

No big change in assessment for farm acres

INDIANA State Department of Agriculture Director Andy Miller insists nothing changed in how bare farmland will be assessed due to the 2008 property tax reform package. The formula used since 2005 is still in place. It's based on legislation passed in '05 that fixed assessed value of farmland at \$880 per acre in '05 and '06, then required a six-year average market value for '07 and beyond.

The formula considers cash rent, crop prices, input costs and even property tax costs. "Assessments only go up if net [farm] operating income goes up," Miller says.

Average assessed value for bare farmland is \$1,140 for taxes payable this year — approximately a 30% increase in assessed value. Since a lower income year rolls off and a higher income year rolls in to the formula, the average value for taxes payable in '09 will be \$1,200 an acre. Adjustments are made for land quality.

"A \$1 increase in farmland assessed value doesn't equal a \$1 increase in farm property taxes," Miller asserts. "Many incorrectly assume that if assessment goes up 30%, taxes go up 30%. Property taxes might not go up at all or could decrease, depending on the property tax rate."

Indiana Farm Bureau's Katrina Hall, tax specialist, cautions that in the next few years assessed value of farmland is likely to increase, simply because crop prices are substantially higher now compared to a few years ago.

Property taxes on land in many townships are still under the 2% cap in the new legislation. Taxes on farmland in certain counties, especially areas with good land, are already at 2%. But where current taxes are below the cap, there's no guarantee taxes payable on that land won't eventually rise to 2%.

Youth eye ag's future

By TOM J. BECHMAN

THE top three winners in the inaugural *Indiana Prairie Farmer/CountryMark* youth essay contest displayed their thoughts in the April issue of the magazine. This time, take a look at how three more students tackled the topic, which was "educating the public about agriculture."

The fourth through sixth-place winners also received cash awards from *CountryMark*. Fourth place went to Mary Kelich, Elwood. Hayden Wilder, Remington, captured fifth place. Tori Frey, Crawfordsville,

nailed sixth place.

Judging essays is somewhat like judging livestock shows: It boils down to subjective opinions.

You may have your own favorite. All contestants deserve praise for taking time to write down their thoughts about agriculture.

Thanks to Susan and Terry Hayhurst, Terre Haute, who designed and facilitated the contest. Also, thanks once again to *CountryMark* for awarding cash prizes to the six winners.

Fourth Place

Name: Mary Kelich
Hometown: Elwood



Edward Lindeman has told us that "some problems must be dealt with collectively. They can't be solved solely through individual educational efforts. For many problems, the educational efforts must focus on the collective, the community, rather than on individuals." When looking back on traditional agricultural education of the public, the focus has been on the individual. Agricultural theory, research and innovations tended to be taught to the individual, even in a group setting.

Educational theory tells us that learning from an expert is an excellent way to learn new information. However, most schools and Extension offices do not have those kinds of resources. Learning from the expert does not support a broad-based educational program.

Agriculture has many issues that are public concerns. Issues, by definition, are public problems. The use of biofuels to decrease the need for foreign crude oil, sustainable agriculture to meet the nutritional demands of our nation and world, and keeping the family farm viable in a world of factory farms are just a few of the issues that the public needs to understand. Education is crucial to any type of development.

The question is, can schools and Extension educators do the job? It has been done before. In the 1950s, county agents held over 800 public meetings to educate farmers and circulate petitions supporting state help for brucellosis testing of cattle herds in Minnesota.

Effective, broad-based education about agricultural issues will require access to information, publications and electronic sources, such as Web-based programs. It will also require education about agriculture's history and production. "Agricultural literacy" is a term coined by the Women's Leadership Committee of the American Farm Bureau to encompass education about agricultural issues. Education is motivation. When people discover their passions, there is no stopping them!

Fifth Place

Name: Hayden Wilder
Hometown: Remington



In today's changing world, people are constantly looking for ways to make their lives easier. Though they may not know it, many of the problems they're faced with are solved by farmers. The biggest example of this is the use of ethanol. This is the best way to show the public how agriculture positively affects them.

In America, we are using more ethanol because of the price of imported oil. As we all know, ethanol comes mainly from corn and can be used with any amount of gasoline. The disadvantage to using ethanol is poorer miles per gallon. Let's take E85 for example — the most common ethanol-based fuel, with 85% ethanol and 15% gasoline. It lowers your fuel economy by (up to) 34%. That means that if your (Toyota) Camry gets 30 miles per gallon with gasoline, it (could) get 20 mpg with E85.

These figures pay off, though. The average price of gasoline is \$3.10. The average price of E85 per gallon is about \$2.55. From an environmentalist's standpoint, ethanol use reduces carbon dioxide emissions by 30%. This also helps the farmer, as he also gets over \$4 per bushel of corn with the increased ethanol demand.

Almost every American car can run on a 10% blend. Many companies are making vehicles compatible to higher ethanol ratios. Portland, Ore., declared that all city cars need to run on at least an E10 blend. Missouri, Minnesota and Hawaii require all vehicles to run on an ethanol mixture. There are 6 million E85-compatible vehicles on the road.

Of all ways that agriculture affects Americans, ethanol is the largest. E85 is the most common, and it helps the consumer, environmentalist and farmer. With the need for reduction of (crude) oil use, farmers can help the public with ethanol production.

Minnesota proves that E20 ethanol blends work

FIFTH-PLACE essay contest winner Hayden Wilder noted some states push ethanol use hard. The legislature in Minnesota mandated that all vehicles must run on at least an E20 blend, meaning 20% ethanol, by 2013.

The state of Minnesota conducted a test with 40 pairs of cars, one running on E10 and the other on E20. The results clearly showed that raising ethanol blends to 20% do not present problems for current, conventional vehicles on the road. Going to E20 also does not affect power and performance.

Even though E20 blends passed the test with flying colors, it doesn't mean these blends are ready to become mainstream. It will take a waiver from the U.S. EPA to allow E20 to become part of all gasoline in Minnesota. State leaders intend to apply for the waiver soon.

By Tom J. Bechman

Sixth Place

Name: Tori Frey
Hometown: Crawfordsville



The word "agriculture" says a lot about the way of life. Agriculture is much more than cows, sows and plows, as people tend to think. For example, all life on Earth depends upon plant growth and soil, as it provides the world with food and fiber. A subject that is often looked (over) in education is agriculture, and how it has benefited families. What can we do to educate the public about agriculture?

Education is very important, no matter how young or old you may be. A way of educating the public on agriculture is through organizations — for example, the FFA. Our FFA Chapter at North Montgomery High School provides a day of scheduled activities for a Farm Safety Day. We invite our elementary and middle schools to come learn about the farm and safety practices.

Farm safety is extremely important because many

children of young ages have begun to work on their family farms and don't understand the importance of farm safety.

At Farm Safety Day, the following topics are covered: tractor safety, pesticide and fertilizer safety, how to drive ATVs, plus livestock, planting and harvesting safety. Our chapter decided to put the program together because so many children and adults have been injured or (killed) from lack of knowledge of farm equipment and ag-related activities. The main objective that we hope to achieve is to host a successful Farm Safety Day program with the help and support of our community and FFA chapter.

Our chapter chose to educate the public on farm safety. My family's farm has chosen to use SOPs (standard operating procedures) to ensure safety procedures (are used). What can your community do to be educated on agriculture?

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