

Pencil becomes primary planting tool

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN
MANHEIM — Jim Kettering, Colebrook Rd., R7 Manheim, is using a pencil and pocket calculator as much as a plow and planter to put his corn crop in this year.

In these times of rising costs of production inputs, including skyrocketing interest rates, this meant many planting preparation hours spent seated at a desk before he even climbed behind the wheel of the tractor to turn the first ground.

"I did much more figuring and calculating this year than I ever did before," Kettering explained.

"My basic goal, just as I'm sure it was with many other growers this year, was to try and get the most production with the least possible cost, but still not skimp on anything important.

"I wanted to cut costs, but I didn't want to cut to the point that it would hurt the yield potential."

Beginning last year, not too long after the crop was in the bin, Kettering started taking a look at the already rising production costs.

"For last year's crop, I put in 22 tons of 6-30-11 starter fertilizer," he said.

"Back in December when I went to buy this year's starter fertilizer, I found that 18 tons cost me the same amount as the 22 tons had cost last year. That cost included the early order discount, too."

So Kettering went back to take a second look at his soil test and decided to cut back his starter fertilizer use by about 25 percent.

"Previously, I'd apply fertilizer a bit on the high side," he said.

"I'd include a little bit



As he loads seed corn into hopper of planter, Jim Kettering, R7 Manheim, terms current season as one that required close planting and preparations.

extra for insurance. But this year, I'm following the soil test recommendations to the letter."

In addition, Kettering is shooting for a 150-bushel yield potential this year. In the past he's aimed a bit higher for approximately 175 bushels an acre.

A consistently high Lancaster County planter in the five-acre corn club, Kettering is not to be considered a production economizer, either.

"When I saw the way the costs were heading," he explained, "it became essential to sit down and figure as close as possible."

"I feed 90 percent of my corn through hogs and steers and saw the need to economize. A cash grain farmer would have to watch even closer this year."

Kettering also made some

changes in his plowdown fertilizer.

Last year, he plowed down 500 lbs of 32-0-10 and this year he switched to 600 pounds of 22-0-8.

"My total nitrogen use last year was about 172 to 175 lbs an acre," he explained.

"This year, I cut back exactly to the soil test needs and am applying about 142 lbs. an acre."

There are many other costs for Kettering which have shown dramatic increases from one planting season to another.

Among two that really stand out are interest rates and the cost of his fuel.

"I can remember that interest rates were 9 percent at planting time last year," he said.

"Now, that rate stands at 17 percent, just about double."

His diesel fuel now costs 94.4 cents a gallon. Last year, it was approximately half that amount, too.

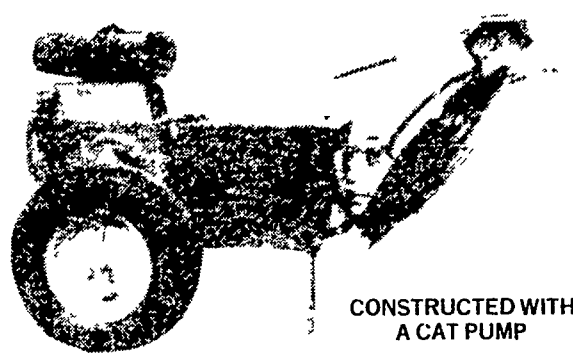
Kettering, together with his father farms about 400 acres, more than half of which is rented ground.

"Over the last three years, land rents have gone up considerably," he adds.

"I've heard of some rents

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