

Energy, environment, production are problems facing farmers

LANCASTER — "The energy required for crop production has come under close scrutiny since the 1973 Arab Oil Embargo," stated G.B. Triplett, Professor of Agronomy, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center, Wooster, Ohio during the 7th Annual Mid-Atlantic No-till Conference.

"I hope agriculture gets its fuel allotment, but farmers can't count on it," he said.

Triplett addressed 1200 farmers from six states concerning problems facing agriculture in the near future — energy, environmental quality, and production demand.

In recent years, with the advent of no-till farming, energy demands have been reduced while farmers continue to meet the growing

need for more and better crop production, he pointed out.

"The reason land is tilled in the first place is to meet the needs of the crop. There will always be a need for seedbed preparation and weed control," Triplett said, "but it is questionable whether tillage is needed for nutrient incorporation, burying plant residues, loosening soil or soil aeration in order to insure a bumper crop."

Triplett pointed out one way agriculture has reduced tillage operations and hand labor is with herbicides. Chemically controlling weeds eliminates several cultivation steps and consequently trips across the field from planting to harvesting.

In case studies conducted

in Ohio, Triplett told how crop yields dropped dramatically on both well-drained and poorly-drained soils when conventional tillage was used instead of no-till.

While crop yields increased on those specific plots, with no-till, soil erosion decreased, according to Triplett.

"When soil is kept untilled with a mulch protecting it, it stays in place. When you look at national averages for soil loss in the Corn Belt and see we're losing 8 tons of soil per acre, it doesn't take long to realize we're exporting our precious top soil along with the grain."

Triplett told the group of farmers that it took 5 diesel gallons of fuel to grow an acre of corn in the 1940's. Since no-till has arrived, this gallons-per-acre figure has dropped to less than one gallon.

The Ohioian also expressed his concern over what agricultural land is designated prime farmland, and what isn't.

"I believe the prime farmland designation is based on conventional tillage methods. If it was based on no-till, a lot more land would become prime," he said.

Where will the future agricultural land be found in the U.S.? According to Triplett, increased acres of land suitable for grain production extends from central Ohio through Pennsylvania, southern New York, West Virginia, Kentucky, Virginia, and Maryland to the East Coast.

"The growing season and

rainfall are suitable and soils are productive with good management practices. These rolling hills could present difficulties in using large equipment, but could come into production

with enough economic incentives," Triplett explained.

"The challenge then is to apply the conservation tillage practices to the most

desirable locations. We should continue efforts to develop technology for producing crop yields as reliably with reduced tillage as with more conventional methods," he concluded.

No-till

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to apply some additional N on the no-till fields to compensate for the higher yield goals.

—Unless N fertilizers can be soil incorporated, such as by injection ammonium nitrate or some other N source should be utilized that is not as subject to volatilization or immobilization losses as urea.

—N applications should be split, with a small amount of starter N (30-40 lb/A) at planting followed by the remainder as a sidedress when the corn is 12" to 18" tall (or approximately 5 to 6 weeks after planting.) This is true for medium and heavy textured soils as well as light sandy soils.

—When using nitrogen solutions, consider a split application as in (3) above. Use drop nozzles with a coarse directed stream or a solid stream for the second application to obtain more complete N to soil contact. Do not spray N solution over

the top of the growing plants

—A regular and close security of soil pH levels must be practiced, particularly in the surface two inches. Continued application of acid-forming fertilizers on the surface will quickly result in a lower soil pH at the surface. Reported de-activation of triazine herbicides due to low soil pH can cause a serious breakdown in weed control. A regular lime program is essential.

"The no-tillage concept for producing corn is undoubtedly the most exciting "new" cultural practice to happen in decades. It has gained rapid acceptance by farmers of many states in the Mid-Atlantic area.

"As more information is gained through research and practical experience and more of the temporary problems are solved, no-tillage corn production is expected to continue to gain in popularity," concluded Bandel.



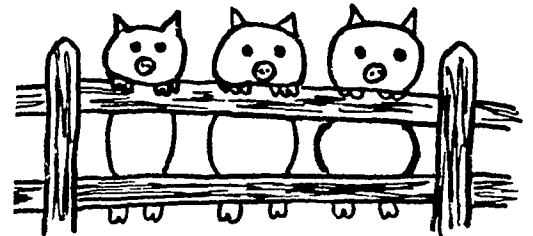
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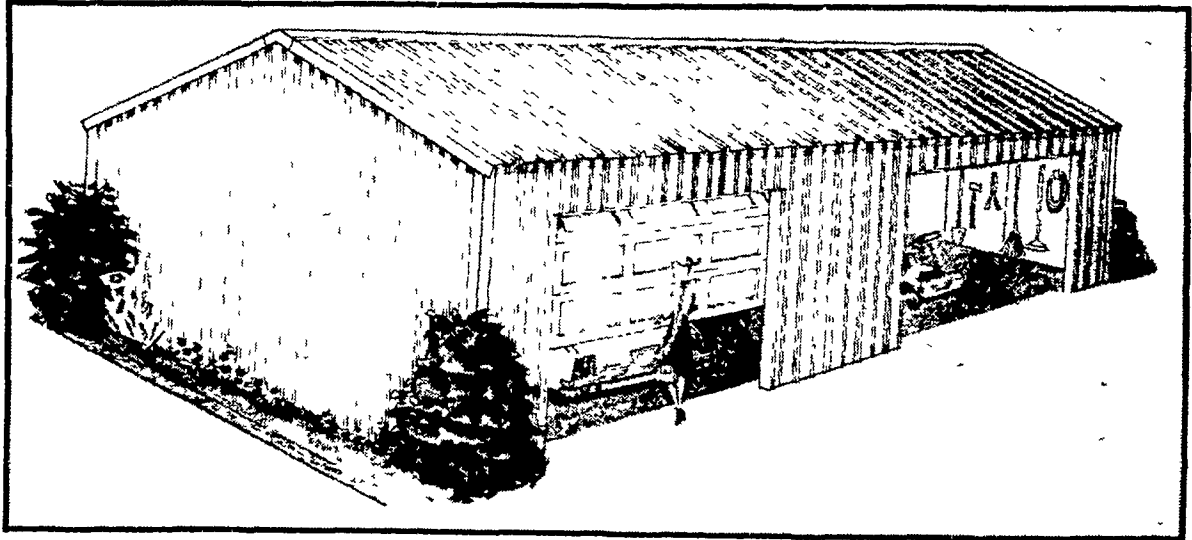
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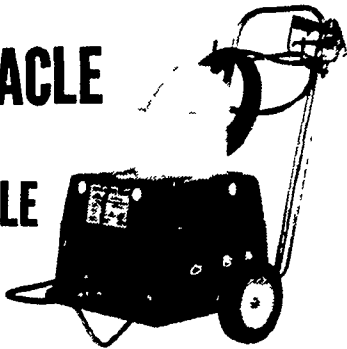
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