



Editor's note: This is a monthly column from the Pennsylvania Ag Statistics Service (PASS), a field office of USDA's National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) in cooperation with the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture (PDA). The Website is www.usda.gov/nass.

CENSUS UPDATE —

CALLING ALL GROWERS!

As of this writing, Pennsylvania growers are responding well to the Ag Census, exceeded only by growers in Ohio, Indiana, and Rhode Island. A big "thank you" goes to the thousands of growers who have returned completed forms for the 2002 Census of Agriculture.

However, our good response rates can change over the next several weeks as nonrespondents are phoned or visited in all states. *Any undercount could have an impact on the funding of the ag services or programs in your county or across Pennsylvania during the next five years!*

Since we are required by law to conduct the Census of Agriculture, we must make every effort to get a completed census form from every grower, including large, small, and hobby farms. We are beginning intensive efforts to call or visit those who have not yet completed the 2002 Census of Agriculture.

We really don't want to bother folks at home, but we have no choice. There still may be time to avoid a visit or phone call if you send in a completed census form right away. Returning the form by mail also saves the excessive taxpayer cost of collecting information by telephone or a personal visit.

Initially, we are calling growers in the lowest responding counties. In Pennsylvania, this includes Cameron, Crawford, Fayette, Forest, Lackawanna, and Lawrence counties. After that, we will contact as many nonrespondents as possible in all counties.

County statistics from the Ag Census will often be the only information about a county until the next Ag Census which is five years away. A complete count is needed for every county so that each county is properly represented compared to the rest.

So far, Adams, Centre, and York counties are showing the highest response rates in Pennsylvania. Any county that comes up short in the final tally may not get fair consideration for extension services or other decisions that affect Pennsylvania growers.

Here is a partial list of items that are affected by counts from the Census of Agriculture: extension funding and staffing, ag research grants, Farm Bill programs, crop insurance, farm loans by private lenders, small farm programs, Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education program, programs run by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, and much more.

Remember that small, part-time, and hobby farms must be counted too, because they make up about half the farms in Pennsylvania. Call (888) 4AG-STAT or (888) 424-7828 if you need a census form or any help completing it.

2003 PLANTING INTENTIONS

PUBLISHED MARCH 31

First, I want to thank all growers who answered our March Agricultural Survey. This survey allows us to publish intentions for

the coming crop year in Pennsylvania and across the nation.

Pennsylvania farmers intend to plant more acres of barley, oats, soybeans, and sorghum this spring and harvest more hay in 2003.

Corn and tobacco acreage intentions in Pennsylvania are unchanged from a year ago. Wheat acres planted in Pennsylvania last fall are down from a year ago. For the complete report with all states, look for the Prospective Plantings report on March 31 in the 2003 DATE search at www.usda.gov/nass/search.htm.

2003 SMALL GRAIN INTENTIONS

In Pennsylvania, all wheat, at 175,000 acres, is down 8 percent from last year, but 3 percent above the 2001 planted acres. Expected barley planted acreage is 75,000, up 7 percent from 2002 and 5,000 acres more than were planted in 2001. Expected oats planted acreage is 145,000, up 4 percent from 2002, but 5,000 acres less than two years ago. Expected oats acreage for harvest is 115,000, unchanged from the last 2 years.

Nationwide, wheat fall-planted acres are up 2 percent from last year. Barley planting intentions are up 6 percent. Oat seedings are expected to be down 4 percent from 2002 and oat harvested acres are expected at 5 percent above 2002.

2003 ROW CROP INTENTIONS

In Pennsylvania, intended plantings of corn for all purposes are 1.45 million acres, unchanged from last year and 50,000 acres below two years ago. Soybean planted acreage intentions are expected at 370,000 acres, 1 percent above the 365,000 planted last year, but 30,000 acres less than two years ago. Sorghum plantings are expected to be at 13,000 acres, up 18 percent or 2,000 acres over last year.

Nationwide, farmers intend to plant 79.0 million acres of corn for all purposes in 2003, virtually unchanged from 2002, but 4 percent above 2001. Soybean producers across the U.S. intend to plant 73.2 million acres in 2003, down 1 percent from last year and, if realized, the lowest planted area since 1998. This is the third consecutive year that soybean acreage has declined in the U.S.

Sorghum planted acres are expected at 9.45 million acres across the nation, 1 percent below previous year.

2003 TOBACCO AND HAY HARVEST PLANS

In Pennsylvania, intentions are to harvest 1,300 acres of Southern Maryland, Type-32 tobacco, unchanged from a year ago. Pennsylvania Seedleaf Type-41 tobacco harvested acreage is expected to be 2,100 acres, also unchanged from last year.

Nationally, Southern Maryland Type-32 tobacco expectations are to harvest 2,800 acres, 7 percent less than the 3,000 acres in 2002. All U.S. tobacco harvest is expected from 417,510 acres, down 3 percent from last year.

Pennsylvania harvest intentions for all dry hay in 2003 is 1.9 million acres, up 6 percent or 100,000 acres over last year. Nationally, dry hay is expected to be harvested from 63.6 million acres, down 1 percent from 2002.

Farmers: Be Aware Of Japanese Knotweed

DAVE LEFEVER
Lancaster Farming Staff

MILL HALL (Clinton Co.) — Japanese knotweed, a fast-growing perennial also known as Japanese bamboo, has become a concern in some parts of northern Pennsylvania, according to a crop agent here.

The ornamental plant can be "aggressively competitive" with native vegetation as well as farm crops when accidentally introduced into fields, said Tom Butzler, Clinton County extension agent.

Butzler said Japanese knotweed was originally brought into the U.S. from Asia as an ornamental landscaping plant. The flowers and plants are "very attractive," he said.

According to Butzler, there are several characteristics that made the plant desirable to American gardeners. It is a shrub-like perennial that can grow to more than 10 feet in height. Also, Japanese knotweed is an aggressive spreader, through its underground stems called rhizomes. As a result of its aggressiveness and height characteristics, gardeners saw its potential as live screening material and erosion control. As an added bonus, small greenish-white flowers bloom in attractive, branched sprays during the months of August and September.

But those desirable characteristics also created many problems. The plant spreads so quickly that it forms dense thickets that exclude native vegetation and greatly alter natural ecosystems, especially around waterways.

Japanese knotweed is placed into a category called invasive species. According to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources, "Invasive plants are environmentally noxious weeds that grow aggressively, spread easily and displace other plants. They are hard to control, and if they escape from cultivation, can overtake large areas, degrading their habitat value not only for other plants, but insects, birds and animals."

Although the flowers produce seed in prolific numbers, new Japanese knotweed plantings are most likely started with the movement of underground rhizomes. The rhizomes, once established, can be a nightmare to eliminate.

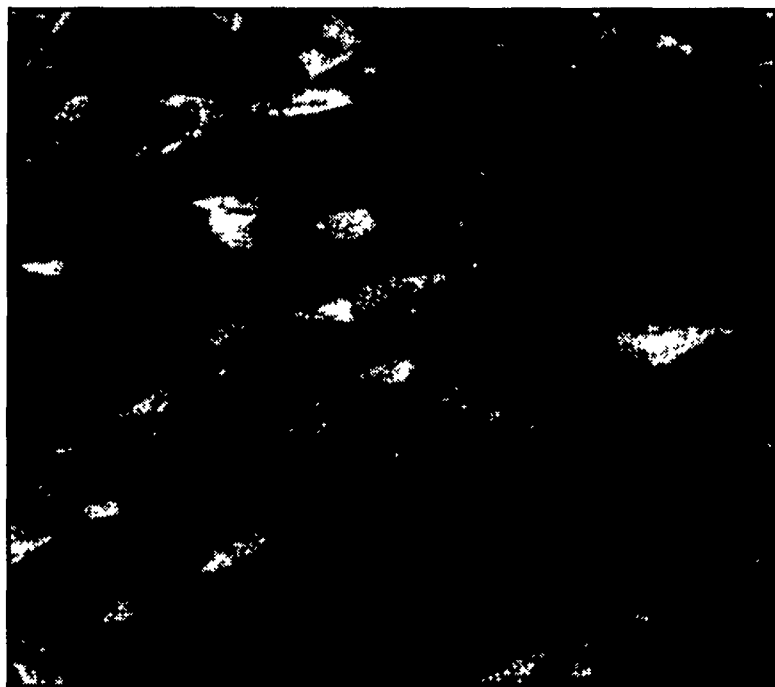
Butzler said that the most common way for the plant to be introduced on farms is when soil is hauled in from another site to fill low spots in fields. If the soil contains knotweed rhizomes, the weed can become established and spread in the field, competing with corn, soybeans, forage, or vegetable crops.

Stands of escaped Japanese knotweed are often seen along waterways in the area, Butzler said. Knotweed rhizomes can float down a river or stream and eventually become established along the banks.

Another situation Butzler observed is where soil was placed alongside a roadway to bring the surrounding yards up to grade with the pavement. The soil placed along the road contained Japanese knotweed rhizomes. A minor infestation occurred in several surrounding yards.



Shown is Japanese knotweed blooming in late summer.



Japanese knotweed invades a corn field.

When rhizome-infested soil is transported to another location it can give rise to a stand on the new site.

Beside the concern for crop production, Butzler also noted that Japanese knotweed can also threaten native plant populations with its aggressive spreading nature.

While he has not yet seen an economic impact from knotweed, Butzler said the potential is there if the weed goes unchecked for too long.

"It can be a pretty nasty weed," he said. "It is really destroying ecosystems along waterways."

Many people are "not aware what the plant is," he said.

Unfortunately, Butzler noted, the usual herbicide program for crops does little to control this weed problem.

Control of Japanese knotweed can be achieved by various methods, but the goal is to destroy the extensive rhizome system. Repeated pulling or cutting will, after several years, eventually de-

plete the energy reserve of the rhizome and kill the plant. It is important that all cut or pulled knotweed stems are disposed of properly. As stems, crowns, and rhizomes readily regenerate, they must be allowed to dry out thoroughly after they have been pulled or cut.

Several herbicides can be used for control, but it still may take several years to eradicate the entire plant. It will take patience to eliminate this weed, Butzler noted, and the earlier the problem is tackled, the easier it will be to control. An established stand is very difficult to control.

Larry Kuhns, professor of ornamental horticulture at Penn State stated that "compared to invasive plants and weeds, the chemical pollutants of the '60s, '70s and '80s will be considered an easy cleanup."

Bob Anderson, crop agent from Lancaster County, said he has not yet noticed any Japanese knotweed stands south of the Snyder/Union county area.

MAHA Spring Classic May 2-3

MERCER (Mercer Co.) — Join Mid-Atlantic Highland Association (MAHA) for their 14th annual show.

The first show of the new season, in a new location, will be conducted at the Mercer County 4-H Park. Mercer is at the crossroads of Interstate 80 and Interstate 79.

Highland enthusiasts may begin arriving on Thursday, May 1, with or without animals. There are plenty of activities all weekend for all to enjoy, whether you are showing cattle or not.

Friday afternoon features the Junior Show. Feast at the HOG Rally (Highland Owners Group)

Barbeque, then enjoy an evening of informative activities. Watch a hoof trimming demonstration. Or, bring an animal to the arena, for a showmanship workshop and practice show.

See some of the finest Highlands in the east at the Open Show on Saturday morning. Highland hamburgers will be available for lunch, to benefit the MAHA Juniors. In the evening, convene back at the host hotel to enjoy a social hour and banquet.

You can pack up your animals and head home on Sunday, as clean up will be taken care of for you.