

PRACTICAL PRODUCTION GOALS - FARMERS' VIEWPOINT

Bill Cooper - West Bend

I'm not just too sure what to start with, we decided that we would each make a few comments and, if there are any questions, we can deal with them in the question period.

A lot of the papers were quite general and when it comes to a practicing producer looking at general comments you have a little trouble because you have to get down to real specifics. These are so specific that they vary from one farm to the next. The guy two miles away from you may have to come up with different decisions and different practices. It is pretty hard to generalize and this was the problem here today. However, I am not sure that, in terms of the research, they can do too much about this. The individual producer has to apply recommendations to his own situation.

When we talk about increased production or production potential we think of it in two ways, either by increasing yields by adding inputs, or by seeding extra acres. I don't think there will be quite as much problem in convincing producers to increase yields by adding such things as fertilizers, wild oat chemicals, and other of these methods at times of high prices such as we have today. The problem will be to find these products, to get the wild oat chemicals, to get the fertilizers. I think there are a number of people right now disappointed in fertilizer availability. I have heard of cases where they have been turned down, on orders, and in fact some of them having money refunded. I heard just yesterday of quite a line of trucks coming across the U.S. border picking up fertilizer at the prices that were probably a little higher than the normal price. So there are various things happening right now that are a problem to the actual producer.

Another thing, of course, is the availability of equipment to make some of these practices economical and practical. In

some cases where the producer has not been using fertilizer for example, he may have a problem finding a fertilizer attachment that will work properly. I think that the producers will utilize the fertilizer, wild oat sprays, etc. that they have at their disposal, with the returns to their produce such as it is today.

In terms of seeding extra acres, most of the discussion here was whether we seed a half or a one-third, two-third situation. If I were just talking about my own particular situation, this doesn't really interest me that much. I am more interested in what happens when I go from four to five to six crops as we have been doing for a number of years. Here we get into specific weed problems, couch grass, and so on. However, I can see some problems for the guy switching from a fallow-wheat to a one-third - two thirds rotation, and I think one is availability of labor, which wasn't mentioned too much here today, especially the availability of competent labor to run the machines. Art Guitard mentioned that you could maybe pick up machines to do certain jobs, but on the other hand machinery may not be available this year. It's one thing to be able to pick up the machine, it's another to operate it when you get it.

This is tied in with timeliness of operation and in our area I think this is a very important one. We have to look at maturity of crop. I go to a variety of crops with different dates of maturity to make better use of my labor and machinery. If we can spread out our seeding dates and spread out our harvesting dates we can make much better use of our labor and our equipment. When I talk about maturity of crop I talk about drying time in the swaths as well as just the days to maturity. I think Art mentioned 106 days, however, this is a figure that may not mean too much. In our area it is somewhere around 90 days frost free, however the last few years we have had frost in July as well so it is a little hard to predict. The other thing is that crops like rapeseed dry very quickly in the swath

and if we compare rape to wheat we can always figure on getting rapeseed off dry but the wheat may be left out. These are things that are pretty important.

I was a bit concerned here about the topic that Ken Bowren handled, in terms of seedbed preparation in stubble. I think there needs to be a lot more research done for example, in terms of a particular machine that will seed into stubble properly. He mentioned on the one hand that a discer was good and I think he mentioned on the other hand that the press drill seemed to give the best results. When you're talking about a \$9,000 machine that we purchased last year, a seed drill, and then if you have to buy another \$9,000 discer to seed some other crop I think you're looking at something that farmers aren't going to accept. If we could come up with a machine that would do both things you'd get along probably a little quicker in terms of seeding stubble crops.

In our area it's a little different from Ken's Melfort clay where it is nice and level and even. The rolliness of the land in our area, it's an Oxbow loam, does not lend itself too well to discer seeding because of the lack of depth control. I think if anyone is here from Ag. Engineering, if they developed automatic depth control systems it would be a tremendous advantage but seeding with that kind of machine at present just doesn't lend itself too much to our area.

With regard to our soils, fertilizers, soil testing and so on, we ran into a problem this year where we didn't get our results back from our soil tests soon enough to guarantee supply of nitrogen. We didn't anticipate the need for that much. This is the problem that the last speaker was talking about, insurance supplies so that we can make use of these results that we have.

The other point I had down here is the present income situation, you have to say that it is a factor in having a person change his cropping plans. If for example, your income is doubled or tripled and went from \$15,000 to \$40,000 a year, I'm not sure how much harder you would be tempted to work or change your production, whether you'd stay at the office a

little longer or not. So I think that's a factor, changing our production plans.

Bill Copeland - Rosetown

Well, between Bill and the rest of the speakers, it has been covered by a blanket, there's no place to go from here. Being invited here to comment on various speakers is one thing, but when they turn lights out and won't let you make any notes, that is another problem. However, farmers are in the dark most of the time anyway.

I do have a few things which I would like to say, however. There are so many things that we don't know, that it seems like the exception is the rule. You can't make any general recommendations. I think in almost all areas what we do need is more research and a better liaison between the researchers and the farmers and the public. So often things go on, and are well along towards being developed before the farmers ever know that they are in the mill at all.

So many things that they do which they think pay and have no real way of gauging it. For example, Art's statement about snow ridging, this year would probably be a good example. We have zero moisture in the stubble I would say, and we certainly have lots of snow, it never quits blowing, so that this year snow ridging would probably pay. Although there are years when you just get a nice cover of snow, you ridge it and you can see that stubble for the rest of the winter and the further to the southwest you go the more likely this type of thing will happen. These things could be very critical, particularly in a year like this one, it looks like we will be able to sell it, it looks like the price will be right. If we could put 20% more of our acreage to crop, and stubble would be the way to do it I guess, then snow ridging might just be a very paying proposition.

Bill Cooper's farm must be a real mess of volunteer grain if he gets up to 7 crops without summerfallowing. A seed grower wouldn't look kindly on that type of operation.

As far as projections for next year go, when we think of the costs, we have no idea what they are likely to be. To start with, we haven't got any of our \$5.00 wheat. And then there's the price of weed sprays, we really haven't any idea of what they are going to be. Fertilizers the same, we don't even know if they will be available. With fertilizer, I've paid for it, I haven't got it yet. It was supposed to be here a couple of months ago. Fuel has gone very high relative to what it has been, although it hasn't changed very much over the years. Machinery is something it doesn't matter how much money you have, you can't buy it. I am not sure that we are any better off than we were when barley was at 3 bushels for a dollar.

When a farmer changes his rotations to an extreme, you do run into machine problems and labor problems as Bill pointed out. When you are used to seeding half or two-thirds of your farm and you seed virtually the whole thing, then you have a peak load on machinery at the time of harvest. This places increasing demands on labor. Now some people have a built-in labor force and others don't. But one thing is quite clear, there is a time for harvest and when it comes that time is today, it's not tomorrow but it's right now.

Light seeding was one thing I wanted to mention. It usually produces as well as somewhat heavier rates, and I'm talking about 25 or 30 lbs as compared with one bushel. You do, however, have a few problems; for example, you have to have some place to lay that swath, you can get some thinning by wireworm, wind can cause some thinning, disease can cause thinning. Of course, good farmers wouldn't have these problems, but I've seen an occasion when it happened to the neighbor.

In summary, I want to thank you for having us here, I really do feel that the research which you do is worthwhile and I would

like to see the farmer hear more of it.

Dale Pocock - Nipawin

I would just like to follow along on the themes set by the two Bills who preceded me. I will be speaking probably on behalf of the Gray Black area, the Nipawin district in particular.

I am not criticizing any of the lectures today, but we do have some extremities there which are much different than the rest of the province. For example, I don't think it's probably necessary for too many of the farmers in our area to be out ridging the fields this winter. They would probably have problems getting across them let alone making any ridges. In our area last summer, of course it did vary some, but most farmers received about 30 inches of rain during the growing season and then when you look at Swift Current which had less than 2 inches you could see that it is very difficult to come up with recommendations that apply across the province.

I will just relate some of our experiences, now with regard to soil types, we are on sandy loam but within a few miles you come to clay loam and even heavy clay soils. Quite often phosphate is adequate in our soils and generally nitrogen is the biggest limitation to crop production. In some cases we have yields which suffer from sulfur deficiencies. I would like to think a little bit more along the lines of rotation, now we use fair amounts of fertilizer but we also try and arrive at a rotation which is going to provide adequate nitrogen, or at least work toward keeping your nitrogen levels up. With current high returns for grass and forage crops this goal may change somewhat, but I think we still have to maintain rotations which insure adequate soil fertility and condition. Like Ken Bowren said, we prefer to seed rapeseed on summerfallow, we have tried seeding it on stubble and followed soil test recommendations, but it is kind of hard to get the type of yields which would justify this sort of cropping practice.

We summerfallow to a certain extent, and some of us in connection with the seed growers, probably have to maintain a

certain amount of summerfallow around. In a rotation, for instance the one which we are working on which has clovers or alfalfa in it and after eight years you can have a short fallow period and still get fairly adequate yields the following year.

Then it comes to a question of picking a crop, generally we prefer to seed flax after breaking alfalfa, it seems to respond the best, especially in years when you do have lower rainfall. Also, in terms of nutrient requirements, the following crops generally do not require as much nitrogen. This is an important consideration in growing rapeseed. Rapeseed is a heavy user of nitrogen that I like to think now, if possible, of seeding rapeseed down to alfalfa or clover so the following year you are not going to have to put these high inputs of nitrogen into the system. You can get down to extremely low amounts of nitrogen in your soil after a heavy rape crop. Generally, rapeseed doesn't respond quite as well after breaking alfalfa, but on some of your grasslands you can do quite well. This is probably in connection with a particular problem we have with our type of soil, namely, crusting problems, after heavy rains. This of course varies from farm to farm. I think this is probably tied into rotation to a great extent.

Several years ago I decided that if you were going to grow stubble crops, and we do quite a lot of that up in our area, that you are money in pocket to summerfallow the land if you aren't willing to put in the input of fertilizers and herbicides. Now you might have to change your opinion slightly on this with the different economic situation, but I don't think we should probably lose the aims which we have had previously.

Now there is just one other point I would like to bring up with regard to fertilizer. When it comes to applying fertilizer to forage crops or to stubble crops where you have to apply heavy rates of nitrogen fertilizer, I would like to criticize the use of these spin spreaders. You can improve the pattern by dropping the speed and dropping the width down to half, say 20 feet. But we like to use attachments mounted on cultivators that will give

you a much more even spread and when you are paying for this fertilizer, if you can get it, I think we should try and get it on as well as possible. This idea applied particularly for grass grown for seed production in wide rows. Most people I ask want to get adequate nitrogen on for seed production and at the same time not encourage weed growth, between the rows. By using the cultivator mounted type of applicators, we are able to band the nitrogen on along the rows. We met some criticism saying that it would spread out but we have one example where the applicator carried on to a strip of grass sod. In this strip there was a one foot band where the nitrogen was applied and a 24 inch band where there was no increase in growth at all. So I think we have to look at the total practice of fertilizer use, not just buying it and applying it, but doing the best job of applying it we can.