

# How to evaluate rental land

NEWARK, DE — Farmers who rent land should survey fields carefully for potential production problems before deciding whether to renew the rental agreement.

"Anyone renting or considering renting farmland should carefully evaluate every field before making a deal to re-rent or to add more land to their operation," advises University of Delaware extension agricultural agent Derby Walker.

The first step in such an evaluation is to identify serious weed problems such as johnsongrass, giant ragweed, burcucumber or Canada thistle. Canada thistle and johnsongrass are considered noxious weeds in Delaware and by law must be controlled. Burcucumber and giant ragweed may be added to that list. But, says Walker, several other plants—including spurred anoda, shatter cane and triazine-resistant weeds—are also very difficult to control.

"If a farm has a serious weed infestation which will require special treatment to control, this

may increase your production costs," the extension agent says. "For example, if it costs you \$150 an acre to grow soybeans in a certain field and the rent for that field is \$60, a weed problem that costs you \$10 extra to control could boost your production costs from a normal \$210 to \$220 an acre."

Two other problems to look for when evaluating a field for possible rental are signs of nutritional deficiency, and nematodes. "It's especially easy to spot these areas in soybean fields," Walker says. "Usually the indicators are off-colored or stunted beans. Investigate these spots to determine their cause. Sometimes you can tell by looking at the plants; other times, a soil sample and/or nematode test must be taken."

When a field is infested with soybean cyst nematodes, it can greatly alter cropping alternatives because the grower will be limited to resistant soybean varieties and will need to follow a crop rotation program in order to prevent high yield losses. Similarly, a

nutritional problem will mean spending extra dollars to correct the deficiency and bring the field up to standard.

Something else to look for in soybean fields is any symptom of a soil-borne disease like Fusarium or root rot. These diseases often don't show up until late in the season when dead bean plants appear. Sometimes entire areas of a field will be almost totally wiped out.

"If there's root rot in a field," Walker says, "it's better not to plant soybeans there. Or try a resistant variety. However, fields that have been planted to beans several years in a row may have so many disease organisms that even resistant varieties will fail."

Because these problems are common on the Delmarva peninsula, the county agent says it's extremely important to evaluate field-by-field the land a farmer tills or plans to till. Just one field with a

serious problem can threaten an entire farm operation. This should be taken into account—especially under current conditions of economic stress.

"If you're renting a piece of land and encounter serious problems which boost your production costs by \$10 to \$20 per acre," he says, "ask yourself: Can I afford to till that field?"

If production costs will be increased beyond the possibility of making a profit, that piece of ground is a guaranteed loss.

"Today," says Walker, "you can't afford to plant a crop into a field where you can't expect a return over cost because of a nematode infestation, nutritional imbalance or serious weed problem. If, on the other hand, you have options which can help increase your chances of making a profit, take advantage of them."

Delaware farmers who don't know how to evaluate rental land can contact the University of Delaware's extension farm

management specialist, Dr. Don Tilmon. He is prepared to sit down with individual producers and show them how to do this, adding in the costs imposed by serious problems and using these costs to determine a fair rental value. (Programs of the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service are open to everyone regardless of race, color, sex, handicap, age or national origin.)

"It doesn't take long to evaluate a farm," Walker concludes. "Basically it's a matter of carefully looking over the land, making notes as you go, jotting down your production costs, adding a rental value plus any additional expenses imposed by special problems, and then determining what you feel is a legitimate yield potential for that farm. If you know the market value of the crop, it isn't difficult to figure out whether you can actually afford to rent that piece of ground under that particular cropping system."

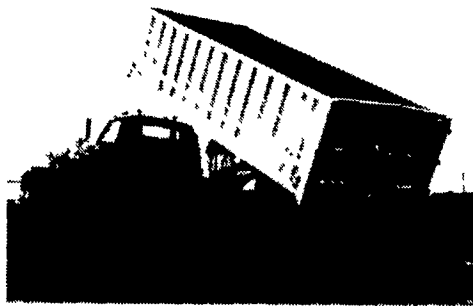


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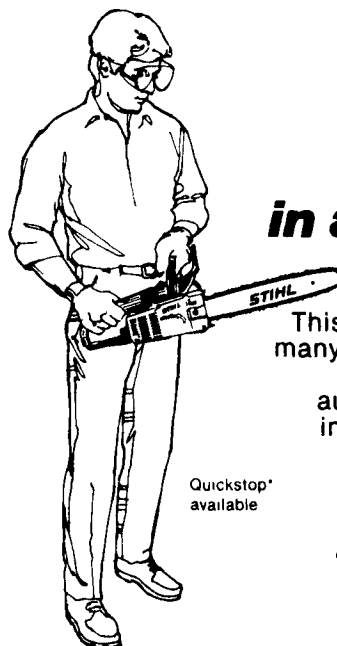
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