

● **Wheel Track**

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 ty conservationist. Wayne Maresch, it is unusual to find that type of soil farmed so intensively. "It takes better than average management to

farm that soil as effectively as Snavely has," Maresch said. "Through good cultural practices and management he has raised the organic and fertility levels sufficiently to be profitable."

But Snavely is not relying

on wheel track planting alone to improve his soil's productivity. Although the farm has no livestock, and therefore no manure is added to the fields, certain conservation practices are followed. For example, he plants on a "modified contour"; he uses strip cropping on any slope greater than 10 percent. In April he put in a grass waterway that will eventually be an outlet for cropland terraces; he regularly tests the soil for organic matter and nutrient needs. He estimates that the water holding capacity of his Berks shaley loam has been raised to a level that is equal to or better than that of average limestone soil.

There are several "secrets" to the successful use of wheel track planting that Snavely has learned in the last eight years. One of the most important of these is to plant no later than two days after plowing. If a longer time is allowed, he found there is a loss in germination. "The drier the ground and the weather, the closer you want to plant to plowing," is a general rule he follows. He also feels that with continuous corn there may be a greater buildup of corn-attacking in-

sects than might be true if a rotation were followed. For this reason he feels an insecticide is a necessary part of this program.

Step by step, he outlined his corn cultivation method as follows:

1 — Discs down corn stalks and stubble — usually in the Fall.

2 — Plans to plant when soil temperature is 60 degrees F at about an eight-inch depth.

3 — Plows not more than two days before planting — often does both operations in one day. He uses a two-way, reversible plow which eliminates the problem of furrows, and plows down 300-400 pounds of 0-20-20 and 100 pounds of actual nitrogen per acre.

4 — At planting, he adds 150-250 pounds of a starter fertilizer, depending upon the analysis. He also puts down an insecticide and herbicide when he plants.

5 — Although he previously used 40-inch rows with a two-row planter, he has a new four-row planter this year and will use 38-inch rows. When he gets a six-row planter he plans to go to 30-inch rows.

6 — After planting, no further mechanical cultivation is done unless the herbicide fails to adequately control the weeds.

7 — He averages 19,000 plants per acre.

Snavely reported that his

yield has constantly improved, except for last year when he averaged just under 100 bushels per acre. Two years ago he had a farm average of 120 bushels. He checks his yield by picking four rows, weighing the wagon at a nearby scale, and taking a moisture sample. He plans to check about nine different hybrids this year.

In addition to the farm's 128-acres in corn, the Snavelys also raise wheat and tobacco as cash crops. Jerry also puts in several hundred hours of custom work in the area each year — corn planting and picking, and combining. Some seasonal help is hired to handle the tobacco crop.


Jerry, a member of the Manheim Young Farmer Association, runs the farm at Lititz R1 for his father who operates a feed mill near the farm. The old stone farmhouse where Jerry lives with his wife and young son has an interesting history. It was built in 1754 by Christian Eby, and is mentioned in the book "Trail of the Conestoga." It came into the Snavely family through Jerry's grandfather, who also established the family in the milling business. Until young Snavely took over operation of the farm eight years ago, the land had been rented out and run-down. But it appears to be thriving under its present vigorous and imaginative management!

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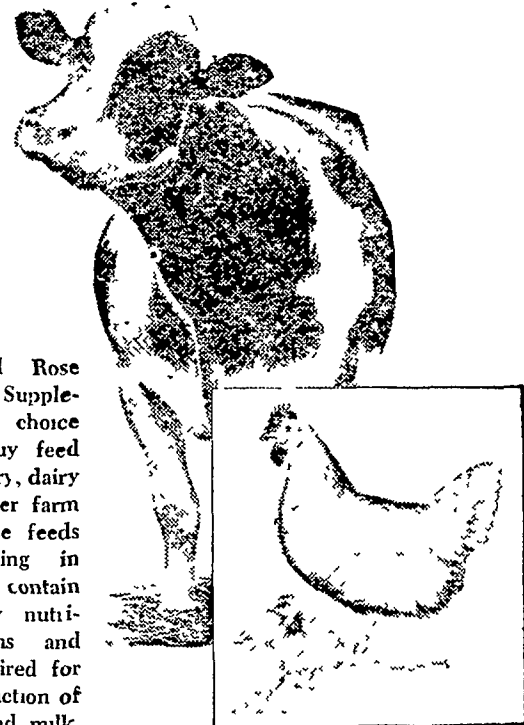
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