10 issues and events that affected Hancock County farmers in 2017

Each year, agriculture has its challenges and 2017 was no exception. A review of the year reveals 10 issues or events that affected farmers in Hancock County.

**Grain prices**

Grain prices continued to remain low in 2017. Low grain prices are projected in 2018 with the abundance of grain harvested in the U.S. this past year.

Farm revenue did not drop as much in 2017 as in previous years, but is still too low for profitability on many farms.

The county in many situations, have had to look for other income sources to stay solvent, such as off-farm jobs. Lower farm income has also affected businesses that supply farming operations.

Land prices continued to drop in 2017 but at a slower rate than previous years.

**Weather and crop yields**

Last year’s Hancock County crop yields were affected by excessive rains during the planting season and flooding in July. Stands were heavily reduced in fields with the most damage that were unable to recover.

However, fields that were not affected, or had good drainage, yielded quite well in 2017.

The county yield average for corn may be in the upper 170s and the low 50s for soybeans.

Wheat had a second year of good yields. However, wheat acres continue to drop as a result of low prices for wheat compared to other crops.

**Waterhemp gets a foothold**

Several local soybean fields were discovered to be infested with waterhemp this past year. Unfortunately, several of these fields were along the Blanchard River, which may have allowed floodwater to carry seeds downstream to infest other fields in the future.

One female plant can produce 500,000 seeds. Fortunately, waterhemp’s meaner cousin, Palmer amaranth, has not established a population in the county.

Both weed species can be difficult to control and have caused major yield losses in soybean fields in other parts of the country.

**Algae blooms in Lake Erie**

Last year was a bad year for blooms in Lake Erie. This should not be a surprise, since excessive rainfall fell early in the growing season and extensive flooding occurred in early July.

Historically, algae blooms form in Lake Erie in years that excessive rainfall occurs in the Western Lake Erie Basin.

Activist groups want Lake Erie declared a distressed watershed. This designation would remove local and state control of the issue and possibly cause unnecessary financial hardships on municipalities, businesses and agriculture in the watershed without improving the lake.

**Fertilizer certification training**

Farmers that apply fertilizer to more than 50 acres of land had to complete fertilizer certification training by Sept. 30, 2017, to be able to privately apply fertilizer in the future. Over 350 farmers in Hancock County completed the training.

The Ohio Department of Agriculture will be enforcing the regulation in 2018. The fertilizer certification program is one way that the agricultural community is assuring the public that farmers know the best management practices when applying nutrients to the land.

**Resignation of Sen. Cliff Hite**

Not only did Hancock County farmers benefit from having a state senator from their county, but one that was also the chairman of the Ohio Senate Agriculture Committee. He served in that role from 2011 until his resignation in 2017. During his chairmanship, he co-sponsored the bill that resulted in the agriculture fertilizer applicator certification program, and provided leadership for fairness in the formulation used in the CAUV program.

**Dicamba tolerant soybean technology**

Last year was the first year that farmers could spray new dicamba herbicides on dicamba-tolerant soybeans. This technology provided farmers with a new post-emergent tool to combat difficult weeds such as marestail, ragweed and waterhemp.

However, volatility problems have arisen from these products across the country, and damage has occurred in non-tolerant soybeans and other susceptible crops.

In response, the U.S. EPA has declared the new dicamba herbicides as “restricted use” and farmers will have to complete special training to apply them.

**Veterinarian feed directive rules**

New antibiotic regulations were placed on livestock producers in 2017. A farmer was no longer allowed to purchase livestock antibiotics without a directive from a veterinarian.

The veterinarian requirement has increased costs for the livestock producer and may not have any benefit in reducing the development of resistant bacteria in medical antibiotics for humans.

Researchers have not found any correlation between livestock antibiotics and antibiotic resistance in humans.

**Rover pipeline**

The section of the controversial Rover pipeline that crossed northeastern Hancock County in Washington Township was completed in 2017. Two 42-inch-diameter pipes were buried at least 4 feet from the surface in farm fields.

The pipeline connects the shale oil fields of eastern Ohio and other states with a natural gas hub in Defiance.

Research data is limited on the long-term effects of disrupting and compacting soil during the construction. Ohio State University is conducting research on another pipeline to answer this question.

**CAUV reform**

On June 30 last year, the new Ohio budget bill changed the formula for CAUV (current agriculture use valuation), which will reduce valuation of farmland under this program. Several counties in the area will see the benefit of the legislation in 2018.

However, Hancock County farmers will have to wait several more years before seeing the reduction. As a result, farmers in Hancock County will continue to see high property taxes.

Many of these events and issues will continue to affect farmers in 2018. Farmers will be asked to complete the latest agriculture census over the next month and Congress will begin debate on a new farm bill. Both of these events occur about every five years.

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