

Conservation Halves Soil Loss

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The terraces have performed very well for Yost. "When the terraces were being put in, I noticed that some of them were really high, and I didn't think I'd ever need that much of a terrace. But I've seen my fields after a heavy rain, with some of those terraces nearly full to the top."

Terraces slow the runoff water enough so that it doesn't carry soil away from the farm. In slow-moving water, soil simply sinks to the bottom. Fast water, though, will erode it.

Terraces conserve moisture, too, in addition to soil. On Yost's farm, there was an area at the foot of a hill that was marshy part of the year and dry enough to drive a tractor on the rest of the year. Now that area is a pond. The terraces helped create a constant flow of ground water seeping down through Yost's fields. This ground water now feeds the springs all year, instead of just in wet periods.

Yost figures it will be a few years before he recoups the expense of his diversion terraces, but he's glad he got them installed. "By 1977, everybody's going to need some conservation planning for their farms, and I'm way ahead of the game. I'm sure if I'd sell my farm now, I'd get the money I paid for terraces."

The Rural Environmental Assistance Program (REAP) helped pay for much of the work Yost had done. REAP has since been replaced by a similar program, Rural Environmental Conservation Program (RECP). "But even if the government hadn't helped me pay for these practices, I still would have put them in. Not only am I saving soil, water and fertilizer, I'm being a better steward of the soil, too. Farmers in Lancaster County usually consider themselves a pretty conservative bunch. And I think we've all got to think about conserving the farmland that's here."

Alfalfa is grown on about 45 of Yost's acres, corn on another 35 and there's also some 12 acres of pasture for his 35 head of Holstein cows. Yost raises all his own replacements, as well as some breeder bulls.

With so much of his land in alfalfa, Yost could probably have solved his soil loss problems with fewer terraces. "I wanted the whole farm terraced," he pointed out, "because I was interested in conserving water, too, not just soil. Also, if I

wanted to, I could plant the whole farm in continuous corn. I don't think I'm going to do that, though, because I never fell in love with the cornstalk."

He never fell in love with the cornstalk? "No, I think the alfalfa stem has a lot more feeding value than cornstalks. I crib most of my corn, all but maybe five or six acres which I cut for silage. I chop just about all the alfalfa for haylage. My haylage samples run anywhere from 18- to 22-percent protein, so I buy very little additional protein with my feeding program."

Last year Yost's cows had Lancaster County's highest DHIA herd average. In the past four years, Yost said his production has averaged about 15,500 pounds of milk and about 635 pounds of fat.

Yost cuts his alfalfa in the bud stage. "I don't like to see any flowers at all," he said. "I may be sacrificing some tonnage by not waiting until some of the plants are in bloom, but I feel I make it up in quality."

He chops his crop when it's at 50-percent moisture, and says he very rarely suffers rain damage with any of his hay fields. "The only time you'll damage hay is when you start raking it at about 40-percent moisture."

Alfalfa fields are top-dressed with whatever soil tests indicate is needed. Per acre yields run about five to six tons per year, with even new seedings coming through with as high as four tons the first year. Yost sprays his alfalfa for chickweed, and sprays after the second, third and fourth cuttings for leaf hoppers. He hasn't experienced many problems with weevils, mostly because he has his first cutting off by May 30, a schedule which interrupts that pest's life cycle. He does spray for weevil after the first cutting.

Yost is an enthusiastic dairyman who'd rather work with cows than in the field. He thinks there's a good future in dairying for the farmer who's willing to keep up with the times. "I don't think we're going to see the end of the family farm," he said, "but I do think we're going to have to operate differently in many ways."

Yost and his wife, Rhoda, have four daughters, Debbie, Beth, Lori and Tammy. Yost is a member of the Pennsylvania Farmers Association, the Garden Spot Young Farmers, Red Rose DHIA, and the local, state and national Holstein clubs.



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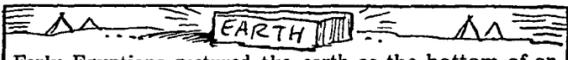
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