President’s Message

Every year has its challenges, but this year seems to be throwing the kitchen sink at us, and then a second one to follow it up. We started the year with large Hi/Lo temperature swings in February and March, and it doesn’t seem to be changing. As I sit down to write this, I’ve retreated to the air conditioning since it decided to soar into the 90s for the next two days before it drops into the high 50s to mid-60s. Costs continue to rise as diesel fuel seems to be continually creeping up, heading to $6 and above; chemical prices are uncertain until the bill is in your hand; and sourcing parts is just miserable. Often times I find that we look to our own niche in agriculture for the state of the year, but this year every sector of Ag is struggling. Between row crop farmers being unable to get the crop into the ground, to avian flu leading to the culling of millions of birds, this is a tough year for all of agriculture.

I hope many of you took the opportunity to attend one of the twilight meetings. I attended the one in Berks County at Keim Orchards. It was a good opportunity to talk to other growers who are facing similar situations to that which I’m seeing in my own operation. The conversation quickly turned to a question of, “what now?” Many growers seem to be in the position of either their crop is gone, or there are apples, but what will still be there come harvest? I know I’m seeing this at my own farm as I took a ride through a few blocks yesterday. You can find plenty of trees with 8-10mm fruit next to fruit that have just hit petal fall, and the next branch over is at pink. With so much variability on a single tree, how do you make a management decision? Dr. Schupp said something at the twilight meeting that stuck with me. He said we have to approach our decisions logically and avoid emotionally making decisions. Since I started in agriculture, I’ve definitely seen a shift in the desire to have data at our fingertips to make decisions. With the advent of on-farm weather stations, moisture monitoring stations, and data loggers, we have more and more opportunities to have the scientific data at hand when making these decisions. I agree that logic should drive our decisions because at the end of the day we need to make the decision that will keep the lights on at the farm. But on the other hand, emotion will never be completely gone from the decision-making process. Let’s face it, there is nothing logical about waking up at 4 am to go drive circles in a sprayer.

I was recently told that Dean Roush has officially given the go ahead to fill Dr. Crassweller’s former position at Rock Springs. The hiring process should begin shortly, and hopefully in as short a time as possible we should see the position filled. The SHAP board has pushed for this heavily, and it feels good to get a win this year. I would also like to remind everyone to renew your 2022 SHAP membership by filling out the form on page 23 and mailing it along with your payment to Maureen Irvin. On behalf of the SHAP board, I would like to thank all members for your continued support of the association.

Andrew Schwalm  
SHAP President