

Too much fertilizer is message at Crops Day

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN

LANCASTER — Many farmers are using too much fertilizer, particularly in areas of high livestock concentrations like Lancaster County.

This message came out loud and clear from Penn State Extension agronomists at the Lancaster County Crops and Soils Day program at the Farm and Home Center on Tuesday.

Perhaps Joe McGahen, Extension agronomist who spoke on corn production, said it in its most

simple and straight-forward terms.

More corn yields these days are being hurt by high fertility than low fertility," McGahen said.

"Use soil tests and don't blindly follow the standard recommendations for certain desired yields.

"Soil tests can just as well tell us when not to fertilize as when we should fertilize."

McGahen explained that farmers' number one challenge in the next five years will be to learn how

IUM FARM SEED



Five-Acre Corn Club participants in Lancaster County include, from the left, Harold L. Brubaker, Strasburg, Luke Brubaker, Mt. Joy; Karl M. Hess, R6 Lancaster; Dennis Eby, R1 Gap; and H. Grant Troop, R3 Quarryville.



Pa. Alfalfa Growers Program participants from Lancaster County are Don Hershey, left, and Nelson Wenger, both of the Manheim area.

to manage manure properly as a natural resource to grow crops.

We're going to have to learn how to keep this manure on the land and not having it flowing down some stream."

The proper management of manure and the addition of commercial fertilizer only when soil tests call for it was cited by McGahen as the chief way in which farmers can make their corn growing more efficient since fertilizer accounts for the biggest single input.

Another area of high input is machinery. The Pennsylvania Five-Acre Corn Club program has found that most participating farmers are over-invested in machinery.

McGahen showed examples

from farms where NPK values in the soils were already much higher than needed for maximum corn yields. He cited one farm where a soil test showed 1150 lbs. of phosphorus.

Such high rates can tie up various micro-nutrients and work against achieving high yields, he explained.

McGahen also explained some visual means of checking corn to determine when it is at its peak of maturity for harvesting.

He suggested following the milk line on the kernel — the dividing line between the white and the yellow coloring. The milk line starts in the dent stage and moves from the crown of the kernel to the tip. When it reaches the tip, the white disappears completely and a

black layer forms and it is the time of maximum yields.

When the milk line is about at the halfway point on the kernel, the moisture is at about 40 percent and it will take about three more weeks to reach full maturity and about 25 percent moisture. But at the half-milk-line stage, some 90 percent of dry matter weight is already in the grain.

Elwood Hatley also covered proper fertilization rates in his discussion of small grains and ways to improve — particularly wheat and barley yields through better management.

Studies with wheat in Lancaster County have shown that nitrogen fertilization rates are often too high. On farms where chicken

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