

York County corn clinic gives booster for yields

BY JOYCE BUYP
Staff Correspondent

BAIR — York County's annual corn clinic continues to be one of the most popular winter educational meetings sponsored by the extension service. Over 300 farmers filled the 4-H center for this year's meeting on January 17.

They heard extension specialists, compared tillage and planting practices and visited the two dozen commercial booths set up for the day-long event.

Featured speakers from Penn State were ag engineer James Garthe; Willis McClellan, the university's weed specialist; and entomology expert Stan Gesell.

In a presentation on reducing field losses of corn crops, Garthe exhibited data slides on the value of harvesting high moisture grain

and treating it with acid preservatives.

Acid treatment allows storage of grains at 25 to 30 percent moisture, without the capital investment of a silo. Propionic acid, alone or mixed with acetic acid, is the product often used, in amounts of approximately one to three percent of the weight of the grain to be treated.

Actual quantities must be determined by the conditions of storage time, temperature and moisture content.

Because the acid does react with certain chemicals and with concrete, tests have been run to determine the type of materials that best resist the corrosive action of the acids.

Aluminum structures rated the highest points, but galvanized steel treated with several coats of primer and

paints were also found to be suitable. Detailed specifications on those various materials are available from the extension service.

But acid-treated grain has perhaps an even greater advantage than just getting it harvested early. Acid treatments, says Garthe, can increase crude protein levels of feed grains up to four percent, at about one-tenth the cost of soybean meal protein additives.

Rolling the grain through a mill increased the nitrogen and protein retention even more. And, livestock made greater weight gains on the treated feeds.

According to Bill McClellan, Penn State weed specialist, certain farms across the state are encountering a brand new problem in fertilization - too

much of a good thing. The good thing is poultry manure; and some fields near poultry houses are getting too much of it, resulting in excessive levels of both phosphorus and potassium.

"It's to the point where we must soil test to see where we can do the least damage with manure applications," warned McClellan.

Estimates are that, for each pound of nitrogen going into the soil in poultry manure, a pound of phosphorus and a half-pound of potassium are also added.

When phosphorus levels in the soil become too high,

corn plants do not receive needed amounts of the trace mineral zinc, while high potassium counts affect the levels of magnesium. However, because of its great value in adding other trace elements, manure remains an important soil improver.

With the cost of chemical fertilizers escalating to unheard of levels, scientists are turning their research toward developing plants that biologically increase the amounts of nitrogen in the soils.

Alfalfa, for instance, is the best nitrogen producer, automatically adding 200

pounds per acre back into the soil.

Ladino grasses put back about 175 pounds, lupines add about 150 pounds, and crimson clovers and pasture grasses restore about 100 pounds.

McClellan also emphasized the need for regular lime applications, since a key to proper weed control with herbicides is the proper level of soil acidity.

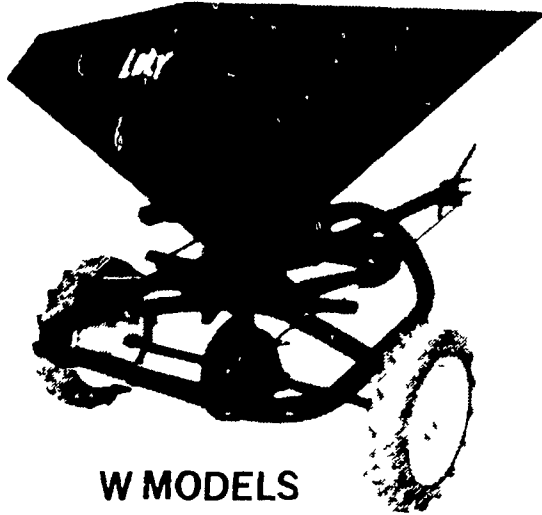
Any pH reading below 6.2 is crucial, says McClellan, and just adding a ton of lime per year as a rule of thumb may not be enough if the soil was too acid to begin with.

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Donald Lott, right, ag pesticide inspector for the state department of agriculture, explains the pesticide applicator recertification form to Clarence Godfrey.

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