

Danville Co-op Agronomy News, July 2010

In the last few weeks, several wheat producers have contacted me to ask questions about growing a double crop or an alternative crop besides wheat. Their questions are justified by the fact that both the world market and domestic wheat market is telling us loud and clear financially, that they don't need any more wheat. We are not loading any ships at the port and the domestic market has all it needs of high quality (no cheat, no rye) wheat. They will still buy quality wheat for a decent price, but they can pick and chose where their wheat will come from. The question is: How do we build flexibility in our cropping systems to answer the demand of our markets? The long term answer to that question is simply knowledge of our soils, knowledge of our alternative crops, and close examination of our cultural practices and the implementation of changes that will allow for alternative cropping.

Since coming to this area almost two years ago, I have learned that our two biggest challenges in crop production are soil pH and compaction. Soybeans, corn and sorghum are not fond of acid soils. Out of hundreds of soil samples pulled in the last two years, it is rare to find a soil pH reading at or above 7.0 which is neutral. Also, Farnum, Shellabarger and Milan soils, among others, are extremely easy to compact. How do you make a brick: Take a clay soil and squeeze all the air, moisture and organic matter out of it, then bake it in the sun! Moisture storage is greatest in clay soils, but how do we get the moisture past the brick to enable us to store it? These thoughts only scratch the surface as to what we need to address. We haven't gotten into nutrients, varietal differences, rotational selection, organic matter and carbon sequestration.

So, we have determined that we have some things to learn and consider. How do we proceed in our educational efforts to address the most important issues regarding crop rotations and alternative cropping? Would classroom style mini-seminars help? Maybe some question and answer sessions? Inviting guest speakers and industry leaders to our sessions is a real possibility. Is there a group of people even willing to invest their time to get their questions answered? Is anybody out there? Your local Danville Co-op is willing to help organize this effort if there is any interest! We are asking for you to engage us in this discussion. If there are interested parties out there, we want to help!

Remember, "It's all about the soil". A farm tractor has never grown a plant, ever!