Calendar of Events

Apr 26  Smyth County Watershed Field Day for 6th Graders
May TBA  Smyth Washington Cattlemen’s Meeting
May 7    Bristol Steer Show Weigh In
May 8    75th Annual Bristol Steer Show
May 15   VESA Meeting, Petersburg, VA
May 15-17 Tennessee State Ag Agent Meeting, Knoxville
May 20   Marion Tree Commission Arbor Day Celebration, Marion Elementary School
May 27   VFW Memorial Day Parade and Celebration, Marion
June 17-21 Smyth County 4-H Camp
June 21   Deadline to consign calves to July 17 VQA Sale
June 24-27 Kentucky State Ag Agents Meeting, Owensboro
July 17   VQA Sale, 7 PM Tri State Livestock Market
July 19   Deadline to consign calves to August VQA Sale
July 22   VQA Steer Take Up
July 24   VQA Heifer Take Up
July 29-30 Rich Valley Fair Livestock Shows
Aug 21    VQA Sale
Aug 22    Forage Field Day at Glade Research Farm.

Just Look at Everything That’s Going On!
A great way to stay current is to pick up a Saturday edition of the Smyth County News. In it, you will find an “Upcoming Events” section at the end of all of Andy’s weekly articles!

Serving You by Reporting and Listening!

I hope you enjoy this edition of the Smyth County Agriculture Extension Newsletter! My goal is to continue to provide you with a newsletter packed with information at least once each quarter. Let us know what you think. If you have ideas for articles or topics of interest, please contact us at (276) 783-5175.

VA Ag Agents to Host National Meeting:
Fundraiser Seeks to Put a New Gator in Your Shed!

Many of you may already be aware that the Annual Meeting and Professional Improvement Conference (AMPIC) of the National Association of County Agricultural Agents (NACAA) is coming to Virginia in July 2020.

This is our chance to showcase Virginia Agriculture to the Nation, but as Extension Agents, we cannot do it without your help. Hosting 1,200-1,500 people is a daunting task, and does not come without costs so we are actively pursuing all avenues of funding.

One small piece of our efforts is the raffling off a new John Deere Gator XUV 835 M. This machine is valued at over $25,000 and comes equipped with full cab, heat and air conditioning, power dump bed, brush guard, alloy wheels and radial tires. We are offering 5 cash prizes of $500 (4) and $1000 (1) as well.

Tickets are $100 and only 600 tickets will be offered, so with the cash prizes your chance of winning is 1 in 100. The drawing will be held when the last ticket sells. If you’d like a ticket, give me a call at (276) 780-9486.

If you are a person with a disability and desire any assistive devices, services or other accommodations to participate in this activity, please contact Andy Overbay or Pam Testerman at (276) 783-5175/TDD (800) 828-1120 during business hours of 8:00 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. to discuss accommodations 5 days prior to the event.
Time to Be on the Lookout!

Now that spring is in full swing, it is time to be vigilant in regards to controlling many of our summer weed issues. This year especially, following a wet and rough winter season, need to be on the lookout because the damaging effects of last year’s weather on our lawns and fields will allow weeds ample opportunity to prolong our misery well into 2019.

Was crabgrass an issue in your lawn last summer? If so, NOW is the time to be treating your lawn with pre-emergence products such as a weed and feed. The best time to treat for warm season grasses like crabgrass lies between the blooming of forsythia (which has been in bloom for two weeks now) and the blooming of dogwoods, which is eminent.

It is also a good time to treat thistles that are still in the rosette stages. Once thistles begin to send up their vertical shoots, you might as well wait until October 2019 or get the hoe out. Spraying then will produce poor control results.

Another pest that needs to be monitored is the multiflora rose (on right). Roses need to be treated with products that are of most benefit on woody stemmed plants and it is best to apply these products on the new foliage of spring just before the new buds produce flowers. While our area rose bushes are beginning to green up, it is time to gather the supplies needed and check the sprayers readiness so that we can strike at the optimum time.

One thing you do NOT want to do is bush hog or mow rose bushes, even ones that have been treated recently. Think about the tea roses you might purchase to put in your landscaping; what does the rose look like? In most cases, you will purchase a plastic bag of rose roots that is about 12-14 inches long with three or so stubby stems protruding from the bag.

It doesn't look like much, but within a few weeks, new stems grow vigorously from the planted root ball. The reason for this rapid growth is because the roots have plenty of stored energy with very little old growth to support. In response to planting, feeding, water and sunlight, new canes burst forth.

When you mow a wild rose in the field, you are prepping the plant for the same response. Reductions in the woody material above the ground only serves to lighten the load on the roots that are primed to grow new roses. Old bushes can be destroyed in the future, but it is best to let a treated rose die and overwinter at least one year before the canes are removed.

Finally, be on the lookout for many of our spring weeds that never seem to lose steam. The very best way to control weeds in lawns and fields is with a healthy stand of grass or crops; however, following last year’s weather, nearly every stand of grass has been adversely affected. We are already seeing splashes of color that are not welcome. The purples of the weed henbit are already on full display. It won’t be long before the yellows of mustard, spurge and buttercup make their debut.

As we have noted in the past, once you see these plants’ blooms control methods are useless for the most part but it is also an opportunity to mark our 2020 calendars to be on the lookout once again.

Starting a New Venture? Use Caution!

Things change and those who do not change with them can find themselves in a tight spot. As we advance as a society in the tools that we use, it makes sense that the jobs we can do with those tools and the worth we can generate from our skills with those tools will change as well.

Change happens faster and faster; a good idea today can be a disaster tomorrow. Farming as an industry is no different and this is especially true as new crops and enterprises begin to surface as possible opportunities. For example industrial hemp is the latest national rage, but any new venture needs research.

There are many factors to consider before starting a new farm enterprise. Financial management is an important component in the startup and decision-making processes for beginning farmers. Knowing as much as you can about what it will take to produce and sell the crop is really more important than knowing what the gross receipts for a crop might be.

While this is not an exhaustive list, here are some things that I strongly suggest you consider before investing any time or money in a new venture.

First, what is your level of expertise? A new crop or venture needs to be considered an experiment and there will be much learning for at least the first two to three years. The less you know about producing a certain product, the more likely you are to make mistakes. Be honest with yourself, having experience even in a similar enterprise is not experience in the real thing.

Second, what is the market for this product? This one is not unlike a will or a plan. If you do not have it in writing, it doesn’t exist. Pick Tennessee Products, the marketing branch of the Tennessee Department of Agriculture used to say that you need to have the crop sold before you plant the first seed. In new venture, you really need to explore getting a contract for your product from a buyer. While this isn’t a guarantee of success, it at least may provide you with some security.

Along those lines, I would also suggest that you stress cash up front and on delivery. I have seen buyers take possession of a crop and file for bankruptcy before the truck made it in to unload. If that happens, your crop belongs to the buyer and by law, they cannot pay you for it.

Third, are there more than one entity interested in buying your product? Putting all of your eggs in one basket is an old saying but like many old sayings it stands the test of time mostly because it is true. Lone buyers are very likely to hold their “take it or leave it” status over a grower, especially a new and naïve one.

Fourth, what are the pitfalls? When recruiting producers, it is hardly likely that you will see and hear about possible failures, predators or production nightmares. Talk to people who have been there and done that and make sure you hear the mistakes more than the successes. Successes can be hard to duplicate; failures are almost always one size fits all.

Finally, is this product so new that suppliers are not available to assist you? For very new crops, you may find that weed and insect controls are limited and very, very expensive. Why? Because there has not be time to get a number of chemicals labeled as legal to be used on a particular crop. What few will have been labeled could quickly become scarce or too expensive to apply regardless of availability.