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CropLinks

information on forages, corn and cereals

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Another Dry One!

The end of a tough cropping season which featured below average yields for most NS field crops, higher fertilizer-fuel-herbicide costs, and yet another drought in western and parts of central NS. How dry was it……the Kentville Agriculture Canada weather station reported only 30 mils of rainfall between July 30th and September 14th, no wonder there was no mid-season pasture growth, our corn crop had lots of height but less than normal grain development, and provincial stored forage reserves are not where they should be heading into winter.

This is the cropping off-season, time to plan and re-energize for next year's cropping activities and to enjoy the nice quality of life that being a Maritimer usually offers. Season's Greetings !

New Variety Selection Guide

This issue of CropLinks features 'What's New' in the Corn, Forage and Cereal Guides. These various variety selection guides recommend what we feel are the best genetics available to you based on Maritime performance testing.

In corn there are nine new grain hybrids and eleven new silage hybrids added to the Recommended Lists. Corn growers have an excellent line-up of high yielding, adequately maturing (2150-2400 corn heat units) GMO or non-GMO hybrids to choose from. It's important to work with your agronomist or corn seed rep to choose the appropriate maturing hybrid for your production area, soil texture, and type of silo used for silage corn. Don't hesitate to call us if you have particular corn hybrid selection questions.

The 2006 Forage Guide has only a few new additions to the Recommended Lists mainly because it takes 4 years to complete a trial on perennial forages and usually only alfalfa, clovers and timothy are tested with any frequency. The 2006 Forage Guide does list newly recommended alfalfa varieties Bishops 134, Magnum IV, Pickseed 2065 MF, Pioneer 54V54 and Renaissance along with another 8 – 10 alfalfas that have done well in prior Maritime testing and show good to very good winter hardiness in our climate. In forages less than 5% of the yield difference is usually linked to varietal genetics (versus over 10% that we can get with corn or winter wheat varietal selection in the Maritimes). The keys to good forage performance tend to be more in selecting the right seed mixture, good establishment, harvest timing and fertility.

In the 2006 Cereal Guide there are not any changes on the Recommended Lists, however the relative yield % for those varieties on the list have either improved or dropped off slightly with the addition of the 2005 Maritime testing results.

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Happy Holidays!

All the best from the CropLinks Team to you and your loved ones during this holiday season!

Poncho 250 Seed Treatment

This year Nova Scotia had almost 20,000 acres of corn production of which a very high percentage of this acreage had Poncho 250 insecticial seed treatment. For the most part, Poncho 250 provided very good protection from wireworm; however, there were complaints from four growers (less than 100 total acres) that this lighter rate of Poncho was not adequate to give them full season wireworm protection and maintain a good crop population.

Poncho 250 is stated to give good early season wireworm protection up to the 4th or 5th leaf stage of development. In the small number of cases where corn treated with Poncho 250 was damaged by wireworm, wireworm populations were high with many wireworms feeding on each plant for several weeks. Wireworm pressure is greatest in the second year of corn following grass. Wireworms which live for several years feed on the remnants of the grass sod during the first year. In the second year of corn all there is for the wireworm to eat is the corn roots. This is when wireworm damage is most severe. If you suspect a field has a high population of wireworms especially in the second year of corn following grass forage we would suggest you spend the extra $5.00/acre and order "Poncho 1250" or use the granular insecticide "Force" if this attachment is on your planter.

Regarding black cutworm control from the Poncho 250 seed treatment, it is very difficult to assess its effectiveness because cutworm occurrence in NS corn is fairly light and sporadic from year-to-year (not the common pest that wireworms are). In 2005 there were about 6-8 conventionally tilled & weed free fields in western NS that required a foliar – evening application of Matador to knockdown aggressively feeding black cutworms at the 5-6th leaf stage of corn.

Our most severe black cutworm damage, however, was on no-till fields that had lots of perennial grass weed problems. In this farm situation meadow foxtails and bluegrass weeds started after the early October Roundup burndown, didn't get sprayed prior to corn planting and were an attractive host for the cutworm moth to lay eggs on. When the grasses were burnt off in the Roundup Ready corn around the 5-6th leaf stage, the cutworms then moved onto the corn crop and destroyed a high percentage of plants.

For no-till corn growers, especially those using the Roundup Ready hybrids your better black cutworm protection options would be using "Force" granular insecticide or possibly the Poncho 1250 rate (although there is no NS research data on Poncho 1250 to support this regarding black cutworms). The few conventionally tilled cornfields that have black cutworm damage serious enough to be concerned with can be treated with a foliar application of Matador when detected at the 4-6th leaf stage.

Variety Guides (cont.)

With regard to 6 – row barley some NS growers have inquired about new varieties Encore and AC Klinck which are leading the Quebec trials. We now have two years of testing on AC Klinck and have just looked at Encore in 2005 for the first time, early results show these varieties are better than Chapais, but not as good as AC Legend, which has been our top Maritime barley in recent years.

Cheap Feed or Cheap Fuel?

At the recent Maritime Seed Growers Association annual meeting, Peter Boswall, from PEI Department of Agriculture had a presentation on burning cereals for heat production. With a few Nova Scotia farmers heating their homes with a "corn furnace" and pleased with the money that they are saving, I thought I'd pass on some of Peter's comments.

Peter encourages growers that already have grain storage and auguring systems in place to consider using cereals to heat homes and farm buildings. Barley and wheat have about 40% of the net heat value of oil, or at the current cost of $0.75/litre for furnace oil the heating energy in barley is worth about $300/tonne. He said cereals have about 80% of the heat value of wood pellets which are selling for $260/tonne on the Island and are in short supply.

In his handout, Peter says that odor from these cereal burning furnaces can occur when the flame is restricted, but this can be overcome by having a bottom feeding furnace and reducing low-load burning operations(don't oversize the burner for your needs). Burning cereals produces more acidity so corrosion resistant materials are required and the high potassium content of grain can cause clinker formation (baseball sized hard mass) in the furnace which can quickly be taken out on a daily basis.

If you think oil prices are going to stay high for some time you may want to check out the heating and insurance situation with "corn stoves". Some reputable websites that I googled with "burning corn" were www.omafra.gov.on.ca/english/engineer/facts/93-023.htm and www.bae.umn.edu/extens/energy/cornburners.html or http://burncorn.cas.psu.edu/ .

Stay warm this winter!