

Conservationist

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make conservation more profitable and more livable, and still do a good job of saving soil," he told a group of visitors to his farm on Thursday morning. "My fields are terraced. The terraces carry runoff water from my cornfields into a grass waterway, and from there it goes into a stream."

"We've been told that we must plant our crops parallel to the terraces. Until this year, that's what I did. But I had a lot of point rows, and I ran down a lot of my corn when it came time to harvest my crop. I didn't like that, but I figured that's what I had to do to be a conservation farmer. "But you know, I started to think about that, and I

decided that those terraces might do just as good a of holding back the water if I planted up and down the hills and right over the terraces. I think I was right."

Stauffer's audience had more than a casual interest in his technique. All who listened were area and district conservationists and conservation technicians from around the state. They were in Lancaster County for an annual training session-field trip. Other stops in their tour were the Stauffer Homestead near Blue Ball, the Carl Herr farm in the southern end of the county, and the Pequea Valley Winery. One of the day's most improbable sights had to be Aaron Stauffer flanked by state conservation director Benny Martin on his right, and area conservation director James Olsen on his left. The trio were walking down a steep slope against a backdrop of corn rows running straight up the hill behind them.

After the tour group had left, Stauffer explained of the details of his experiment to Lancaster Farming. On his 67 acre farm, Stauffer rears some 33,000 broilers annually, and fattens about 100 steers. For the past five years, he has grown nothing but corn and a few acres of tobacco. He shoots for 20,000 corn plants to the acre, and said he averages 160 to 185 bushel yields.

"Plowing with the slopes was purely an experiment this year," he pointed out. "I'm working very closely with the SCS, and if anybody else would want to try it, I'd



Aaron Stauffer, right, points out a feature of his radical corn planting program to state conservationist Benny Martin on Thursday morning.

The gentleman at the left is a staff conservationist with the USDA in Washington, D.C.

advise them to contact the SCS before they do anything else."

Stauffer pointed out that conservation plans prepared by the USDA's Soil and Conservation Service are designed to take into account a farmer's complete program. A farmer who has terraces now, but is also strip cropping, may not be able to go to an all corn program without some changes. Perhaps another terrace or even more than one may be needed.

Planting with the slope has two big advantages, Stauffer feels, and they're advantages which could find more money in the Stauffer bank account at the end of

the year. "Your big savings come in equipment time and run down crop," he said. "Today it costs \$45 an hour - at least - to run one of those big self-propelled forage harvesters. When there are a lot of point rows, it takes a lot more time to get a crop in than when the equipment can just keep going in a straight line. Plus, with point rows we were running over a lot of crop. This year, we didn't lose nearly as much."

Terrace maintenance will be increased, Stauffer feels, but this is a minor point compared to the other savings he'll realize. He pointed out a spot where the tractor wheels had dug into the top of a terrace. "We

were pulling a big wagon, and it was loaded down too much to take over that terrace. We learned a lot this year about a few things we should maybe do differently next year. But I think we're going to stick with the basic idea, planting up and down the hills."

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