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ADMC NEWSLETTER

Agricultural Drainage Management Coalition

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CIG Update

All of the demonstration projects are complete and collecting data. Most of the demonstration sites have had up grades to the battery systems for increased power and longer life. Managing the maintenance of twenty systems over five states has become a daunting task.

With all of the snow this winter and the heavy rains this spring we anticipate good flows in all of the systems during the early part of the 2008 growing season. Currently, very few crops have been planted.

Our partners in each state that are working locally to collect the data and make sure the protocols for the projects are operating correctly are; Ohio—Ohio State University, Dr. Larry C. Brown and ARS Research Leader Dr. Norman Fausey, Indiana—Purdue University, Dr. Jane Frankenberger, Dept. of Agricultural & Biological Engineering and Dr. Eileen Kladvko, Dept. of Agronomy, Illinois—University of Illinois, Dr. Richard A. Cooke, Dept. of Agri-

cultural & Biological Engineering, Iowa—Iowa State University, Dr. Matt J. Helmers, Dept. of Agricultural & Biosystems Engineering and Dr. Dan Jaynes, Agriculture Research Service, and Minnesota—MN. Dept. of Agriculture, Mark Dittrich, Agricultural Resources Management & Development Division, University of Minnesota, Dr. Gary Sands, Dept. of Byproducts & Biosystems Engineering, Southwest Research and Outreach Center, Dr. Jeff Strock, Dept. of Soil, Water and Climate.

Without the help and cooperation of these partners in this project, it would be very difficult to manage a program of this size and scope.

Currently, we are working with the Conservation Technology Information Center (CTIC) of West Lafayette, IN to develop an education and outreach program for information dissemination to producers, landowners, government agencies, ag industry people, consumers and the environmental community.

Executive Director's Report

This winter and spring has been very busy traveling to numerous meetings putting on presentations about Drainage Water Management (DWM). It started out on January 2nd going to Ohio to do a presentation for the Ohio Land Improvement Contractors Association. During January I also made presentations to MnLICA, MN Corn Growers, and the Hawk Creek Watershed in central Minnesota, and attended trade shows and had display booths at the MN Corn Growers Meeting, MN Soybean Growers Meeting, MN LICA Meeting, and the Iowa

LICA Meeting. February was a time for catching up in the office and working to update the ADMC website.

March included a presentation and tradeshow at the MN Drainage workshop put on by the University of Minnesota. On the 14th, I traveled to Cedar Rapids, Iowa to do a presentation for the Linn County Soil & Water Conservation District. April started out with a three day joint spring meeting of the Agricultural Drainage Task Force (ADMS) and ADMC at Purdue University. Followed up with putting

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ADMC Contacts

Leonard Binstock
Executive Director
110 Cedar Avenue North
P. O. Box 592
Owatonna, MN 55060
(507) 451-0073
Fax: (507) 451-3714
lbinstock@admcoalition.com

Charlie Schafer
President
Agri Drain Corp.
Adair, IA
(800) 232-4742
charlie@agridrain.com

Kent Rodelius
Vice President
Prinsco, Inc.
Willmar, MN
(800) 992-1725
krodelius@prinsco.com

Stephen Baker
Treasurer
Springfield Plastics, Inc.
Auburn, IL
(800) 252-3361
sbaker@spipipe.com

Chris Overmyer
Secretary
Francesville Drain Tile Corp.
Francesville, IN
(800) 854-7120
covemyer@fratco.com

Shortages Threaten Farmers' Key Tool: Fertilizer

NYTimes.com By KEITH BRADSHER and ANDREW MARTIN

XUAN CANH, Vietnam — Truong Thi Nha stands just four and a half feet tall. Her three grown children tower over her, just as many young people in this village outside Hanoi dwarf their parents. The biggest reason the children are so robust: fertilizer. Ms. Nha, her face weathered beyond its 51 years, said her growth was stunted by a childhood of hunger and malnutrition. Just a few decades ago, crop yields here were far lower and diets much worse. Then the widespread use of inexpensive chemical fertilizer, coupled with market reforms, helped power an agricultural explosion here that had already occurred in other parts of the world. Yields of rice and corn rose, and diets grew richer. Now those gains are threatened in many countries by spot shortages and soaring prices for fertilizer, the most essential ingredient of modern agriculture. Some kinds of fertilizer have nearly tripled in price in the last year, keeping farmers from buying all they need. That is one of many factors contributing to a rise in food prices that, according to the United Nations' World Food Program, threatens to push tens of millions of poor people into malnutrition. Protests over high food prices have erupted across the developing world, and the stability of governments from Senegal to the Philippines is threatened.

In the United States, farmers in Iowa eager to replenish nutrients in the soil have increased the age-old practice of spreading hog manure on fields. In India, the cost of subsidizing fertilizer for farmers has soared, leading to political dispute. And in Africa, plans to stave off hunger by increasing crop yields are suddenly in jeopardy. The squeeze on the supply of fertilizer has been building for roughly five years. Rising demand for food and biofuels prompted farmers everywhere to plant more crops. As demand grew, the fertilizer mines and factories of the world proved unable to keep up. Some dealers in the Midwest ran out of fertilizer last fall, and they continue to restrict sales this spring because of a limited supply. "If you want 10,000 tons, they'll sell you 5,000 today, maybe 3,000," said W. Scott Tinsman Jr., a fertilizer dealer in Davenport, Iowa. "The rubber band is stretched really far." Fertilizer companies are confident the shortage will be solved eventually, noting that they plan to build scores of new factories. But that will probably create fresh problems in the long run as the world grows more dependent on fossil fuels to produce chemical fertilizers. Intensified use of such fertilizers is certain to mean greater pollution of waterways, too. Agriculture and development experts say the world has few alternatives to its growing dependence on fertilizer. As population increases and a rising global middle class demands more food, fertilizer is among the most effective strategies to increase crop yields. "Putting fertilizer on the ground on a one-acre plot can, in typical cases, raise an extra ton of output," said Jeffrey D. Sachs, the Columbia University economist who has focused on eradicating poverty. "That's the difference between life and death." The demand for fertilizer has been driven by a

confluence of events, including population growth, shrinking world grain stocks and the appetite for corn and palm oil to make biofuel. But experts say the biggest factor has been the growing demand for food, especially meat, in the developing world.

Recently, Ms. Nha, the tiny Vietnamese woman, stood in a field outside her village, her weather-beaten face shielded from the drizzle by a big straw hat. She took a break from wielding her wood-handled hoe and described the meager diets of her youth. Her family, including six brothers and sisters, struggled to survive on rations from the commune where they lived, eating little protein. The occasional pigs they raised on rice stalks and mush "fattened very slowly," Ms. Nha recalled. But with market reforms, better seeds and increased fertilizer use, Vietnam's rice yields per acre have doubled and corn yields have tripled, allowing farmers to fatten a growing herd of livestock. Several times a season, Ms. Nha and her neighbors walk down their rows of corn with battered metal buckets full of chemical fertilizer, which looks like coarse gray sand, sprinkling a bit at the base of each plant. Ms. Nha's husband, Le Van Son, remembers villagers' amazement in the 1990s when they learned that a pound of chemical fertilizer contained more of the major nutrients than 100 pounds of manure.

Overall global consumption of fertilizer increased by an estimated 31 percent from 1996 to 2008, driven by a 56 percent increase in developing countries, according to the International Fertilizer Industry Association. "Markets are asking farmers to step on the accelerator," said Michael R. Rahm, vice president for market analysis and strategic planning at Mosaic, a fertilizer producer in Plymouth, Minn. "They've pressed on it, but the market has told them to step on it harder." Fertilizer is plant food, a combination of nutrients added to soil to help plants grow. The three most important are nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium. The latter two have long been available. But nitrogen in a form that plants can absorb is scarce, and the lack of it led to low crop yields for centuries. That limitation ended in the early 20th century with the invention of a procedure, now primarily fueled by natural gas, that draws chemically inert nitrogen from the air and converts it into a usable form. As the use of such fertilizer spread, it was accompanied by improved plant varieties and greater mechanization. From 1900 to 2000, worldwide food production jumped by 600 percent. Scientists said that increase was the fundamental reason world population was able to rise to about 6.7 billion today from 1.7 billion in 1900. Vaclav Smil, a professor at the University of Manitoba, calculates that without nitrogen fertilizer, there would be insufficient food for 40 percent of the world's population, at least based on today's diets.

Initially, much of the increased production of fertilizer went to grains like wheat and rice that served as the foundation of a basic diet. But recently, with world economic growth at a brisk 5 percent a year, hundreds of millions of people began

(Fertilizer Shortages continued on page 3)

on three back to back presentations with several groups that are looking for better ways to manage our drainage systems for water quality and quantity in Minnesota.

We continue to work on developing an education and outreach program to disseminate the information about DWM and have designed and produced public relations pieces to educate and promote DWM and ADMC. As more information is circulated the more requests we receive to do presentations.

Agriculture has reached a new plateau of increased production, new record prices and increased operating expenses that are stretching the management skills of today's operators. The article from the New York Times.com that is reprinted in this newsletter, relates to some of the

problems that are occurring in agriculture today. There are going to be many challenges, such as seed & fertilizer shortages, increased financing needs and environmental challenges that are going to require new technologies and information services to produce the increased production that today's society demands. The CIG demonstration



projects that ADMC and its partners are collecting data from should give producers the information needed to make informative decisions.

ADMC & Partners viewing one of the Minnesota Control Systems

(Continued from page 2) Shortages Threaten Farmers' Key Tool: Fertilizer

earning enough money to buy more meat from animals fattened with grains. That occurred at the same time that rising production of biofuels, like ethanol, put new pressure on grain supplies. These factors translated into rising fertilizer demand. Prices at a terminal in Tampa, Fla., for one fertilizer, diammonium phosphate, jumped to \$1,102 a ton from \$393 a ton in the last year, according to JPMorgan Securities, which tracks the prices. Urea, a type of granular nitrogen fertilizer, jumped to \$505 a ton from \$273 a ton in the last year. Manufacturers are scrambling to increase supply. At least 50 plants to make nitrogen fertilizer are under construction, many in the Middle East where natural gas is abundant, and phosphorous and potassium mines are being expanded. But these projects are expensive and time-consuming, and supplies are expected to remain tight for years. Fertilizer is vitally important in Iowa, whose farmers grow more corn than in any other state and depend on fertilizer to increase yields. But the combination of high prices and spot shortages has forced some farmers to revert to older methods of fertilization, making hog manure a hot commodity. Farmers are cutting deals to have hog barns built on the edges of their corn and soybean fields. On a tour of his rolling farm in Oxford Junction in eastern Iowa, Jayson Willmack pointed to the future sites of two buildings that will hold 2,400 hogs. Their manure will eventually replace commercial fertilizer on 400 acres, about 10 percent of his farm, and save him perhaps \$50,000 annually. "Every little bit helps," he said. Such a strategy has severe limits — manure contains so little nitrogen that tons are required on each acre. That means farmers in Iowa and abroad have little choice but to pay the higher prices for commercial fertilizer. In many countries, those cost increases have so far been offset

by record high prices for crops. But fertilizer inflation has created a crisis in countries that subsidize fertilizer use for farmers. In India, for instance, the government's subsidy bill could be as high as \$22 billion in the coming year, up from \$4 billion in 2004-5. Once new supplies become available, the rising use of fertilizer will still pose difficulties.

Environmental groups fear increased use, particularly of nitrogen fertilizer made using fossil fuels. Because plants do not absorb all the nitrogen, much of it leaches into streams and groundwater. That runoff has long been recognized as a major pollution problem, and it is growing. A barometer of the pollution is the rising number of dead zones where rivers meet the sea. In the Gulf of Mexico, for instance, nitrogen runoff from fields in the Corn Belt washes downstream and feeds plant life in the gulf. The algae blooms suck oxygen from the water, killing other marine life. More than 400 dead zones have been identified, from the coasts of China to the Chesapeake Bay, and the primary reason is agricultural runoff, said Robert J. Diaz, a professor at the Virginia Institute of Marine Science. "Nitrogen is nitrogen," Professor Diaz said. "If it's on land, it produces corn. If it gets in the water, it produces algae." This month, a United Nations panel called for changes in agricultural practices to make them less damaging. The panel recommended techniques that offer some of the same benefits as chemical fertilizer, like increased crop rotation with legumes that naturally add some nitrogen to the soil. But others say those approaches, while helpful, will be not be enough to meet the world's rapidly rising demand for food and biofuel. "This is a basic problem, to feed 6.6 billion people," said Norman Borlaug, an American scientist who was awarded a Nobel Peace Prize in 1970 for his role in spreading intensive agricultural practices to poor countries. "Without chemical fertilizer, forget it. The game is over."



**Agricultural Drainage Management
Coalition**

110 Cedar Avenue North

P.O. Box 592

Owatonna, MN 55060-0592

Phone: 507-451-0073

Fax: 507-451-3714

E-mail: lbinstock@admcoalition.com

www.admcoalition.com

***A Public / Private Partnership
Improving America's Water
Quality, Wildlife Habitat and
Agronomics Through Drainage
Water Management***

Schedule of Events

**July 6-11, 2008 — Helsinki, Finland
10th International Drainage
Workshop**

**July 8-13, 2008 — Harrisburg, PA
LICA Summer Meeting**

**July 17-18, 2008 — Columbia, MO
Missouri Drainage Field Day**

**July 26-30, 2008 — Tucson, AZ
SWCS Annual Conference**

**July 31, 2008 — Peoria, IL
IL Soybean Growers Annual
Meeting**