Despite low commodity prices, Ohio farmers can stay in the black in 2017 — but they will need to tighten their belts and slash expenses, said Barry Ward, agricultural economist at The Ohio State University.

“Farmers need to re-evaluate all of their inputs in general, and focus on those things that give a clear ROI (return on investment) when corn is only bringing in $3.50 to $4.00 per bushel,” said Ward, who works for Ohio State University Extension, the outreach arm of the College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences.

**Nine Strategies for a Profitable 2017**

**Recommended strategies:**

1. **Re-evaluate crop production inputs** such as prophylactic fungicide applications and specialty fertility products.
2. **Forego phosphorus and potassium fertilizer** if soil tests show there’s enough in the ground for the coming crop.
3. **Review and adjust nitrogen rates** and application timing.
4. **Re-evaluate seed technology.** “Seeds with fewer GMO traits are usually less expensive,” Ward said. “But this will require more management time — you may have more weed pressure, more insect pressure. You need to weigh the pros and cons — and if you’ve done some on-farm evaluation, you will know what works and is worth the investment.”
5. **Eliminate excess equipment** and re-evaluate equipment sizing. “The secondary markets are soft, so it’s not the best time to sell excess equipment. If there is a true need for equipment, this would be the time to buy,” he said.
6. **Renegotiate cash leases.** “The economics of the past three years have cried for a lowering of cash leases, but they have held up because of equity positions on behalf of farmers’ and landowners’ property taxes,” Ward said. “Landowners need to understand that margins have declined and lease prices need to come down.”
7. **Consider more do-it-yourself repairs** and services, including spraying, soil sampling and equipment repairs.
8. **Evaluate farm yield ratios** with price ratios when determining crop mix.
9. **Re-examine family living expenses.** “It’s not easy to do,” Ward said, “but family living expenses need to ratchet back to pre-2006 levels.” According to Illinois Farm Business Farm Management Association data, family expenses were $85 per acre in 2006, compared with $110 per acre in 2015.
It’s a FACT: Time is running out for some Ohio growers to meet the educational requirements of Ohio’s agricultural fertilization law by the fall 2017 deadline.

Fertilizer Applicator Certification Training (FACT) allows farmers and commercial fertilizer applicators to meet the educational requirements of HB150, which requires those who apply fertilizer to more than 50 acres to become certified by Sept. 30, 2017. The training was developed by College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences researchers and educators, and is offered in partnership with the Ohio Department of Agriculture. It provides research-based tactics to keep nutrients in the field and available to crops while increasing stewardship of nearby and downstream water resources.

Since Sept. 2014, Ohio State University Extension has trained more than 12,600 Ohio farmers on best practices to apply fertilizer for optimum crop yield, to reduce the risk of nutrient runoff and to improve water quality throughout the state.

But several thousand farmers still need to sign up for the training, said Sam Custer, OSU Extension agriculture and natural resources educator. The reasons why some haven’t signed up vary, he said. “Some people are procrastinators and will naturally wait until the deadline,” Custer said. “Some have found that the trainings haven’t been convenient for their work schedules, and some people don’t like to be told what to do.

“Still others have said that they weren’t aware of HB150 and the required training.”

Aaron Overholser, a fifth-generation Darke County farmer who works a 1,100-acre corn and soybean farm, attended one of the training sessions. He said it offered a valuable opportunity to learn nutrient management information that not only benefits his farm financially, but also has a positive impact on his crops and the environment.

“I never pass up an opportunity to learn, especially information that will help us be more efficient with money and our land resources. The training was an economic advantage. It allowed me to network with other farmers and learn more about our soil.”

OSU Extension is offering FACT workshops throughout the fall, winter and spring. Information about training opportunities near you can be found at nutrienteducation.osu.edu.
**New App Allows Growers to Design On-Farm Test Plots**

Growers interested in testing and comparing management methods now have the help of a new app from The Ohio State University.

Called **Ohio State PLOTS**, the free app helps users design plot layouts for on-farm trials. Growers can compare hybrids, seeding populations, nutrient management systems, and other practices and inputs, said John Fulton, precision agriculture specialist for Ohio State University Extension.

Fulton, who is also an associate professor in the Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering in Ohio State’s College of Food, Agricultural, and Environmental Sciences, said the app was designed as a tool to help improve water quality in Ohio by allowing users to fine-tune nutrient management more accurately.

“The app is a means where growers can set up trials specific to nutrient management to allow them to see what management decisions best impact their farm and offer the best financial and fertility decisions,” he said. “Users can fine-tune their nutrient management and maximize profits, all while minimizing environmental concerns.”

“The app is a great way to help growers ensure their farm remains productive and profitable, as well as aiding in making smarter choices for cleaner water.”

The app, which is available for both Apple and Android devices, includes a random number generator that removes human error when developing plot layouts. Users can create a report that compares parameters such as yield, stand counts, crop health and varieties, Fulton said.

“The app statistically analyzes these parameters,” he said. “Without having to be a statistician, users can review the mean or average comparisons within the summary report and determine the best fit for their farm management strategy.”

The app was created with funding from Field to Faucet, an Ohio State initiative dedicated to research, education and outreach activities designed to deliver solutions to harmful algal blooms and other water-quality issues.

It can be downloaded for free by searching for “Ohio State PLOTS” in the App Store and Google Play Store. More information on the app can be found at fabe.osu.edu/programs/precision-ag/other.
Seven New Year’s Resolutions for Buckeye Farmers

The new year’s here, and so are suggestions for what you can do to make it an even better one.

ONE
Put “superbugs” on your radar
Antibiotic-resistant bacteria — so-called “superbugs” — are a global health threat. They’re putting both people and livestock at risk, including in Ohio. Raise your awareness.
goo.osu.edu/AntibioticResistance
goo.osu.edu/lejeunerome

TWO
Keep on keeping farm safety in mind
Farming is one of America’s most dangerous jobs. Do your part to make it less so. Stay current on best practices through CFAES’s Agricultural Safety and Health Program.
agsafety.osu.edu

THREE
Complete fertilizer applicator training
Ohio’s Fertilizer Applicator Certification Training (FACT) keeps farms productive and water clean. It’s required if you apply fertilizer to more than 50 acres. More than 12,600 farmers have already completed the training.
Do it by September 30 — nutrienteducation.osu.edu

FOUR
Explore precision agriculture
Scientists in CFAES’s Department of Food, Agricultural and Biological Engineering are big on precision agriculture and its benefits. Discover the possibilities on their website.
fabe.osu.edu/programs/precisionag

FIVE
Grow what you know about healthy eating
Once a week, CFAES’s “Chow Line” column serves hot tips on food, food safety and nutrition. It’s free to subscribe.
u.osu.edu/chowline

SIX
Turn your woods even greener
Oaks, maples, deer and more all call your woods home — or can. Get tips on helping them thrive from CFAES’s Ohio Woodland Stewards Program. Statewide workshops teach about trees, timber, wildlife and more.
woodlandstewards.osu.edu

SEVEN
See if solar can save you money
Is it worth it to invest in solar energy for your farm? Run the numbers. Solar Electric Investment Analysis (parts 1–6), co-authored by Extension field specialist Eric Romich, lets you do it.
go.osu.edu/SolarInvestment

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