



The Dairy Business

By
Newton Bair

Soil program underway

The first round of bidding for entry into the Conservation Reserve Program is now past. We'll all be watching the papers for reports on how the program has been received, and for hints as to the level of bids that were ac-

ceptable. After all, that is the key to your decision on whether to participate or not.

There will be later opportunities to submit bids, and so give you more of a chance to assess the situation. I believe that everyone

should at least study the effect of a bid on your operation. Whether you are serious about it or not, it will be a good exercise in economics. And it might even open up a new vision of how you might help save some soil for future generations, at no cost to you.

Don't be fooled by the oversimplification of the rules. A per-acre bid based on rent that you are currently paying for land can be misleading. Much rental land in Southeastern Pennsylvania is actually overpriced for Agriculture. I find it hard to justify paying \$125 an acre for corn land, even for good limestone soil. Even \$45 for rolling, shaley or sandy soil is hard to justify at present grain prices.

To arrive at a fair and profitable price per acre for a Conservation bid, considerable pencil work is necessary. In the first place, Class II and III and IV Soil Capability Classes are our commonly farmed soils.

Any classes higher than these are not commonly farmed in this

area. They usually are too steep, rocky or thin to even plow up for farm crops. Anyone in his right mind wouldn't consider it in the first place.

But don't assume that those Class I, II, and III soils aren't going to qualify. Too much of what we consider our best farmland is washing down the Susquehanna at a furious rate.

Since those steep and stony soils are also eligible for the program, they should be considered first. They are not usually profitable to farm anyway, so even a very conservative bid for taking them out of production will benefit you and all mankind. Covering them with grass and trees will be a blessing for years to come.

What about those fairly level fields that have been farmed for many years? Or those rolling hills that used to produce 80 bushels of corn, when the mules could still jump over the gullies?

Have you noticed that the sod strip your father left stand in the bottom is now fifty feet wider than it was a few years back? Or maybe it has turned into two or more gullies, separated by the original strip.

In many of those fields that we consider fairly easy fields to farm, the soil is still moving down hill faster than you think. If it were not for tons of chemicals added each year, the present crops would be mighty poor.

Every farmer in Pennsylvania

should seriously consider putting at least some of their poorest land in the Conservation Reserve. If everyone would apply the simplest economics of profitability to these soils, they would invariably find that most grain crops could be purchased cheaper than they can be grown on such land. The savings in time and energy alone would make it worthwhile to put it in grass or trees for a long term.

So if you have missed the first deadline for sign up, you still have time to sharpen the pencil for a later signup. Here are some things to consider:

- Present per acre cost of growing a crop.
- Your net profit over direct costs.
- Total acreage considered for entry in Reserve.
- Added costs of establishing cover crops.
- Annual upkeep costs.
- Reduced machinery ownership costs.
- Savings in labor, seed, fertilizer, etc.

The total annual reduction in income divided by the number of acres involved will give the minimum bid per acre, to equate the Conservation Program with continued production. Use the worksheet provided by ASCS, or better yet, use a computer spreadsheet to figure your bid. Above all, don't guess, use accurate figures, and add a little margin for safety.

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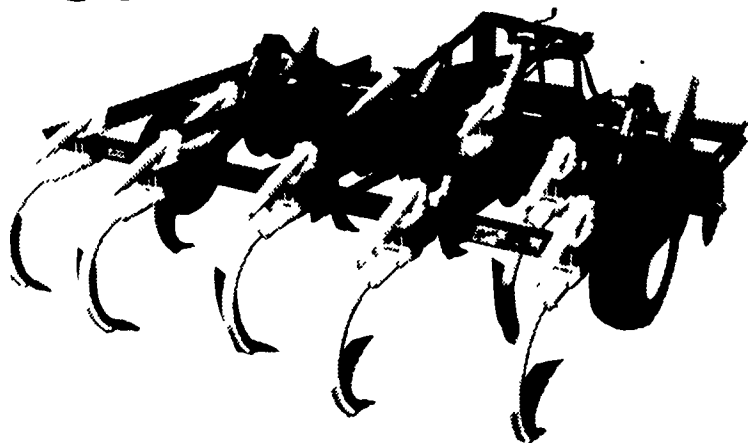
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Holstein breeders plan meeting

The Central Jersey Holstein Association will hold its annual dinner dance and meeting on Saturday, April 5, at the Ringoes Fire House. Social hour is set for 6:45 p.m. and dinner to follow at 7:15, report Bill & Natalie Teets, Clinton Township, co-chairmen for the event.

Dinner menu includes roast beef and roast ham served family style. Dancing to the music of Les Parson's Band has been arranged by the dinner-dance committee, and will continue to 12:30.

Brief items of business, including election of directors and a

report of the association president, Bernard Beatty, Bethlehem Township, will take place during the music intermissions.

"It will be a fun evening, with good food, music, and fellowship," says Mrs. Teets. All members and friends of the association are encouraged to attend. Tickets are \$16 each for dinner and dance. They are available from dinner committee members, directors, and in the Hunterdon County Cooperative Extension office, Extension Center, Flemington.

Ticket sale deadline is Wednesday, March 26.

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