

Agronomy Agent's Corner #13

Wintertime

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Winter is a time to reflect on several aspects of farm life. Crop planning should be reviewed to promote plant and financial success. Snowfall's contribution to next year's moisture supply is key to wheat closing its canopy in a timely manner. Equipment maintenance can fall behind during the fall rush of harvesting summer crops and planting wheat. Winter provides an opportunity to catch up on equipment maintenance. Do not forget to do what Jimmy Buffet calls time on the water. Spend some time mentally recovering from the intensity of the growing season.

Crop planning includes scheduling planting, review of your systems method, marketing, and building budgets. From a production perspective successive planting is almost always detrimental to yield. From a financial perspective if prices surge for the crop you planted last year, it can be hard to justify not planting it again. Investment in grain storage can enable avoiding successive planting more often. When choosing fields for your planting order and distribution, remember what teachers said before taking multiple choice tests. Unless you feel confident in changing your answer, do not change your answer. During my time working on a corporate farm, I saw too many times people discussing which variety to put in which field for months. In the end the plan was either not improved from the original plan, too convoluted to reasonably implement, or simply a bad plan.

Snowfall contribution to soil moisture in Sedgwick county averages 38 inches per year (usclimatedata.com). Assuming a 7:1 conversion to rainfall equivalent, snow makes up 29% of the annual precipitation in the county. A winter without snow would put the county over five inches short of the expected annual precipitation. While we do not have control over how much snow will fall. We can use the snowfall records to make decisions like should preplant irrigation be applied and should the crop loss insurance company be contacted about the possibility of prevented planting.

Equipment maintenance is more than changing oil and cleaning equipment. Development of a ten-year budget for repairing and replacing equipment reduces downtime and sets reasonable expectations for operational cost. A combine with 8,000 hours on it will likely be stopped for repairs for more hours in a season than a combine with 500 hours on it. These delays cost in increased shattering and lost labor hours. Maximizing profit includes comparing down time cost to the cost of upgrading equipment.

Works Cited

Weather averages Sedgwick, Colorado.

<https://www.usclimatedata.com/climate/sedgwick/colorado/united-states/usco0350> retrieved 6 Nov. 2020.