

# Stormwater runoff takes toll in crops

LANCASTER — Aaron Z. Stauffer, Chairman of the Lancaster Conservation District alerted farmers to losses in crop yields, crop quality and farm income that are caused by uncontrolled stormwater runoff from farm fields. The official stated that the amount of rainfall is the deciding factor as to the crops that can be grown in the area. The crop must draw from water stored in the soil to maintain growth between rains. When rain water is allowed to run from farm fields instead of percolating into the soil, the water is lost to the growing crop. In the times between rains, these crops can experience drought stresses. Quality and yield will be

reduced unless water is applied by artificial means through irrigation. The costs in labor, equipment and energy to irrigate a crop can be substantial and many farmers accept reduced yields and quality rather than incur the added costs.

Other considerations noted by the Conservation District Chairman were the nutrients and pesticides that are absorbed by rainwater and are carried from the field with stormwater runoff. Nitrates, particularly, other crop nutrients, chemicals for crop disease control, pesticides, herbicides and soil additives are water soluble and will disappear down the slopes with the runoff. These elements, vitally needed for crop



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production, are lost to the crop but the cost of applying them must be deducted from the gross farm income.

The conservationist cautioned all landowners about the toxic properties of some of the pesticides that are applied to crops and home gardens and ornamentals. When these chemicals are washed into streams they can retain much of their toxicity and create hazards downstream.

In addition the official stressed soil loss, the main concern farmers should have in controlling the stormwater runoff from fields that are plowed and tilled for crop production. When soil on sloping farm fields is unprotected because surface vegetation has been removed the soil is subject to the bombing action of raindrops. The raindrops loosen the soil particles, lift them above the surface, place the clay and silt

particles in suspension and then the collected rainwater and soil washes from the fields and off of the farm. This process in Pennsylvania has removed over 60 per cent of the topsoil from our farms, and, where it continues, will eventually destroy the source of every farmer's livelihood.

The Conservation District official offered the services of technicians, who work with the District, to farmers and other landowners to assist them in developing a soil and water conservation plan. Persons who have noticed excessive stormwater runoff, muddy water or erosion gullies on their farm or property should contact the Conservation District at the Farm & Home Center, Room 6, 1383 Arcadia Road, Lancaster, PA 17601, telephone: 717: 299-5361, to learn how they can improve or correct their soil and water conditions.

## DER committee meets

HARRISBURG — The Agriculture Advisory Committee of the Department of Environmental Resources heard at its March 2 meeting of plans for stormwater management legislation sponsored by Rep. Frank J. O'Connell.

O'Connell explained his desire to have control over stormwater management vested in local governments with advice and guidance from counties and Conservation Districts.

Local governments would be encouraged to accept their responsibilities and would face withdrawal of various forms of state funds if they did not.

Committee members and O'Connell engaged in a wide-ranging discussion of the problem and O'Connell promised to supply Committee members with copies of the draft legislation.

The Committee's Sewage Sludge Work Group reported it has completed half of its assignment with development of a manual on septage, suggested revisions to State regulations on land

application of the septic and holding tank wastes and a revised set of Interim Guidelines for Sewage, Septic Tank and Holding Tank Waste Use on Agricultural Lands.

Christopher H. Allen, of the Pennsylvania Farmers Association, Work Group Chairman, said the draft manual is an explanation of the Interim Guidelines document with simplified language and additional information for the farmer/user.

It will be submitted to the Department for its use along with the Guidelines. The proposed regulation change will be given to DER for consideration for presentation to the Environmental Quality Board.

The Education and Training Work Group completed a slide series on the Manure Management Manual prepared by the Advisory Committee and will use it to train farmers and government agency personnel in the recommended techniques for manure management.

## Grain advisors to meet

WASHINGTON, D.C. — The next meeting of the Federal Grain Standards Act Advisory Committee will be held here April 4 at 9 a.m. in Room 206, South Building, USDA.

Leland E. Bartelt, administrator of USDA's Federal Grain Inspection Service (FGIS), said the purpose of the meeting is for members to make recommendations on issues discussed at the first meeting of the advisory group on Dec. 14.

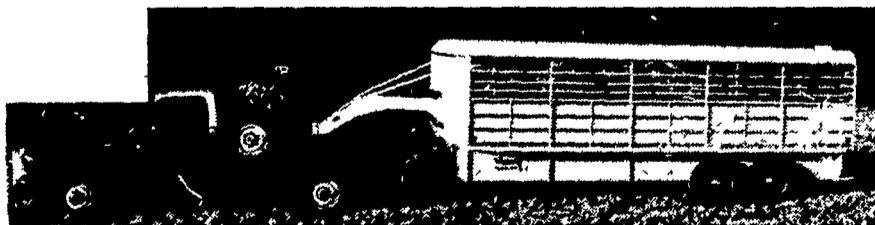
The meeting is open to the public. However, participation by persons other than committee members will be limited to written statements, unless their participation is otherwise requested by the chairman.

Persons who wish to address the committee at the meeting should contact Dr. Bartelt, Administrator,

FGIS, USDA, Washington, DC 20250; phone (202) 447-9170.

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