



# Ag MAILBAG

Questions should be emailed to: [info@ag.state.wv.us](mailto:info@ag.state.wv.us) or [marketbulletin@ag.state.wv.us](mailto:marketbulletin@ag.state.wv.us) or mailed to: WVDA, Market Bulletin, 1900 Kanawha Blvd., E, Charleston, WV 25305.

**Q:** I have heard that there is an insect attacking ash trees. We have two beautiful trees and would like to keep them healthy. Is there anything we can do to protect them? I have seen purple bags hanging on trees in Ohio. Is this something that would be helpful? If these would be helpful, where can we get them or something else?

~ Sharon Williams

**A:** Dear Sharon,

The ash pest you referred to in your email is an introduced pest (its name is the Emerald Ash Borer) that attacks and kills ash trees. I will forward your inquiry to Jody Wilson and she can contact you with additional information. You can learn more about this pest by visiting the West Virginia Department of Agriculture's website at [www.wvagriculture.org/](http://www.wvagriculture.org/). On the right side of the homepage is a link to our emerald ash borer website. I invite you to visit the Plant Industries Division website by clicking on Plant Industries on the left side of the WVDA home page. There you may find other information of interest to you. Thank you for your inquiry and good luck preserving your ash trees.

Gary W. Gibson, Director  
WVDA Plant Industries Division

## GARDEN CALENDAR

~ JUNE ~

- June 5..... Seed pumpkins and winter squash
- June 6..... Plant celery
- June 7..... Monitor for garden pests. Build a high tunnel
- June 9..... Mulch garden to control weeds and conserve moisture
- June 10..... Plant tomatoes. Seed bush beans
- June 11..... Begin control measures for squash vine borer and cucumber beetle
- June 12..... Seed winter squash
- June 13..... Seed corn and beets
- June 14..... Seed pumpkins
- June 15..... Begin bagworm control
- June 16..... Plant peppers. Prune raspberries
- June 18..... Prune spring-flowering shrubs
- June 19..... Seed pole limas and snap beans
- June 22..... Renovate strawberries and last harvest
- June 23..... Pinch back garden mums
- June 24..... Treat lawn for white grubs
- June 25..... End asparagus harvest
- June 26..... Prune pine trees
- June 27..... Turn compost
- June 30..... Plant late tomatoes

## AILING ECONOMY DOESN'T HURT FFA HAM, BACON AND EGG SALES

An unstable national economy had no apparent effect on the annual FFA State Ham, Bacon and Egg Show and Sale, held in Charleston March 9.

"Thanks to the continuing generosity of the bidders who support these educational programs, West Virginia FFA students will have money to put toward next year's projects, or money to help offset the cost of college," said Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass. "Nearly all the bidders show up year after year, and their support has helped a generation of young farmers."



Proceeds from the state show totaled \$36,769, nearly \$750 more than the 2008 sale, and the fifth highest total in the history of the event. More than \$1.1 million has been raised since it was started in 1941. Numerous county sales have provided an untold number of additional dollars for students.

County sales in 2009 also remained strong, according to Gene Walker, a special assistant with the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) who works with school FFA programs.

The Grand Champion Ham at the state sale was produced by Nick Billeter of Tyler Consolidated High School and purchased by the Tate-Porter Family Automall for \$3,325. Jenessa Kinkade of Valley High School produced the Grand Champion Bacon, which brought \$1,750 from Gunnoe Farms LLC. Trevor Cummings of Roane County High School sold his Grand Champion Eggs to the Tate-Porter Family Automall for \$2,000.

Kelley Flesher of Tyler Consolidated sold her Reserve Champion ham for \$2,200 to Gunnoe Sausage Co. The Reserve Champion Bacon was produced by Ava Morris of Valley High and brought \$1,800 from Kroger Mid-Atlantic. Brandon Ash of Roane County High sold his Reserve Champion Eggs to Fas-Chek for \$2,500.

The show is sponsored annually by the Governor's Office, the WVDA, West Virginia Department of Education and Carhartt. Ronald Morrison Auction Services and Resource Marketing, Inc. donated auctioneering services. For more information, visit [www.wvffa.org](http://www.wvffa.org).



### Photos

Top: Champion Ham (19 pounds, \$175/pound, \$3,325) produced by Nick Billeter, Tyler Consolidated High School, and purchased by Don Tate of Tate-Porter Family Automall.

Middle: Champion Bacon (7 pounds, \$250/pound, \$1,750) produced by Jenessa Kinkade, Valley High School, and purchased by RG Gunnoe Farms, LLC. Joy Gunnoe pictured.

Bottom: Champion Eggs (white, \$2,000). Produced by Trevor Cummings, Roane County High School, and purchased by Tate-Porter Family Automall, Don Tate (left) and Mark Porter (right).

~ See Reserve Champion Photos in July Market Bulletin ~

## WVU-Extension Service Offers Cattle Farmer Financial Assistance Program in North Central West Virginia

Increasing input cost of fertilizer, fuel, machinery and feed are forcing livestock producers to consider more economical farming methods. West Virginia producers cannot cover these increasing input costs by handling large volumes of livestock due to the small size of their farms. Typical West Virginia cattle farms in North Central West Virginia average 124 acres of farmland and consist of approximately 17 cows. State farmers could increase income by adding sheep to their farming operation. When a farmer adds sheep to a cattle only grazing operation, it is referred to multi-species grazing.

Grazing, cont. on page 4

# Something to ponder while mowing hay

Tom McConnell, Director, West Virginia Small Farm Center of the WVU Extension Service

I love to mow hay. That precious time mowing is when I have an opportunity to ponder about the big picture on the farm and how it is going. It seems harder and harder to make a small herd of beef cows resemble an agricultural enterprise as opposed to a very expensive hobby. As I mow that hay with a three day forecast for clear weather, I tend to forget the expensive winter and focus on the good times. Here are some things you can ponder as you mow hay.

I read an article recently where it was suggested that when the margins are slim, don't try to catch up by chasing production. This is correct. An example, if your calf check doesn't go far enough, don't manage toward more production like heavier calves by feeding them. The law of diminishing returns will work against you as the cash outlay to do this will be very high and the net margin from each increased unit of production will be less. In commodity agriculture the key to profitability is efficiency. Dr. Barton Baker at WVU when asked about what he and others learned from the many years studying the families with the Allegheny Highlands Project of the 1960s and 1970s, replied, "those that spent the least made the most!" He went on to explain that after the fertility needs were met and the farmers used good genetics, conservative management was the most profitable.

Conservative management would include a strict culling program that focuses on producing a short calving window. The long-term solution should be to decrease feed costs for the cow and increasing weaning weights of the calves. Getting those non-productive cows now will provide more feed for you herd.

Feed costs are always the place to start when trying to become more efficient. Depending on whose budget or operation, feed is always at least 50 percent of the annual cow costs. The more days your cows effectively graze the lower your feed costs are. We can't do this immediately but most of us can add a few days of grazing to both ends of the wintering period starting this fall, by rotat-

ing our pastures this summer and stockpiling our meadows. Working with your county extension agents and USDA professionals you should probably rethink your stalking rate.

The expenses associated with growing, harvesting and feeding hay offer opportunity for great savings, too. Farmers must develop a nutrient cycling plan that gets more manure back onto the meadows. The little bit of phosphorus and potassium that leaves the farm in the cattle is insignificant compared to the waste associated with feeding the cows on the same paddock year after year.

Reducing hay equipment costs is a very important place to look for reducing cost of production. Very few beef farms make enough hay to actually make a baler pay for itself. Convenience can be very expensive. Hiring your neighbor to perform one or another part of your haying operation can reduce your haying expense. Many farmers can hire their baling done for less than a baler depreciates in one year.

Another option is owning equipment together. This practice is taking hold in the corn and wheat belts; the high price for equipment has made those farmers choose that option more quickly than here. I recently received a publication from the Midwest that focuses on equipment sharing. It stressed the key to success is a cooperative personality and rock solid agreements as to use and price. One farmer in a shared equipment arrangement said that he enjoyed the renewed neighborly aspects more than the monetary savings.

Another option, as one of my colleagues suggested, don't make any hay – buy it all. For this to work a farmer must reduce the number of days you are required to feed your cows. The argument is, you may increase the number of cows you can run; but remember the value in reducing harvested hay and grazing those meadows. Having no equipment to rust, breakdown, and depreciate is a very good position to be in.

Saving hay by storing it in a building has to be considered very seriously. Some tests reveal that a farmer can lose up to 40 percent

of hay stored outside. It is the single most sensible risk management option for winter feed. In good years, save and protect your hay, and in those dry years tap into the extra stored hay. It is imperative to control the cost of this building, but the payoff period to pay off the investment is shorter than you might think. You will feed your cows more hay from a bale stored inside than one stored outside.

This discussion should get you through your first cutting. Now something to ponder for your second cutting and brush hogging – consider the one production system that is worth chasing; adding value to your cattle by selling them to your neighbors as beef – not as a commodity!

## Agriculture Commissioner Delivers \$50,000 for Flatwoods Farmers' Market Construction

West Virginia Commissioner of Agriculture Gus R. Douglass presented Braxton County businessman Greg Skidmore with a \$50,000 check May 4, to formally kick off the Flatwoods Farmers' Market project.

The new market – to be built just off Interstate-79 near the entrance of the Flatwoods Factory Outlet Stores – is one of three to receive grants from the West Virginia Department of Agriculture (WVDA) to create year-round farmers' markets.

Small agribusinesses need farmers' markets to sell their products because most of them cannot produce the immense volume required by most national grocery chains, Commissioner Douglass noted.

"Year-round markets create opportunities that would not otherwise exist for West Virginia's small agribusinesses, which in turn create West Virginia-based jobs for West Virginia citizens," said Commissioner Douglass.

### Grazing, cont. from page 3

Multi-species grazing can increase a farm's pasture carrying capacity. Compared with grazing only cattle, grazing sheep and cattle can increase production per farm an average of 24 percent. A general rule of thumb is that on moderately stocked pastures one ewe can be added for each cow without affecting cattle performance or pasture condition. For example, on a typical North Central farm with 17 cows that weans 17 (500-pound calves) and adds 17 ewes an additional 2,040 pounds of lamb could be produced. If sold May 2, 2009 this translates into \$2,468.40 sold at the Weston Livestock Auction and \$3,274.20 at the New Holland Auction.

This program will provide a financial incentive opportunity to 20 farmers in a 12-county area that includes Barbour, Gilmer, Harrison, Lewis, Marion, Monongalia, Preston, Randolph, Taylor, Tucker, and Upshur Counties to add sheep to their cattle grazing operation. Farmers interested in adding sheep to their cattle operations partici-

pating in the program will be supplied fence materials with a value not to exceed \$5,100. Farmers will be asked to commit to a three year monitoring period which includes keeping track of expenses, and allowing WVU-Extension Service to monitor soil and forage changes throughout the duration of the project. Farmers who participate in the program will agree to attend a free workshop that covers the basics for incorporating sheep into their operation. Included in this workshop will be information on forages, carrying capacity, stocking rates, pasture management, watering systems, fencing needs, sheep nutrition, herd health, predators, livestock guardians, and lamb marketing. A pilot project will coordinate the pooling and delivery of sheep and lambs to the New Holland Market in Pennsylvania.

For more information, contact your county Extension Agent, or Tom Basden, WVU-ES Nutrient Management Specialist at (304) 293-6131 or [Tom.Basden@mail.wvu.edu](mailto:Tom.Basden@mail.wvu.edu).