

Innovation News

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OPENING COMMENTS

This is a special issue of "Innovation News" to provide exclusive information to the sponsoring partners of the Innovative Farmers Project.

As the project starts in its third year, I think it's safe to say the project has developed well beyond our expectations. Currently, there are 76 full members from Huron, Sanilac and Tuscola Counties. That is an increase of 22 over 1995. In addition, Calhoun County has started a group with 13 members. We also have an additional 20 associate members.

As for sponsoring partners, there are 45 suppliers, governmental agencies, non-profit groups, lending institutions and commodity groups that are providing financial support, materials, equipment and supplies.

Without the help of the sponsoring partners, the Innovative Farmers Project would not be possible. On behalf of the Innovative Farmers members, I personally want to thank you for your continuing support of this project.

We hope that you will take the time to visit the plot sites this summer and study the groups' activities. If you would like a personal/private tour, please let us know. While the plot effort is designed to directly benefit the farmer members, we also hope to incorporate ideas or projects that will be beneficial to each of the individual sponsoring partners.

Whether that is testing or implementing a new product or piece of equipment, implementing a certain practice or providing information to a certain group, we hope that this project also becomes "your" project. We all need to be involved to ensure the projects' long-term success.

Again, give us a call or stop by and visit the plot sites. We are ready to give tours at your convenience!

DATES TO REMEMBER

Ag Expo Michigan State University
June 25 to 27

Innovative Farmers Tour
August 22

ADDITIONAL INNOVATIVE FARMERS ACTIVITIES

The dates have not been set yet, but we are starting to plan two additional events that you might want to be a part of. A brief description is provided below:

WATER QUALITY POLICY TOUR

Funds have been secured from the Michigan Integrated Food and Farming Systems Project to sponsor a Water Quality Public Policy Tour. Tentative plans are for a one-day tour in August for the purpose of visiting on-farm sites where secondary fertilizer containments, herbicide injectors,

cover crops, integrated pest management, integrated crop management and other water quality initiatives are being implemented.

The purpose of the tour is to educate and inform environmental groups, legislators, government agency and media about the changes farmers are making. We want the farmers to explain first-hand why THEY are implementing the changes. At the same time, we want them to identify two or three policy issues that need to be addressed.

If you have suggestions or ideas, give me a call.

SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE/ ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT MEETING

The next meeting of the Sustainable Agriculture/Economic Development Group will be on Thursday, August 1. The meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. at Cousins Restaurant in Bad Axe.

John Gardner, North Dakota State Extension, Carrington, North Dakota, will be the guest speaker. John will present information on the growing trend of farmer-owned cooperatives designed to add value to their products. He will identify the characteristics of a successful cooperative, how they are set up and why there is so much interest in North Dakota in forming farmer-owned cooperatives.

The Huron County group is extending invitations to all interested citizens to become involved in the local program and will be forming at least three groups to explore opportunities in the livestock, crops and niche market areas.

Please plan to join us on August 1, 1996.

FFA/4-H WATER QUALITY FIELD DAY

Last year, members from all of the Huron County Agri-Science Programs were invited to participate in a Water Quality Workshop. It worked very well and

involved students from USA, Harbor Beach, Port Hope, Kinde and Bad Axe. NRCS and SCD joined us in sponsoring the project.

In September, we plan to conduct the program again and include 4-H this year. We will be adding more hands-on type of activities such as measuring residue, counting worms in a given soil mass, measuring water infiltration, conducting several biological tests on water and visiting the IF plots.

INNOVATIVE FARMER APPLIED RESEARCH PLOT UPDATE

The following projects will be conducted in cooperation with MSU Extension Specialists during the 1996 growing year. These plots are in addition to the IF member designed plots.

1. **Effect of Residue on Suppressing White Mold** - Pat Hart
This is the first year of a three-year study where Pat will be working with us to determine if crop residue does in fact suppress white mold. During the initial start-up year, we will be looking at the effect row width (7.5-, 22- and 30-inch) has on white mold in three soybean varieties.
2. **Soil Health and Quality** - Richard Harwood
This is the third year that we will be evaluating the effect tillage has on nutrient stratification, mineralization and organic matter. This year we will begin looking at bulk density and water infiltration.
3. **Soil Nitrate-N** - Maurice Vitosh
We will be looking the correlation between mineralization rate and soil temperature using a series of soil thermometers that measure soil temperature every four hours.
4. **Developing A Reduced Tillage Herbicide Program** - Jim Kells
At the request of one grower, we will develop a herbicide "plan" for high residue cropping systems rather than a weed-by-weed plan.

5. **Dry Bean Herbicide Study** - Karen Renner
This is the second year of a dry bean herbicide study designed to develop alternative programs for high residue dry bean production. Five tillage systems (plow, chisel, zone-till with residue managers, zone-till without residue managers and slot no-till) will be used to compare ten herbicide packages.
6. **Evaluation of the Cost of Switching to Zone-Till** - Gerald Schwab
In this project, we are looking at the cost of changing equipment to a zone-till system. What can be sold, what needs to be bought and the overall effect on total farm income.
7. **Manure Management** - Tim Harrigan
We will continue to work and fine-tune various approaches for transferring manure from livestock farms to cash crop operations. An agreement for the cooperating farms has been received from a project in Wisconsin. Tim is conducting actual loading, hauling and application time studies to better determine transfer costs.
8. **Need for Starter Phosphate on High Testing (+80 lbs. P) Soils** - Don Christenson
For several years, we have been conducting plot work on this topic. We will continue this in 1996 and in addition will be looking at the affect of low rates of liquid fertilizer applied on the seed.
9. **Other Activities:**
Additional plots will be conducted to look at Bt corn, corn interseeded to clover and establishing corn on corn in reduced tillage.

SOIL DOCTOR UPDATE

Over the past few years some members indicated an interest in the Soil Doctor. Reports on the success of the machine to measure soil nitrate-N and adjust the application rate on the go have been mixed.

Therefore, the Huron County Corn Growers and Innovative Farmers are going to launch a project this

year to determine the effectiveness of the Soil Doctor for the Thumb Area. Funding support has been secured from the Corn Marketing Board of Michigan, the Huron County Corn Growers, Michigan Ag Stewardship Association and the Innovative Farmers. Maurice Vitosh, Michigan State University will be assisting with this project.

Farmers interested in trying the equipment on limited acreage will be charged \$10 per acre. The \$10 fee will be for the tractor, operator and soil doctor mounted on a tool bar applicator.

Initially the Soil Doctor will be set-up for 22-inch rows. If there is enough interest, we will adjust the tractor and tool bar to meet the demand.

The Soil Doctor, which we are leasing for one year, is for 28%; and therefore, we will need to pull a nurse tank behind the tool bar.

We hope to have a few plots to verify its effectiveness. Terra of Elkton and Kinde, will be providing the tool bar.

NARROW ROW EQUIPMENT UPDATE

The equipment is taking a while to get together. Greg Renn has been doing a great job in getting all of the equipment together this spring. Tim Leipprandt, Kerry Southworth, Jim Herford and Ross Voelker have assisted Greg in putting the cart together. We plan to have the entire unit ready within the week. We are waiting for the right wheel struts.

This narrow row unit (tractor-JD7700, cart, planter and cultivator) will be available for rental at a rate of \$10 per acre to try narrow row 22-inch zone-till crop production.

We hope to have a few large strips planted this spring.