

January weather limits outside agriculture work in Douglas County

By Larry W. Dallas, President Douglas County Farm Bureau

January weather hasn't been very conducive to accomplishing much, outside at least. Rain on two successive Mondays kept us from taking hay to the sale at Arthur. Soft drives and barn lots have kept much grain from moving off the farm. After the snow on the second weekend of the month, most of us devoted a day or two to clearing drives and lots. Farmers pay federal income tax March 1 so many of us are gathering the numbers we need to file our taxes. The year end is also the time to see where your operation is at fiscally, especially compared to past years.

Grain movement has been hampered as well by problems in Decatur, a major user of corn and soybeans from the area. Archer Daniels Midland had a major breakdown in their grain receiving in December and can unload grain cars only with difficulty. This means trying to satisfy their need for corn with semi loads. The tradeoff is not good. A rail car holds around 3,500 bushels of

corn. A loaded semi hauls about 900 bushels. ADM is taking corn 24 hours a day to get enough corn to cover their needs. The repairs are expected to take months so this won't soon be remedied.

The partial government shutdown is in the news often, and I have heard stories about its effect on farmers. Right now I would classify it as an inconvenience. The local Farm Service Agency offices are closed so no business can be transacted there. The FSA has new farmer and limited resource operating loans, and this is the time of year to purchase inputs for the best discounts. Not being able to buy inputs now could cut into those farmers' bottom lines. The support program triggered by the trade problems with China is on hold too. Sign up for that was to end January 15, but that will be extended by the length of the closure.

We have a new farm bill, but this is only a framework for the future programs. The government hiatus is preventing the development of the policy that is based on this framework. In the long run this may be the worst effect of

the closure. We have an idea what the farm programs will be going forward, but that is not set in stone yet. We have two Conservation Security Program contracts that encourage conservation practices on our farm land. It appears that this program is radically altered in the new Farm Bill, but we just don't know until the regulations are finalized. Planting time is not far off in the far southern parts of the country. They would like to know, I am sure, what the farm programs are before the crop goes in the ground. The markets are in a little bit of a holding pattern without that important piece of information.

I have talked about the many reports the government issues about crop conditions, food demand, and farm exports. These are not being issued with the partial shutdown. I heard one market analyst that said it was especially inconvenient not to have export sales numbers. I heard another that said most of the information the government provides can be found privately if you look for it. It is certain that we are operating under some handicap without the regular reports from the

government. It has been assumed since the last production report in December that yields of the corn and soybeans would be lowered because of the drawn out harvest, especially is the Upper Midwest. There will be no confirmation of this until the government is back up and running.

This time of year is filled with meetings since field operations are on hold. The new Farm Bill reauthorizes the crop insurance we use to lower our risk in agricultural production. Several companies are holding meetings around the state to explain what they know right now about the insurance. Illinois drainage districts and affiliated organizations have a statewide meeting the third week of January. It was two days long with sessions on engineering, conservation and legal matters. Marketing our production is often the hardest part of this business and meetings on marketing take place nearly daily around the state.

The American Farm Bureau Federation held its annual meeting in early January. It is similar to our state annual meeting with semi-

nars for education and delegate sessions to set policy. Illinois Farm Bureau sent a large contingent to participate and influence the policy of our national organization. It helped that the meeting was held in a warmer place than Illinois, New Orleans. For the second year in a row, President Trump addressed the group and Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue was also in attendance. Illinois was able to move several of its policy initiatives through the delegate session into AFBF policy.

One part of the new Farm Bill legalizes the production of hemp as a farm crop, and we have seen several articles about this as an alternative to corn and soybeans in Illinois. Alternative crops are always attractive, especially in times of depressed commodity prices. It is never as simple as obtaining seed and planting the new crop. Will the planter we have now plant the new crop? How is it harvested and where will it be delivered? What form do you take to market, the whole plant or just the seed? What are the fertilizer requirements of the new plants? Often we see claims

that this new crop or another don't really use that many nutrients from the soil. That seems unlikely for any crop and, if the whole plant is removed, very unlikely. What are the other agronomic requirements for the crop?

In cleaning out some old files I found information about field peas. These were touted several years ago to be planted early in the spring and harvested soon enough to plant something else after the peas were harvested. None of these planted around here since that first year of interest. They are much more suited to areas with a less humid climate than we have. I recently saw information about a winter annual, penny cress, to be planted in the fall as a cover crop plant and harvested in the early spring for oil production. Soybeans would follow it. A similar plant is a weed in the area so it is probably well adapted but the same questions about markets apply.

Thank you for reading about Douglas County agriculture this month. I hope you find it informative and interesting.

HOMES

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"You have to be working towards what that person is trying to accomplish through the at home programs - window washing or someone who is older and wants to retire. It's really geared toward the person."

With the addition of Marion County Horizon Center to the Douglas County services, Intermittent CILA will become an option for area families as well.

"The person can live in their apartment or own home, and we are responsible for providing them with up to 15 hours per week of staff," Houser explained. "A

lot of times families use it for an outing - grocery shopping or doctor's appointments."

Of the individuals who are 24-hour residents, up to 35 percent of them have a goal to eventually live in their own apartment.

"Part of their experience with us is to learn those things they need to live on their own," Houser said. "This service (Intermittent CILA) can provide them a safety net."

Over the last few weeks Houser and Mayhall have coordinated final work at the homes and interviews for the 24-hour staff.

"We're finding that a lot of people are coming to interview who are very excited, but don't know much

about providing care," Mayhall said.

"They don't have experience, but they are excited to have a difference in someone else's life," Houser said.

Houser says to apply as a DSP or CNA for the Tuscola group homes email your resume to raymond-househm@gmail.com or call 217-599-1076.

"Typically neighbors won't see so many cars at the houses, but right now while we are doing training there will be a little more than usual," Houser said. "We are trying to be mindful of that and move vehicles to get them out of the way."

Raymond Drive residents planned to move in by the end of January, while the

Center Street residents will likely move in this month.

"We understand the fear of the unknown, and I believe once we are settled their opinions will change," Houser said about the community members' concerns during the planning commission hearing in October. "We want to be good neighbors and that's one of our main goals. If we can't be good neighbors our residents won't have a good quality of life, and that's a huge thing for us. We want to be integrated into the community, and we are really hoping that the community can really get to know our residents and get to know what we do."

At the Raymond house, the residents were anxious to

move into their rooms to add their own taste to the décor. One resident has a particular liking for Minnie Mouse, and the staff had Minnie bedding waiting for her.

"(Executive director) David (Armbrust's) philosophy is different than anyone I've ever worked for, and I've been in the field for almost 25 years," Houser explained. "The philosophy of Marion County is that these are the residents' homes, and whatever we need to do to make the resident comfortable that is what we do. So that is why we put the fence up at Raymond, for example. If it's something they would benefit from we are happy to provide it."

"We've already talked

about painting the A-frame of the swing together (at the Raymond house), and they are very excited about that just like I am excited about going shopping for my house," Mayhall said.

"It is their choice; it is their right; it's their home," Houser added. "We are just there to provide services so that they can live as independently as possible in their home. We are not there to dictate what they do or what they don't do, although, just as you and I live, there are rules that you live by, and if you live with others their feelings are something to take into consideration. So when they make choices in the house, they have to all come together."

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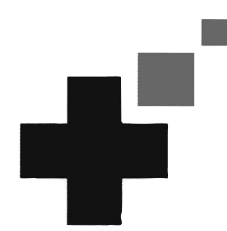
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