

Farm Bill Impact on Alternative Crops

By Rob Myers, Executive Director

In February of this year, Congress finished its first appropriations cycle after passage of the 2002 Farm Bill. Although the Farm Bill stipulates mandatory action on certain farm programs, many of the programs outlined in the Farm Bill are dependent on agriculture appropriations action for funding. Thus, we are just now getting a picture of how the new Farm Bill is going to shape up, although many program details are yet to be forthcoming from USDA.

There are actually a few programs within the new Farm Bill that provide direct or indirect support to new or alternative crops. The most significant of these, from a funding standpoint, is the minor oilseeds program, which allows producers of sesame, crambe, canola, flax and safflower to participate in crop subsidy programs. Specifically, growers of these alternative oilseeds are eligible for marketing loans and loan deficiency payments, just like soybean and sunflower producers.

Indirect support for alternative crops comes through increased funding for biobased products and bioenergy crops. There is also some support for crop diversification

in the greatly increased budget for conservation programs, especially the new Conservation Security Program (CSP). CSP funding probably won't become available until next fall or winter, but the program specifically authorizes payments for "resource conserving crop rotations." The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) got a big boost in funding, and although it does not directly support alternative crops, some landscape diversification practices such as agroforestry and riparian buffers are supported.

Unfortunately, there are some areas of farm policy where alternative crops are excluded. These include export assistance programs and crop insurance. Although there is a program for uninsured crops, it provides very small payments. There is a provision to get insurance coverage on a case-by-case basis for certain alternative crops, but the new Farm Bill did not increase support for this area.

Although Farm Bill support for alternative crops is not as consistent as one would hope, it is worth being aware of some of the opportunities noted above. Contact our office if you have questions about any of these programs.

Farmer's Corner: Brad Minton, Dexter, MO

By Cortney Miller, Communications Specialist

Brad Minton, of Dexter, MO, has taken an innovative approach to growing sunflowers on his farm. Minton, who began growing sunflowers two years ago, says that his primary goal of producing sunflowers was as a commodity and an attempt to diversify their cropland. His secondary goal was to provide additional diversification to their hunt club.

Minton and his family lease land to hunters to hunt dove after he harvests his sunflower crop. "Not only have we provided hunters with a perfect dove hunting environment, we have provided ourselves with an additional source of income", says Minton.

Originally, Minton focused primarily in wetland waterfowl. "I found that many of my clients from metropolitan areas were seeking land to dove hunt."

According to Minton, there are additional expenses incurred when leasing hunting rights, such as insurance, advertising and labor. By managing fields and controlling the habitat, he continues to grow the dove population on his land.

Minton contracts his sunflower seed to Bucheit Agri in Perryville, Mo.

By leasing dove hunting rights, Brad Minton has added profits to his farm in southeast Missouri.



Sunflower Planting Tips to Increase Yield



The National Sunflower Association surveyed states with significant sunflower production last year, including Missouri. One commercial field per 5,000 production acres was surveyed.

The extensive survey included insect, disease, and weed pests, as well as agronomic characteristics. One noteworthy result was that poor stand establishment was a close second to drought as the number one yield robber for last year. The High Plains account for much of the U.S. sunflower production and much of that region suffered under a serious and extensive drought in 2002.

An optimum stand for sunflowers is 20-25,000 plants per acre. Both even emergence and plant spacing are required for sunflowers to compensate for a less than optimum stand (15-20,000 plants per acre).

The National Sunflower Association has issued several planting tips with the following applying to Missouri:

PLANTER ADJUSTMENTS

Your planter is like a machine gun. It has to shoot out 13.5 seeds per second, if you have an eight row planter seeding 20,000 seeds at 5 mph. Sunflower seeds have more variation than most other seeds. That is why it is so important to clean and adjust your planter before planting your sunflowers. Also use the recommended plates, fingers and air pressure to help avoid skips on doubles. Run your planter at recommended speeds.

WOODY HULL

Sunflowers have evolved over thousands of years. One survival mechanism is its woody hull that prevents germination during dry conditions. To insure even germination, seed must be placed in soils with adequate soil moisture and good seed to soil contact.

SEED DEPTH

Sunflower seed needs to be planted at depth of 1 to 1.5 inches.

FURROW CLOSING

Sunflower needs to have excellent seed to soil contact. Again because sunflowers have a woody hull, closure of the furrow becomes more important than for corn and most other crops.

INSECTS

Insects like wire worms and cutworms can drastically reduce stands. Use approved chemicals to control insects [where they are known to present a problem].

WEED CONTROL

Satisfactory weed control is essential. Use labeled products and apply them as recommended. Know the field's weed history and control accordingly.

Contract Reminder

JM Farms, located in the northeast corner of Oklahoma, is offering canola contracts through a bid system. Producers who wish to grow canola determine at what price they are willing to market canola and then provide a bid to JM Farms by August 1. JM Farms will then determine which farmers they will offer contracts to. Producers can contact Scott Engelbrecht, JM Farms, at 918-540-1567 for contract details.

Specialty Crop Workshop Wrap-Up

The Missouri Department of Agriculture, University of Missouri Extension, and the Thomas Jefferson Agricultural Institute conducted five workshops throughout the past winter to address opportunities for Missouri farmers to add income to their crop rotations with specialty crops. Meetings were held in Chillicothe, Mexico, Nevada, Osage Beach and Sikeston.

Each workshop discussed topics such as specialty crops, diversifying with vegetables, sunflowers and value-added birdseed opportunities, specialty grains and oilseeds, agroforestry income opportunities, and funding sources for specialty crops. Most workshops also included a producer panel, allowing farmers interested in growing specialty crops to interact with experienced specialty crop producers.

Speakers included staff from the Jefferson Institute, the Missouri Department of Agriculture, University of Missouri and Extension, Southwest Missouri State University, and the Missouri Department of Conservation.

The meetings were attended by 140 farmers and landowners.

During a meeting in Chillicothe, MO, farmers had the opportunity to discuss individual experiences with each other.





New Educational Farm Planned For Mid-Missouri

The Jefferson Educational Farm, to be located on the outskirts of Columbia, will serve as a year-round instructional facility for both youth and adult audiences. A special emphasis will be placed on the contemporary role of agriculture in today's society, including the production and uses of various crops. Construction of the facility is expected to begin in 2004, with the facility open for visitors or school tours in late 2004 or 2005. The Jefferson Institute has received its first major funding commitment. Senator Kit Bond was able to secure \$500,000 for the educational farm in the omnibus appropriations bill.

Indoor Exhibits and Programs

- Visitors' building with displays and exhibits on crops and crop uses, conservation, and other contemporary issues.
- Classroom space - three classrooms for hands-on youth education and adult education programs
- Teaching greenhouse - will provide examples of a wide range of crops of economic importance
- Reading room with books on agriculture and horticulture, including children's books on farming

Outdoor education

- Demonstration fields of major and minor Missouri crops
- Demonstration gardens on plant breeding and genetic improvements (e.g., corn and sunflowers)
- Children's garden with focus on plants of economic importance (including food, feed, fiber crops)
- Replica of Thomas Jefferson's 1000-foot long test garden with various agronomic and horticultural crops, including a replica of Jefferson's garden pavilion

Plan to Visit!

The Jefferson Educational Farm will be open year-round for tours or general visitation; with youth educators and visitors staff on-site Monday through Saturday. Check our progress on the facility at www.jeffersoninstitute.org.

THANK YOU!

The Jefferson Institute would like to thank the following state universities and MU farms for their participation in planting alternative crop demonstration plantings for the upcoming summer. Each planting will include ten alternative crops, similar to the demonstration we exhibited at the Missouri State Fair in 2002.

Hundley-Whaley Center
Albany, MO
660-726-3698

Southwest Ag Center
Mt. Vernon, MO
417-466-4225

Bradford Research & Extension Center
Columbia, MO
573-884-7945

Truman State University
Kirksville, MO
660-785-4280

Southeast Missouri State University
Cape Girardeau, MO
573-651-2796



Ten alternative crops will be on display throughout Missouri during the summer. Crops include: sunflowers, blackeye peas, kenaf, black beans, buckwheat, sesame, pearl millet, amaranth, edamames and flax.



*This newsletter is printed on 100% kenaf paper,
an alternative fiber crop.*

The Thomas Jefferson Agricultural Institute is a 501(c)3 non-profit education and research center based in Columbia, MO. For more information, contact us at (573) 449-3518 or by email at: info@jeffersoninstitute.org.



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