

Corn Conference speakers offer growers survival tips

BY SUZANNE KEENE

UNIVERSITY PARK — Like all farmers, Pennsylvania corn growers face an uncertain future clouded by Gramm-Rudman budget cuts. But some farmers will be survivors of these troubled economic times.

"There are men and women out there who are on a sound financial base, and they are going to survive," said Ken Rice, chairman of the first Pennsylvania Corn Conference held at Penn State University Tuesday.

To help Pennsylvania corn growers be among agriculture's survivors, the corn conference planners scheduled a day full of speakers who offered advice on topics ranging from improved production techniques to marketing alternatives.

Al Tank, assistant vice president of the National Corn Growers Association, provided an update on the Farm Bill for the 200 farmers attending the conference.

"I can't even tell you what the Farm Bill is going to be today," Tank said, but noted that grain farmers can expect further cuts in government programs.

Tank pointed out that 77 percent of all federal funding is exempt from the Gramm-Rudman cuts, while agriculture is 100 percent liable. Of the \$65 billion Gramm-Rudman cuts designated for 1987, 18 percent will be from agriculture programs, he said.

"It doesn't bode very well for implementing programs," he continued.

"Agriculture is just a heartbeat away from mandatory controls," Tank warned. But if the Farm Bill can be implemented successfully, these supply controls can be avoided, he predicted. "There is no medium ground here."

Extension ag economist Lou Moore brought the corn growers up to date on the general economy, noting that agriculture has not shared in the prosperity enjoyed in most other areas of the economy.

Moore offered the farmers the following suggestions for planning for 1986 — recognize that the squeeze isn't over and dig in to be survivors; don't take on debt, and assume a role in developing farm

programs. Survivors will also keep better records, improve efficiency and marketing knowledge, develop a business plan, and use government programs, he said.

William Waters, area farm management agent, urged growers to increase efficiency by using proper production techniques.

"We are approaching the point where those who don't use some of these production techniques will be left behind," he suggested.

A grower may survive for several years producing corn at a cost that exceeds the market price, but "in the long run, the producer must produce at or less than market price," Waters said.

For the most part, Waters continued, studies have shown that the more corn a farmer produces, the less his production cost per unit is. "We seem to be locked into a low market price," he said, noting that one way to survive is "to use the production techniques that allow us to get into those high yield rates."

In order to increase production, though, the grower must follow closely the recommendations of those who monitor the effects of different production variables. If even one variable — such as fertilizer or insect control — is off, production can be seriously reduced.

Among the efficiency techniques Waters suggested were: hybrid seed, plant establishment, weed and insect control, fertility, timeliness, and method.

A change to a reduced tillage system may also increase a farmer's efficiency by saving time and labor costs, Waters said. When selecting a tillage method, farmers should choose one that permits them to finish their work in the limited time allotted.

Studies have shown, Waters said, that a change from conventional to reduced tillage will decrease labor by one hour per acre, while a move to no-till cropping usually saves a farmer about an hour and a half per acre.

But, he cautioned, "Unless you pay strict attention, moving over to a minimum tillage program is no guarantee that you are going to

reduce the cost of production." However, he added, a no-till program usually reduces production costs.

When setting a reasonable yield goal, farmers should plan to fertilize only up to the level where they set the goal. Any more fertilizer would be a waste of resources and increase production costs.

But producer is only one of the farmer's many roles; he must be an effective marketer as well. One marketing alternative for corn is to feed it to dairy beef cattle. "The time is at hand to do something different," noted Darwin Braund, director of dairy and livestock research for Agway, Inc. "Dairy cattle deserve a serious look as a viable alternative."

"Dairy beef, wrapped up in black and white hide, represents the answer to the consumer's desire for low-calorie beef," Braund noted.

Chain store tests have shown that consumers prefer the taste of dairy beef. But, he continued, chain stores refuse to handle two lines of beef. They look for consistent product quantity and quality. If a producer can offer these, he should be able to market his product, Braund said.

"Without some effort and success in marketing, the profit capability is small," he warned, but quickly added that given a market, "It's a very, very profitable enterprise."

"Maybe it is time to set aside our conventional mentality and think about doing some things dif-

ferently," he concluded.

In addition to the educational program the Conference offered the Pennsylvania Master Corn Grower's Association an opportunity to honor their charter 10-year members. Those honored were:

Joe Stump, Ben Wineka, Harold Bock, John McGill, Herman Espy, Marlin G. Hege, Harold Lockhoff, Joseph S. Beard, Galen Dreibelbis, Doebler's Hybrids, Clarence Godfrey, Charles M. Andlar, Lester A. Colhoun, Geroge Rumbaugh, Bob Nearhoff, Jr., Stanford Seed Co., Walter C. Johnson, John W. Schwartz, Joseph Hartle Jr., Ernest Hollenbaugh, and Thomas H. Mikesell.

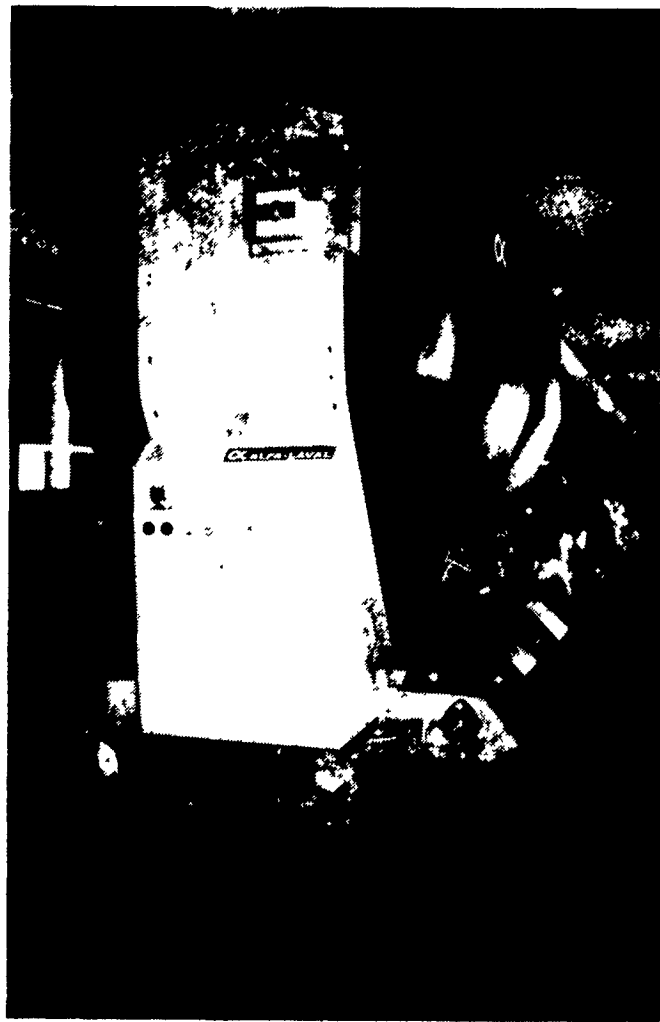
Other 10 year members are: Mark Kieffer and Son, Harry H. Stambaugh, Dr. Joseph McGahen, Lester E. Luckenbaugh, John W. Greene and Son, Harold and Steven Gross, Richard E. Luckenbaugh, Chris and Willard Kimmel, Codorus Fertilizer Service, Richard Burd, Todd Hybrids, Pioneer Hybrids, Hoffman Seeds, William C. Gerhart, Frank White, Druck Farms, Kenneth Rice, Ray A. Layser, John T. Smith, William Hoover, Wayne Harpster, Charles A. Hess, Donald E. Crouse and George E. Steele.

Conference sponsors were The Pennsylvania Master Corn Growers' Association, Allied Industries, and Penn State University.



Farm management agent William Waters was one of several speakers at the first Pennsylvania Corn Conference who offered corn growers ideas for surviving in tough economic times.

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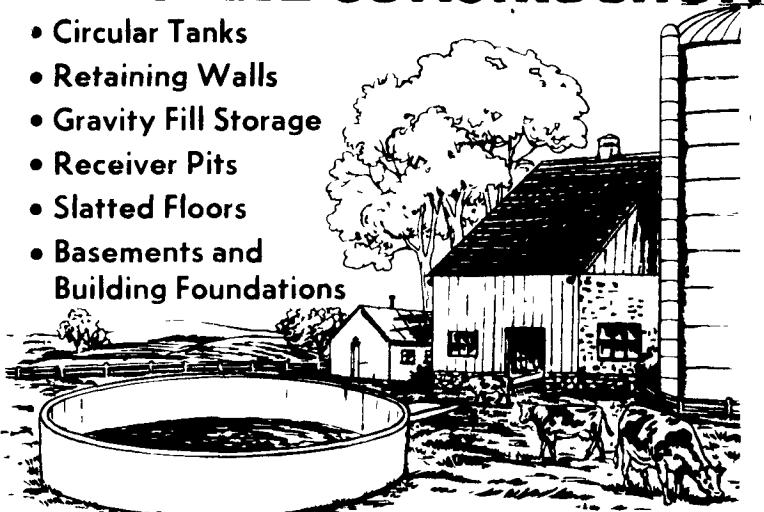
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