

# Soil, forage testing lab opens in Lancaster Co.

BY SHEILA MILLER

BUCK — "Don't worry about the smell in here — it's nothing that will hurt you. I'm just ashing forage samples," assures Richard Croyle stepping out of Wednesday's wind and into his laboratory.

Croyle recently opened his own soils and forage testing lab here to serve Lancaster County and other area farmers with fast results in forage and soil analysis.

The lab is set up in a small white building next to Wenger Equipment, Inc., a John Deere dealer. Coming south from Lancaster on Route 272, it's located just past the intersection of Route 372.

The name of the laboratory is Biometrics — presently displayed in roughed-out letters. The front window advertisement announces soil testing, forage testing, moisture, fiber, pH, minerals, and protein are found within.

Croyle, a bearded chemist and owner of Biometrics, eases himself

into his cushioned business chair and begins to discuss his venture.

"I set up shop," he said, "around the first week of December. But before coming into the area, I did a marketing survey which showed there was a definite need for a testing service here."

"Soil and forage samples from local farms were being sent out. Now, with my lab set up in Lancaster County, I feel I'll be offering a service which will locally benefit farmers."

When asked why he chose Lancaster County rather than another part of the state, Croyle confesses he and his family always liked the community, and more practically, there is a large concentration of dairy cattle requiring a large amount of forage testing.

Croyle, himself, is originally from Blair County and the community called Holidaysburg. He admits he did not grow up on a farm, but worked summers during high school on his uncle's dairy

farm. As he sips a cup of steaming coffee, Croyle recollects the many steps that led him to his present occupation.

"After high school graduation, I went to Penn State and studied zoology. I received my Bachelor of Science Degree in 1966."

"I decided to continue my education at Penn State, and received my Master's in animal nutrition in 1968 and my Ph.D. in 1972."

After leaving the scholarly confines of the University's campus, Croyle was employed by a biological corporation that manufactured medical products. He stayed with Dexter Corporation for eight years.

Then, said Croyle, a move to a chemical company in Bellefonte came about. He remained in the employ of Supelco, a company which makes environmental testing chemicals for the science of chromatography, until he decided



With the help of his computer, Dick Croyle, owner of Biometrics, says he can have forage and soil test reports in the mail to farmers within 72 hours from receiving the samples.

to embark on his own business venture.

Since he opened his front door last December, Croyle claims business has been good — he's done several hundred tests so far, and it's the off season for soil and forage testing.

In his testing lab, Croyle says he sticks to the basic analysis and hasn't gotten into any exotic testing yet.

His forage program tests hay, silage, haylage, total mix rations, and even manures for recycling, giving a complete analysis for percent moisture, dry matter, crude protein, digestible protein, acid detergent fiber, crude fiber, T.D.N., calcium, phosphorus, potassium, magnesium, estimated net energy, and trace elements. The cost of this total test is \$16.

Croyle emphasizes his testing service has a rapid turnaround time. "Within 72 hours after a sample is received, a report is in the mail," he says.

How can one man working alone provide such prompt, accurate service? Croyle walks over to a work bench where what appears to

be a portable typewriter and portable television are set up. Actually, this is a computer, Croyle explains. The program analysis of test data appears on the video screen within a thousandth of a second, and a printer sets the information in type in 70 seconds, the boasts.

Not forgetting his soil testing program, Croyle notes his test methods and reporting system parallel the Penn State test. He says the results are presented in histogram or graphic form so farmers can see the proportions of nitrogen, phosphorus, potassium they have. Recommendations for fertilizer and lime, using new SMP methodology, will be included, too.

Croyle stresses the importance of farmers giving the testing lab all the information they can on the field being tested, such as soil type, cropping history, and manure application.

"This preliminary information is important in order to get the total picture from the testing."

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In one of many lab procedures, the chemist adds detergent solution to forage samples to determine fiber analysis. The solution will be placed on a hot plate and "digested." Croyle

receives the forage and soil samples through the mail. He says three-handful samples can be sealed in plastic bags and enclosed in a manila envelope for mailing into the lab.



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