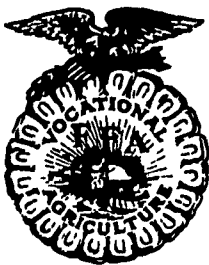


From Local Ag Teachers:



Thoughts in Passing



The article this week was prepared by J. W. Hilton, teacher of agriculture, Penn Manor School District.

Can Your Soil Stand Continuous Corn?
In recent years many farmers in the county have

been finding success in a continuous corn cropping system. The concept that corn, small grains, and hay must be rotated to maintain soil productivity has been questioned. Not all the answers are known, but with an improved fertilization program reduced tillage, and consideration of conservation practices where necessary many farmers may crop their fields more intensively to achieve a greater return per acre.

Space limits discussing all the advantages or disadvantages of continuous row crops. Yet one that seems to be of greatest importance is sometimes overlooked when discussing cropping systems. And that is "can your soil stand continuous corn?"

Yes, we can meet the nutrient requirements of corn. Yes, we can follow sound conservation practices. Yes, we can produce and maintain high yielding stands. Yes, we must be careful in maintaining soil tilth when using a continuous corn cropping system.

Soil tilth is often ignored

and sometimes destroyed when following a continuous corn cropping system. Maintenance of tilth is of prime importance in fields where a continuous corn system is being practiced. The more you work the seedbed and cultivate the crop, the faster you destroy the crumb structure which makes your soil porous easy to work and free from clods.

Good soil tilth allows water to enter the soil structure rather than run off, plant roots to penetrate easily to reach moisture and nourishment, maintenance of higher fertility with less nutrient tie-up and less crusting of soil surface following heavy rains. The fact that soil tilth doesn't always hold up is due to the extra plowing, harrowing, and cultivation generally associated with row crop farming. A minimum tillage system may allow you to grow continuous row crop without destroying tilth depending on your soil type.

Continuous corn on sandy and silt loams may well produce as high a yield as corn following a hay crop in rotation. Even with an average yield of 95 percent of that of corn in a 3 or 4 year rotation you may achieve 3 or 4 corn crops which may

return more dollars per acre. Extra nitrogen may well add extra organic matter from crop residues and aid in maintaining soil tilth.

Good soil structure or tilth is even more important and more difficult to maintain on clay loams, silt clays, and straight clays soils. Continuous corn is not as well suited to these heavier soils, but may be successful when following a fertilization program which produces greater amounts of crop residues; minimum tillage; working the soil at proper moisture content; and fall plowing.

Soil high in clay and silt content should be watched carefully for these warning signs when used in continuous cropping systems.

1. Fields dry slowly following rains.
2. Plowing requires more power.
3. Seedbed remains cloudy after several harrowings.
4. Yields are lower than from other fields of the same soil type.

These warning signs indicate that your farming methods are not maintaining soil tilth and you should consider reduced tillage and increased fertilization to produce more crop residues to improve tilth. Damage to soil tilth from over cropping with row crop is temporary and can be corrected unless it results in serious soil loss by erosion.

The Soil Conservation Service, working with soil specialists from the Pennsylvania State University, have set up guides to the most intensive cropping systems for most every soil type in Pennsylvania.



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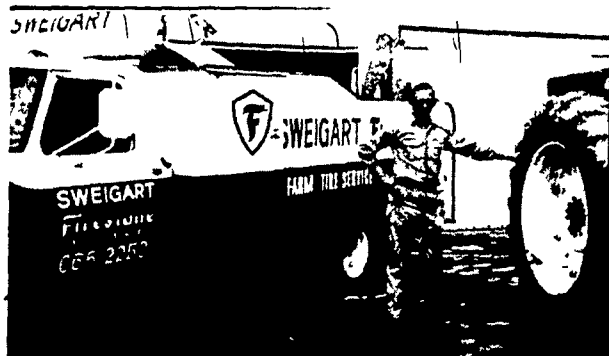
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