

What is on your work list for 2022?

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In my part of the country, Land Managers spend most of the first quarter of the calendar year indoors – buttoning up records from the previous year, writing reports, meeting with clients/tenants and attending continuing education. Early April begins to offer good days to get out, but often too cold or too wet for consistent fieldwork just yet.

Now is a good time to finalize work lists for the year and confirm contractor work orders. It would also be wise to double-check work estimates bid last fall for 2022 completion to ensure supplies are in stock and cost estimates have not significantly changed.

Here is a rundown of my April work checklist:

General Curb Appeal: The aesthetic of a farm may not increase a farm's overall productivity, but there is something rewarding for both landowner and farmer to drive by a good-looking farm.

- Is there fallen debris to pick up around a field border?

- Do any buildings or structures on the property need repairing?
- Is there any mowing to be completed before the regional nesting period? Mowing permanent grass or native plantings indicates a farm is well kept, but it can also be a best practice for weed management and stand establishment.



Photo: Purple thistles in full bloom along a field border in early June. Mowing this field border earlier in the season would have helped suppress the invasive plant's seed bank and given the intended perennials a stronger chance to establish.

Equipment Field Access and Safety: Some years, it is a mad dash to get the crop out before the weather changes, and there is little time to address the general wear and tear of a property. Early spring can offer a chance to review field entrances and borders that may hurt or hinder farming operations.

- Are field entrances wide enough for equipment? Should additional gravel be spread from field to road?
- Are there trees at field entrances or along the border that should be removed or limbed up?



Photo: Clean entrances and fence rows ensure clear site lines and protect equipment from unnecessary scratches or damage.

In-field Maintenance: Getting out onto the farm is equally important as addressing perimeter issues.

- Are there terraces or other structures on the farm with washouts needing repair? Now is also a good time to cut and treat trees that may hurt the integrity of structures.
- Are there any sub-surface drainage tile repairs to address? It may be too late to find a contractor for a spring repair, but we may flag areas for post-harvest repair.
- Are there waterways to be addressed? Over time, it is natural for waterways to need reshaping to efficiently move water off a farm field; reshaping may require seeding for better establishment. It is also possible that reseeding may be needed from accidental spray drift or tillage from the previous year. Even with the best intentions, edges of waterways may get dinged from time to time and need to be fixed.



Photo: Operator is reshaping a waterway on a farm with a winter-hardy cereal rye cover crop growing. The farmer will take the excess dirt collected and fan it out into the farm field.

These early-season check-ins are also a good opportunity to discuss future goals:

- What repair or improvement projects should be scheduled for post-harvest? This might include drainage, dirt work or soil testing.
- Are there new conservation practices to incorporate into the farm? If a new practice was adopted in the past 12 months, are there any lessons to be learned for this year? Could there be any new federal/state/private conservation funding channels to explore?
- What data will be collected at the end of the season? Understanding the inputs applied to get the harvested yields help both tenant and landowner better plan for future improvement projects. It may also identify poorer producing areas of the farm that likely also have an environmental concern.

As we get closer to the planned start date of a growing season, it is important to be mindful of farmers' schedules. Farmers in my area are currently preparing their fleet of equipment needed for planting 2022 with inputs purchased and lined up for delivery. They will begin to closely watch the ten-day forecast and track soil temperatures. The key to successful collaboration is finding meeting times that fit both parties' schedules and give plenty of preparation time for new requests/project ideas.

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