

# Program launched in Del. to grow 200 bu. corn

NEWARK — Delaware farmers who irrigate ought to be able to grow 200 bushels of corn an acre. So far none have managed to do so, though a few have come

mightily close to this goal. But if Extension specialists at the University of Delaware are right in their predictions, farmers who grow corn under irrigation will be

bringing in some bonanza yields over the next couple of years.

With 200-bushel-an-acre harvests in mind, the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service has launched its "First State Irrigation Program" — a program designed to help corn farmers get the most out of present production technology.

"Most grain farmers have had limited experience with irrigation," says Extension agronomist Dr. William H. Mitchell, in explaining the need for the program. "It represents a new type of farming with greatly increased yields and higher profit potentials. With water no longer the yield-limiting factor, there can be less fluctuations in crop yields and more stability in the farming operation. We think that by placing more attention on refinement of the total production system, farmers will be able to get off the yield plateau they've been on in recent years."

"More fertilizer, better hybrids, improved weed control, and tillage practices have carried dry land yields upward about as far as they can go," adds Mitchell. "But

if we can match the best of these practices with a properly managed irrigation system, there's no telling where we can go."

The First State Irrigation Program is designed to combine farmer know-how with expertise from supporting agricultural industries and Extension specialists and bring all this to bear on the problem of boosting corn yields.

There are three key features of the program: (1) informal discussions with farmers, (2) careful monitoring of production practices over the growing season, and (3) collection of yield data at harvesttime.

The Extension team first meets with individual farmers in "kitchen-table" discussions to review irrigation and crop production practices and to determine which are best suited for each farm. Then, during the growing season, each irrigation unit will be closely monitored for water use, crop nutrition, tillage, and weed control. At this time certain diagnostic tests such as leaf tissue analysis will be performed. This will make it possible to detect micro-nutrient deficiencies

in time to correct them. Production details will be carefully recorded.

After yield data has been collected at the end of the season, a "Governor's Trophy" will be presented to the top corn grower in the program. Top yield will be determined by sampling at six locations, chosen at random, in a one-acre block selected by the grower.

Participants pay an entry fee of \$50 for each irrigation unit entered. This fee will be used to (1) purchase three rain gauges for each entrant; (2) analyze soil samples from top and subsoil; (3) analyze corn tissue samples; (4) process production data; and (5) obtain aerial photographs using color and infrared film. If possible, data will be computerized. The aerial photographs will help to pinpoint problems of water application, disease, and fertility.

It is hoped that industry sponsors will pick up the tab for farmer entry fees. It is also hoped that industry representatives will become directly involved in this race to break the 200-bushel yield barrier on Delaware farms—by visiting individual

growers and offering their own advice as to how to improve production.

Mitchell says farmers are enthusiastic about the possibilities of growing 200-bushel-an-acre corn. They're testing out a number of good solid practices to see which combinations will work best for them. More are expected to join as the program becomes better known.

Delaware corn farmers who are interested in entering the First State Irrigation Program should contact their county Extension office in Newark, Dover, or Georgetown.

## 4-H club meets

READING — The Western Berks 4-H Dairy Club met on May 5, at the home of Lori & Karen Leshar. Fifteen members were present.

Future dates for the year were discussed. After the meeting, leaders showed the club members how to clip an animal.

The next meeting of the group will be held at the home of club leader John Stump, on June 2.

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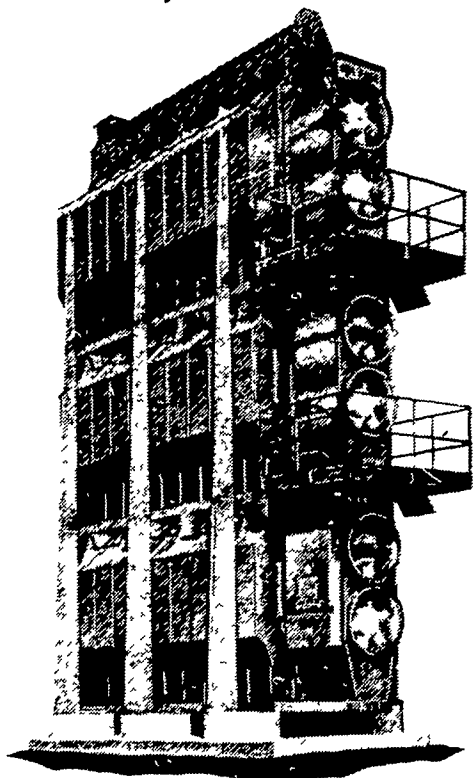
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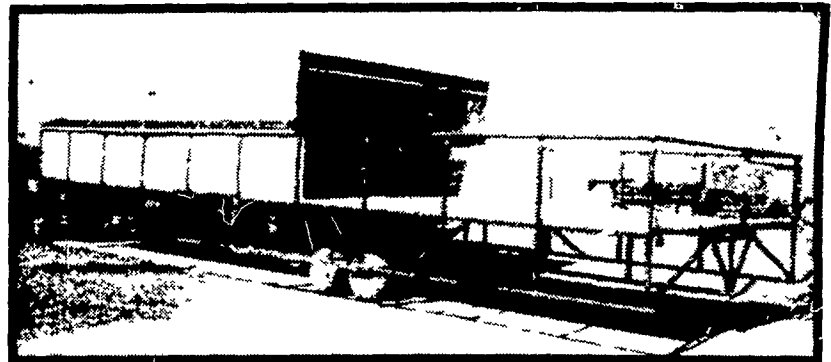
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