



James Eakin, center, is shown addressing a group of farmers during the Lebanon County grain sorghum field tour held

Wednesday. Eakin is an extension agronomist at Penn State.

Lebanon Co. Farmers Look at Grain Sorghum

About a dozen farmers turned out Wednesday for a tour of experimental grain sorghum plots planted this spring by the Lebanon County extension office. Penn State extension agronomist James Eakin talked to the group about the value of grain sorghum, or milo, varieties in different livestock feeding programs, and about growing and harvesting the crop.

According to Glenn Miller and Newton Bair, the two county agents at the meeting, many Lebanon County farmers have gone entirely from corn to sorghum. The Berks shale soils which predominate in the county favor sorghum, rather than corn, as a feed crop. Berks shale soils drain much more rapidly than the Hagerstown and Duffield soils which cover much of Lancaster County. Sorghum is much better adapted than corn to droughty conditions.

In a drier than average year, corn crops on many Lebanon County farms could fail almost completely. Grain sorghum, though, would be very little affected by drier weather. It is

grown quite extensively in dry parts of the Southwest. Eakin said corn does poorly in about one year out of three in Lebanon County. This year's weather would have favored corn, Eakin pointed out, "But you can't predict the weather." He views sorghum as good insurance.

Sorghum's feeding value is about 92 percent that of corn's, Eakin noted, which means that in a normal year a sorghum grower is giving up about eight percent. In a dry year, though, sorghum will yield a crop where corn won't. And 92 percent is a lot better than nothing.

Working sorghum into a feeding program calls for some careful management, Eakin said. "Protein content in sorghum varies so much, anywhere from 9 to 12 percent, that you really should have your crop tested so you know exactly how much supplemental feed you'll have to buy."

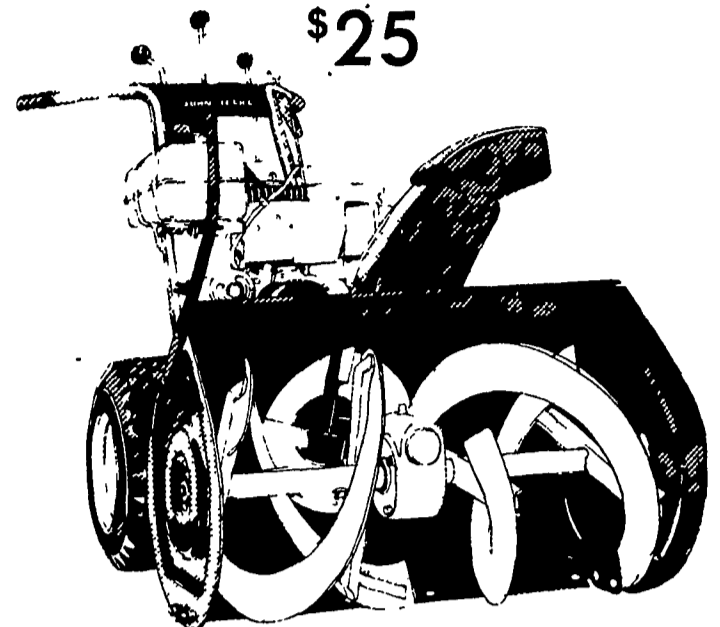
Cows, steers and hogs can use grain sorghum, Eakin said, although some commercial lysine may have to be added to the ration. Sorghum is lower in

lysine, an essential amino acid, than is corn. Although some poultrymen have reported success at feeding grain sorghum to chickens, Eakin said he'd be a little careful about using the bird resistant varieties because of their high tannic acid content.

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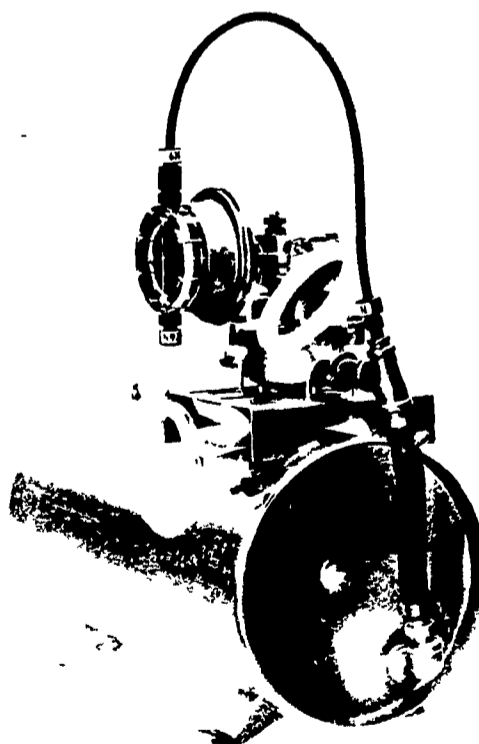
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