

Cornell Guides Integrated Field-Crop Management

By Eleanor Jacobs

For decades, Cornell University's field crops researchers and educators have helped farmers, input suppliers and farm consultants, including Extension educators, to grow better crops. Though the university has always had many ways to provide crop management information, one approach that has served agriculture for 58 years has been the Cornell Guide for Integrated Field Crop Management, formerly Cornell Recommends.

The 2009 Cornell Guide will be available for purchase at the upcoming Field Crop Dealer Meetings, scheduled for Oct. 28 to 31 in Albany, New Hartford, Batavia and Auburn, N.Y. (For information on the meetings, contact Larissa Smith at 607-255-2177 or email her at lls14@cornell.edu.) What the authors wrote in the first Guide in 1950 to explain its purpose holds true today: "This handbook lists the best information we have to date from research and contacts with the trade on choice of variety, seed, fertilizer, planting and management recommendations for New York field crops."

Practical guide

"Our Guide is useful for farmers," says Russ Hahn, a Professor in the Department of Crop and Soil Sciences who prepares the weed management section of the Guide. "The original concept was to get information into the hands of farmers."

Users confirm the Guide's practicality and usefulness. Willard DeGolyer can't remember when he has not had copies of the Cornell Guide on his Castile, N.Y., dairy where he grows more than 1,500 acres of corn, hay and peas. "It's an absolutely wonderful resource. We make sure it's in the hands of employees," he says about giving two copies to his crop managers. "The way it's written, it's easy for employees to look through and find information."

DeGolyer's crop consultants also use the guide. "We all use the Cornell Guide quite extensively," says Chad Stoeckl, DeGolyer's crop adviser with Western New York Crop Management Association based in Perry, N.Y. "All members of the association's cropping staff have the Guide on hand whether in the office or their vehicles."

Extension educators across the state also use it as a primary crop production reference. "I used the agronomy Guide as my first reference when I worked in Extension as a crops specialist," says Nate Herendeen, who recently retired as the crops specialist for the Northwest New York Dairy, Livestock and Field Crops team. "I carried a Guide in my car, had one on the desk in the office and one at home." Herendeen now works part time as a crop consultant with Western New York Crop Management Association.

Updates and upgrades

Crop production is a moving target – things change frequently, particularly in the areas of pest management. Pesticides, herbicides and fungicides can change every year, and the Cornell Guide is updated annually to keep the reference current. As research and field experiences add to the crop production knowledge base – and as society's expectations of farmers change – the Cornell Guide incorporates new information.

"The annual update is extremely valuable; labels change and information changes," says Larry Eckhardt, president of Capital Area Ag Consulting Inc., Stephentown, N.Y. "I use the

Guide for looking at crop protectant rates and use. I will look at a weed and go to the Guide to see Cornell's experience with products and practices."

This sentiment is shared by Bob DeWaine, a Monsanto technology development representative, in Sherrill, N.Y. "The Guide is a quick reference to see what pest management products are registered for use in New York and their rates, and I know the information is current," he says. "And it's awfully nice to help answer fertility and nutrient management related questions as well."

Tom Kilcer, regional crop and soils specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension based in Troy, N.Y., also relies on the annual updates. "The annual update ensures that the information is correct," says Kilcer who uses the Guide for information on varieties and herbicide and insecticide recommendations, and as a reference for fertilizer recommendations when a farm doesn't have a soil test.

The Guide changes to reflect both farmers' and society's concerns about the environmental and economic aspects of protecting crops from pests. "There's a lot more IPM and cultural practices to control pests (in the current Guide)," notes Eckhardt.

These changes are reflected in the publication's title change from Cornell Recommends for Field Crops to Cornell Recommends for Integrated Field Crop Management and the addition of a new section on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in 1992.

"The emphasis on IPM reflects both farmers' and society's concerns about the environmental and economic aspects of protecting crops from pests," says Keith Waldron, Livestock and Field Crops IPM Coordinator.

Farmers and society are also placing more emphasis now on nutrient management practices, and the Cornell Guide reflects that. In 1997 a section on bio-solids, or sewage sludge, was added and more recently, environmental risk indicators and updated guidance for fertilizer and manure management were added.

"All of our recommendations are worked off the Guide and its values," says Stoeckl. "Without the ability to have a quick resource guide to help in making decisions with nutrient management, it would take a lot of time to calculate changes."

Easy access

Just as crop production practices change so does the way people can receive information. In 2005, the Cornell Guide for Integrated Field Crop Management was made available on-line for people who find that format easier or quicker to use. (See www.fieldcrops.org/).

"If I do not have a recent hardcopy handy while on the phone or on-site, I go on the internet to access the most up-to-date information on rates or active ingredients," Herendeen says.

Eckhardt agrees. "It's valuable to have the Guide on-line. I can go to the website and punch in a couple words and the information is there."

A final word on the Cornell Guide to Integrated Field Crop Management: It's a trusted source of information because of its land grant university origin. DeGolyer's comment reflects this trust: "Being third-party based makes it particularly valuable and reliable."

"It is a complete guide, and we value it highly," Stoeckl adds.

From A to W – alfalfa to wind erosion and applicator recordkeeping to western corn rootworm – the Cornell Guide to Integrated Field Crop Management has current, unbiased, well-researched information whether you till the soil or work with the people who do.

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