

## The Importance of Staying Flexible

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

Many people, and I should be one of those, exercise on a regular basis with the intent of staying in shape and staying flexible. The latter is clearly important as we age, I'm finding out! But with our cropping plans and maybe even with our cattle summer pasture plans, I notice that we tend to get locked into doing things a certain way and come you know what or high water, that's what we do. Because of pressures to make early seed orders I think we allow ourselves to get locked into next year's cropping plan before we even have this year's crop out of the field. While it is important to plan, I think it is equally important to try to remain flexible!

We are always faced with the uncertainty of weather, be it temperature or precipitation. Delayed planting in May sometimes forces us to switch from corn to soybeans or grain sorghum. Dry weather in the spring and early summer can force us to reduce stocking rates at the start of the season or perhaps pull cattle off of pastures in mid summer. By the way, the Climate Prediction Center of the National Weather Service is calling for warmer than normal temperatures through just about all of 2022 with early spring being drier than normal and that may carry on into the summer as well. So be ready to be flexible on those grazing plans. We are short on moisture in those pastures right now and it may get worse before it gets better and early season growth may be below average.

But let's talk about cropping plans. The weather wildcard is nothing new. We have that every year. What's different this year is supply chain issues with herbicides, fertilizers and possible other inputs. Prices for some inputs have tripled from spring 2021 and that's assuming you can even get them. This may be the year that crop production "business as usual" goes out the window.

The benefits of no-till crop production have been pretty well accepted. But no-till crop production weighs very heavily on one specific input; herbicides. We use herbicides to control weeds thereby reducing the mechanical tillage we used to do to control weeds before we planted as well as controlling weeds in the growing crop. I grew up learning how to cultivate row crops. We have a generation of farmers who have likely never used a row cultivator.

If burn down herbicides, read that as glyphosate, are either unavailable or ridiculously expensive, what can you do? We go back to the old way where we used field cultivators, tandem or offset discs and harrows to control weeds just before tilling. It may be time to get some of that equipment out, cleaned up, repaired, and ready to go. Just in case. Yes, that's going to impact organic matter and surface residue, but at least it'll allow you to control the weeds and get the crop seed in the ground.

The cost and availability issues also mean that you need to make sure that when you do apply herbicides you are doing so in the most efficient way possible. Make sure that your sprayers are calibrated and all new spray tips are in place. It means using the recommended carrier rate, not the minimum, and driving a little bit slower so that you can maintain adequate and accurate spray coverage. Fertilizer applications may need to be a bit more directed. Soil test in the coming weeks so we aren't applying more fertilizer than we need to. This isn't the time to try to build phosphorus levels in the soil. Change is hard especially when it's forced on us and not our choice. But this year, more than any that I can remember in the past 40 years, it is important to stay flexible!