

WEST CENTRAL MISSOURI  
WINTER 2012

## Davis joins West Central

Patrick Davis joins the University of Missouri Extension West Central team, serving as a livestock specialist in Johnson, Lafayette and Ray counties.

Davis grew up on a diversified grain and livestock farm in Lamar, Mo. He has a Doctor of Philosophy in animal science from MU.



Davis worked at the Roman L. Hruska U.S. Meat Animal Research Center in Clay Center, Neb. He also worked with the MU Extension Missouri Agriculture and Energy Saving Team - A Revolutionary Opportunity program that helps farmers reduce their energy usage.

Feel free to contact Davis at the MU Extension office in Johnson County, 135 W. Market St., Warrensburg, Mo.; (660) 747-3193; [davismp@missouri.edu](mailto:davismp@missouri.edu).



## a look ahead

- Jan. 17** - Cass County Soils and Crops Conference, (816) 380-8460
- Jan. 17** - Farm and Small Business Estate Planning, (660) 584-3658
- Jan. 18** - Herbicide Resistant Weed Management Strategies, (660) 679-4167
- Jan. 26** - Good Agricultural Practices for Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Producers, (816) 270-2141
- Feb. 28** - West Central Missouri Goat Workshop, (816) 380-8460

## Risk management is a necessary survival tool

**So much time has been spent improving production that many agricultural operators have been left exposed to financial ruin if the price or production suddenly drops or declines over time. The summer of 2011 has shown that we do have a lot of risk exposure to drought, wind, hail, floods and price fluctuations.**

Most producers use a combination of tools to manage risk. This past year the number one tool of choice was crop insurance. To determine what level of crop insurance to buy, a producer needs to know his break-even price or the revenue needed to cover variable costs.

Protecting price in today's volatile commodity markets must be considered in developing a production plan for 2012. A wise plan is to use a combination of strategies such as forward contracting, options market puts and hedging tools that are available to producers. These options can be used to form a strong marketing plan. But to effectively take a crop to market, knowing the break-even price or per acre revenue is a must.

The natural disasters that occurred in 2011 shed light upon the importance of protecting property. Now is a good time to review your farm policy with your insurance agent. Make sure all of the equipment is listed and the value of the house and outbuildings is correctly reflected.

Review your life insurance policies, making sure the coverage is appropriate to meet the needs of the farm and family. Adequate insurance is critical for the long-term success and continuation of the farming operation.

The need to limit the farm's exposure to risk continues to increase. Today's farmers must take the time to learn about ways to limit risk. Protecting themselves against price, production and property losses is especially important if their farming operations are going to thrive in the future.

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## Variables in growing quality transplants

Producers need to dedicate a fair amount of time to ensuring they can provide high-quality, consistent transplants.

The primary variables influencing quality and consistency include planting date, final pot size, growing medium, nutritional status, light intensity and water availability. All of these variables can be manipulated to help guarantee quality.

Not all species require the same regimen, but producers can select production plantings that are similar to one another to increase management efficiencies.

Transplants should be acclimated to the outdoor environment prior to sale. Acclimate plants by lowering production facility temperatures by 10 degrees for about 10 days or by placing them outside in a protected area when conditions permit.

To avoid transplanting shock, recommend that customers plant in the late afternoon or on a cloudy day.



## Growing transplants commercially

Expand market offerings in the spring by growing vegetable and flower transplants.

**With many commercial transplant production facilities reporting record sales in recent years, producers may wish to consider tapping into this market.**

By offering vegetable and flower transplants, market producers can diversify their early-season offerings at a time when production levels and revenue are slowly building. Producers who do not sell at market can take advantage of this opportunity to begin a new on-farm enterprise, especially if there is existing infrastructure.

Many home gardeners are reluctant to produce their own transplants because of the space required and the time involved. At-home transplant production seldom results in strong, healthy plants that perform well in the garden.

When home gardeners do attempt to produce

their own transplants it is often because they're uncertain whether their favorite plant/variety will be commercially available as transplants.

Producers should pay particular attention to current trends in demand. Producing novel varieties will both help to diversify and differentiate their offerings.

Another option for those looking to enter into this enterprise is to produce transplants on contract for local vegetable producers, other individuals or agencies in need of larger quantities of plants. While many of these entities produce their own transplants, many of them would welcome the opportunity to partner with a local producer to alleviate the pressures this task can impose.

Others who buy transplants at retail might be limited in achieving their goals due to the cost of transplants. If the option to buy at wholesale prices is present, they may be more inclined to expand their plantings.

**Producing novel varieties will help diversify and differentiate your offerings.**

If you are interested in adding transplant production to your on-farm

enterprise or would like assistance in identifying potential buyers for contract growing, don't hesitate to contact me.

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## Determining the optimum yield goal per acre

**When you submit a soil test, you have to list a yield goal. That number is used to determine the amount of fertilizer to apply.**

In general, producers set their yield goals too low in order to save money on fertilizer. When I came to Vernon County as an agronomy specialist 22 years ago, common yield goals were 30 bushels for soybeans and 80 bushels for corn. Many producers are still asking for those same yield goals.

What determines yield? Weather, of course, but also soil potential, fertility, pest issues and crop genetics. A deep bottomland soil certainly has a higher yield potential than a shallow upland.

With high crop prices, there is certainly marginal land going into crops. Those marginal soils probably won't produce 70 bushel soybeans but the

bottomland acreage could produce a higher yield.

Dr. Daryl Buchholz, the former state soil fertility specialist in Missouri, once said, "If you fertilize for an average yield, over time your average will go down." When you get good weather, you want the fertility there to get those good yields. If you don't have the weather for good yields, you may lose some of the nitrogen for the next crop, but your phosphorus, potassium and lime will be there.

Compared to 20 years ago, current crop varieties have better pest resistance and better yield potential. Even in a drought year, the five top yielding Group 4 soybean varieties in the test plots at Nevada, Mo., averaged 39 bushels per acre.

In 2010, the top five averaged 73 bushels. So is 30 bushels a good yield goal? Will a 30 bushel

soybean yield at \$10 per bushel pay the bills? In 2011, the top five varieties in the corn plots at Lamar, Mo., averaged 119 bushels per acre. In 2010, this figure was 183 bushels.

Fertility is necessary to take advantage of the years when we have conditions for good yields. Will 80 bushel corn at \$6 pay the bills? Will it give us a profit cushion for the bad years?

We have to be realistic about our soil's yield potential but we also need the fertility to take advantage of the improved yield potential of today's crops.

### Fertilizer costs pay off in yield

In 2011, the MU dryland corn budget for a 155 bushel yield had estimated operating costs of \$337 per acre. With estimated ownership costs of \$188 per acre, the total cost was \$525 per acre. Of that, \$120 was for fertilizer and amendments such as lime.

For 50 bushel soybeans, the operating costs were \$165 and the ownership costs were \$176 for a total of \$341. Of that, \$53 was for fertilizer and amendments.

Fertilizer prices are high compared to 10 years ago. But increasing fertilizer and lime to make a 155 bushel corn yield compared to a 80 bushel yield or making a 60 bushel soybean yield compared to a 30 bushel yield is still a small part of the overall cost of production.

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### **New Year resolutions that can improve herd health**

Each year, people make New Year's resolutions about things they want to achieve with work and family. This is the time of year I like to refer back to a description of what a cow may wish for during the upcoming New Year, as written by John Hall, a Virginia Tech Extension beef cattle specialist. This Cow's Wish List points out good management practices that should be implemented into a beef cow/calf operation. Why not focus on making two or three of these improvements in your herd for 2012?

1. Good working facilities so neither of us gets hurt.
2. Improved pasture management for better grazing.
3. A good free-choice supplement that contains trace minerals.
4. Regular body condition checks to decide when to supplement.
5. A bull that has good, balanced expected progeny differences, maybe even an artificial insemination bull.
6. Attention during calving.
7. A 60- to 90-day breeding season; I don't like the bull that much.
8. A complete vaccination program that includes protection against leptospirosis.
9. Process my calf at birth so it gets a good start and is identified.
10. Dewormer for my calves, but possibly not for me as I may be resistant to worms.
11. Control those darn flies.
12. A vaccination and weaning program for my calf so it won't get sick.
13. A veterinarian who understands my needs.
14. A marketing program for my calf, so it sells well and you can afford to keep me another year.

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