

# Farming in flood's wake

By **HOLLY SPANGLER**

**W**HAT does it take to put a piece of ground back together following a flood? According to Dianne Barnett, it's not as tough as you may think, once debris is removed and drainage restored.

Barnett manages 15,000 acres of farmland for the family-owned Adwell Corp., based out of Jacksonville. Nearly all of it is bottom ground, and some 10,000 acres lay underwater last June in the Lima Lake Drainage District. Barnett says a variety of university opinions suggest

inoculating soybean seed because you won't have microbial activity after a flood; others say flooded ground has lost oxygen, so you should till.

"To be quite honest, a lot of the same opinions came out after the 1993 flood," she says. "But what most of us did was minimum till in the spring, including running a field cultivator, putting on nitrogen, herbicides and then planting. And we set company yield records in 1994."

Experts also warned of lost fertility, though their '93 tests showed little change in potash



**ALL SMILES:** Atop the rebuilt levee, river bottom farmers like Dianne Barnett see progress in construction equipment.

and higher potassium levels. This spring, Barnett says, they'll take soil tests to see whether they'll need to supple-

ment their usual practices with starter fertilizer. "We'll make the decision based on actual numbers instead of hunches."



**BEFORE AND AFTER:** This bird's-eye view from the bluff shows how water engulfed fields, buildings and bins all across the Warsaw bottoms.

They're still awaiting the final \$60,000, as of press time. She acknowledges that the holdup occurred in the state's Shared Services program, created by the governor to streamline fiscal functions.

Says Barnett, "Illinois Emergency Management would tell us our request had been processed, and it was in Shared Services. But it could be weeks

there. There was no way to trace it." Although many of their complaints center on FEMA and its response to the flood, FEMA's Len DeCarlo explains that agricultural land falls under USDA's domain. "FEMA's programs will work in certain cases on repairs of levees. But our charter is geared to first help residents and local government to re-

cover from the storm."

DeCarlo also asserts that FEMA processes claims promptly, sending them on to the state to cut a check for drainage districts. "If there's a delay, it's because we're missing certain documentation."

To date, much repair work is done. In southeastern Illinois, levee breaks are repaired and farmers are preparing for a

normal spring planting season. Along the Mississippi, levee repair is progressing and should be complete in time for spring planting.

### Crop insurance questions

Pump station repairs are slow-going, in part because parts are so difficult to come by.

Barnett reports that a recent pledge by the Corps of Engineers to continue running their temporary pumps has relieved many local farmers who couldn't have risked planting without knowing those pumps would keep seepage water at bay. However, as she explains, landowners recently learned that their federal crop insurance rates will jump to the high-risk rate if any levees are not repaired "to prior specifications" by the closure date, March 16. A high-risk determination would push rates from \$25 or \$30 an acre, to \$150 to \$200 an acre.

"My question is: Who confirms that it is rebuilt?" Barnett

### They said it

"It's a very, very slow situation, with a lot of paperwork. The hardest part of recovering from a disaster shouldn't be the paperwork and convincing the government agencies what their job is."



**Joe Zumwalt,**  
Warsaw farmer



"We lost a lot of materials from wave-washing when water was inside the levees. Water was 25 feet deep in our drainage district and huge waves put ledges in the side of the levee."

**Dianne Barnett,**  
Adwell Corp. farm manager  
and commissioner of  
Lima Lake Drainage District

"Our agent with National Flood Insurance told us the only event they've seen worse than ours was Katrina and New Orleans."



**Gerald Jenkins,** manager of  
Ursa Farmers Co-op

asks. "Is mine considered rebuilt now? What if they get caught and don't have restructuring and forming done by March 16? Who decides that?"

For these farmers, the insurance hurdle is another step toward putting their land back into production.

Zumwalt reports that '93 left fewer houses behind in the bottom, which resulted in less debris to clean up in '08. And although some of the soil is gone, never to raise a corn crop again, farmers like Zumwalt and Barnett are eternal optimists. 1994 brought one of their best crops ever; perhaps 2009 will bring the same.



**RUBBLE:** These piles of crumbled concrete are all that remain of a 700,000-bushel bin at Ursa Farmers Co-op.

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