

Water and nitrogen needed for corn

DOVER, Del — Water and nitrogen are the most critical factors in successful corn production on sandy Delaware soils. This is an old, familiar story, but one never told more clearly than during the present crop season, says Dr. William Mitchell Extension

agronomist at the University of Delaware.

Mitchell, who has been surveying corn fields in lower Delaware as part of a University of Delaware irrigation study, returned from his tour convinced of this fact.

Without irrigation, yields of 25 bushels per acre are showing up throughout the lower half of the state. On heavier soils, even in the drought area, he sometimes came across yields up around 75 bushels and occasionally they hit 100. But these were exceptions. In the same area, irrigated corn fields are producing between 150 and 190 bushels an acre.

There are about 20,000 acres of irrigated corn in lower Kent and Sussex counties now, and the number is increasing rapidly, says the agronomist. The reason is obvious. At current corn prices, there's little or no profit, even at these yield levels. But at least some farmers have managed to avoid the losses of \$100 or more per acre associated with dry land production this year.

Daniel Vanderwende, a dairy farmer located west of Greenwood, was one of the people Mitchell visited during his recent survey. This was the farmer's first experience with corn irrigation and he's had his share of difficulties. But he told the agronomist he's generally well satisfied with his decision to irrigate.

Based on previous experience, Vanderwende had hoped to produce about 100 bushels an acre without water and had set a goal of 160 bushels on the irrigated land. Like so many of his neighbors, however, he ended up with an estimated

28 bushels from the dry land corn. By way of contrast, where his traveling sprinkler system was in operation, he got about 173 bushels of dry-shelled corn. He was able to irrigate about 100 acres from his two-million-gallon storage pond. Once harvest has been completed, the dairyman will be able to review the whole project to see where he goes from there.

As he traveled around lower Delaware, noting the differences between drought-ravaged crops and those in adjacent, irrigated fields, Mitchell had a chance to talk with lots of growers about their cropping practices. There's one thing irrigated corn growers agree on, he notes—one can't be stingy with nitrogen if he wants those top yields.

It takes about one pound of nitrogen to grow a bushel of corn. This means that if the yield aim is 200 bushels, the nitrogen requirement is going to be about double what most farmers have been accustomed to using. At current prices, this means the nitrogen cost will come to between \$30 and \$40 an acre. That price is expected to go up as the cost of natural gas goes up, since natural gas is an essential ingredient in the production of nitrogen fertilizer.

In the light of this situation, the agronomist reminds growers that they have an excellent, natural source of nitrogen in certain legume cover crops. Clovers or vetch seeded now will

provide a large percentage of next year's nitrogen needs for corn—at a fraction of the cost.

Many acres of corn land have already been harvested because of drought-hastened maturity. If asked once and seeded to 20 pounds of hairy vetch or 10-12 pounds of crimson clover, the result can be the same as using 100

pounds of fertilizer nitrogen next spring.

Mitchell's conclusions, based on his survey: "Combining legume and fertilizer nitrogen with irrigation water is the best way I know to beat the weather and be assured of corn yields capable of doubling the state average in 1978."

LeHi chairman warns of excess milk production

ALLENTOWN - The chairman of Lehigh Valley Cooperative Farmers on Tuesday expressed concern regarding the stability of milk markets for many Pennsylvania dairymen in light of current and future milk marketing conditions.

Alpheus L. Ruth, in a statement issued here, said Current farm milk production is exceeding 1976 monthly levels and is expected to surpass 1977 levels by 46 per cent next year. In the meantime, fluid whole milk demand is running below a year ago, adding to excess market supplies."

The Cooperative executive said that maintaining a stable milk market in the future is a single most important problem facing dairy farmers today.

Those milk farmers who are not associated with an efficient plant operation which has the capacity to manufacture large quantities of reserve supplies of

milk could find themselves without a market for their milk, Ruth warned. Manufacturing milk plant facilities are essential to a stable and assured market, he said.

Lehigh Valley Cooperative Farmers operates three milk plant facilities. Two of the plants are engaged in packaging fluid whole milk. The third processes milk into a variety of manufactured dairy products including cottage cheese, ice cream, yogurt and cheddar cheese.

The plants are located at Landsdale, Schuylkill Haven and Allentown.

Ruth pointed out that the Allentown operation is the only reserve processing plant in eastern Pennsylvania and provides a balancing facility for handling milk produced in excess of fresh whole milk sales. As such, it provides an essential service to the dairy industry of the entire state, he said.



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