

Hoffman's aerial show is Montgomery County's first

BY DONNA TOMMELLEO
PENNSBURG — Fact: Contour tillage can reduce soil losses by 50 percent.
Fact: Contour stripping can reduce soil losses by 75 percent.
Fact: Three to four tons of corn or sorghum residue or two tons of small grain residue will reduce soil erosion up to 95 percent.
These and more conservation guidelines for land with a three to eight percent slope are included in a research paper written by Joseph Turelle, former Chief Agronomist with the Soil Conservation Service.

It is also a well-known fact (at least to inhabitants of Montgomery County) that farmland in Montgomery County is dwindling due to urban pressure. A current land survey reveals that only 40 percent

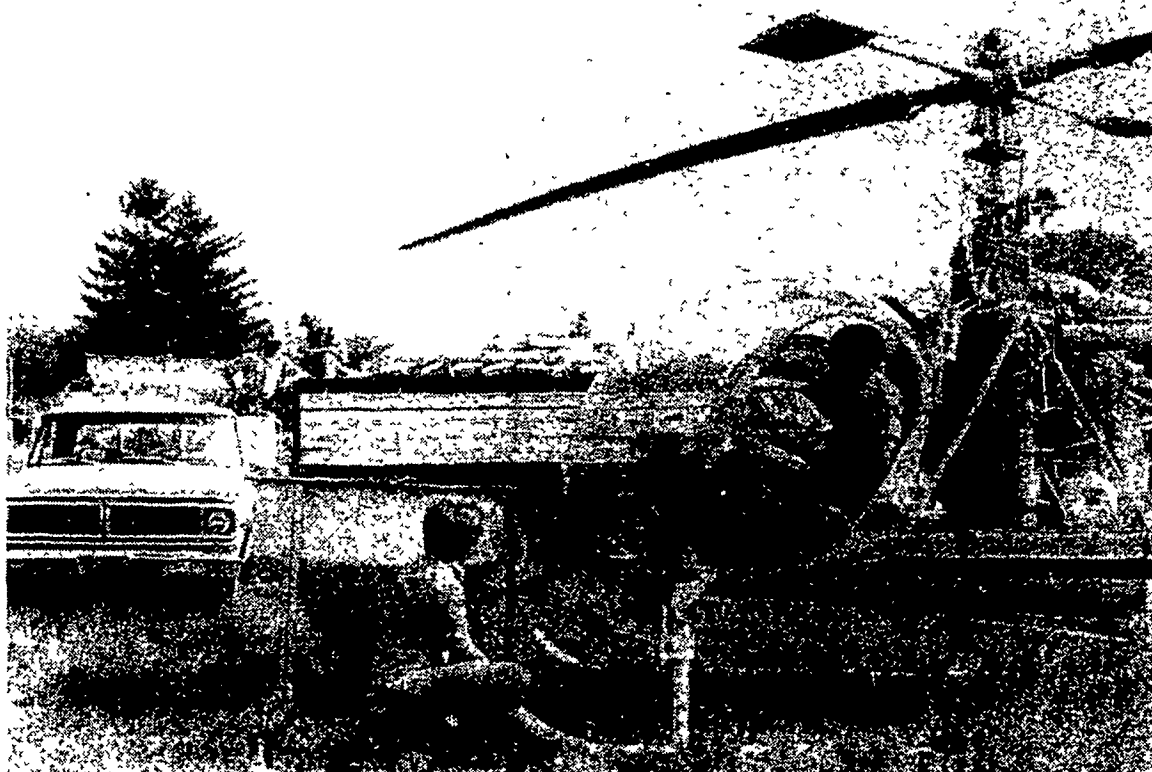
of the county's land is used for agriculture.

"We don't have that much land that we can lose," understated Wilson Hoffman, a Montgomery County grain and livestock farmer.

"Wilson uses his resources wisely. He makes his decisions based on the best available information," said Steve Hill, Montgomery County soil conservationist, who was on hand to witness the first aerial seeding of a small grain in the county.

Hoffman recently elected to seed about 125 acres of rye over a standing corn crop, which is no small item when the corn plants average 8 to 10 feet high.

"In a standing crop, it's hard to plant a cover crop," Hill explained. "But with a helicopter, a farmer can oversee a fast-



Wilson Hoffman and son Steve, background left, wait with their truckload of rye seed while pilot Victor Gray, in helicopter, and an Ag-Rotor technician make a few adjustments on the whirly-bird's seed spreader before take-off.



Gray pilots the helicopter skyward with a bucket of rye seed in tow. The pilot was able to seed four acres per trip.

growing winter grass, which can come on in the fall and be there in the critical erosion period."

Next spring, Hoffman's field will hold an estimated three to four tons of rye and corn stubble residue to battle soil erosion, retain moisture and maximize effects of pesticides and herbicides.

"After a rainstorm of less than one inch, there is almost zero percent run-off in a no-till system with a cover crop," Hill noted.

Hoffman, a staunch supporter of conservation practices, including no-till, joined forces with ASCS to cost-share about 50 percent the expense of seeding his fields.

"It wouldn't be a bad idea to seed everything, but I'm just going to do it to the ground I feel needs it the most," Hoffman said.

A helicopter, pilot and technicians, provided by Ag-Rotors, Inc., from Adams County, arrived on Monday and met Hoffman and his son Steve, 20, at a local airport-combination-golf course. It almost seemed ironic that the very spot Hoffman joined the aerial group that was going to help him conserve his precious



The chopper, which can hold up to 1,200 pounds returns for another load. The helicopter crew, according to pilot Gray, has traveled the entire northeastern coast to spray for gypsy moths, apply fertilizers and carry out cover crop seedings.



Pilot Victor Gray has a bird's eye view of the Montgomery County farmland, as he furnishes farmer Wilson Hoffman's fields with a much needed rye cover crop.

farmland was once a dairy farm. but it does save time," said Hoffman.

Hoffman and his conservation-cortege next proceeded to a 40-acre field outside Pennsburg. Helicopter pilot Victor Gray maintained a seeding rate of two bushels per acre or approximately 20 acres per hour.

The land Hoffman designated for seeding is owned by the Philadelphia Suburban Water Company and is 125 of 600 acres Hoffman leases. The majority of the land seeded rests near the county's Green Lane Reservoir. The entire corn crop, when combined in a couple weeks, is a result of no-till planting.

"Cost-wise, no-till isn't any cheaper than conventional tillage

His 40-acre soybean crop has also benefitted from no-tillage.

"For the last two years the yield has been better. A lot of times, we'll double crop with wheat or barley so as not to disturb the moisture," he added.

The Montgomery County farmer has been working the land for the last 24 years. Raised on a dairy farm, Hoffman opted for a grain and livestock operation.

Up until last year he fed between 1,000 and 1,200 steers a year. But due to the "economics of steer prices," Hoffman said, he swit-

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