Integrated Cranberry Crop Management for Wisconsin

Cranberry

Crop Management Newsletter

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Contents:

DO YOU HAVE ANY STUDENTS?

From time to time growers call me and ask if I know of any students who either might be interested in working on a marsh during the summer or students who are near graduation who might wish to pursue full-time work on a cranberry marsh. While these are good questions, giving a good response is difficult for me. I don't teach undergraduate students, so I don't get to know the horticulture majors in the department. However, there are other ways to recruit students and graduates to your operations.

Internships. Internships are very popular among students. Internships provide 'real world' experiences for students that balance the 'book learning' they get on campus. Through internships students first hand exposure to the industry and they can earn credit for their work. Perhaps most importantly, they get the chance to see if they like working in the industry and you get the chance to look at potential employees without making a permanent commitment. If the intern is not who you are looking for you don't have to invite them back. If they work out well you'll have a trained employee following graduation.

Interns are not just summer employees. They are continuing their education and they can (and usually do) obtain credit for their work experience. In addition to the work they do for you, they will need a project of some sort they can do that will require some extra effort. The project is negotiable between the student, the employer, and the faculty advisor. The student will do the work then produce a report of acceptable quality to the faculty advisor. This is the basis for credit earned.

Most of the UW-System campuses offer internships. At the end of this article I'll provide contact information for campuses with strong agriculture or natural resource programs. If you wish to offer an internship the best approach is to contact the career services departments of the various campuses. They'll be able to help you post your internship and establish contact with a faculty member who would advise interns. They can also give you an idea about the pay that interns are receiving from other places. You'll need to meet or exceed that average compensation in order to attract the best interns possible.

The mistake most companies make is getting notice of internships to campuses too late. If you are

considering offering an internship for 2008 you should get the information to the career services offices by January. If you wait until March or April that is too late for most students to plan for the summer.

Permanent employees. Along these same lines, employees are usually only as good as where you look for them. Depending on what you are looking for, good employees can be found through local job centers and by contacts among people you know. However, if you want people who can solve problems independently and who can make good decisions based on data and observations you need to find college educated people.

One common criticism of all kinds of growers who wish to hire UW graduates is that the students don't have practical training. That is a legitimate concern. However, practical knowledge of how to actually operate a cranberry marsh is best learned 'on the job'. What does a college education provide that you won't find among less well educated? College students are taught to solve problems and to look at problems in unique ways. They are taught to look at data and to draw conclusions based on data and not on assumptions and 'gut feelings'. If I were looking for a manager or an assistant manager I'd be looking for a college graduate. In my opinion the field of study is less important than just the fact that they have completed college. While I would prefer someone with a biology background, I think a case could be made that someone who had studied Medieval European literature would also perform well. Why? Because they would have learned to think about the problems at hand. They have also shown a commitment to accomplish something that required effort and sacrifice. Obtaining a college education is not easy.

Another deterrent to attracting good employees is compensation. Agriculture historically pays very poorly. Statistics on starting salaries of recent graduates from UW-Madison show that agriculture graduates are among the lowest paid, almost half that of students in engineering, business, or computer science. Like most other things in life, you get what you pay for.

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THOUGHTS ABOUT MOWING DIKES

I've been on dozens of cranberry marshes this summer looking for interesting and troublesome weeds to photograph for our upcoming weed ID book. Most marshes have some weeds in the beds and, in my opinion, a few weeds is not necessarily a bad thing. Most of the properties I was on did a good job of weed control. Some struggled to keep those pesky weeds at bay. Here are a couple of observations on weed control from 2007.

Growers that kept the sides of their dikes mowed also had good weed control in the perimeter ditches and beds. I don't think that mowing dikes necessarily helped keep weeds out of the beds, although in some cases I believe that is true. Keeping dikes mowed can prevent the movement of weed seeds from dikes into beds. Mowing dikes also removes habitat for rodents that may wish to burrow into the dikes. Besides, well maintained dikes give the appearance of a well run and well managed property.

Is dike mowing the cause of fewer weeds in beds? I'm not convinced that is true. I believe that the same pride of management that makes dike mowing a priority also causes weed management to be a priority. When one is willing to spend labor and fuel to mow dikes, one is also willing to pursue those extra management details into weed management in the beds.

My other observation about weed control goes back to a statement attributed to Mac Dana (Former Horticulture Professor at UW-Madison. Some old-timers will remember him.) It was his opinion that weeds were the most significant pests of cranberries and that when growers spent resources controlling weeds, yield would increase. He liked to point out the increase in state average yield after Roundup was first labeled for cranberry production. I think Mac was right.

I see growers spending much time and effort in 'spoon feeding' fertilizer to cranberry beds. Clearly, cranberries benefit from fertilizer applications. I would argue, however, that if beds are weedy the miniscule potential gains in productivity from fertilizer application are fully negated by the competitive effects of weeds. In my view, weed control is a more important priority than fertilizer because I believe the return on investment is greater.

Good weed control still requires some handwork such as pulling weeds and 'hockey stick' wiping with glyphosate. One mistake many growers make with regards to weed wiping is they use a solution that is too strong. A glyphosate solution of 5-10% is adequate to get good control. When growers report to me that wiped weeds quickly die back, only to come back up from the roots it is clear that they have used a mixture that is too strong. Solutions that are too strong kill the plant tops before the herbicide can be translocated to the roots. For hand wiping adding an appropriate dye helps document coverage since the effectiveness of glyphosate wiping is dependent on the amount of leaf surface area covered. Adding liquid ammonium sulfate also aids in getting the herbicide into the leaves and not just on the outside.

Teryl Roper, UW-Madison Extension Horticulturist

Reading is to the mind what exercise is to the body. As by the one, health is preserved, strengthened and invigorated: by the other, virtue (which is the health of the mind) is kept alive, cherished, and confirmed.

Joseph Addison

A man is not paid for having brains but for using them.

Author Unknown

If you were graduate yesterday, and have learned nothing today, you will be uneducated tomorrow.

Author Unknown

SPILL PREPAREDNESS

With harvest approaching now is the time to prevent oil spills and to have a plan for dealing with any mishaps that might occur. Except for crankcase oil in engines, all lubricants on harvesters should be food grade oils that are approved by the Food and Drug Administration. These are designated as H-1. Food grade oils have a residue tolerance of 10 ppm, non-food grade oil and fuel have a zero tolerance.

Have a spill kit handy to the harvest and cleaning operations. Make sure your spill kit contains: floating booms to con[illegible] spill, absorbent materials to sop up [illegible] worker protection supplies such as g[illegible] and coveralls to protect workers, and containers to receive the spent absorbents and booms. Make sure you have a plan to deal with spills and that your employees and supervisors each know what their responsibilities are within the plan.

Inspect your crankcase housings for oil residues and evidence of leaks and clean them, and if necessary, install a pan to collect leaks. Inspect all hydraulic hoses, connections and power units for cracks, leaks and weak spots and replace those that may not survive the harvest season.

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Author: Thomas Heddinghaus, CPC/NOAA

Recent rains have improved soil moisture conditions over much of the state. Northern Wisconsin is still below normal rainfall amounts and still considered to be suffering from a drought. Hopefully fall rains will fill reservoirs for harvest.

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