

Soil Stewardship week begins

LITITZ — The conservation of productive soil, water, and related resources on the privately-owned lands of the United States, which was never an easy undertaking, is becoming more critical.

In the 45 years since the nationwide conservation program was launched, a great deal has been accomplished. But steady changes in land use and management, the introduction of bigger farm machinery, and the evolution of new attitudes toward the land have now compounded the difficulties of the task.

Soil stewardship, the spirit of responsible man at work on the land, is going to be tested as never before.

The dollar costs of applying conservation measures, as well as maintaining conservation systems of farming, are rising. The size of farms is increasing while the number of farmers is shrinking.

As one result, the traditional intimacy between the farmer and his land is diminishing in too many places. Increasingly, farmland is being regarded as a commodity to be bought and sold rather than as a very special and vulnerable resource tied to the landscape — a resource with a productive capability on which all life depends for all generations to come.

During the 10 years prior to 1978, an average of nearly

three million acres of rural land were converted each year to urban uses. A third of this was "prime" farmland — the very best we had.

The demand for maximum yields to offset accelerated production costs and ever-rising land valuations has led to more intensified farming — which in turn has depleted attention to conservation and in some places increased the rates of soil erosion beyond all acceptable levels.

On thousands of acres, for example, annual losses of soil from cropland now exceed 25 tons per acre or five times what some experts regard as a "safe" loss.

Such losses are triply damaging. Not only do they

reduce productive capacity and add enormously to the pollution of lakes and rivers; they cut seriously into the opportunities for oncoming farm families to earn a respectable livelihood in agriculture.

What we need is a new land ethic, "forged of our twin concerns for the land's proper use and its proper care," says Executive Vice President Neil Sampson of the National Association of Conservation Districts.

"We must begin to treasure the prime farmlands...keep them

available for agricultural use, help farmers survive economically and environmentally so they can profitably produce from them, and insist that they be used in such manner that soil depletion is minimized."

"The new ethic," Sampson adds, "must be a product of education and social evolution. It can't be written, legislated, or imposed on people. It must change, first, the way we Americans think about land. Only then will it successfully alter the ways we use this vital resource."

There is more here than a

plea for a fresh point of view about the land. It is a call to break from traditional habits of social procrastination — of delaying what is hard but necessary until costly crisis is upon us.

If we value nature we will do these things and start the process soon, but if we are callous about life and measure it only by the day at hand we will be acting the coward and the fool. In the judgment of nature, this is a crowning test of our maturity and resource stewardship.

Northern Lebanon tops soil, land judging

JONESTOWN — Close to 120 students competed in Lebanon County's vocational agriculture land judging contest on Tuesday.

Rained out the previous week, the students had a beautiful day to be outside, enjoying the sun and land, this week. The contest was held at the Paul Maulfair farm, near Jonestown.

The favorable weather must have had a good effect on the concentration of three young men in the contest. Mike Bare and Todd Propt of Northern Lebanon High School, and Jeff Riegel of Annville-Cleona High School tied for first place. They each scored 229 out of a possible 300 points.

Joe Harvatine, another Little Dutchman, had a score that ranked fourth in the contest. And there was a three way tie for fifth place between Ed Ditzler and Dale Zimmerman of Northern

Lebanon, and Donald Baer of Annville-Cleona.

David Bomgardner, the Little Dutchman that topped last year's contest, had a score that fell in at eighth place, followed by Ronald Reinbold and Mike Gingrich of Northern Lebanon, for ninth and tenth place respectively.

The top ten placings received a monetary award from the Lebanon County FFA Agricultural Society.

In the judging contest, the students looked at three different test pits, dug to about four feet in depth. They looked at the slope of the land, the stoniness of the soil, the soil texture, the depth of the topsoil, and whether the soil was well-drained or wet.

They were also judging whether the land had erosion occurring and whether it was subject to flooding.

Then the students had to

evaluate whether the land needed conservation practices, such as strip cropping systems, sod waterways, and the like. They also determined if there would be any special limits on building a home on the land, installing a septic field, or building a lagoon.

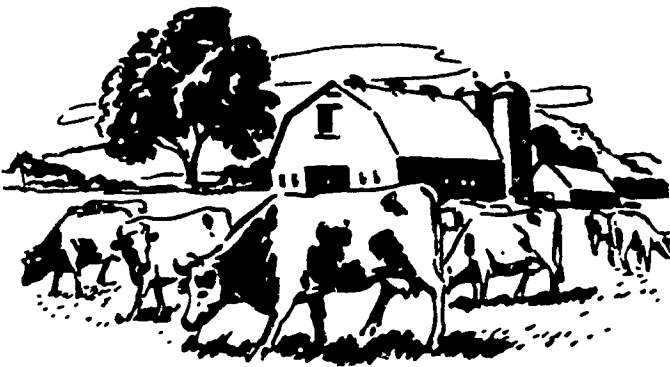
Schools participating in the contest included Northern Lebanon, the host, Cedar Crest, ELCO, and Annville-Cleona.—SM



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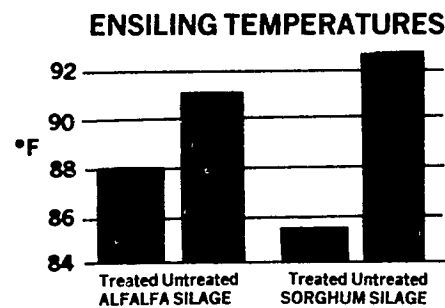
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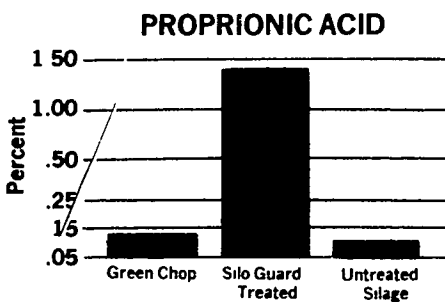
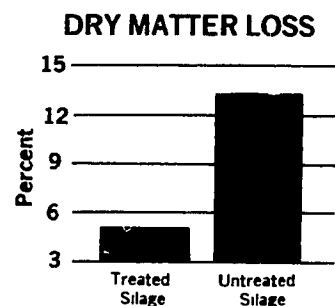


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