

Revise farm practices to beat energy pinch

THE sight alone of Missouri agriculture in progress during springtime gives producers an incentive to be productive this season. But I'm afraid this spring is going to be a challenge for many farmers in the form of unavoidable high fuel and energy prices.

Certainly, the price of gasoline and diesel fuel will hit farmers harder this year, with predictions closing in on the \$4-per-gallon mark by summer. The best way to get around higher input costs is proper planning and rethinking production strategies.

Despite high production expenses, a recent report by the Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute predicts U.S. farmers will plant 4 million more acres this year than in 2007. With planting in full swing, farmers can consider saving money by identifying where energy and fuel are wasted in the crop fields. USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service says saving on energy happens in three ways: reducing tillage, applying pesticides and nutrients more efficiently, and using manure rather than petroleum-based fertilizers.

Energy estimator

In a tillage energy estimator, the NRCS predicts that producers could save up to 53% on fuel costs going no-till vs. conventional, based on diesel fuel at \$3 per gallon. This estimate is based on average field and equipment conditions, average fertilizer and pesticide applications, and normal crop yields. Taking into account factors that were not included



College Farmer

By Katie Allen

Key Points

- Identify where to save money on fuel, energy before planting.
- Seek energy savings with smart tillage and fertilizer use.
- Plant a garden to avoid high food prices, enjoy fresh foods.

in the estimate, such as trips from fields and farms, market transport, irrigation, and grain drying, the total amount saved using no-till could vary from farm to farm.

Applying pesticides using scouting, spot spraying and Integrated Pest Management could bring producers up to 25% in savings, according to NRCS. It also reports that using rotations or manure rather than commercial fertilizers can reduce fertilizer costs as much as \$85 per acre.

For more information on measuring energy savings with irrigation, nitrogen use, tillage and animal housing, go to www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/energy. The energy estimators take into account specific farm locations and production costs to help determine where and how a producer can save money.

Hoe down food costs

On another note, producers and consumers alike can think about saving cash this spring and summer with their own fruit and vegetable gardens. Planting a garden not only provides good exercise and

a chance to be outdoors, but also helps bring fresh foods to the dinner table. Having a personal garden also gives growers the opportunity to try out different varieties of fruits and vegetables and find what they like best.

Another reason to garden: Food prices have increased with fuel and energy prices in recent years. According to the Biotechnology Industry Organization, food prices in the U.S. increased 4.1% from 2006 to 2007 due to increased grain prices, fuel prices, worldwide demand from weather-related disruptions such as droughts and freezes, and contamination scares.

Taking the traditional approach on the farm with a garden could be the ticket to saving on food costs, as well as fuel costs to and from the grocery store. Plus, those gardeners with green thumbs and a surplus of food can consider providing to their local food banks, which are always in need of fresh, perishable foods.

Opportune time

Now is a great and exciting time to be involved in agriculture despite the energy pinch. Only time will tell what fuel and energy prices will do and what production and management decisions farmers will need to make accordingly. From shell corn to sweet corn, I challenge producers to take control of their operations, plan ahead, and concentrate on a great growing season.

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MAY

3: Missouri Nut Growers Association annual grafting day, Lathrop. Call 816-740-4282.

17: Growing and Marketing Walnut Trees Seminar, West Plains. Discussions will cover pruning, thinning, weed control, site selection, timber stand improvement and marketing. Contact Missouri Chapter of the Walnut Council; e-mail palmh@missouri.edu or call 573-882-1402.

17-18: Bunker Hill Quilt Show. Five miles north of Pineville on W Highway, or five miles east of Anderson on Hwy. 76. Show runs 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturday; 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on Sunday. Admission by donation. Call Linda Johnson at 417-223-4684 or e-mail bunkerhillquiltclub@yahoo.com.

17-19: Thirty years of Missouri Fiber Artists Celebration and Conference, Fayette. Call 573-443-1731.

JUNE

9-11: University of Missouri Youth Pork Institute, Columbia.

9-13: Missouri Agribusiness Academy, Kansas City.

13-15: Missouri Cattlemen's Association Junior Show, State Fairgrounds, Sedalia.

JULY

3-6: National Junior Suffolk Sheep Show, State Fairgrounds, Sedalia.

16-18: MO-AG Summer Meeting, Lake Ozark.

17-20: Golden City Harvest Days, Golden City Park. Call 417-537-4200.

AUGUST

3-5: Missouri Young Farmers/Young Farm Wives Summer Tour, Kirksville. Call 660-626-1476.

6-8: Missouri Corn Growers Association Board Meeting, Lake Ozark. Call 573-893-4181.

7-17: 2008 Missouri State Fair, Sedalia. Call 660-530-5600 or visit www.mostatefair.com.

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Livestock sector challenged

GROWTH in ethanol production means distillers grains and other coproducts displace increasing amounts of corn in feed rations. In general, prices for coproducts keep pace with corn prices, so they do not give large cost-savings, as some expected, says Scott Brown, livestock analyst with the University of Missouri Food and Agricultural Policy Research Institute. "Higher corn prices force feedlots to lower what they can pay for feeder cattle. Coming years could be financially difficult as high and rising input costs coincide with lower feeder-cattle prices."

Returns for beef have declined from the high levels in 2003-05. Cow-calf returns are expected to remain in the red for most of the baseline years. After a slight increase the past two years, beef cow numbers are projected to fall throughout the baseline.

Hog producers face lower returns. Pork supplies will remain high through 2008, despite recent decisions to cut sow numbers, Brown says. "Given expected input costs, hog prices need to average \$50 to \$55 per hundredweight to provide historic average returns." FAPRI projects a price of \$44 for finished hogs in 2008.

Dairy producers face lower prices after the record price of \$19 per hundred pounds for milk in 2007. Strong international demand provides a cushion to an expected decline in milk prices, Brown reports.

Food, energy prices linked

THE Consumer Price Index for food rose 4% in 2007, more than the CPI for all goods and services. "Much of that increase came from rising energy prices, which increased costs all along the marketing chain including the farm level," reports Scott Brown, a University of Missouri livestock analyst.

While all components of CPI for food rose in 2007, dairy, eggs, and cereal and bakery goods led the increase. The food CPI is expected to rise 3.7% in 2008. However, food inflation increases should slow to 2.5% in 2009 and 2.1% by 2017.



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