Research Projects Answer Crop Management Concerns

DES MOINES, Iowa — Providing better crop management information to producers is the goal of a Crop Management Research Awards program, funded through the agronomy sciences department of Pioneer Hi-Bred International, Inc.

For the 1998 growing season, Pioneer has awarded a total of more than $100,000 in research funds to scientists at universities and other institutions in the United States and Canada.

"Pioneer strongly supports applied crop management research projects conducted outside our company because these university projects do a thorough job of answering questions of immediate concern to farmers," said Paul Carter, agronomy sciences manager at Pioneer's Des Moines, Iowa, headquarters. "These projects also complement the results obtained from the agronomy research conducted within the company."

Over the past decade, Pioneer has contributed more than $1 million in funding to applied research designed to find more cost-effective, technologically advanced and environmentally friendly ways to produce crops.

Dr. John Shanahan, soil and crop sciences department at Colorado State University, has received a Pioneer crop management research award for the second consecutive year and is studying varying corn hybrids and seeding rates within fields in precision farming systems.

"This project and others like it are very important to farmers because they address areas of current interest and concern," said Shanahan. "Without private funding provided by Pioneer, other companies and trade associations, university researchers would not be able to initiate many research projects that evaluate new and current crop management practices and look for ways to improve them."

Shanahan notes that public funds are used primarily for basic research for which practical impacts are several years in the future. They are less designed to provide farmers with direct benefits or knowledge in the near term.

Currently the company is funding 25 ongoing research projects. Examples include determining how corn row spacing affects corn rootworm and European corn borer infestation levels at the University of Minnesota, evaluating the effects of agronomic and management factors in maintaining high protein and oil concentrations in soybeans at South Dakota State University, and avoiding corn borer resistance in corn hybrids with the Bt gene at Pennsylvania State University.

New crop management knowledge and other information gained from the research projects are transferred by the company to farmers as soon as possible, noted Carter. Scientists interested in applying for Pioneer crop management research awards are strongly encouraged to discuss initial ideas with Pioneer staff before developing a written proposal.

ASA President Calls For Improved Access To EU Market

SAINT LOUIS, Mo. — American Soybean Association (ASA) President Mark Berg, recently testified before the House International Relations Committee to present soybean producers' views on trade issues with the European Union (EU) concerning agricultural products derived from biotechnology.

Berg, a Tripp, S.D. soybean grower, pointed to the rapid acceptance of biotech crops by U.S. farmers as an important factor for addressing EU delays in approving imports of these new varieties.

"After many years of seeing the technology advance, and now with the commercialization developing rapidly, American farmers are very eager to take advantage of the benefits plant biotechnology offers," said Berg.

Berg reported that 30 percent of U.S. soybean acreage, 25 percent of corn acreage and 40 percent of cotton acreage—a total of 44 million acres—would be planted with genetically modified varieties in 1998. "This rapid expansion is possible not only because of the developments in technology, but also the regulatory system in the United States which efficiently evaluates the safety of genetically modified crops using science-based risk assessments."

The United States has approved the marketing of three soybean varieties and 15 corn varieties since 1996. In contrast, the EU has approved the marketing of only one soybean variety and one corn variety. EU delays in approvals are beginning to disrupt marketing of U.S. commodities to European Markets, prompting Berg to make five recommendations.

"First we need the EU to adopt a much more transparent and efficient process for approving new biotech varieties," said Berg, who cited frustration with EU changing its approval process in midstream.

The second action Berg suggested is for biotech and seed companies to seek clearances for new varieties in major U.S. export markets on a timely basis, and preferably before they are commercialized in the United States. To prevent trade sanctions against all U.S. soybeans, ASA has requested that each company in the soybean biotech arena not launch biotech varieties into commercial markets until the varieties are approved overseas as well as in the United States. ASA has receive assurances for 1998 that companies will postpone their commercial launches of unapproved varieties.

Berg's third request was for the EU and other countries to accept that there is not scientific basis for requiring segregation or labeling of biotech varieties that have been determined to be substantially equivalent to conventional varieties in terms of safety, nutrition, and composition.

Fourth, the Clinton Administration needs to engage the EU in an effort to reach agreement to recognize each other's procedures for approving and commercializing biotech crops and products.

Berg's final recommendation was that rules governing biotech would be included in the next World Trade Organization negotiations. "The language in Sanitary and Phytosanitary Agreement in the Uruguay Round Agreement must be clarified to apply to biotech crops and products, and to supersede the rules of any other international treaty or agreement," Berg said.

Transition Team Has First Meeting

DENVER, Colo. — Sheep industry leaders took the first step toward making an industry-wide association a reality recently.

Meeting as a task force representing all industry segments, the U.S. sheep industry's Transition Team met in Denver where they discussed the viability of a member-based association and business development council.

The group's task of developing a new national sheep industry organization stems from the eventual closure of the American Sheep Industry Association, which will run out of funding in September 1999. ASI was established 10 years ago through the merger of the National Wool Growers Association and American Sheep Producers Council.

The Transition Team is an offshoot of the industry-wide approved Tecker Group. The firm was chosen in August 1997 by a producer committee to help the domestic sheep industry build an industry-wide organization from the ground up. ASI initiated the process after its board of directors approved a directive aimed at giving the industry practical options complete with an implementation and funding plan.

The plan stressed the involvement of the entire industry through stakeholder meetings and telephone interviews. Producers, feeders, packers and other industry representatives participated in the survey to ensure a balance of information. All were asked for input on the goals and functions of a national organization and ways for funding those activities.

Jim Butler, assistant vice chancellor of external affairs for the Texas A&M University system, was chosen to head the transition team because of his organization skills, knowledge of the industry and ability to inspire collective thinking and teamwork. He kicked off the 1-1/2 day meeting on May 1 by telling those present to network extensively with people inside and outside the industry in working toward their goal of establishing a new association. He said that such an approach would foster a sense of unity and expand the industry's horizon by allowing its members to think outside the box.

Butler continued to build momentum by establishing two subcommittees – a six-member association subcommittee that will deal namely with membership and financial structures, and a seven-member subcommittee charged with organizing a business development council. The subcommittees will address such major issues as the mission, vision and goals and governance or representation of the new association. The entire team developed and agreed on a proposed budget for phase one of the project.

"There are a number of difficult issues we need to work through as we attempt to build the industry-wide organization, but I am confident the transition team is up to the task," said Butler. "I was pleased with the work of the subcommittees and the ideas that emerged."

Butler emphasized that the 14 team members were chosen for their expertise and leadership skills. They are: Mike Caskey, Southwestern Technical College, Pipestone, Minn.; Dolly Echeverria, sheep producer, Casa Grande, Ariz.; Don Godby, National Lamb Feeders Association, Eaton, Colo.; Ron Guenther, U.S. Sheep Seedstock Alliance, Powell, Ohio; Frank Moore, sheep producer, Douglas, Wyo.; Waine Kirby, American Farm Bureau Federation, Ladora, Iowa; Danny Lanning, United Sheep Producers, Hammond, Mont.; Carl Menzies, sheep producer, San Angelo, Texas; Bob Mertz, National Lamb Feeders Association, Manhattan, Kan.; Lorin Moench, Jr., American Sheep Industry Association, Salt Lake City, Utah; Rosemary Mucklow, National Meat Association, Oakland, Calif.; Michael O'Bryne, American Textile Manufacturers Institute, Jamestown, S.C.; and Jim Sheeder, sheep producer, Somerset, Pa.

The second meeting of the full transition team will be held in late June or early July. Meetings will be supplemented with conference calls of both the entire team and the two subcommittees.

York County Announces Envirothon Winners

YORK (York Co.) — The York Catholic Junior High School "Woodchuckers" won the 7th annual York County Middle School Envirothon at the Izaak Walton League grounds near Dallastown.

The team coached by Kathy McGann consisted of Gene Shuman, Lauren Martin, Brittany Urban, Andy McGann, Dustin Rhodes and Mike Wiegmann.

Other winners included the York Suburban "Omega I" who placed second and the St. John Lutheran "Pests" who placed third. First place category winners were Northern Middle School team II for wildlife, the Dover "Odd Otters" for forestry, the St. John Lutheran "Pests for current events, and the York Catholic "Woodchuckers" for aquatics.

Twenty-three teams of six students from 14 schools participated. These were Crossroads, Dover Intermediate, Eastern, Hannah Penn, New Freedom Christian School, Northern, Northeastern, South Eastern, Southern, St. John Lutheran, St. Joseph School, York Catholic, York Suburban and York Home School Association.

All students received a seedling, T-shirt, certificate and participation ribbons. The top three teams received placement ribbons, plaques and cash awards for their environmental libraries. The first place team also received the Envirothon banner for 1998. Awards were presented by several of the 30 local sponsors including businesses and nonprofit organizations.

Fifth Grade Results

The Fawn Area Elementary "Wild Things" won the 7th annual York County fifth grade Envirothon at the Izaak Walton League grounds near Dallastown.

The teams coached by Kelly Downs and Nancy Blevins consisted of Joe Mueller, Tyler Oliveros, Shauntel Schlessman, Lindsey Clark, Sara Tomkins, and Jason Blevins.

Other winners included the Wellsville Elementary "Team I" who placed second and the Ore Valley Elementary "Stinkbugs" who placed third. First place category winners were Fawn Area "Wild Things" for wildlife, Wellsville "I" for forestry, Wellsville "I" for current events, and Fawn Area "Wild Things" for aquatics.

Twenty-five teams of six students from 22 schools participated. These were Conewago, Dallastown, Delta-Peach Bottom, Dover, Fawn Area, Friendship, Kralltown, Leaders Heights, Leib, Loganville-Springfield, North Hills, Orendorf, Ore Valley, Phineas Davis, Southern, Spring Grove, St. John Lutheran, St. Joseph School, Weiglestown, Wellsville, York Home School Association, and York Township.

The Envirothon is an environmental learning competition for students in grades 3-12. Fifth grade students are tested as a team of six in the areas of forestry, wildlife, aquatics, and a current event. This year's current event is watersheds.