

They got bedding and saved soil, too

WEST CHESTER — Where's the cover crop?

Directors of the Chester County Conservation District have been suggesting that farmers ask themselves this question. It is well accepted that a winter cover crop such as rye or barley holds top soil in place. Corn stalks, left on the ground through the winter, helps cut down on top-soil movement from the top of the slope to the bottom. Yet, some farmers mow and bale corn stalks for bedding.

Willis Hocking and his three sons, Bob, Dave and John, of Landenberg, faced that problem last fall. With nearly 270 head of

cattle, it takes a lot of bedding. And bedding was in short supply. A dry summer had cut down on the straw yield from wheat and barley crops. Old hay or spoiled hay was also in short supply.

The Hockings didn't want to lose the top soil, humus and any left-over fertilizer by having it wash away. They had rented land from Morris Matson, Lincoln University. He didn't want to lose his valuable capital asset, the top soil from his property.

What to do? The Hockings' answer was to rake and bale the leaves and husks. They did not mow the

stubble. The standing stalks and other trash was left for ground protection.

'And, it worked. "Very little, if any erosion and movement of top soil took place. We harvested nearly a ton to the acre of badly needed bedding material," Willis said. They were careful to stay off the steep slopes where top soil movement could be more of a problem.

They run soil tests every two or three years, depending on previous conditions and intended crop. They like as high a level of organic material as possible.

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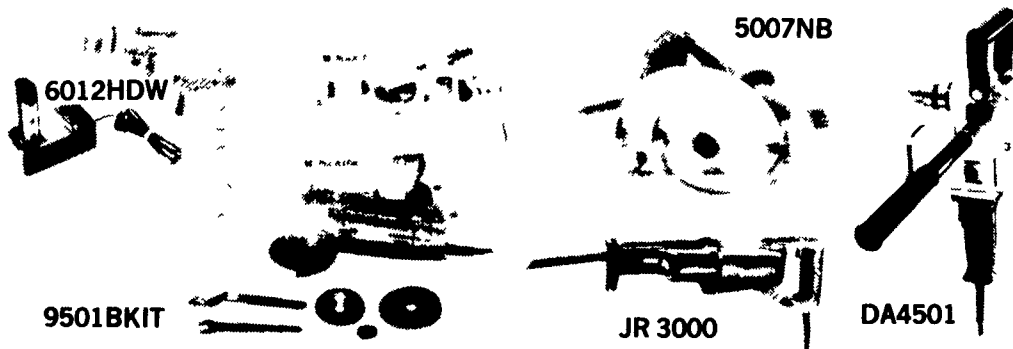


Morris Matson, of Chester County, finds little soil movement on corn fields on his land. Stubble held the top soil in place, while leaves and husks were harvested for bedding last fall.

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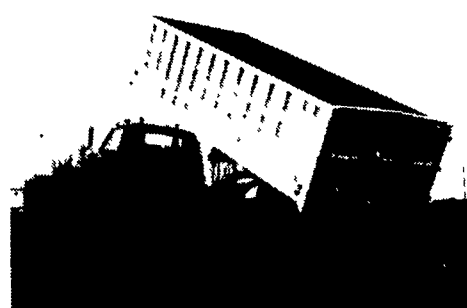
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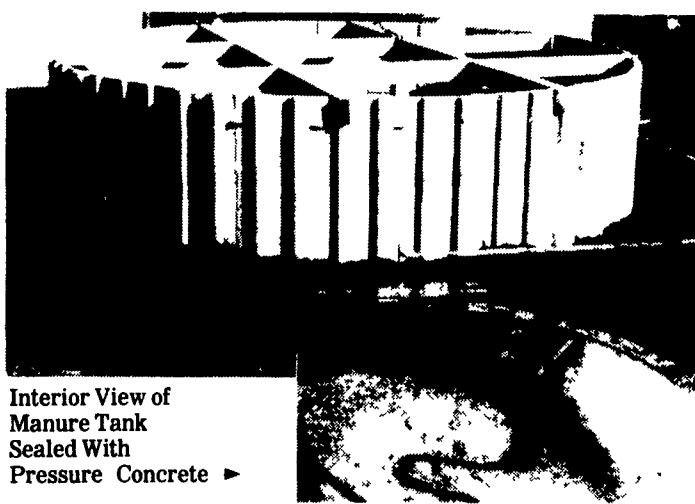
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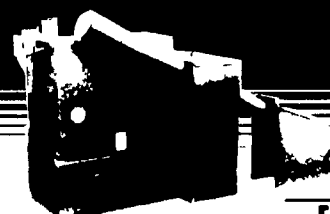
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