

Berks dairyman

(Continued from Page D10)
is serving as director for the District, in his second four-year term.

Conservation practices can be seen, not only on Duncan's home farm, but also on the six farms he rents. Over the years, the fields have been stripped and contoured; and on areas where slopes are steep, diversions have been installed to prevent erosion.

Minimum tillage is Duncan's usual method of preparing the 550 acres of land he farms, with the help of two full-time farm hands and several part-timers, including son Donald, a student at Conrad Weiser High School. However, he confesses he keeps a moldboard around for some plowing.

"We disk with the field cultivator attached, and then we plant. It

looks rough, but there's little washing even during a heavy rain," he says firmly.

Duncan says he's tried no-till but "wasn't terribly pleased."

"I had a hard time killing the alfalfa with Paraquat," he recalls, grinning. "Then I heard the company was recommending the herbicide to control weeds in alfalfa. Needless to say, I had a beautiful stand of alfalfa."

The conservation farmer admits he had more success when he attempted no-tilling into wheat stubble or rye.

Whether no-till will be a part of the Duncan operation on a bigger scale in the future will depend on the cost of equipment and sprays.

"No-till definitely saves on labor," he states, "but I question the costs — you have to use a lot

more sprays. And with no-till you have more trouble with fungus, insects, and runoff. With that sod cover, the rain can't soak in."

Duncan was not spared the effects of last summer's drought, and his short corn supply prompted him to try to play the odds with the weather. On April 16, Duncan planted his first corn of the year, a short-season variety that he hopes will be ready by August when his last year's corn supply will run out.

"By planting for an August harvest, I'm hoping the corn will get the advantage of the rains before the weather is dry and hot — and I'm spreading my corn harvest over a number of months," he explains.

Along with the 250 acres of corn that he harvests for silage and high moisture grain, Duncan raises 100 acres of alfalfa, oats, and wheat. Most of his crops are used to feed his cattle, however he markets

some corn whenever the harvest permits.

Duncan feeds a total mix ration to his milking string — divided into two production-level groups and fed accordingly.

In a network of silos, conveyor belts, and mixing bin, Duncan makes his own precise mix that's high in energy and protein. Silage, haylage, corn, and soybeans are weighed and measured, with premix and buffers added. The feeding operation is almost totally automated — another labor saving feature.

The cows that make up his high-production group are given special treatment in the Duncan free stall barn. Each one of the cows wears a magnet that triggers an automatic feeder which allows the cow to eat as much as she wants. However,

Duncan notes, they don't seem to be eating a significant amount more than before the automatic feeder was installed. Again, he credits the new feeder with saving labor.

Duncan is a strong advocate of home-mixing, stating, "It's the biggest change needed for dairy farmers to stay in business. They've got to use their home-grown grains in the feeding program, and most certainly their forages."

The straight-through parlor Duncan added in 1977 (one of the first of its kind) has cut the time he and others have to spend milking. Ten cows, five on each side, enter the parlor, are washed and dried with individual terry cloth towels, and are hooked up to the low-line.

(Turn to Page D12)

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