

# Timonium hosts 12th Mid-Atlantic No-Till Conference

BY JACK HUBLEY

TIMONIUM, Md. — In the midst of a floundering farm economy, Farm Journal's staff economist, John Marten, delivered an upbeat address at the Mid-Atlantic No-Till Conference in Timonium on Wednesday.

Marten named five economic indicators that bode well for agriculture during the coming year. "The massive economic trends that have battered agriculture for the last five years are shifting," he said, pointing out that downward trends in farm production costs, interest rates, the dollar, the deficit and inflation should provide some light at the end of what has become a dark rural American tunnel. "This is the first time this has been true in 10 years or longer," he said.

Turning to Farm Bill '85, which has received the blessing of both the House and the Senate this week, Marten labelled the bill a "handle with no bucket." "It's not a bill that's going to bale us out," he said.

If signed by the President, the bill contains a dairy title that would maintain the milk support price at \$11.60 through 1986. This price would include a 40-cent

assessment to finance a whole-herd buy-out program. The support price would drop to \$11.35 in 1987, and again to \$11.10 on Oct. 1, of the same year. The buy-out assessment would likewise be dropped to 25 cents for 1987.

Farmers interested in liquidating their dairy herds would submit a bid to the government. The Secretary of Agriculture would reserve the right to determine if participating farmers would be prohibited from being in the dairy production business for a period of three, four or five years. No more than seven percent of the nation's dairy herd could be culled in any one year, and USDA would be required to buy a predetermined amount of red meat to minimize the program's impact on the beef cattle industry.

Will the buy-out program be effective? Yes, said the economist, labeling it a "golden parachute" program for farmers close to retirement and those in serious financial difficulties.

Marten predicted a three to five-percent increase in general cattle slaughter due to the buy-out program, cautioning beef producers that the buy-out, along with cheap grain and a swine in-

dustry "in reasonable shape" would combine to dampen beef prices.

On the subject of grain, Marten noted that prices for all the major grains are currently being maintained at artificially high levels by government loan programs. "If I were you, I'd start selling some of my corn away," Marten advised growers. With the new wheat loan rate set at \$2.70 a bushel or less, those storing wheat would do well to get rid of it, he said.

Marten's address capped a morning of presentations by university and government specialists who discussed manure management, weed and insect control with respect to no-till systems.

Unlike phosphorous and potash, nitrogen is a much more difficult nutrient to manage, said Cornell University's Stuart Klausner. Nitrogen is available on a 50-50 basis from both urine and manure solids, Klausner said.

But while the organic nitrogen present in manure is relatively stable, the ammonia nitrogen present in urine is far more volatile. Studies show that 90 percent of the ammonia nitrogen



Farm Journal's John Marten points out reasons to be optimistic about farming's future.

applied to soil and not incorporated, dissipates within two weeks, he said.

Penn State's Douglas Beegle underscored the importance of quick manure incorporation when utilizing the nitrogen present in urea by stating that up to a dollar's-worth of nitrogen per ton of manure will be lost by allowing the manure to remain on the soil's surface for more than a week.

"Injection is probably, agronomically, the right way to go (to preserve nitrogen)," said Beegle, "but it's tough to justify economically. It takes an awful lot of time to get out there and inject that manure."

Beegle said that choosing between no-till's soil savings and conventional tillage's nitrogen savings can be a difficult decision for the farmer. One compromise, he pointed out, would be to go with some type of reduced tillage using a chisel plow or heavy disk.

Pat Lietman, of the U.S. Geological Survey, discussed the manure problem with respect to ground water quality. Lietman, who is currently monitoring water quality in Lancaster County's Conestoga River basin, noted that

45 percent of the rural area within her Conestoga Rural Clean Water Project area contained ground water with nitrate levels in excess of drinking water standards. By contrast, excess nitrate levels were found in only 18 percent of the ground water in nonagricultural areas.

Following Lietman were Scott Hagood of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and Lee Hellman of the University of Maryland. Hagood looked at weed control in corn and soybeans, while Hellman discussed trends in insecticides for the next decade.

The conference's afternoon session included a "Quiz the Experts" panel moderated by Penn State agronomist Lynn Hoffman.



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