

Agricultural Newsletter

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



Biofuels...The challenges ahead

Jason Fischbach
Area Agricultural Agent
Ashland & Bayfield Counties

With industry and government interest in biofuels expanding, it is important for farmers and landowners to be aware of both the potential and challenges posed by biofuels. Over the coming months there will be increased opportunities from UW Extension, industry, and others to learn more about biofuels. The following is a discussion of three important issues posed by biofuels.

Everyone says biofuels will help wean ourselves from foreign oil, is that true?

In short, biofuels can potentially help wean ourselves from foreign oil, but only if we wean ourselves from foreign oil. Even as biofuel production has risen so has foreign oil consumption. Between the years 2000 and 2005 ethanol consumption increased by 2.27 billion gallons and gasoline use increased by 10.2 billion gallons. In the short term, biofuels may actually increase the use of petroleum because fuel will be readily available reducing the incentive for conservation.

The only way to use less foreign oil is to use less foreign oil. At this point, biofuels are doing nothing to reduce the use of petroleum. They are only increasing the overall supply of liquid fuel. For example, a ten percent ethanol requirement in gasoline is intended to replace 10% of the gasoline use (and thus foreign oil). At this point, all it is doing is adding another 10% to our fuel supply.

It is important to realize that our economy over the last 200 years has been defined by an ever-increasing use of energy. Biofuels are being promoted primarily because of the concern that we are running out of oil. However, like oil, the supply of biofuels are limited. Thus, the real challenge we face as a society is not where we get our liquid fuels, it is how we live in a world with limited liquid fuels, something we have never done.

Are biofuels sustainable?

For biofuels to work they have to be sustainable. In other words, we have to be able to grow feedstocks and make biofuels in perpetuity. If groundwater is depleted or soil organic matter is destroyed than biofuels will be just as unsustainable as petroleum. One of the biggest challenges is how to produce a net gain in energy when making biofuels. For example, it takes a lot of energy to grow corn, harvest it, make ethanol, and ship it to users. It is crucial that the energy

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content of the finished ethanol is more than what went into it. This is true for any form of bioenergy. What this does is introduce a new accounting system for industry. Not only does the venture have to make money, it has to make energy.

This new system of accounting may change the way we practice agriculture. We will have to find things to grow and ways to grow them that use as little energy as possible. Switchgrass is often touted as the feedstock of the future primarily because it is a perennial plant that only needs to be planted once every five or six years saving tillage and other energy inputs. The changes will likely go even further. We know that monocultures eventually require pesticides; thus, bioenergy plantings may consist of mixtures of perennial plants that provide a resiliency to pest outbreaks reducing yet another energy input. Currently, fertilizer is a major energy input for bioenergy crops. We will likely see increased use of legumes that fix nitrogen and a greater appreciation of soil organic matter and biota that make nutrients available to plants.

What should I know about by-products?

There are very real concerns that biofuels will take land away from food production and drive up the price for food. For that reason, the biofuel industry is finding ways to turn the by-products from making bioenergy into food. The feeding of dried distiller's grains to beef and dairy cows is a good example of using agricultural land to make both energy and food.

As a farmer it will be important to learn and understand the agricultural use of bioenergy by-

products. Can you feed them to animals? Can you use them for bedding? Can you use them as fertilizer, mulch, compost, herbicides, or other things?

2007 Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium to be held in Canada

Dr. David Thomas
Extension Sheep Specialist
University of Wisconsin-Madison

New, aspiring and seasoned dairy sheep farmers and artisanal sheep milk cheese-makers from across North America will gather to discuss dairy sheep farming and marketing at the 2007 Great Lakes Dairy Sheep Symposium on November 1-3, 2007 in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. The annual symposium is sponsored by the Dairy Sheep Association of North America (DSANA), and this year's event is organized by the dairy sheep producers of Ontario and the Ontario Sheep Marketing Organization. The venue for the meeting will be the Ramada Inn in Guelph, Ontario.

Sheep dairy products are gaining popularity among U.S. and Canadian consumers. Traditional imported sheep milk cheeses like Feta, Roquefort, and Manchego are now being accompanied by an array of prize-winning North American sheep milk cheese originals. However, because this industry is in its infancy, the symposium has become the industry's primary source of new technical information.

Symposium presentations will be made by international and domestic researchers and veteran farmers. The

first day of the symposium will focus on ideas, information, and resources to assist current and future producers in cost of production, marketing strategies, and nutrition of the lactating ewe. Farm tours will take place on the second day. The tour will feature a farm milking 500 ewes in a well designed unit with lots of good ideas for producers, a second smaller farm featuring a rapid exit parlor and a unique breed of sheep called the British Milk Sheep, and a newly built plant processing sheep milk from the Ewenity Dairy Cooperative. The final day will feature topics related to milking equipment and animal health. Dr. George Fthenakis, an international expert on sheep health from Greece, will share his expertise in the best practices of udder health management and the production of quality milk.

The symposium program, registration form, and hotel information can be found at the DSANA web site (<http://www.dsana.org/>) or by contacting the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food & Rural Affairs (phone: 519-826-4047, fax: 519-826-3442, email: ag.info.omafra@ontario.ca). The registration fee is \$185 (Canadian) per person if paid by Oct. 1, 2007 and \$210 (Canadian) after Oct. 1, 2007. Payment can be by check or credit card.

Participants from outside Canada need to be sure they have proper documentation for entering and leaving Canada.

Organizations and companies are encouraged to become sponsors and exhibit at the symposium. Contact Mike Foran if interested (519-826-4061, michael.foran@ontario.ca).

Johne's deadlines approaching

Dairy, beef and goat producers can learn about next year's Johne's Disease Control Program during an upcoming series of meetings around the state. Program director Dr. Beth Patton is reminding them to meet deadlines to submit invoices for their 2007 Johne's costs and apply for payments in 2008.

Producers can get partial reimbursement for the cost of a Johne's risk assessment by a certified veterinarian, testing, and vaccination. Those who applied for reimbursement for work done in 2007 have already been notified if they are eligible. "If you received an award letter, but haven't yet submitted your bills, please send them to us as soon as possible," Patton said. The deadline is Feb. 1, 2008.

Producers who want to receive reimbursement for work done in 2008 must first have their veterinarian do a risk assessment and management plan (RAMP) by December 31 of this year and then submit an application by February 1, 2008. They also have to renew their RAMP in 2008. An application form is available online at <http://www.datcp.state.wi.us/ah/agriculture/animals/disease/johnes/index.jsp> or by calling 608-224-4893.

The six meetings, each held from 1 to 2 p.m., are directed at producers, veterinarians, and students, and will provide an overview of Wisconsin's Johne's disease control program and how producers can receive reimbursement for their 2008 expenses to control Johne's. The meeting schedule is as follows:

- Wausau – Tuesday, October 30, North Central Technical College, 1000 W. Campus Drive, Room E101
- Eau Claire – Thursday, November 1, Chippewa Valley Technical College, 620 W. Clairemont Ave., Room 100A
- Fennimore – Thursday, November 8, Southwest Wisconsin Technical College, 1800 Bronson Blvd., Room 493
- Appleton – Tuesday, November 13, Fox Valley Technical College, 1825 N. Bluemound Drive, Room E130 A/B
- Madison – Thursday, November 15, Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, 2811 Agriculture Drive, Room 106
- La Crosse – Tuesday, November 27, Western Technical College, 304 Sixth St. N., Room R200

The Johne's disease reimbursement system has changed in the past several years. Producers can now receive reimbursement for testing without officially classifying their herds A, B, C or D according to the level of Johne's infection revealed by testing. Also, they can now receive partial reimbursement for vaccinating and any testing costs – veterinary fees, shipping or laboratory costs.

"Most important, they can get partly reimbursed when they have a certified veterinarian do a risk assessment and develop a herd plan," Patton said. "This is the single most important step producers can take to control or prevent Johne's disease, and that's why we require it in order to be eligible to receive reimbursement for your other costs." For more information about the meetings, call Dr. Andrea Foley, 608-224-4352.

US Dept. of Ag Conservation Program signup for 2008 starts now

*Tom Fredrickson
Natural Resources Conservation Service*

The U.S. Dept. of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) has announced that the Wisconsin signup for conservation programs will be early this year, starting on September 4 for 2008 funding. There are a number of changes to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) this year in addition to the earlier availability. EQIP is the primary program available to provide financial assistance for agricultural conservation practices.

This year, a number of new conservation practices will be offered, including Waste Facility Cover, Mulching, Obstruction Removal, and Subsurface Drains, in addition to the more than 50 other practices that have been eligible in the past. Also, to help streamline payments, EQIP no longer does "cost-sharing" – instead it offers flat-rate payments based on a schedule for each particular practice. Farmers will know upfront what the payment will be, not a percentage of the costs as in the past.

All eligible applications received by the end of the ranking period on November 16, 2007 will be evaluated and ranked for 2008 funds. Signup is at the NRCS

offices in USDA Service Centers statewide. NRCS anticipates \$17 million in funds for Wisconsin, however that figure could change depending on Congressional action on the Farm Bill. Of the \$17 million, an estimated \$4 million will go toward animal waste concerns.

The Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program will also begin signup on September 4, for landowners interested in restoring wildlife habitat.

For more information, see www.wi.nrcs.usda.gov under Programs, or contact the Spooner NRCS office at 635-8228 Extension 3, the Ladysmith office at 715-532-7629, or the Ashland Service Center at 715-682-9117.

Watch out for nitrate poisoning

*Tom Syverud
Extension and Outreach Agent
Douglas County*

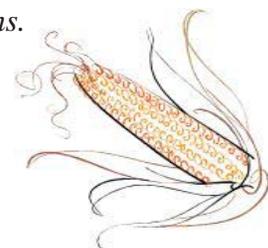
Plants normally take up nitrogen from the soil in the form of nitrate-nitrogen. This is true whether a commercial fertilizer or an organic nitrogen source, such as manure, is used to fertilize crops. Under normal weather conditions, the nitrate is rapidly converted to protein in the plant. However, if the leaves are damaged, such as by frost, the plant will accumulate and store the nitrate-nitrogen in the stalk. Nitrates may accumulate in plants from excessive nitrogen fertilization or heavy manure applications. Also, when a good rainfall breaks a drought, the plant takes a large amount of water and nitrates up together. Under these adverse conditions corn, sorghum and Sudan grass are the common crops that may present a problem with excess nitrate accumulation. Weeds

such as pigweed and lambsquarter can also concentrate nitrate-nitrogen.

Ruminant livestock can tolerate some excess nitrate, depending upon their health and condition. An animal can become conditioned to eat larger amounts of feed with high nitrate content if the introduction is gradual. Avoid rapid feed changes. Healthy animals with no parasites are less likely to be adversely affected. If adequate grain is fed, animals can consume more nitrates because carbohydrates enhance the conversion process from nitrate to protein. Dry cows have to be watched carefully. The symptoms of nitrate poisoning include poor appetite, weak calves, lambs or kids, abortions, poor growth, general unthrifty conditions, or death. Several additional factors result in poor performance. For example, performance on a ration that is low in energy or lacking in essential minerals is apt to be worse if nitrate is also present.

If fresh-chopped silage is suspected to be high in nitrates, it should be tested. Samples can be analyzed by University or commercial forage testing laboratories. Preventing nitrate loss in the sample before analysis is critical. It is best to take fresh silages directly to the laboratory. If samples must be held or shipped, samples should be frozen before shipment. Freeze samples in airtight, plastic bags for at least 24 hours and ship in insulated containers to reach the laboratory while still frozen.

*Information compiled from
University of Wisconsin
publications.*



Dairy Road Show January 15 in Rice Lake

*Otto Wiegand
Area Agricultural Agent
Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn Counties*



The 2008 Dairy Road Show will be held at 14 locations around the state in January. The Road Show is a good opportunity to hear the latest developments on hot topics for dairy farmers. The subjects to be covered will include: dairy crossbreeding updates, evaluation of milking performance, the Wisconsin Johnes control program, and dairy nutrition using bio-energy byproduct feeds.

The nearest location in NW Wisconsin will be UW-Barron at Rice Lake on Tuesday, January 15, from 10:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. The cost, which includes lunch and materials, will be \$25 if pre-registered by Friday, January 11 or \$35 for late registrations. Other sites in northern and central Wisconsin include Menomonie, Medford, Abbotsford and Plover. The Road Show is sponsored by the UW-Extension Dairy Team.

For more information and registration, contact Otto or Kevin at Spooner UW Extension, 800-528-1914 / 715-635-3506, Tim at the Barron County UW Extension, 715-537-6250, Ryan at Polk County UW Extension, 715-485-8600, or Aliasha at Rusk County UW Extension, 715-532-2151.

Short of forage? Try these resources

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

To help farmers either buy or sell hay here are two websites to help out.

The Farmer to Farmer Hay, Forage and Corn List:

<http://farmertofarmer.uwex.edu/>

puts Wisconsin farmers in touch with one another for the purpose of buying and/or selling corn and forage. The farmer to farmer list is free of charge to both buyers and sellers. Users can list or search for hay, alfalfa haylage, sorghum sudangrass, corn silage, high moisture corn, or corn grain. Search just one county or several counties at the same time.

The Upper Midwest Haylist:

<http://www.haylist.umn.edu/>

is a cooperative effort of the Extension Services of Minnesota, Illinois, Wisconsin, and South Dakota. Haylist is a self-service tool that enables buyers and sellers of hay, straw and corn silage in the U.S. and Canada to announce and search available or needed hay lots and to view haylot summary data.

UW-Cooperative Extension assumes no responsibility in the transaction of buying or selling the items listed on these web sites. All transactions and negotiations are handled directly between buyers and sellers.

Don't have access to a computer or the Internet? Contact your local library or your local UW-Extension Ag Agent for assistance.

This Quarter's Events

Current – Disaster Program Signups for Northwestern Wisconsin Counties, (1) Livestock Compensation Program for grazing losses in 2005-2006, and (2) Crop Disaster Program for crop losses in 2005-2006 for those who had crop insurance or NAP, contact your local FSA office.

October 2-6, Tuesday - Saturday, World Dairy Expo, Madison.

October 16, 6:30 - 9:30 p.m. - Home Grown Fuels, the economics and sustainability of biodiesel, Great Lakes Visitor Center, Brandon Boys 715-682-1189.

October-December – EQIP Signup Period, see article.

November 7, Grape Pruning Workshop, Spooner Ag Research Station. For more information, contact Kevin Schoessow at 715-635-3506.

November 2007 – Mar 2008, Wisconsin School for Beginning Farmers, Spooner area. Application deadline November 1, 2007. See article

December – Ag Census. Please fill it out accurately, see article.

January 15, Tuesday, 10:30-3:00 – Dairy Road Show, UW-Barron, Rice Lake - see article, also watch farm magazines and newspapers. The brochure will be in the January 2008 newsletter.

January 24-25, Thursday-Friday, Midwest Value-Added Agriculture Conference & Wisconsin Local Food Summit, Eau Claire, Plaza Hotel, contact Jane Hansen, UWEX, 715-339-2555, or River Country 715-834-9672/800-226-9672 for more details.

How USDA agriculture survey data impacts farmers

Kevin Schoessow

Area Ag Development Agent

Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn Counties

Each year the USDA Agriculture Resource Management Survey contacts farmers in every county across the country for survey data on agriculture practices. These surveys are sent out to a randomly selected group of farmers to help get a snapshot of agricultural activities. In addition to these yearly random surveys, the USDA does a much more extensive Census of Agriculture every five years. The next Census of Agriculture is scheduled to be sent out in November of 2007.

The data collected from these surveys is used by many different government agencies, as well as non-government groups. They directly impact farm programs, policies, and ultimately farmers themselves. Government disaster programs, crop and livestock insurance and dairy programs are all impacted by farmer reported survey data. Bottom line: it's in the farmer's best interest to read these surveys and fill them out as accurately as possible.

Uses of ARMS Data

Did you know that virtually every federal policy and program that affects U.S. farmers is based on data from the Agricultural Resource Management Survey (ARMS)? ARMS is USDA's primary source of information on the production practices, resource use and economic well-being of America's farm households.

- ARMS provides annual cost-of-production estimates required by Congress for more than 15 commodities covered under farm-support legislation.
- ARMS provides data regarding chemical use on field crops as required by environmental and food safety laws such as the Food Quality Protection Act.
- ARMS data underpin USDA's estimates of net farm income and demonstrate agriculture's contribution to the gross domestic product.
- ARMS tracks farmers' adoption of new technologies such as bio-engineered seed, livestock waste management practices, chemical and biological pest management alternatives, and information management technologies such as the internet and GPS.
- USDA's Office of Energy and New Uses relies on ARMS data to estimate farmers' annual expenses for gasoline, diesel, natural gas, liquid propane gas and other fuels.
- ARMS enables USDA to calculate the parity prices that help regulate the federal marketing orders for more than 30 fruits, vegetables, nuts and specialty crops.
- The Agricultural Marketing Service uses ARMS data in deriving its monthly cost-of-production estimates for milk production for the United States and five regions.
- The Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service use ARMS data to determine annual federal grazing fees on the nation's public lands.
- The Risk Management Agency uses ARMS data to understand levels of farm income and risk management tools used by farmers.
- The Agricultural Research Service uses ARMS data to better understand the structural and production characteristics of farms and the demographic characteristics of farm operators for each of its research planning regions.
- The Natural Resources Conservation Service uses ARMS data on production costs, input use, and technology adoption to assess the performance of conservation programs.
- The Rural Business Cooperative Service uses ARMS to obtain information about the use of cooperatives by farmers.
- The Cooperative Extension System uses ARMS-based data about farm sizes and types to better target farmer education programs.

Wisconsin school for beginning dairy and livestock farmers begins in November

***Spoooner Ag Research Station – 15 Sessions, November-March
Thursdays, 11:00 a.m - 1:15 p.m.***

*Otto Wiegand
Area Agricultural Agent
Burnett, Sawyer, & Washburn Counties*

The Wisconsin School for Beginning Farmers course will be offered this fall and winter at Spooner, Phillips, Wausau, Madison and Reedsburg. It is offered through the University of Wisconsin Farm and Industry Short Course. Delivery will be done through interactive video and audio. Although the course begins with grazing, most of the subject materials apply to both grass-based and conventional farming and cover dairy, beef, sheep and goats. The most important aspect of the course is business planning. Each student will be required to develop his/her own business plan by the end of the course. Since the course began in 1995, 200 students have enrolled and 1/3 have gone on to start their own farms.

There are 15 required regular sessions and some opportunities for software training, tours or attendance at GrassWorks, depending on location. The class sessions run from 11:00 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. on Thursdays except for one Tuesday before Thanksgiving. Students who miss a session may catch it later on-line.

The cost of the distance course is \$240. You may also take it for university credit at a higher cost. Additional afternoon sessions covering related topics of interest will be added at Spooner by local UW-Extension during Terms II & III and will be open to the public. This information will be available later. Due to scheduling conflicts, a few of the sessions may be held at another location in Spooner. You will have to bring your own lunch.

The registration deadline is November 1. Enrollment may be limited, so call early. To register or obtain further information, contact Otto Wiegand at UWEX Spooner at 715-635-3506, Dick Cates at 608-265-6437, or Jennifer Taylor at 608-265-7914. The course is a collaborative effort between the UW-Center for Integrated Agricultural Studies, UW Cooperative Extension, CALS, DATCP, the Technical Colleges and GrassWorks.

Tentative Schedule:

Term I

- November 15, Thursday – Starting a dairy or livestock business, environmental considerations
- November 20, Tuesday – Setting realistic goals for starting your farm business
- November 29, Thursday – Feeding the dairy cow on pasture
- December 6, Thursday – Farm selection, grazing layout design
- December 13, Thursday – Beef production and marketing
- December 20, Thursday – Goat dairying, Term I exam
- To Be Determined – Introduction to financial planning software (FINPACK)

Term II

- January 24, Thursday – Developing a business plan, lessons learned from farm startups
- January 31, Thursday – Successful business startup model, marketing strategies
- February 7, Thursday – Enterprise budgets, records, Term II exam

Term III

- February 14, Thursday – Organic dairying
- February 21, Thursday – Sheep dairying
- February 28, Thursday – Low-cost milking parlors, wintering
- March 6, Thursday – Dairy crossbreeding, decision-making
- March 13, Thursday – Bringing it together, farmer perspectives
- March 20, Thursday – Presentations of student business plans, farmer/lender panel

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Kevin Schoessow
UWEX Area Agricultural Agent



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