevin Schoessow  
Area Ag Development Agent  
715-635-3506 or 800-528-1914

Yves Berger  
Spoooner Ag Research Station  
Superintendent & Sheep  
Researcher  
715-635-3735

Phil Holman  
Spoooner Ag Research Station  
Asst. Superintendent  
715-635-3735

## **Representing Ashland, Bayfield, Douglas, and Iron Counties:**

Tom Syverud  
Extension & Outreach Educator  
715-682-7268

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Research Station, W6646 Highway 70,  
Spoooner, WI 54801 or UWEX Area  
Agricultural Agent, Ashland Ag Research  
Station, 68760 State Farm Road, Ashland, WI  
54806.

*(cont.)*

producer to provide the highest quality commodity? Why not take advantage of quality premiums if the buyer offers them. Be a price maker and get the higher price for quality.

Are there creative selling arrangements you might be able to develop? This is a bit more challenging. One such creative arrangement might be pooling production with other farmers to get a better price based on volume. Or perhaps there is a local buyer or neighboring farm you could work with who is looking to purchase local production? This could eliminate storage or transportation cost. Selling on the futures market may be another creative selling arrangement.

A price maker according to Dr. Reddy also has lots of people skills and good customer relations. Do you have a team of resource people you can rely on for up to date information? What kind of feed back are you getting from your customers? Are you a good negotiator?

Finally, are you willing to learn new skills, and try new technologies? Both are necessities to be price makers.

So are you a price taker or a price maker? Some would say farmers will always be price takers. I tend to be a bit more optimistic and think there are some opportunities for farmers to be price makers. It depends on how you look at it.

If you would like more information on Direct Marketing or local farmers markets call Kevin Schoessow, Area Ag Development Agent for Burnett, Washburn and Sawyer Counties at 635-3506 or 1-800-528-1914.

## **Youth tractor & machinery training dates set**

*Kevin Schoessow*  
Area Ag Development Agent  
Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn Counties

Wisconsin Law requires that any youth less than 16 years of age be certified to operate a tractor or machinery on public roads—even if working for a parent or guardian. In addition, Federal Child Labor regulations make it unlawful to hire or even permit without pay any youth under age 16 to participate in any work activities listed as hazardous unless the youth is working on a farm owned and operated by the youth's parents or legal guardian, or the youth has a training certificate which provides an exemption from certain hazardous work activities. Operating a tractor over 20 PTO horsepower is included in the list of hazardous work activities.

Wisconsin training guidelines require that youth participate in 24 hours of classroom training and complete a driving course. A course satisfying these requirements will be conducted in Spoooner at the Spoooner Agricultural Research Station on June 8-10 from 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. A similar course is also tentatively scheduled for the second week of June at Northwestern High School in Maple.

Students must be at least 12 years old to enroll in the program and attend all the training sessions to receive their certification.

In order to have time for parents and students to complete permission forms, preregistration for this course is required.

To preregister for the Spooner training contacting Lorraine Toman at the Spooner Area Ag Agents UW-Extension office at 715-635-3506 or 800-528-1914, and to preregister for the Maple training contact Tom Syverud at the Ashland Ag Research Station at (715) 682-8393. Please provide the name, address, telephone number, date of birth, and social security number of the youth to be certified.

## Best management practices for corn

*Kevin Schoessow  
Area Ag Development Agent  
Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn Counties*

Have you ever wondered what management practices the most profitable and productive corn growers use in order to be “the best?” Since 1987 the Agronomy Department of the University of Wisconsin has been conducting a contest for farmers called PEPS (Profits through Efficient Production Systems). Over the years nearly 1400 corn and soybean growers have participated in this program. A review of the information collected from the top contestants each year reveals some “best management practices” that the top producers consistently use in their farm operations.

Top-profit farmers own or rent land with the capability of yielding 140 to 160 bushels per acre. They don’t follow corn with corn, but rather, rotate corn with soybeans or alfalfa to take advantage of nitrogen credits from those crops. They select corn hybrids with high yield potential, fast dry-down, and good standability. Top-

profit farmers use tillage sparingly and try to leave 30% residue cover at planting. They question whether each pass is necessary and reduce trips across the field by combining herbicide, fertilizer application and tillage whenever possible. These corn growers also soil test and only apply nutrients needed or recommended using the least costly form of fertilizer per unit of nitrogen, phosphorus, or potassium. They use manure and legume credits to reduce purchased fertilizer costs. They don’t cut back on overall nitrogen supplied unless they were over applying previously. Top-profit corn growers don’t use micronutrients unless soil tests recommend it, and they plant their corn early. These farmers generally use plant populations of 26,000 to 30,000 seeds per acre on lighter soils and 28,000 to 32,000 on medium to heavy soils. The top-profit corn growers monitor insect levels and apply insecticides only when economic thresholds occur. They control weeds using the least costly strategies and often use band applications or timely rotary hoeing and cultivation.

Other characteristics of top-profit farmers include a knack for substituting information for more expensive purchased inputs. Information topics include the University’s hybrid performance data, soil tests, manure analysis, pest scouting, and crop consultants or their own on-farm trials.

Farmers interested in enrolling in the PEPS Contest for 2004 or obtaining a copy of the PEPS Contest results from last year should contact the Spooner Area UW-Extension Office at the Spooner Ag Research Station at 1-800-528-1914 or 635-3506.

## Pasture fertilization is key

*Tom Syverud  
Extension and Outreach Educator  
Ashland Ag Research Station*

Pasture fertilization depends upon a number of factors. The amount of forage needed and when the feed is needed, the amount of legume present in the pastures, and if rotational grazing is used. Pasturing removes significant amounts of phosphorus and potassium each year; however, because of manure and urine is returned to the pasture, only 15% of the total phosphorus and potassium is actually removed. This amounts to only two pounds of phosphate and nine pounds of potash, respectively. Unfortunately, redistribution of manure or nutrients is often concentrated where animals congregate, like waterers and entrances. Studies have shown that disposition is more uniform on rotational grazed pastures. Soil testing to determine fertilization rates is especially important where legumes are present in the pasture, since grasses use potash at the expense of legumes.

On the other hand, yield responses to nitrogen are consistent and dramatic. Most pastures are nitrogen deficient. However, if a pasture stand is one-third or more legume, then no nitrogen is recommended. When fertilizing a pasture, an application of 40 to 60 pounds of nitrogen is recommended in split applications. The late summer application is important for good fall grazing. When using urea fertilizer as a nitrogen source, losses of 10% can occur if it doesn’t rain for four days. If possible, make applications when rain is expected soon. Thanks to Keith Kelling and Dan Underlander for information provided.

# Predicting pre-harvest alfalfa quality using PEAQ

Mike Rankin  
Crops and Soils Agent  
Fond du Lac County

**Predictive Equations for Alfalfa Quality (PEAQ)** is a method to predict the forage quality of standing alfalfa. It was developed by Agronomists at the University of Wisconsin. It was developed by Agronomists at the University of Wisconsin - Madison under the direction of Dr. Ken Albrecht. The two equations predict ADF and NDF when the height of the tallest stem is measured and the maturity stage of the most advanced plant is determined. The equations have been validated not only in Wisconsin but also in numerous other environments from California to New York. Because regression equations are difficult and somewhat time consuming to deal with in a production field situation, tables have been developed using computer spreadsheet programs that help make for rapid in field estimates of NDF or Relative Feed Value (RFV). Additionally, several seed companies have developed “PEAQ Sticks” that can easily be used to determine plant height and forage quality.

Recently, the original “5 maturity stage” system used with PEAQ has been simplified to a “3 maturity stage” system without a loss of precision. Many state and county extension staff are using PEAQ along with other methods to help farmers predict the optimum harvest time for alfalfa. This has proved especially useful for first-cutting.

## *Estimating Alfalfa RFV in the Field Using PEAQ*

- Step 1:** Choose a representative 2-square-foot area in the field.
- Step 2:** Determine the most mature stem in the 2-square-foot sampling area using the criteria shown in the table at right.
- Step 3:** Measure the length of the tallest stem in the 2-square-foot area. Measure it from the soil surface (next to plant crown) to the tip of the stem (NOT to the tip of the highest leaf blade). Straighten the stem for an accurate measure of its length. The tallest stem may not be the most mature stem.
- Step 4:** Based on the most mature stem and length of the tallest stem, use the chart at the right to determine estimated NDF content of the standing alfalfa forage.
- Step 5:** Repeat steps 1 to 4 in four or five representative areas across the field. Sample more times for fields larger than 30 acres.

**NOTE:** This procedure estimates alfalfa NDF content of the standing crop. It does not account for changes in quality due to wilting, harvesting, and storage. These factors may further lower RFV by 15 to 25 points, assuming good wilting and harvesting conditions. This procedure is most accurate for good stands of pure alfalfa with healthy growth.

# Experience with high corn populations

*Phil Holman  
Asst. Superintendent  
Spooner Ag Research Station*

The 2003 Wisconsin Corn Research Report includes results from nine different locations that looked at corn plant populations at harvest. Each location had four different varieties and had final plant populations ranging from 26,000 to 50,000 plants per acre at harvest.

Individual location results and an overall average is listed in the table on the right. Increasing harvest plant population from 26000 to 32000 increased harvest yields by 8.4 bushels on average. That yield increase would easily pay for the increased seed cost. Increasing the harvest plant population from 32000 to 38000 did increase yields by 2.8 bushels per acre but the yield increase does not justify the increased seed cost. Plant populations higher than 38000 had yields decline.

A couple items to note: 1) these are harvest populations and you need to plant more seeds per acre to reach those target final plant populations per acre, and 2) Chippewa Falls (which is closest to here) showed no benefit to

plant populations higher than 26,000 plants per acre. The most likely cause of this is because the Chippewa Falls site is a sandy soil. Sandy soils have shown the least response to high plant populations in previous studies.

	Population				
	26000	32000	38000	44000	50000
<b>Arlington</b>	185	196	190	184	178
<b>Chippewa Falls</b>	116	115	116	106	110
<b>Fond du Lac</b>	180	182	187	186	189
<b>Galesville</b>	192	198	201	198	194
<b>Hancock</b>	243	256	256	263	261
<b>Janesville</b>	182	204	210	206	199
<b>Lancaster</b>	167	164	163	157	143
<b>Marshfield</b>	110	118	111	117	115
<b>Seymour</b>	189	200	213	211	207
<b>Valders</b>	163	178	192	197	194
yield average	172.7	181.1	183.9	182.5	179
bu increase		8.4	2.8	-1.4	-3.5
value increase @2.20		\$18.48	\$6.16	-\$3.08	-\$7.70
added seed cost @\$100/bag		\$7.50	\$7.50	\$7.50	\$7.50
net		\$10.98	-\$1.34	-\$10.58	-\$15.20

# Fly control for cattle

*Tom Syverud  
Extension and Outreach Educator  
Ashland Ag Research Station*



Flies cost farmers both treatment costs and lost production. Horn and face flies are the main species that affect pastured cattle in northern Wisconsin. Biting flies can also spread disease. Face flies, in addition to producing eye irritation, are vectors of the infectious agent of pinkeye in cattle. Both horn and face flies can develop resistance to insecticides. Therefore, it is important to rotate the insecticide ear tag, pour-on, and the insect spray you use. Alternating the class of drug will increase the success of your prevention program. Fly sprays and pour-ons are fairly effective, but wear off and must be applied monthly during fly season. Cattle must use back rubbers or dust bags daily to be effective. Place these pieces in front of feed or water.

Since face and horn flies lay eggs and their larva only develop in manure, feed-additives or bolus forms of insecticide that kill larva in manure can also be very effective. However, for the feed products to work properly, the right amount must be fed daily. Additionally, in confinement, stables flies can attack the animals' legs and ankles with painful bites while feeding on blood. Scraping up manure, eliminating standing water and cleaning up spilled feed and silage will reduce fly populations in general. Sources for this article were UC-Davis and Iowa State.

# Agronomy studies at the Spooner Station

Phil Holman  
Asst. Superintendent  
Spooner Ag Research Station

## Alfalfa & Grass Mixtures

**Study:** This research will look at yield and quality from different Alfalfa-Grass Mixtures as the plants mature. Three cuttings will be harvested with an early, normal, and late cutting. Alfalfa and grass mixes include Ryegrass, Timothy, Early Maturity Orchardgrass, and Late Maturity Orchardgrass. The mixtures will be compared to one treatment of pure alfalfa. Samples will be analyzed for feed quality. It will be interesting to see how yields increase and quality decreases with each of the mixtures. This study is being done at Spooner, Marshfield, and Arlington.

## Emergency Forages Study:

This study was done last year at Spooner, Marshfield, and Arlington and will be repeated this year. It will look at yields and forage quality for different crops that can be grown for additional forage. The crops include: Sudangrass, Sorghum Sudangrass, Foxtail Millet, Pearl Millet, Japanese Millet, three maturities of Corn Silage, Oat & Peas, Barley & Peas, Forage Barley, BMR Sorghum, and Soybeans for Forage. These species will be planted in early May, early June and early July to see how yields change with planting dates. Last year the corn silages provided the greatest yields.

## Winter Wheat Variety Trial:

Most recent winter wheat varieties (either commercial or publics) have been developed in locations with less

severe winters. It has been several years since there was a winter wheat variety trial at Spooner. Thus a variety trial was seeded last September. Winter-hardiness will be evaluated soon. There are a couple varieties that look like they should not be tried this far north. Yield measurements will be taken in late July or early August.

## Other Variety Trial Studies:

**Corn Grain** – Irrigated sand, dryland sand, & dryland silt loam locations;  
**Corn Silage** – Irrigated sand & dryland silt loam; **Soybeans** – Irrigated sand & dryland silt loam;  
**Alfalfa, Canola, Potatoes, Oats, & Barley.**

**Potato Studies:** In addition to the Variety trial there will be a Potato Seedpiece Treatment Evaluation, New Herbicide Evaluation and MH30 on Russet Burbank Trial.

**Other Studies:** Grass Maturity Ratings of Varieties of Timothy, Orchardgrass, Ryegrass and Fescues; Organic Corn Date of Planting and Population Trial; Switchgrass Variety Adaptation; Hairy Vetch Winter Survival; and continued growth of the Hybrid Poplar plantation.

## We're on the Web!

You may find this newsletter, our gardener's newsletter, and additional information on our upcoming events by visiting the websites of the **Spooner Agricultural Research Station:**

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/sars/index.htm>

and the **Ashland Agricultural Research Station:**

<http://www.uwex.edu/ces/aars/>

# Updates on dairy sheep research

Yves Berger  
Superintendent  
Spooner Ag Research Station

Lambing of over 300 dairy breed ewes, East Friesian and Lacaune crosses, at the Spooner Ag Research Station started in early January and was completed by mid-March. The mature ewes were started on milking after one day, and the first lactation ewes were kept with their lambs up to a month before entering the milking string. Lambs are raised on milk replacer with automatic feeders until weaning time. The oldest lambs are close to market weight already.

The Spooner Ag Research Station is a member of the Wisconsin Sheep Dairy Cooperative ([www.sheepmilk.biz](http://www.sheepmilk.biz)). The cooperative members collectively market their milk. Milk is purchased by cheese producers in Wisconsin, New York, and Colorado. One Wisconsin cheese producer has won numerous Cheese Makers Awards for the cheeses made from sheep milk. The cooperative has also contracted for a cheese plant to make their own labeled cheese which is being sold through Whole Food Stores and Wisconsin Cheesemart.

For more information on Dairy Sheep see the Wisconsin Sheep Dairy Cooperative website listed above or call Yves Berger at 715-635-3735.

Spooner Ag Research Station Sheep Day is August 28<sup>th</sup>. The program will feature topics on Sheep Production Management for all sheep producers and will include updates on the Dairy Sheep Research conducted at the Spooner Ag Research Station.

A lamb barbecue lunch will be served at noon.

Research on the sheep dairy this year will include: Electronic Identification of Sheep; Milk Production of Ewes on Kura Clover Pasture; Effect of Feeding Level on Dairy Ewe Lambs on Future Milk Production; and Development of a Dairy Breed of Sheep.

For more information on Sheep Day, call 715-635-3735.

## Farmers markets seeking vendors

*Kevin Schoessow  
Area Ag Development Agent  
Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn Counties*

In the past year or so, I have been working to help establish and promote local Farmers Markets. These markets are currently in search of producers wanting to sell locally raised agriculture products directly to consumers. The goal of these markets is to provide consumers the opportunity to purchase locally grown or processed food.

Products sold at markets may include garden produce, sweet corn, pumpkins, squash, cut flowers, bedding plants, locally grown fruit, honey, maple syrup or any other local agriculture products. There are certain rules that apply if you are selling meat, eggs, or processed foods. Markets typically start in July and end the last week in October.

If you, or perhaps a relative or neighbor, would like more information on selling at these local markets, you can contact me or the market manager listed later. Included in this list are well established markets and others that have just recently started.

In either case, most markets welcome new vendors.

***Cable Area Farmers Market:***  
Saturdays, 8 a.m. - 1 p.m. Natural History Museum in Cable. 715-798-3890.

***Hayward Area Farmers Market:***  
Mondays, 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., Sawyer County Fairgrounds. Laura Berlage, Market Manager, at 715-462-3453, [nstarhomestead@centurytel.net](mailto:nstarhomestead@centurytel.net) or Jim Spinner, Assistant Manager, at 715-945-3028.

***Ashland Farmers Market:***  
Saturdays, 8 am - Noon at Chapple Avenue off Historic Main Street in Ashland. 800-284-9484 or [www.visitashland.com](http://www.visitashland.com).

***Burnett County Farmers Market:***  
Saturdays, 3 p.m. to 7 p.m., Burnett Hockey Arena parking lot in Siren. Cheryl Marek, 715-689-2415.

***Superior Farmers Market:***  
Saturdays, 8 a.m. to Noon, Barkers Island Resort in Superior. 715-394-5712.

***Bayfield Area Farmers Market:***  
Saturdays, 9 a.m. - Noon, corner of Maypenny Ave. & Third Street in Bayfield. 715-779-3335.

***Spoooner/Shell Lake Area Farmers Market:*** Time and location to be determined. Contact Tony Webber at 469-3411 or [twebb100@yahoo.com](mailto:twebb100@yahoo.com).

***Hurley Farmers Market:***  
Saturdays, 10 a.m. until sold out and Wednesdays, 2 p.m. until sold out. Business Hwy. 51 & 10th Street, Hurley. 715-561-4334.

Local Farmers Markets are not for everyone. However, they do offer some producers an opportunity to put a few more dollars in their pockets and provide a quality, local food product to the consumer.

## This Quarter's Events

**June 8-10, 2004,** Youth Tractor & Machinery Safety Training, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Spooner Ag Research Station, 715-635-3506.

**June 12, 2004,** Washburn County Dairy Breakfast, Washburn County Fairgrounds.

**June 19, 2004,** Burnett County Dairy Breakfast, Site to be determined. Call 715-349-2243 for more information.

**June 26, 2004,** Sawyer County Dairy Breakfast, Sawyer County Fairgrounds.

**June 29, 2004,** Garden Flowers Workshop, Ashland Ag Research Station, 715-682-7268.

**June 30, 2004,** Garden Flowers Workshop, Spooner Ag Research Station, 715-635-3506.

**July 20, 2004,** Garden Insect Disease and Control Workshop, Ashland Ag Research Station, 715-682-7268.

**July 21, 2004,** Garden Insect Disease and Control Workshop, Spooner Ag Research Station, 715-635-3506.

**August 17, 2004,** Twilight Garden Meeting, Ashland Ag Research Station, 715-682-7268.

**August 18, 2004,** Twilight Garden Meeting, Spooner Ag Research Station, 715-635-3506.

**August 19, 2004,** Potato Growers Field Day, Spooner Ag Research Station, 715-635-3735.

**August 28, 2004,** Spooner Sheep Day, Spooner Ag Research Station, 715-635-3735.

**September 15, 2004,** All About Potatoes, Ashland Ag Research Station, 715-682-7268.

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*Kevin A. Schoessow*

Kevin Schoessow  
UWEX Area Agricultural Agent

**UW  
Extension**

UW-Extension Spooner Area Office  
Spooner Agricultural Research Station  
W6646 Highway 70  
Spooner, WI 54801

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