



NUTS & BOLTS REAL-TIME UPDATE

March 20, 2008

Farm Management Minute: Miracle Products

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This winter, many of us will go to a meeting where a speaker will be trying to sell a new product that will "increase your yield 10-15%". As a scientist, I listen carefully to those product promotions. In agriculture, as well as other fields, advances in technology are often made from the fringes, and there could very well be new product that could increase yields while decreasing fertilizer or pesticide costs. After carefully listening to the benefits of a new miracle product, I nearly always dismiss the claims. If you want to evaluate a speaker, always ask the following questions.

1. Does the vendor use a control in the field studies they quote? The most common claim you will hear is, "I used this product this year, and my yield increased 20 bushels to the acre." Every farmer knows that yields vary from year to year, and a field is likely to have 20% higher yield one year just due to weather conditions. A legitimate study will always compare treated fields to nearby untreated fields or controls.
2. Does the vendor use replications? If someone is comparing two fields, there is always a chance that one field will have a higher yield than another just by the luck of the draw. Scientists try to reduce the chance that their results are not due to random chance by replicating the plots and comparing several different plots with the same treatment with several control plots. If the experiment is properly replicated, the scientist can use statistics to give the probability if the results are due to the product or by random chance.
3. Did the vendor study the product in multiple locations? Last winter I saw an articulate man selling "ocean solids", which is a pleasant term for sea salt. His plots had controls and replications. All of his studies were conducted in the southeast U.S., in old, heavily leached soils. The soils in the upper Midwest are young, poorly leached soils, and many have too much salt to begin with. A product that may help in the south could destroy soils in North Dakota. In the ancient Middle East, armies applied salt to farm fields to destroy farmland.
4. Does the vendor use sound science to promote the product? I have seen products that give the soil more "energy". Plants get their energy from the sun, not the soil. Any product that defies proven scientific principles is not worth trying.

In some cases, you may want to try a product. Few farmers have the time to conduct a good replicated field trial, but many can try certain products. If you are trying a new product, apply the product on a small part of your field with similar soil to the rest of the field, so that you can have a side by side comparison between the treated plot and the control.

President's Update

By John Hobert

With Easter approaching this weekend, I would like to send my best wishes to each of you and your families as you celebrate this special time. Where has time gone? It seems like we just finished the 2007 National Farm Business Management Confer-
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ence at Rochester and here we are only 84 days from Fresno. I hope that you are planning to attend the 2008 Natinal Farm Business Management Conference at Fresno and renew acquaintances and participate in a powerful agenda from June 8th through the 12th. After a very busy farm analysis season, I am certain that you are looking toward Fresno as I am. With a very, very busy schedule from January 7th through the end of this month, I am ready to recharge some batteries this spring and early summer.

As far as our Minnesota instructors are concerned, we have completed all farms, which will be included in our 2007 Annual Regional Reports across our six state regions. Our Minnesota state data will be assembled March 17th with final data most likely available by this weekend. In our SE Minnesota Region, our data will be assembled and made available to our instructors on March 31st. All or our instructors are currently finishing up any rescheduled farm operations and planning for farm business management banquets during the last week of March through the first part of April. I would assume your schedule has been quite similar.

Conference Registration Info

As I noted in the last Update, the Piccadilly Inn-University in Fresno, California is our official Conference headquarters. Room rates have been set at \$102.00 per night which includes taxes. You can get further hotel information at www.piccadillyinn.com. Toll free reservations can be made at 800-468-3587. It is your responsibility to make your own reservations at the hotel this year.

As far as registration costs are concerned, we have set the Fresno conference registration cost at \$290.00. Late registration has been set at \$340.00. NFRBMEA dues



will again be part of registration at \$30.00. Any member registering on time will have a \$320.00 total registration cost while a late registrant will have a \$370.00 registration cost. May 7th is the cut-off date for both early registration and hotel rooms. Please make your plans soon to insure room availability and early registration.

This year, conference registration will be done through the Center for Farm Financial Management at the University of Minnesota. The Center is coordinating our registration as an in-kind sponsorship for the Conference. The registration website is being developed through the efforts of Dale Nordquist at the Center for Farm Financial Management. The website should be active by the end of the month in order for you to register on-line. No paper registration will be conducted this year, as was the case last year. Continue to check the NFRBMEA website for further information on registration during the next two weeks.

Planners Finalize Budget

2008 Conference planners from NAFBAS and NFRBMEA met at the Iowa Farm Bureau Office on Tuesday, March 4th to finalize the Conference budget, set Conference registration costs, and coordinate on-line registration with the Center for Farm Financial Management. Conference planners attending included Bob Rhea, NAFBAS Director; Dale Nordquist, the Center for Farm Financial Management; Tina Barrett, NAFBAS President; Brad Zwilling, NAFBAS; Lyle Stewart, NAFBAS; and me. Laurie Morris, NFRBMEA, and Pat Harrington, NFRBMEA joined the planning group by teleconference.

'08 Conference Agenda Taking Shape

The agenda for our Fresno Conference continues to solidify as we finalize speakers, workshops, tours, and sponsors. Please check the NFRBMEA website for agenda updates as they occur. There will be no major mailing regarding the Conference this year. Each day of the Conference is being coordinated by an individual person this year. Laurie Morris, NFRBMEA Historian, Colorado is coordinating Conference activities for Sunday, June 8th while Bob Rhea, NAFBAS Director, is coordinating Monday, June 9th. Brad Zwilling

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ing, NAFBAS Board Member, is coordinating Tuesday, June 10th while Pat Harrington, NFRBMEA Tour Chairperson, Arizona is coordinating Wednesday, June 11th. Tina Barrett, NAFBAS President, is coordinating Thursday, June 12th activities. As far as myself, I am working on fund raising for this year’s Conference as I did last year. Gary Thome, NFRBMEA, Minnesota is working on this assignment with me this year. I will also be working with our NFRBMEA officer team in planning our NFRBMEA activities for you, the membership. If you have questions or input for the conference planners, please contact the individuals noted above.

Spring Board Meeting Set For April 18

We will be holding our Spring NFRBMEA Board Meeting on Friday, April 18th by webcam technology at a site to be announced. The site chosen will accommodate the most individuals involved with the board meeting.

If you have agenda items for the Spring NFRBMEA Board Meeting, please submit your agenda items to Rick Morgan, NFRBMEA Secretary or myself by April 4th.

Institute Committee Submits Grant Proposal

Clark Hanson, Paul Gorman, and I submitted a grant proposal to the Otto Bremer Foundation this winter and met with a representative from the Otto Bremer Foundation on Friday, January 18th to review our proposal. Our proposal was received well and has entered the next step in the Otto Bremer Foundation process. We are working with Ms. Chris Tholkes at the Otto Bremer Foundation located in St. Paul.

Sponsor News

With a heavy workload finally nearly completed, I have turned my attention to this year’s NFMC potential sponsors. At this time, I have commitments from several 2007 sponsors and am personally following up all other 2007 sponsors at this time. I am following up all past sponsors while Gary Thome, Minnesota is following up all potential new sponsors. If any of you can assist us in following up past sponsors or direct us to new sponsors, please contact Gary Thome or me with contact information.

Other Noteworthy Items

- Paul Gorman, NFRBMEA President Elect, will be contacting all committees to encourage them to complete their action plans and provide a committee report at the 2008 National Farm Management Conference in Fresno.



Happy Spring!

- If you are interested in running for an NFRBMEA office this year, please contact anyone on the officer team to indicate your interest. Offices open for election in Fresno include President Elect, Secretary, Treasurer, and Historian. Let’s work toward an officer team comprised of individuals from throughout the country. Officer applications will be on the NFRBMEA website in the near future along with other applications relative to the NFRBMEA Exchange of Ideas, first-time attendees, etc.

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