

Research

Index for February farm prices received increased 4 points

The preliminary "All Farm Products Index of Prices Received by Farmers" in February, at 168%, based on 1990-1992=100, increased 4 points (2.4%) from January. The Crop Index is up 12 points (6.5%) and the Livestock Index increased 4 points (2.9%). Producers received higher prices for corn, wheat, lettuce and milk and lower prices for strawberries, cattle, broilers and broccoli.

In addition to prices, the overall index is also affected by the seasonal change based on a three-year average mix of commodities producers sell. Increased monthly marketings of milk, cattle, broilers and hogs offset decreased marketings of corn, soybeans, wheat and cotton.

The preliminary All Farm Products Index is up 33 points (24%) from February 2010. The Food Commodities Index, at 163, increased 5 points (3.2%) from last month and increased 29 points (22%) from February 2010.

The February Index of Prices Paid for Commodities and Services, Interest, Taxes and Farm Wage Rates (PPITW) is 197% of the 1990-1992 average. The index is up 3 points (1.5%) from January and is 17 points (9.4%) above February 2010. Higher prices in February for feed grains, complete feeds, nitrogen and

diesel more than offset lower prices for LP gas and other services.

— *National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS),
Agricultural Statistics Board,
U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)*

Editor's note: You may access NASS reports and products electronically, at no cost, on the NASS website: www.nass.usda.gov.

UK switchgrass study at a crossroads

A four-year study with University of Kentucky (UK) College of Agriculture forage specialists exploring switchgrass as an alternative energy source is drawing to a close at the end of 2010. That leaves 20 Northeastern Kentucky producers involved with the project wondering where they go from here.

Each producer grew five acres of the warm-season native grass, used to produce "green" electricity. Despite two drought seasons during the study, producers managed to establish the crop. One of those growers, Bracken County farmer Tom Malone, says this may have been the best year yet for his crop. It yielded six to seven tons per acre despite a late-season drought.

"The proof lies here on the ground,"

2011 Range Beef Cow Symposium dates and location announced

The 23rd Range Beef Cow Symposium (RBCS) will be Nov. 29-Dec. 1 in Mitchell, Neb.

Conducted every other year, the RBCS is organized by the animal science departments of Colorado State University, the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, South Dakota State University and the University of Wyoming. The event rotates between Colorado, western Nebraska, western South Dakota and Wyoming.

The symposium continues to grow in popularity and is now recognized as one of the premier production beef cattle symposiums in the country. Focusing on beef production issues in the Western states, the RBCS regularly attracts 800 to 1,200 attendees and more than 80 agribusiness booth vendors for the three-day event.

One of the most popular aspects of the RBCS are the nightly "Bull Pen Sessions," where the invited speakers are brought back as panelists and are available for informal question-and-answer sessions each evening of the symposium.

Additional information such as the agenda, registration and lodging details will be made available once they are finalized. Participants are encouraged to mark the dates and plan to attend the 2011 Range Beef Cow Symposium Nov. 29-Dec. 1.

For more information, contact Karla Jenkins at 308-632-1245 or kjenkins2@unl.edu.

RBCS is one of the meetings Angus Productions Inc. (API) covers online. To access the meeting coverage site, visit www.api-virtuallibrary.com or go directly to the event site at www.rangebeefcow.com.

said Malone after he harvested his crop of switchgrass. "It is very drought tolerant; it doesn't get affected as does a lot of other forages."

Just as it has the past three years, East Kentucky Power Cooperative's Spurlock Station near Maysville will burn the

switchgrass crop with coal to produce electricity. That may still be an option for producers if they continue to grow the crop on their own.

"The power companies are still

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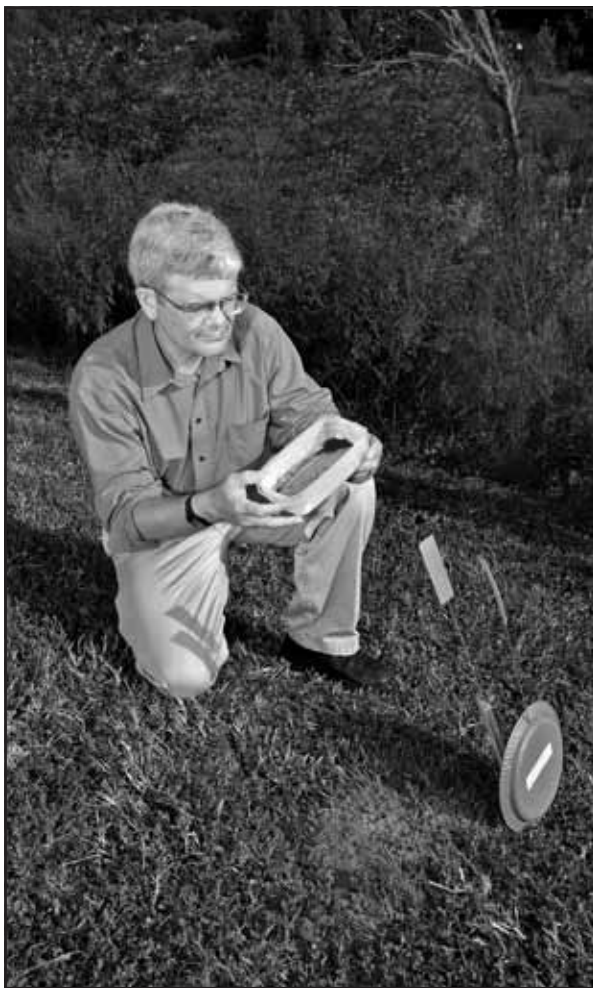
debating what to do and how to go about it,” Malone said. “We are taking a look at it here in (Bracken) county as a group, as a residential or light commercial direction to move in.”

Tom Keene, a UK forage specialist who worked with producers on the switchgrass project, said there is a market for switchgrass as a home-heating source as well as other options. He remains optimistic about the future of switchgrass in Kentucky.

“There is a market with home heating stoves to heat your greenhouses and shops,” Keene said, “so there is some work being done on that. We think if we can just keep the momentum going and not have it die back, then we feel like we are on the right track.”

Keene says another two-year project is already under way, where producers are growing an additional 700 to 750 acres of switchgrass in Kentucky. With surrounding states under a mandate to use green energy it only enhances the future of switchgrass in Kentucky.

— by *Jeff Franklin* for UK College of Agriculture



ARS entomologist Sanford Porter is releasing a fifth species of phorid fly as a way of increasing control of imported fire ants.

New red imported fire ant enemies in place for combat

USDA scientists are releasing the fifth species of phorid fly to control fire ant populations. Red imported fire ants first arrived in the United States in the early 1930s and have been expanding along the southern portion of the country ever since, resulting in medical, agricultural and environmental impacts that cost the U.S. public billions of dollars each year.

Agricultural Research Service (ARS) entomologist Sanford Porter and his colleagues at the ARS Center for Medical, Agricultural and Veterinary Entomology (CMAVE) Imported Fire Ant and Household Insects Research Unit in Gainesville, Fla., have collected, bred and released phorid flies that help to control fire ant populations in the southern part of the United States.

Scientists at CMAVE and cooperators in several states conducted the fire ant biocontrol program to suppress the stinging insects in large areas. Since the program began in 1995, five species of phorid flies have been released to parasitize various sizes of fire ants, from large to very small. According to Porter, the relationship between phorid fly and fire ant is very specific: The introduced phorid fly species only attack imported fire ant species.

The fifth phorid fly species, *Pseudacteon cultellatus*, is currently being released at several sites in Florida to control tiny fire ant workers that belong to multiple-queen colonies. These colonies are particularly problematic because they usually house two to three times the number of worker ants.

Of the four phorid fly species previously released, only one has failed to establish itself and widely spread out. *P. litoralis*, released in 2004 and 2005, was only able to establish itself in Alabama. The others — *P. tricuspis*, *P. curvatus* and *P. obtusus* — have expanded well beyond their release sites and are attacking fire ants across large areas. *P. tricuspis* and *P. curvatus* each cover over half of the U.S. fire ant range, and that is expected to increase to well over two-thirds of the range by the end of 2011, according to Porter.

Read more about this research in the January 2011 issue of *Agricultural Research* magazine, available online at www.ars.usda.gov/is/AR/archive/jan11/ant0111.htm.

— by *Sharon Durham* for ARS

