

Stewardship means sacrifice for Lebanon farmer, minister

BY SHEILA MILLER

FONTANNA — "In the beginning when God created man, He also established a divine principle — that of being a good steward, not only of money and life, but also of the soil. After creating man, He placed him in the garden for a purpose," remarks Abe Hoover, a farmer and Mennonite minister.

After 26 years of milking cows, first in Lancaster County and then in Lebanon, and tilling the land as a tenant and finally an owner, the

soils if not properly taken care of and left go without any planning and purpose."

Hoover's beliefs are not merely Sunday discussions, forgotten during the week. Throughout his farming career, he has practiced what he preaches.

As he leans back against his chair, Hoover beams as he states he has 10 grandchildren to plan a future for in farming. "I'm responsible for taking care of the

moves across his memory, Hoover says, "That first year on our new farm gave me the conviction to take care of the soil regardless of what I was taught."

Conjuring up a picture of the past, Hoover describes what he saw happening to his new farm after the first hard rain.

"When I looked out at our five acre meadow, I saw it was completely under water. All the water was coming down out of the fields which were farmed with the rows running up and down the hills. I saw my ground going down stream.

"I knew then we needed to change — and I was ready to change," he recalls.

That year, Hoover signed up with the Lebanon County Conservation District for help in planning the 75-acre farm, plus an additional 42-acre farm he had just purchased. Over a two-year time span, the "up-and-down-the-hill" farming was erased from the cropland fields on the farms. In its

place were contour strips, two grassed waterways, and two diversions.

"That work stopped the flooding problem," Hoover claims.

Over the years, the dairy

some of the farmland when the waterways were installed — and there was more hayland with contour strips. But then you don't get something for nothing.

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"We have the inconvenience of working fields with curves. If we had put those fields all in corn, we would have had more return from the farm over five years. But you don't look at your pocketbook."

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Reverend Hoover reflects on his experiences in stewardship and his convictions to soil conservation.

Citing the scripture, Hoover says, "The Lord God took man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. Genesis 2:15"

Adding his personal sentiments, he states, "I believe this commandment is valid for 1981. We have the privilege and duty to preserve our soils for the following generations.

"To be a good steward of the soil calls for some planning and sacrifice. It is important to know what is really happening to our

land for them," he says.

Since he began to farm near Ephrata in the 1950s, Hoover recalls, conservation has been important to him.

"I always felt it was more important to be stewards than to domineer the markets. As a tenant farmer in Lancaster, I recognized the importance of cover cropping with rye grass as a soil builder and retainer even when the landlord didn't see it," he remembers.

After ten years of leasing, Hoover and family purchased their own farm in Lebanon County and moved there in 1964.

As a vivid scene from the past

operation grew along with the amount of land farmed by Hoover and sons. Even on the rented ground, soil stewardship was practiced despite the sacrifice it required.

"We worked with our landlords, and most times the conservation idea was of mutual interest.

"Of course, we had to sacrifice

working fields with curves. If we had put those fields all in corn, we would have had more return from the farm over five years. But you don't look at your pocketbook.

"When you work with landlords and sell them on conservation, they'll also benefit — they'll have the scenery, the landscape, and a better outlook."

Along with the permanent conservation practices installed on the crop fields, Hoover explains his family believes in the benefits of no-till and minimum tillage in preparing the 400 acres of corn ground they farm.

Where they remove the corn for silage, he says they generally sow a winter cover crop; on the 250 corn acres that are picked and shelled, the stalks are chopped and used for bedding or blown on the

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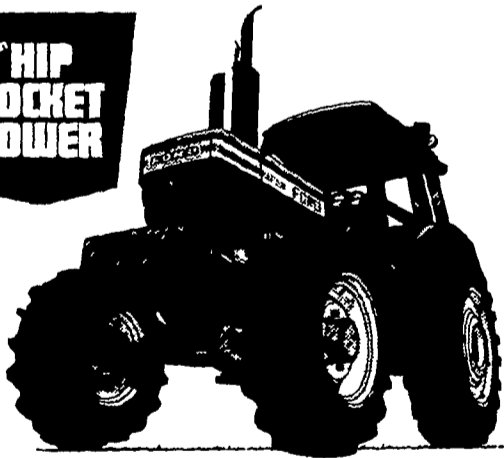
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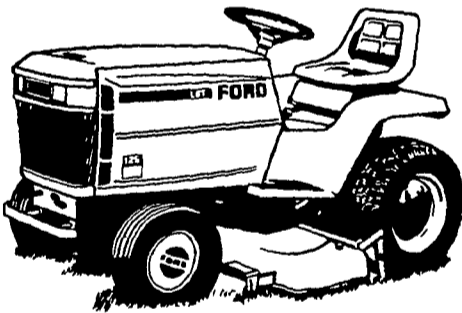
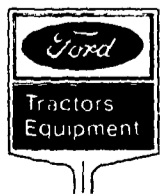
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