

Columns

Early soybean planting a growing trend

There was a little fieldwork done in Douglas County before Easter. The week after Easter saw just about everyone out in the field. There was a lot of ground worked and some corn planted. The relatively new practice of planting soybeans before planting corn acres continues to grow in popularity. A quick windshield survey shows as many acres of soybeans planted as corn.

The old rule of thumb of waiting until the ground temperature was 50 degrees at sunrise is largely out the window. In the past few years, if the ground can be worked, farmers will begin to plant. The even older adage was to plant corn when the oak leaves were the size of squirrel ears. It took warmth for the leaves to grow to that size and that generally meant that it was safe to plant the untreated seed of 100 years ago.

That seed corn was probably shelled by the farmer himself from good ears that were laid aside the fall before. I have seen barn driveways with rows of nails along the beams to hang ears of corn to be dried for the next year's seed. Hybrid corn as we know it was in its infancy. There were varieties of corn that farmers used and some of these can still be purchased. These had descrip-

tive names like Reid's Yellow Dent and Bloody Butcher.

The single cross-seed corn we plant today was just starting to be sold in the 1920s. A single cross is created with the technique many of you are familiar with. Rows of male corn pollinate female rows that are detasseled so they cannot self-pollinate. The resulting corn has the strengths and characteristics of both parents. Seed companies devote millions of dollars each year to research to create new and better crosses to sell to farmers.

That farmer a hundred years ago would have wanted to have his oats planted by now so that they could grow and mature before the hot, dry weather of an Illinois July. Soybeans were just beginning to be planted 100 years ago and were more likely to be cut for hay than harvested for grain. Soybean seeds were seen as more fragile than corn and planting them was delayed until they would come up quickly. Extended cold and wet weather would rot the bean in the ground.

Planting time seed treatments put protective products right on the seed and make it more likely the seed can survive wet, cold weather. These are what allow us to ignore

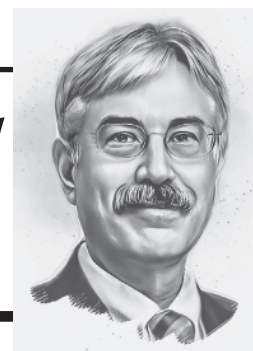
the weather. These treatments contain insecticides, fungicides, and, increasingly, biological products to increase root growth and soil biological activity. As I write this, the air temperature is 39 degrees, after nearly a week of temperatures in the high seventies. An Illinois corn or soybean field is a harsh environment in early spring.

Biologics are the brave new world of seed and plant treatments. Little independent research has been done on these and it is difficult to quantify such things as root growth and soil health. Of course, yield is the ultimate test for results. We are trying a new corn seed treatment on a few acres. It is supposed to provide additional nitrogen for the growing plants. I talked to a University of Illinois agronomist that is skeptical. We are doing strip tests with it to see if it performs as advertised.

Nearly everyone in this area agrees that the ground is working nicely, and it is easy to attain a good seedbed. The planters we use today will plant into about anything, but it is better to put a seed into mellow soil as opposed to a bunch of clods. I think that the relatively dry winter along with a lot of freezing and thawing has left the soil in

Douglas County Agriculture

By Larry Dallas



good condition for the growing season.

Politics continue to be a large concern for agriculture. The Illinois Farm Bureau sent a team of farmers to Washington last month to relay our views on the issues to our legislators. The current Farm Bill expires on September 30 of this year. With a sharply divided Congress, it seems unlikely a new Farm Bill can be agreed upon in just over 5 months. The bulk of Farm Bill spending is for food assistance and that promises to be sticky by itself. Some want to increase that spending and others want to tighten up requirements.

The Waters of the United States issue came to a sort of a head when Congress in rare bipartisanship passed a vote of disapproval of the President's WOTUS rule. That earned a veto from the president, but it was good to see that Congress agrees with most of agricul-

ture. The current rules ignore private property rights and are too hard to interpret. Land far from navigable water might be caught up in the current rule.

There is a case in the Supreme Court dealing with this issue and most agriculture interests thought the US EPA should wait to write the rules until that case was decided. EPA certainly should not do any kind of enforcement of rules that might be thrown out later this summer. Farmers and other landowners have been seesawing back and forth with competing views of what water features should be under federal jurisdiction. Some consistency is due.

Illinois Farm Bureau has a long tradition of developing leadership among its members. Ag Leaders of Tomorrow is one of those efforts. I participated in ALOT in the 1980s and it continues today. Last month the Illinois Farm

Bureau Board had dinner with this year's class and then watched as they had a wrap up exercise using what they had learned. The premise was that they were lobbying a county board or city council about an ag issue like the siting of a hog building.

Advocacy is important to Farm Bureau. With farmers being perhaps 1 percent of the population, we must talk loudly to be heard. Of course, the fact that we are producing the food, fiber, and fuel the country relies on gives us a little extra weight. That also seems to make just about everybody think they know how we should perform that task.

We have already been on the roads, but I will repeat my twice-yearly request that you take care driving around farm equipment. The contrasts in the speed of a tractor and the speed of your car mean that you close the distance to a tractor very quickly. The driver of the tractor might not see you right away either. Please slow down on the country roads. Thank you for driving safely and reading about Douglas County agriculture.

Larry W. Dallas is District 12 Director of the Illinois Farm Bureau

Potpourri and random thoughts

How does your garden grow?

As the grandson of a farmer, the itch to scratch some dirt was too hard for me to overcome after taking a year off from gardening. However, physical limitations such as being as round as I am tall have discouraged me from planting a garden in the traditional fashion, so my bestie "helped" me build some raised garden beds (in this case, he did most of the work while I fetched supplies, same as usual) out of treated 2x4's and a 55-gallon plastic barrel that we cut in half longways. Shout out to Astro for the assist, but I think it's going to cost me some produce if any grows. I cut holes in the bottom for drainage, layered a thin coating of gravel over that, put some weed netting down over the gravel to keep the soil from leaking out the drain holes, and

then filled it with a mix of topsoil and manure. I'm interested in seeing if it works.

The Cardinals are flying low

The redbirds had more wins than any other team in spring training, which served to amp up expectations, and frankly they've played pretty poorly from jump street. Their starting pitching is suspect, and the relievers have been spotty as well. The offense is going to give you three or four runs every time out but when you give up 5 it still equals a loss. Only the fact that we share a division with Cincinnati is keeping us out of the cellar, which frankly is where we belong, so far. Granted, we're only 21 games into a 162-game season, but the teams above us are playing well, and looking like they're not going

Hook, Line and Sinker

By Tony Hooker



anywhere, so it's going to be hard to make up ground.

Blue Devils diamond sports glow

Only a horrendous 10 error game vs ALAH is keeping the VG baseball team out of first place in the Lincoln Prairie Conference, as they sit at 4-1, one game behind the aforementioned Knights. They've gotten good contributions from up and down the lineup at

the plate, and the pitching has been solid. On the diamond to the east, the same thing is go-

ing down. After a 7-error game vs. ALAH, the softballers find themselves at 4-1 in the conference. (The fact that these two games, which featured 22 errors between the 4 teams, occurred simultaneously has me wondering if there was a rending of the space time continuum at VG high school last Monday. We're talking twilight zone stuff here.) They've been getting contributions from their veterans and their newbies alike. Alex Brown, who

will take her talents to Danville Area Community College next year, has been as steady as they come on the pitching rubber this season. Maci Clodfelder, who will play at Lake Land Community College next year, has continued to drop bombs, recently setting the all-time home run mark for VG. All in all, both teams are seeing the benefits of playing a tough non-conference schedule, and I expect that they will make some noise in the post season.

Let them eat chocolate cake

I have a special recipe this week that comes from Jeannine Muchow of Springfield. She says "when my grandkids want chocolate cake, this is the one they are asking for." I have not made this cake but it does sound wonderful, and the name alone makes me think it just has to be good!

Let's Cook

By Linda Hoskins



Pour batter into a greased and floured 13x9x2 pan.

Bake at 350 degrees for 35 to 40 minutes. When completely cooled, ice with your favorite chocolate icing.

If you don't have buttermilk on hand, you can sour your own milk. To make exactly 1 cup of sour milk, put one tablespoon of vinegar or lemon juice in a measuring cup and fill up with whole or 2% milk until you get to 1 cup measuring mark, stir well and let sit for 5 minutes. Vinegar works

better than lemon juice. However, keep in mind this soured milk won't give the exact same flavor as buttermilk, but it will do.

Jeannine says that instead of strong coffee, you can use 2 tsp instant coffee plus 1 cup boiling water. (but be sure to let it cool down first!)

If you have a recipe to share, please send it to letscook!@heraldpubs.com or mail to Mascoutah Herald, PO Box C, Mascoutah IL 62258. Thanks and Happy Cooking!

Weekly + HOROSCOPES

ARIES – Mar 21/Apr 20

Aries, figure out where your priorities lie, then position yourself in the right corner to get things done effectively. It could take some time before you see progress. Remain patient.

TAURUS – Apr 21/May 21

It's best if you can keep tight control of your emotions and not let others see what is brewing behind your stoic demeanor, Taurus. This will give you an advantage in negotiations.

GEMINI – May 22/June 21

Gemini, if you're too pragmatic this week, you may miss the opportunity to do something spontaneous and really enjoyable with friends. Don't think; jump in this one time.

CANCER – June 22/July 22

The week may start off sluggishly, Cancer. Give yourself permission to start off slowly and build up as you get enough energy and motivation to move along.

LEO – July 23/Aug 23

Leo, rather than being ready to roar at the world, you can barely let pass a meow. You're more than happy to roll back over in bed most days. Search for an energy boost.

VIRGO – Aug 24/Sept 22

Virgo, early on in the week you may feel disorganized and out of sorts. But soon enough you will find your stride. Once you're in a groove it will be smooth sailing.

LIBRA – Sept 23/Oct 23

Libra, if someone at work has been holding you back or seems to be standing in your way, it's justifiable to feel resentment. Take the high road and remain pleasant and positive.

SCORPIO – Oct 24/Nov 22

Scorpio, don't ignore your responsibilities, no matter how mundane they may seem. Com-

pleting small tasks will help you set the course for more success.

SAGITTARIUS – Nov 23/Dec 21

Your judgement may be clouded by some lofty dreams you have been having, Sagittarius. Separate the whimsy from what you actually may be able to transfer to real life.

CAPRICORN – Dec 22/Jan 20

You may be tempted to butt heads with authority figures in the days to come, but you'll catch more flies with honey, Capricorn. Get your frustrations out another way.

AQUARIUS – Jan 21/Feb 18

Relationship issues come to the forefront, Aquarius. This can be any relationship, be it personal or professional. Sit down with this person and flesh things out.

PISCES – Feb 19/Mar 20

The current cosmic climate has you a tad restless, Pisces. You're ready to stretch your fins, so to say. Set off on a grand adventure.

FAMOUS BIRTHDAYS

APRIL 23
John Cena, Wrestler (46)
APRIL 24
Joe Keery, Actor (31)
APRIL 25
Al Pacino, Actor (83)
APRIL 26
Channing Tatum, Actor (43)
APRIL 27
Martha Hunt, Model (34)
APRIL 28
Penelope Cruz, Actress (49)
APRIL 29
Jerry Seinfeld, Comic (69)