



Louisiana Agricultural Consultants Association

TURNROW TALK

Volume 11, Spring Issue

April, 2009

President's Column
by Richard Costello, Ph.D.
C&J Consulting LLP, Pioneer, LA

Another year is upon us and it seems like the time from finishing one crop and beginning another gets shorter each year. Each year we are faced with challenges that carry over from the previous year that appear to become more difficult. It is hard for me to believe that any other industry faces more challenges from as many sources as the Agriculture industry.

We are now faced with a great political challenge. Our political system has become heavily weighed with people who are neither educated about nor sympathetic to the plight of the American farmer. Not only is the American farmer at risk, but the very institution that educates us about technology and agronomic practices. The LSU AgCenter and LA Department of Agriculture and Forestry are both facing budget cuts that could lead to the termination of programs that are vital to agricultural consultants, our clients, and to the general public. Programs from the AgCenter reach into every aspect of our daily lives. It is very instrumental in educating the public starting at grade school level about the importance of agriculture. The LA Department of Agriculture and Forestry is in danger of losing funding for its fire fighting units. This could put forest and CRP land in jeopardy. These are institutions we cannot afford to lose.

It has become vitally important that we become more involved in the management of this country. I will be the first to admit that I have not been as involved as I should be. I would challenge you to be involved in some way. We must take an active role in voicing our concerns through telephone, email, and personal visits to our local and state leaders.

At the same that our nation is faced with what seems like a dire situation in our economy, we live in an age of wonder. The technological advancements we see each day both amaze and scare me. We are advancing in areas so rapidly that it seems we are going faster than we can keep up. Just the speed in which information transfer takes place is amazing. We have email on our computers and phones which makes access to information instant. In the next ten years, I believe that we will advance to the point that I hope we will have the intelligence to use the information wisely.

It is no doubt that we live in days of great concern and great expectations. We have many challenges ahead of us. We must be diligent to keep ourselves educated and involved. It is easy to lose faith when we see the failure of our retirement system and a government that appears to be more concerned with themselves than its constituents. We must keep our hope and faith in God first and in our families and friends. James 1:17 reminds us that everything is from God and He is ever constant. I wish you well with the upcoming season.

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Mexican Rice Borer
Commissioner Mike Strain, D.V.M.
Louisiana Dept of Agriculture and Forestry

Rice and sugarcane growers will have a new pest to contend with in coming seasons. The Mexican rice borer (MRB) (*Eoreuma loftini*) has made its way into Louisiana. The insect moved across the Sabine River from Texas and now has a foothold in western Louisiana. We've been expecting it. We've been preparing for it. Now that it's here, we can begin to take a hands-on approach.

What's frustrating about this particular insect, however, is its natural ability to protect itself from insecticides.

The insect larva bores into the plant quickly, avoiding chemicals, parasites and predators, so many traditional insect control approaches are not feasible, especially in sugarcane.

The Louisiana Department of Agriculture and Forestry (LDAF) is aware of the damage potential the Mexican rice borer poses to our rice and sugarcane crops. The LDAF Office of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences is coordinating with EPA and the LSU AgCenter to identify effective insecticides to control this problem pest.

The LDAF, with technical assistance from the LSU AgCenter and U.S. Department of Agriculture-Agricultural Research Service, has been monitoring for the insect since 1999 after it became established in east Texas. Now, after almost ten years of annual trapping, our suspicions have been confirmed. Two Mexican rice borer moths were trapped in December 2008 near two fields northwest of Vinton in Calcasieu Parish.

We knew that this moth would continue to expand its range into our state. Our goal has been to detect its arrival and that has been done. Our new goal is to determine how far and how quickly it is moving and to work cooperatively with the LSU AgCenter and our rice and sugarcane industries to develop management plans for this dangerous pest.

Dr. Gene Reagan, the LSU AgCenter entomologist who has studied the habits of the Mexican rice borer, said estimates of annual yield losses from the pest could eventually approach \$45 million in rice and \$200 million in sugarcane in Louisiana. The LDAF Office of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences will continue to work with the LSU AgCenter, EPA and USDA to devise ways to keep this insect at bay. In addition to chemical control efforts, certain cultural practices such as reducing drought stress in sugarcane have been shown to reduce this pest's damage level. The best line of defense will be MRB-resistant varieties. With help from our federal and state partners, and with your cooperation, we'll be able to effectively combat the MRB and increase the farmers' bottom line.

A Call to be Proactive in These Trying Times

The Executive Board and Governmental Affairs Committee again met with AgCenter administration just recently to discuss what LACA can do to assist the AgCenter in sustaining agriculture in Louisiana. Chancellor Dr. Bill Richardson and Vice-Chancellor Dr. David Boethel were not able to be with us due to illnesses and we hope they are fully recovered and "back in the battle" by the time you are reading this.

As most of you already know from reading the newspapers, watching the news, and/or getting my weekly emails, our AgCenter is in critical need of stakeholders (that's us and all other citizens of our state, rural and urban) help in fighting to keep existing programs and future research alive for our economic good. Serious reductions in research and extension programs are being proposed. There are drastic and devastating cuts being proposed to core programs to keep the AgCenter at least operating at a minimum capacity. We need to be proactive in contacting our legislators to let them know we expect, as those who put them in office, to know that they are fighting as hard as they can to keep current programs and research/extension with a level of funding that will enable the AgCenter to continue the services that we have come to know as necessary for agriculture to thrive in our state.

With the innate possibility of less security in positions, key research and extension personnel, as well as others in urban program positions (eg., childcare, housing, fire-ant and termite control) may find it necessary to go elsewhere, even out of state.

As stewards of the AgCenter, we must all partner to keep agriculture alive and well in Louisiana. LACA has partnered for many years with the AgCenter and can be proud of having an almost "one of a kind" relationship with our Ag-

Center that most states cannot boast.

The AgCenter is primarily dependent upon state funding through the legislature to sustain research stations, extension, and specialized programs. 62-65% of funds come from state funding. The AgCenter competes for grants from commodity groups and have been successful in getting many of these grants funded, but cannot operate at current capacity with this funding alone considering the cuts being proposed. Land grant universities are not tuition dependent at all, so no matter how much tuition and fees increase, which they are, this is of no benefit to the AgCenter. During our meeting with the AgCenter administration, someone brought up the possibility of selling research station equipment which was no longer being used or was surplus. Dr. Paul Coreil explained that even if the equipment was put up for auction and sold after a very long trail of paperwork, the monies would be put into the General Fund, not allocated to the AgCenter. So, you can see the dire need for every one of us to talk to our legislators. If you personally know someone sitting on the Board of Regents, or the Board of Supervisors, please give them a call or meet them for lunch or a cup of coffee and tell them how important it is that we keep the AgCenter operating at the 2008 level of funding. I have listed below the Board of Regents and Board of Supervisors member website pages for your information. I've also listed a website where you can go to find the legislators in your district. You may or may not know these people on a first name basis, but you as a voter, may have put them in office. Please don't wait for "someone else" to make the contact...do your part to help our AgCenter survive and operate at its full potential!

Louisiana Board of Regents

<http://www.regents.state.la.us/Board/regents.htm>

LSU Board of Supervisors

<http://www.lsusystem.edu/boardofsupervisors/members/>

Louisiana Legislature

<http://www.legis.state.la.us/members.htm>

Another Successful Meeting on the Books

Once again, agricultural professionals from various areas of the industry in Louisiana, and out-of-state, gathered together to network and gain educational benefits from the many speakers and presentations that were available at the 2009 Louisiana Agricultural Technology & Management Conference (LATMC). This year we returned to an old venue (formerly the Louisiana Convention Centre') with a significant facelift. For many years, the Louisiana Agricultural Consultants Association annual meeting was held in this location, but wear and tear had gotten the best of the old convention center and host hotel (old Hampton Inn), so the meeting was moved. New ownership and management have restored the conference center and hotel next door (now the SAI Convention Centre' and Baymont Inn & Suites). I think those who attended were very pleased with the restorations and as an added plus, we enjoyed meals prepared by the former chef of the Bistro on the Bayou, William LeRoux.

Plans are already being made to hold the 2010 LATMC in this same location and the dates of February 10-12, 2010 have been chosen. If you didn't attend the meeting this year, you missed a great opportunity to further your ag knowledge,

but you'll have another chance next year. The Executive Board and Program Planning Committee are already working on making the 2010 conference as good or better than this year's.

Presentations given at this year's meeting, unless prohibited by author, have been placed on our website at www.laagcon.org, Annual Meeting, LATMC Information or LATMC Highlights, 2009 Presentations. Also posted on the website is the Crop Protection and Production Quiz with answers that was administered by **Grady Coburn** at this year's conference. Congratulations to the winners: Tied for 1st place were **Richard Costello** and **Mark Smith** (both of whom will be responsible for administering the quiz at the LATMC in 2010). Coming in at 2nd place was **Harold Lambert**, and again tying for 3rd place were **Dwayne Coulon** and **Blaine Viator**. THANKS to **FMC Corporation** for sponsoring the Quiz this year!

This annual meeting is sponsored so generously by so many sustaining members. A big THANKS to all listed below.

Wednesday Luncheon—**BASF Corporation**

Wednesday Evening Social Reception—**Bayer CropScience**

Thursday Breakfast—**Dupont Crop Protection**

Thursday Luncheon—**Monsanto Company/D&PL**

Friday Breakfast/LACA Host Laptop—**Syngenta Crop Protection**

Refreshment Breaks—**AgriLiance LLC, Crop Production Services, MANA, and Valent USA Corporation**

Program Printing—**Cheminova, FMC Corporation**

Out-of-state Guest Speakers—**Agrotain International, Albaugh, Inc., Amvac Chemical Corporation, Nichino America, Inc., Pioneer Hi-Bred International**

Scholarships—**Arysta LifeScience, Dow AgroSciences, United Phosphorus, Inc.**

We also want to again thank members of the LSU Ag-Center who give of their time in "running the show"; **Dale Pollet** again lined up those who did an excellent job of handling presentations and making sure all ran smoothly (a special thanks to **Natalie Hummel, Charles McCown, Dennis Ring, and Alan Morgan**), in addition to providing the audio/visual equipment.

And, to Moderators **Rusty Elston, Scooter LaCoste, Joe Pankey, Carol Pinnell-Alison, Dwayne Coulon, Chuck Greene, Tim White, Paul Templet, BD Fontenot, and Richard Costello**, who so graciously accepted their duty when "volunteered", thank you for running your sessions with so much professionalism.

It is definitely teamwork that brings this conference together and makes it the exceptional meeting it has become. I personally want to thank the Executive Board and Program Planning Committee for being so cooperative during the planning stages. We look forward to making 2010 another "one for the books"!

A Farmer's Perspective

**Elliot Colvin, Brimberry Farms
Start, LA (Richland Parish)**

Elliot Colvin is a rice and row crop farmer from Northeast Louisiana. He sits on the state Farm Bureau Board and has received recognition as Young Farmer of the Year. He farms 2100 acres of wheat, corn, soybeans, and rice. Below is his perspective on farming and the importance of his independent crop consultant.

As another year has begun, there seems to be a great deal of uncertainty in the agricultural community. Farmers are still undecided with what and how many acres to plant; Ag dealers do not know how many supplies to keep on hand; and bankers do not know what crop seems to cash flow the best for

each farm. One thing that can be said about farming: It never happens the same way twice.

This uncertainty brings up the absolute necessity of making well-informed decisions. The major constraint facing farmers today may seem to be some of the things that I mentioned above, but it all comes down to TIME. Farming today requires pinpoint accuracy from tractor work to chemical application. There is no room for error any more. This problem of "not enough hours in the day," makes us look at the need for a consultant to aid in caring for our crops. This helps free up a great deal of time so that the farmer can focus on the decisions that must be made on a daily basis.

With the hiring of a consultant come certain expectations of the farmer and the consultant. The first and foremost being trust. It is absolutely necessary for the farmer to trust the recommendation of the consultant. When a farmer is seeking a consultant to hire he looks for someone that is qualified. The consultant needs to be able to show that he is able to make recommendations based on the information that he has gathered. It is important for the consultant to always keep in mind that there are economics involved with every decision made. These economics go from variety selection to harvest recommendations. It is also very important that a farmer knows that he is getting an unbiased recommendation. It is never good for a consultant to recommend a product or service attached to a "kickback" or incentive from a certain product or service. This will quickly erode a great deal of trust, because the farmer is the one that will be paying the bill for the recommendation in the end. Another issue that can affect the trust between a farmer and consultant is a generic recommendation. This happens when a consultant has looked at other farms all day and just expects that the last field of the day will be the same. It is always important to make field-by-field decisions. This is how a farmer helps justify the cost of hiring a consultant. He knows that this will save money in the end if a specific field doesn't need to be treated when others do. One of the best ways to build trust with a farmer is to just keep him informed of the recommendations and why it needs to be done. There is no substitute for personal communication and explanation.

On the other hand, a consultant needs to trust that the farmer is going to carry out recommendation given. A farmer needs to apply the recommendation of the selected field in a timely manner and with the product recommended. If there is an issue that comes up, such as weather delays, equipment failures, etc; the farmer needs to let the consultant know, so that the situation can be addressed. A farmer needs to know that the consultant is trying to help him make the best decisions he can concerning his farm.

All these factors go into making, not just a good crop, but a profitable crop for the farmer each year. The demand on the farmer is greater than ever before. There is a great deal of money and time on the table for each crop. When profit margins are thin, the value of a consultant goes up in my opinion.

CONGRATULATIONS TO AWARD RECIPIENTS

Congratulations again go out to well-deserved recipients of the Louisiana Agriculture Hall of Fame Award,
Dr. Roger Leonard and
LACA County Agent Award, Miles Brashier.

**Congratulations Scholarship
Winners!!!**

Joshua Temple
Nicole Ward
Stephen Simoneaux

**Mark Your Calendars for the
2010 LACA Sponsored
Louisiana Agricultural
Technology & Management
Conference
February 10-12, 2010**

Welcome New Members!!!

Joining LACA in 2009 as Full Members with voting privileges are Jeremy Babin and Andy Lanie of Calvin Viator, Ph.D. & Associates.

Joining as an Associate Member is James McDonald of Pest Management Enterprises, Inc.

New Sustaining Members as of '09 are Arkion Life Sciences, Becker Underwood, Cache River Valley Seed, Horizon Ag, MANA, RiceTec, and Terral Seed.

For information on membership in LACA, call Denise Wright at 337-945-3694 or email glpblues@bellsouth.net

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For information on membership in NAICC
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