

# PERSPECTIVES

OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF CROP QUEST AGRONOMIC SERVICES, INC.



## WATER MANAGEMENT

### A Growing Challenge for Crop Quest Farmers

In some areas of the High Plains, Crop Quest agronomists actively help farmers plan for crops and inputs based on water availability. In other areas restrictions are coming or already in place, creating new challenges for many farmers who rely on Crop Quest agronomists for timely water management advice.

In Kansas, in the heart of America's breadbasket, water supplies vary dramatically, but farmers in the State share a common challenge – restrictions are coming.

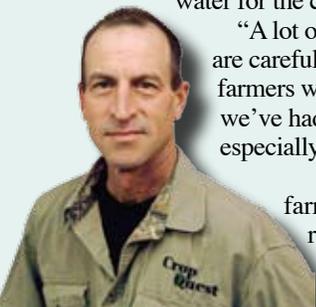
#### Published Kansas Water Plan Objectives include:

- **By 2010, ensure that sufficient surface water storage is available to meet projected year 2040 public water supply needs for areas of Kansas with current or potential access to surface water storage.**
- **By 2010, less than 5% of public water suppliers will be drought vulnerable.**
- **By 2010, ensure that all public water suppliers have the technical, financial and managerial capability to meet their needs and Safe Drinking Water Act requirements.**

In Wichita, Crop Quest Agronomist Kent Norton notes that farmers have adequate water thanks to a rechargeable aquifer that produces a high water level. Farmers frequently check wells, many of which help supply water for the city of Wichita.

"A lot of our wells have meters on them, and growers are careful not to exceed specified levels. We help our farmers with irrigation scheduling. In the past two years we've had too much rain, and it's hurt our corn crop, especially in areas just south of Wichita," Norton says.

He works primarily with corn and soybean farmers. Especially with corn, getting just the right amount of moisture at the right time is critical to growing high yields and high quality corn, he stresses.



Kent Norton

Our growers are in a good situation in that they don't have to turn their irrigation systems on and leave them on during the season, like so many farmers further west do. We can tune irrigation management a little more; make adjustments based on crops and rainfall, Norton says.

"Fine tuning irrigation pivots is critical. Our farmers could do it – they've been irrigating a long time, but most of them don't have the time. A second opinion is good insurance for most of my growers, but the big thing is helping them manage water use because they lack the time to do it themselves," Norton concludes.

In Montezuma, KS, Crop Quest Agronomist Shannon Evans says the water management issues are dramatically different.

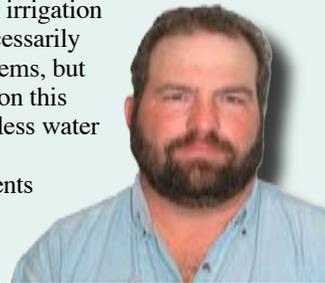
He works with growers who produce corn, milo, soybeans, and a little bit of cotton. We have to be constantly aware of depleting wells – watching to be sure we don't let water levels in individual wells get too low.

Crop selection can be dictated, he says, by the availability of water. Even number of plants per acre can be an issue when growers are trying to maximize yields with a limited amount of water, he stresses.

"I've got a situation in which we have five irrigation circles and low water levels. Cotton is not necessarily the best crop to put under these irrigation systems, but because of water restrictions, it's the best option this particular farmer has because cotton requires less water than his other crops.

"I have another case in which water allotments have been cut back so the grower has to make some decision not only which crop he will plant, but how he will grow these crops based on limited water. The goal is to get maximum value per acre for the crop using the limited water that is available," Evans concludes.

The first step in managing water, he says, is to check the sub-soil profile, so we know the starting point. For example, if we are growing a



Shannon Evans

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## Water Management ... Continued from Page 1

corn crop, we have to know how long the growing season is for a particular hybrid, so we don't have to water it as much as varieties that take more time to mature.

We have to vary plant populations and know the drought tolerance characteristics of potential corn hybrids for a specific field. We have to think through the difference between sandy soil and heavier soils that hold water better, he adds.

Cotton, because of its lower water requirements, is becoming a more frequent cropping choice in Kansas. However, growing cotton in his area is no cup of tea, Evans says.

"We are usually using a shorter growing season cotton variety. We have to battle length of time and getting in heat units. Everything has to work just right. Cotton has to fit in with other crops in terms of when we need to apply irrigation – it's a real challenge," the Crop Quest agronomist stresses.

In Dumas, TX, Crop Quest Agronomist Jason Henry says water restrictions have not been a problem, but a change planned for the 2011 season dropping water usage from two-acre-feet per year to 18-inches per year will make a big change in how farmers grow crops in his area.

"We can still grow corn on 18 inches, but we will have to manage water better. We will probably go to shorter season hybrids and reduce plant populations.

The end-effect will probably be lower yields," he predicts.

"Water usage has never been a problem for our growers, so these new restrictions are going to create a steep learning curve for some of them," Henry adds. "In the past

they just fired up the pivot and didn't have to worry much about what kind of soil profile they had or how they planted the crop."

Having the expertise of a Crop Quest agronomist will be a bigger asset for northwest Texas growers when these new restrictions hit. Henry says drawing from the experience of other Crop Quest agronomists in areas that are already facing limited water supplies and already factoring in alternative cropping systems will be extremely valuable to producers as these water restrictions come into force.

Henry says cotton acreage has been down in his area, but expects more growers will be considering it when the new water restrictions are implemented. Cotton and milo are hard to grow in his area, but the Crop Quest agronomist says it is likely some growers will have to go to these crops to comply with reduced water availability.

Crop Quest Agronomist Johan Marquardt who works in northwest Kansas and eastern Colorado says growers in his area are already looking at more water conservative cropping options. For example, he says, there is more irrigated wheat under pivots linked together, allowing for a corn, milo, wheat rotation and then corn back into wheat.

"Some of our growers have gone to shorter season varieties to avoid late season irrigation. If we are going to have water shortages, later in the growing season is the most likely time," Marquardt says.

The consensus among Crop Quest agronomists is that water management in one way or another is already a challenge for most growers in the Plains. In the future it's likely to be a bigger challenge – one for which Crop Quest is ideally suited to help growers solve.



Jason Henry



Jahan Marquardt

# Agronomic Service And Your Net Profit

By: Norman Kinderknecht



As mentioned in a previous newsletter, I started with Crop Quest in 1994 in central Kansas and left in 2000 to pursue a degree in accounting/economics. Many have inquired why I wanted to return to looking at fields after experiencing the climate control of an office. The answer

is simple. I believe we as agronomists impact the producer's bottom line just as much if not more than any other input in their operation.

There is no doubt producers must have an experienced accountant to tackle their financial and tax situations. What I experienced in my years in accounting was that we were looking at the year in the rear view mirror. We were looking at what we had accomplished and not able to change anything except those issues that impacted tax.

Although there are many factors that producers cannot control such as weather and just plain luck, the simple component of cost of production can be monitored. Having an agronomist is a great asset in controlling costs. Agronomists have the ability to help producers control some of the costs in real time, not just as a reaction to an event.

Crop Quest agronomists can run a quick crop budget to analyze which crops look more profitable for each individual customer. Simple soils tests allow us to evaluate your crop choices to maximize profits.

Crop Quest agronomists work with a wide variety of operations

and management styles. We look at various hybrids in different circumstances. We know what chemicals work in what situations. We pride ourselves in the fact that when you hire a Crop Quest agronomist for full service, you will see your agronomist regularly throughout the year, not just the growing season.

Regular contact encourages strong communication. Because we have a desire to see you succeed, we customize our plans in order that you may take full advantage of the services Crop Quest offers. As producers, your challenge is to maintain a position of economic advantage over your competitors. Controlling your costs to increase your margin is one way to ensure a profitable and successful operation.

It is easy to get complacent with all the technology available today, but who is going to ground truth that technology? Is that particular technology really returning the value it was designed to? Data is key to any operation whether it be a small shop on main street or your farm. Producers must be able to collect, store, retrieve and interpret all of this information. Crop Quest continues to invest more and more in technology. In today's technology environment, Crop Quest has Precision Ag Specialists on staff to help attain production goals using the latest technology available.

When you look at your overall cost or production, an agronomist should be one of the less significant costs that returns the most benefits.



By: Ron O'Hanlon  
President

Member, National Alliance  
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# OPTIMISM IN AGRICULTURE

When we look all around us, to the East Coast, to the West Coast, to the industrialized states on the north and to all the large metropolitan cities, major layoffs are occurring and unemployment is increasing daily. People are struggling to maintain their mortgages and jobs have become scarce. We listen to the nightly news about the plight of our nation and the struggle Americans are having because of the poor economic conditions, but most of us in rural America have felt very little of the effects of what is going on around us.

Many of us in agriculture have to watch our expenses and be cautious with any expansions, but we have a lot of optimism as we

move forward. The cost of fuel has gone down significantly which has helped to offset the drop in commodity prices. Even though grains have come down in price, with the lower fuel prices and fertilizer prices (for those not locked into higher prices), there is still profit potential even with the current marketing prices. Many farmers protected themselves by taking crop insurance on their wheat crop, which will pay over \$8.00 per bushel for a crop disaster. In our rural towns and communities, we are not hearing of drastic layoffs, although some businesses have cut back on overtime hours. In many cases, agriculture is still hiring as people are still needing food and clothing and farmers still need the hired help to assist in their farming enterprises.

Right now agriculture may be the only shining light in these poor economic conditions. We have a lot to be thankful for.



## Agriculture Continues to Thrive; Crop Quest Recruits More Consultants

Crop Quest's primary job is to help producers meet the demands of the world's consumers – which means providing producers in their trade region with topnotch crop consulting and precision agriculture services. To keep up with their demand from producers, Crop Quest continually recruits the best and the brightest. Crop Quest is excited to welcome seven more professional agronomists to their staff.

**Sam Turner** has been working out of the Ulysses office since mid-February helping farmers prepare for their corn crops. "Corn is the primary cash crop in my area," says Turner, "but I have been involved in winter wheat as well and will be advising farmers as they plant soybeans and milo."

Turner who graduated from Texas Tech with an agriculture and applied economics degree in December, interned for Crop Quest last summer.

He is looking forward to his career with Crop Quest where he will be able to "remain close to farming" which he is quite

familiar with as a third generation farmer. Turner grew up in Rule, TX, north of Abilene, where his father and both granddads operated farms. He and his wife, who is a school teacher, have made the move from Texas to Ulysses, and they are enjoying the area. The weather is colder up here, he points out. But, he expects things to heat up quickly enough as Kansas farmers gear up to meet their management objectives.

**Damian Helms** is another third generation farmer, having grown up on a farm in Linn, KS, in the north central part of the state not too far from the Nebraska border. He helped his dad, uncle and grandfather with their dryland crops of beans, milo and wheat along with their irrigated corn. As an agronomist for Crop Quest working in the Silver Lake division, Helms expects to be advising farmers on the same crops. "It will be mostly corn and soybeans," he says, "and about a third of the acres I'll be working on will produce wheat."

Helms receives his degree in animal science from Kansas State University in May and will join Crop Quest later in the month. What he is looking forward to most as he enters this next phase of his life is simply getting started. "For the last four summers I have been an intern for Crop Quest," Helms says. "I am more than ready to just get out as a Crop Quest agronomist and go to work."

Another K-State alumnus, **Dayna New**, has been working with several Crop Quest clients since coming on board in early February. Operating out of the Mt. Hope office, New has been assisting farmers in south central Kansas between Hutchison and Wichita with their alfalfa, wheat and soybean crops. New says she learned about agriculture and developed an appreciation for it growing up on her parents' farm in Sterling, KS, where they grew wheat and sorghum and raised cattle.

New attended Kansas State, studied agronomy and picked up her diploma last August. She was a Crop Quest intern during the 2005 summer season, and later served as a research assistant at the university focusing on the interaction of weeds and corn. Describing herself as a problem solver, New likes to take on challenges, look at them and figure them out. "As I begin my career at Crop Quest," she reports, "I am looking forward to the variety of assignments, job and responsibilities. I won't be dealing with the same thing every day."

**Cody Locknane**, who came on board in March, hopes to "help producers in a broad area of agricultural tasks and production." Based on his degree from Texas Tech University, Locknane brings a wide range of skills and specialties to the job of crop consulting for growers in Crop Quest's Dumas, TX, division. "My major, Agricultural Leadership, offered a broad range of academic emphasis," he says,



Dayna New



Cody Locknane

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“including agriculture in general, animal sciences, agronomy and specialized classes in agricultural leadership.” What he wants to concentrate on first and foremost with the producers in his territory is “increasing their yields and helping them make as much money as they can” he explains. Locknane grew up in Pampa, TX, picking up his initial agriculture experience on his grandfather’s and friends’ farms dealing primarily with corn, wheat and cotton.

**Evan Giacometti** heard about Crop Quest from an agriculture club friend at Kansas State and decided to attend a presentation on campus when Crop Quest representatives outlined what they did and how their employees fit into the company structure. “Basically I liked what they did and how they operated as an employee-owned company,” recalls Giacometti who did a little more research on Crop Quest and applied for a position as crop consultant late last year.



**Evan Giacometti**

Giacometti will literally step off the podium in May with his diploma in agribusiness and animal science and get down to business with Crop Quest in its Garden City division. Like most of Crop Quest’s consultants, Giacometti comes from an agriculture background. He grew up on a farm in Girard, KS, near Pittsburg, and helped his dad switch over from crops to brome grass when they became a full cow-calf operation. He is looking forward to picking up additional experience and practical knowledge of the crops his producers in the Garden City territory raise. “I see this as a great opportunity and am looking forward to learning more.”

**Leighanne Fahrendorf** can’t say for sure how long her family has been farming in Blackwater, MO, but she knows she represents at least a fourth generation of farmers. Besides raising hogs and growing soybeans, wheat and corn, Fahrendorf’s family also had a hardware and feed store in town. “My grandmother owned and ran the store,” she said. Her family continues to produce crops on the small farm but she notes, “They just got out of the hog business.”



**Leighanne Fahrendorf**

A December graduate of Central Missouri State’s agronomy program, Fahrendorf has been

part of the Crop Quest consulting team since the middle of March, working in the Silver Lake division and assisting area producers with their alfalfa, soybean, corn, wheat and milo crops. “It’s been exciting meeting the producers; my first month on the job has been outstanding,” says Fahrendorf, “and I am looking forward to getting into the summer months.”

Fahrendorf brings unique experience to Crop Quest’s clients. She has interned for Pioneer Hi-Bred International and been involved in the seed company’s product advancement trials for corn and soybeans in southern Indiana. “I think my internship with Pioneer and my own background of growing row crops,” she points out, “will benefit the producers I am working with at Crop Quest.”

**Megan Mattive** will have traveled farther than her colleagues when she begins her work with Crop Quest in May. She’ll arrive on the Front Range in Colorado from Costa Rica where she has been studying Spanish at the Costa Rica Language Institute (and getting a chance to observe Costa Rican farming methods). Actually it will be something of a homecoming since she was raised on a potato and barley farm in the San Luis Valley in southern Colorado. “My family is still very much involved in potato and barley farming,” she says, “and we have grown canola in the past as well.”

Mattive holds a degree in horticulture from Colorado State University and worked for a year with Biel Crop Consulting in the San Luis Valley. She has also spent time with the CSU Horticulture Department developing a CSA (community supported agriculture program). For the last two summers Mattive has interned for a crop consulting firm dealing extensively with potatoes, wheat, barley, alfalfa and lettuce. “I also learned a lot about irrigation systems and farm management,” she mentions.

With a degree in horticulture, Mattive believes she has been introduced to a wide variety of crops that may help her develop a wider range of clientele. “The agriculture industry is ever changing,” notes Mattive, “and I feel that agricultural consulting has been and will continue to be an important part of the industry as a whole, helping farmers to further develop.” As a Crop Quest consultant, Mattive hopes to expand her overall knowledge of agriculture. “For me,” she says, “that is a very exciting prospect.”



**Megan Mattive**

## Mission Statement

Crop Quest is an employee-owned company dedicated to providing the highest quality agricultural services for each customer. The quest of our network of professionals is to practice integrity and innovation to ensure our services are economically and environmentally sound.

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