

It takes a continuing conservation commitment

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN
MANHEIM — Seated at the kitchen table of the stately, brick farmhouse at R2 Manheim, Albert Breneman has a panoramic view of the surrounding countryside.

Off to the right, traffic scoots along Rt. 283, some slowing to exit off the Mt. Joy-Manheim ramp.

Off to the left, farm fields, still brown and awaiting the true arrival of spring, stretch nearly to the horizon.

It's a great view. But that elevated pastoral perch, that falls away to sloping fields that once again will be checkered with alternate strips of corn and alfalfa, requires a continuing commitment of man and machine to modern soil conservation practices.

And it's for such a conservation commitment, that extends back over the past decade or more and will continue on into the future, that Breneman and his wife, Mary Jane, were honored this week by the Lancaster Conservation District.

Pointing out the window, Breneman recalls.

"The low area down below used to be a pasture. I can remember chasing cows down there everyday as a kid."

Now, the lower section of the large field contributes its fair share of corn to the feed ration for the Breneman Holstein herd.

"We always had a problem with washing," he continued.

"I can remember one time that it was so bad after a hard rain that I got a bulldozer to haul some of the ground back up to the higher ground."

"But that got pretty expensive quickly."

"It was nothing to have gullies about a foot — plow depth — deep washed out by the running water."

Today, instead of gullies and rushing torrents of surface water every now and then, a network of waterways, sod diversion terrace and six crop terraces are laced across the sloping, 40-acre hillside.

The approximate two-mile



This sloping hillside field features sod diversion terrace, in foreground, and a series of crop terraces on the Albert Breneman farm, R2 Manheim, shown in background.

terracing-system, not only saves the life-blood topsoil of the farm,

but substantially improves the cropping practices and productivity of the face-lifted land.

The system, that includes a pipe drain area in the final terrace, had to be tied into an old tile and stone drain section — remnant of conservation efforts of the past.

"We found the old tile line and stone drains when the new pipe drain was installed," Breneman explained.

"With some 40 acres on that slope, a lot of water runs off that large an area."

"Now, there's very little erosion and the crop population is much better."

"Before, the grades would wash out and the bottom would fill in."

Breneman also updated the farm's manure management practices in keeping with the modernized soil conservation program.

"We also had a problem in the past with manure runoff," he said.

"We used to spread daily and utilized a liquid tank. But, it had to be hauled every 30 days, too."

"Once, I remember we had to haul on top of the snow."

"Well, it turned warm and the manure started to move out of the field."

The present manure management system features a Slurrystore, which permits spreading only every six months.

The Breneman commitment to conservation is not ending with the terrace and waterway system on the main home farm with its 75-cow milking herd.

A second farm, located about a mile or so away, was recently acquired for young stock. It has slopes even greater than the home farm.

Specific planning will begin soon on a conservation program that will likely include about eight terraces in three different fields.

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Albert Breneman, R2 Manheim, pauses amidst morning chores involving Holstein herd on family farm near the Mount Joy-Manheim exit off Rt. 283.

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