

Delaware & Maryland lead in no-till

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Maryland and Delaware may trail most states when it comes to the number and size of its farms. But when it comes to adopting innovative conservation tillage practices, it's near the top.

According to a new survey released by the Conservation Tillage Center, Maryland is second only to Delaware in the percentage of cropland acres using no-till and other conservation tillage practices.

In 1982, no-till was used on 28 percent of Maryland's cropland. Delaware had 31 percent; Kentucky, 27 percent; Virginia, 14 percent and Tennessee, 10 percent.

Conservation tillage, which includes no-till as well as practices

that allow some soil disturbance, was used on 69 percent of Maryland's cropland. Delaware had 79 percent; Tennessee, 55 percent; Iowa, 53 percent and Kentucky, 50 percent.

Figures for the survey were provided by U.S. Soil Conservation Service, Extension Service and state soil conservation agency offices.

Whitey Secor, SCS resource conservationist, attributes the success of no-till and conservation tillage in the Maryland-Delaware area to a number of factors. "Soils are one reason," Secor says. "The light, sandy soils on the Delmarva Peninsula and well-drained, silt loams on the western shore are particularly suited to no-till. Also,

we have progressive farmers, who when faced with an economic crunch, are willing to try new techniques.

While fuel savings, moisture conservation and increased production resulting from double-cropping were the primary motivating factors for most farmers, Secor predicts that soil conservation will become a more important decision factor in the future.

"There's mounting concern about the effect of agricultural pollutants, especially sediment and nutrients, on water quality in the Chesapeake Bay," Secor says. "One of the recommendations of the Environmental Protection Agency's \$27 million bay study is more use of no-till by farmers in the bay's drainage basin. Farmers are going to be under more pressure by environmentalists to reduce erosion and sediment

pollution. Conservation tillage is one of the fastest ways to do it."

The effect of erosion on production is also becoming of growing concern, he added. "It's not uncommon to see fields where the topsoil has been either washed or blown away completely. It costs the farmer more to grow a crop on subsoil than on good, fertile topsoil."

While no-till and conservation tillage can reduce erosion significantly, they shouldn't be viewed as a panacea, Secor warns. "Farmers who are using no-till alone on steep slopes may find that gullies are still forming. Other conservation practices such as contouring, strip-cropping, waterways and diversions may be needed in combination with no-till to control runoff and erosion."

Farmers who have land idled

under the payment-in-kind (PIK) program have a golden opportunity to put in needed conservation practices this summer without affecting production, says Secor, especially in Maryland with the state's new cost share program.

"Farmers should check their fields and see where their problems are," says Secor. "The heavy rains we've been getting have caused a lot of erosion. Some of that is hidden now by tall crops and weeds. But they'll find it if they walk over the fields."

Farmers with erosion problems should contact their local soil conservation district for technical and financial help in erosion control and in planning conservation tillage systems, Secor added.

Flavor of lamb chops tested

CLAY CENTER, Neb. — The taste of chops from ram lambs fed a diet with alfalfa differed from the taste of chops from ram lambs fed a diet with soybean meal as the major protein source.

Determining which chops tasted best would be a matter of personal preference, says food technologist John D. Crouse of USDA's Agricultural Research Service. A taste panel consensus: Chops from ram lambs on the soybean diet had more of a musty flavor and more aftertaste but these tastes were less intense in chops from rams that had been on the diet longest.

Crouse and his colleagues at the Roman L. Hruska U.S. Meat Animal Research Center here wanted to know the influence that diet, breed, sex and slaughter weight might have on carcass characteristics and flavor of broiled lamb chops.

"Our taste panel assessed the intensities of 11 flavor characteristics rather than the degree to which panelists liked or disliked flavors," said Crouse. "A strong flavor may be desirable to one person and objectionable to another."

In an earlier study Crouse and his colleagues found that only about one time in four did taste panelists favor strong flavors over mild flavors.

The latest study was conducted to help assess the consequences of increased lamb availability and reduced consumer costs that are likely to accompany sheep industry advances in genetics,

feeding and management practices.

One likely advance, Crouse says, is an expanding number of sheep with genetic potential to reach heavier market weights than most of today's sheep without a decrease in efficiency with which they utilize feeds.

Ram lambs fed out to slaughter weights of about 151 pounds produced meat with more intense gamey and sweet flavors but less intense muttony and musty flavors than did rams slaughtered at about 110 pounds. Ewe lamb chops, however, increased in muttony and musty flavor with time on feed.

In ram lamb chops derived from the soybean diet, the taste panelists detected greater ammonia, muttony and musty flavors than they did from ewes fed the same diet.

Whether lambs were sired by rams of the Suffolk or Columbia breeds included in the study made no appreciable difference in flavor characteristics of the meat.

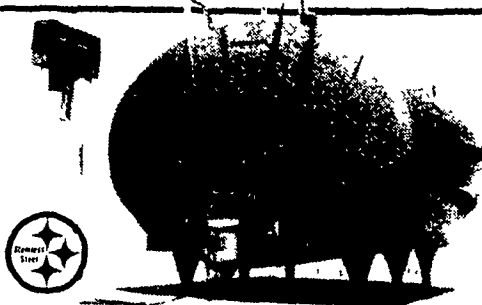
The scientists found that carcasses of Suffolk-sired lambs weighed more and had higher USDA quality grades than carcasses of Columbia-sired lambs but they showed greater secondary sex characteristics and had lower predicted yields of retail cuts.

Lambs fed alfalfa weighed more than lambs fed soybean meal. The alfalfa-fed lambs also had higher quality and yield grades, leg conformation scores, fat thickness and percentage kidney and pelvic fat.

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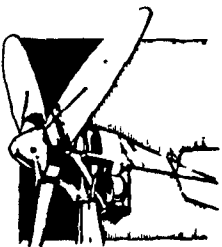
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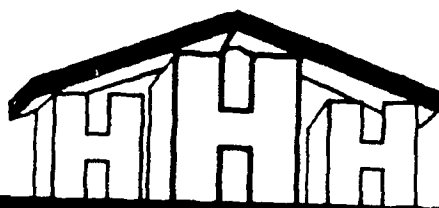
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