



Wyoming potato growers have federal crop insurance options

By James Sedman and John Hewlett

Potatoes are a viable irrigated cash crop in some parts of Wyoming. In 2004, approximately 2,000 acres of potatoes were raised in the state.

Both seed and commercial potato growers in Goshen and Laramie counties are eligible for insurance protection under the Federal Crop Insurance Corporation. Growing potatoes is one of the more risky cash crop enterprises in Wyoming. Utilizing crop insurance to protect against revenue losses from declines in yield can be one of the best ways to minimize production risk.

Potato Insurance Requirements

Potato insurance is a Multiperil Crop Insurance policy (MPCI). All potatoes planted with certified seed for human consumption are eligible.

This policy is yield-based, and it utilizes a producer's actual production history (APH). MPCI policies are intended to help producers achieve a greater level of financial security through revenue protection. A producer's APH yield is compiled using four to 10 years of yield data.

Where yield data is not available, a transition yield is assigned. Producers may insure potato acres in one of two ways: 1) Basic units, which include all insurable acreage in a county. These units are given a 10-percent premium discount. 2) Optional units, where basic units may be divided and insured based on crop type or location. Depending on the area or coverage available, a producer may elect yield coverage ranging from 65 to 90 percent of their APH yield and a price election ranging from 50 to 100 percent of the established harvest price.

Potato insurance will cover losses due to adverse weather, lack of or loss of irrigation water, fire, and insect and disease outbreaks. The insurance has a rotation requirement. No potatoes grown on land previously in potatoes, sugar beets, or sunflowers is eligible for crop insurance.

Producers are also eligible for the Northern Potato Crop Insurance Storage Coverage Endorsement and the Northern Potato Crop Insurance Quality Endorsement. These endorsements protect against declines in quality grades that cannot be sorted after production and protecting against losses while the crop is in storage.

Benefits to Wyoming Producers

As with any crop insurance, the main benefit is to reduce the risk of lost revenue due to drastic yield



reductions. Crop insurance can help make raising potatoes less risky, increasing profit potential. Other benefits include protection against factors beyond the producer's control, such as drought, disease, insects, frost, and other disasters. Consult a crop insurance special-

ist to determine specific insurance needs. They can tailor a plan for protecting against perils faced by most agricultural operators. For a listing of insurance agents, contact your local Farm Service Agency or visit the Risk Management Agency on the Web at www.rma.usda.gov. Click the Find an insurance agent or company link under I Want To... For more information about this and other risk management topics on the Web, consult the Western Risk Management Library at <http://agecon.uwyo.edu/riskmgt>.

James Sedman is a consultant to the UW College of Agriculture's Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics and John Hewlett is a farm and ranch management specialist in the department. Hewlett can be reached at (307) 766-2166 or hewlett@uwyo.edu.

YELLOW-FLOWERING ALFALFA: A DRY LAND FORAGE OPTION

Alfalfa's qualities have long been known, and alfalfa is one of the oldest domesticated crops.

It is grown in all 50 states and has the highest feeding value of all forages. Alfalfa's winter survival and dormancy ratings allow the plant to survive in harsh conditions making it one of Wyoming's ideal forages and crop.

What about drought? There is a type of alfalfa that withstands drought and still produces very good forage. *Medicago sativa ssp. falcata*, otherwise known as yellow-flowering alfalfa, is a very good option for interseeding in rangeland forages.

Yellow-flowering alfalfa, like other legumes, fixes nitrogen, which is one of the most-limited nutrients in rangelands. In turn, higher levels of nitrogen increase the rate of soil carbon storage and improves the water-use efficiency by plants.

Its nitrogen-fixing ability boosts production of other species present in the production system. This will improve soil quality, increase organic matter, increase water-holding capacity, and decrease evaporation by allowing more canopy closure on the rangeland.

Yellow-flowering alfalfa tolerates grazing



and will go dormant more readily and then green up with available moisture later in the growing season.

The feed value of alfalfa has long been recognized due to its high protein value, but there are two major problems: bloat and lack of plant persistence. Yellow-flowering alfalfa's ability to spread and creep makes it competitive with native species. This also helps with the ability to tolerate grazing; however, it is also the reason for decreased tonnage when compared to purple-flowered alfalfa.

Its ability to spread and persist in native rangeland does make it a good option, but there is still one catch. Yellow-flowering alfalfa will still cause bloat. Science has not developed a bloat-resistant alfalfa; however, the chances for bloat are decreased in rangeland production systems due to increased tannin intake from other available forages, which slows the rate of protein digestion in the rumen. This decreases rumen foam, associated with poor release of fermentation gasses. The less rumen foam, the less likelihood of bloat.

Yellow-flowering alfalfa is more persistent in rangeland due to its drought tolerance and growth habits. It forms more of a fibrous root system, and it propagates vegetatively allowing plant reproduction to happen more quickly in a rangeland setting.

Yellow-flowering alfalfa has the ability to extend grazing periods and forage quality. It is not a pure, dry land forage option but can be very useful when combined with native species.

Its seed is more costly than purple-flowered alfalfa. Using yellow-flowering alfalfa is not correct for every management setting. It is another option to increase forage and decrease supplemental feeding needs, which will decrease additional feeding costs.

Ryan Rapp is a University of Wyoming Cooperative Extension Service educator in Converse, Natrona, and Niobrara counties. He can be reached at (307) 358-2417 or rapp@uwyo.edu.

Web-based tools help estimate and reduce ag energy use

Cost-conscious farmers and ranchers are increasingly aware of the impact energy has on their bottom line. Energy savings means more money in the farmer's pocket. Savings start with efficiency and conservation.

Besides finding ways to consume less fuel and electricity, many producers are making use of wind, biofuel, biogas, and/or solar energy on their own farms or generating energy for export off their farms.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) is launching newly developed risk-management tools to address energy costs. These tools offer a user-friendly, Web-based program to help farmers and ranchers conserve energy, make more efficient-fuel decisions, calculate potential savings, and increase energy awareness.

- The "Energy Estimator: Tillage" tool (<http://ecat.sc.egov.usda.gov>) estimates diesel fuel and use and costs in the production of key crops in the producer's area, and it compares potential energy savings between conventional tillage and alternative tillage systems. The crops covered are limited to the most predominant crops in 74 Crop Management Zones (CMZ). Crops identified for Wyoming would be in CMZ 7 or zip code 82501. The "Energy Estimator: Tillage" tool gives an idea of the magnitude of diesel fuel savings under different levels of tillage. Switching from conventional tillage to no-till on a 1,000-acre farm can save up to 3,500 gallons of diesel per year. A two-fold increase in earthworms, a 70-percent water infiltration increase from less evaporation and runoff, and improved wildlife habitat are longer term benefits.

- The second tool built by NRCS helps identify costs based on nitrogen fertilizer application practices. The "Energy Estimator: Nitrogen" (<http://nfat.sc.egov.usda.gov>) identifies costs based on current nitrogen application practices and compares it with the most efficient and cost-effective nitrogen management alternative for each crop selected. Substitution of manure for commercial fertilizer can reduce crop production costs by as much as \$85 per acre for a 1,000-acre farm.

- The latest tool, the "Energy Estimator: Irrigation" (<http://ipat.sc.egov.usda.gov/>) estimates and compares energy consumption for different irrigation systems. By increasing application precision and reducing unneeded applications, water can be conserved and energy can be saved. The conversion of high-pressure systems to low pressure could result in savings of \$41 per acre. A 10-percent improvement in water-use efficiency could reduce diesel consumption by eight gallons per acre. Replacing old diesel engines and pumps with new, energy-efficient models would further reduce fuel consumption and emissions.

These tools are intended to give an estimate of the magnitude of energy savings that could incur under different management systems. Actual results would largely depend upon local circumstances such as predominant soil types, rainfall, slope of land, machinery used, etc.

NRCS supports conservation practices that save producers money and improve the environmental health of the nation. For more information on energy-saving conservation practices, visit the NRCS Web site www.nrcs.usda.gov and follow the "Save ENERGY, Save MONEY" link.

Bonda Habets is a state agronomist for the Wyoming office of the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service in Casper and can be reached at (307) 233-6767 or bonda.habets@wy.usda.gov.