

Carolina Jersey Breeder Tells About Drought

(Continued from Page A1)

Harris' 375 acre dairy farm is located in Iredale County, N.C., right in the heart of the worst drought to hit the south in a century.

The area has received almost 3" of rain in the past week and the ground is still soaking it up like a sponge. Local well drillers report a 5' drop in the underground water table. Local estimates are that it will take at least two years for those tables to be replenished.

With the rain the Harris' hay fields have grown a green mask. It is as if they are trying to cover the scars inflicted on them by the nine month drought and scorching temperatures that have been in the 90's since March. Gene hopes to get one more cutting of hay off before plowing some of the most badly damaged stands under.

Their hay fields which normally yield the Harris' up to 12,000 bales annually, have produced only 3,500 bales this year. Gene added that they also baled their small grains for hay when they failed to form any grains in the heads. Bill Harris is making trips through Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana, and Ohio to try to procure the 5,000 bales of hay the brothers are sure they'll need to buy to hold them through till next spring.

In an effort to grow more forages, the Harris' recently seeded 24 acres with sorghum and sudan grass. Gene relates that such seedings in August are unheard of in this part of the country, but they're hoping with the new moisture in the ground, they may still get two cuttings off this before frost. By feeding this and wet brewers grain, the Harris' hope to extend their silage stores.

The Harris' have two trench silos which each hold 6,700 tons of silage. One has about a 6-8 week supply of old silage still in it. The others contain their entire corn crop, which yielded 5 tons to the

acre. This trench is about 90 percent full. The new silage can't be feed for 6-8 weeks because of its high nitrate content caused by the dry weather.

Gene stresses that the drought has caused several management problems for them, radical changes in some people's feed programs, and even erratic growing patterns for even the trees. The Harris' fear that their herd may suffer reproductive problems for the next 12-24 months, so they are pushing extra minerals to the cows and balancing their rations more often.

Local farmers are feeding anything they can put through a baler. Gene reports that some farmers cut their 2" corn with a haybine and baled it into large round bales to feed like hay. The local auction which normally markets 1,500 of cattle a week is now selling 3,500-4,200 weekly. Gene's wife Barbara relates that she didn't harvest enough green beans from their large garden for even one meal. The trees have already begun to drop their leaves.

With the need so apparently great, how do the Harris' feel about the efforts of farmers elsewhere to donate and deliver hay to the south?

Stated Gene, "We're really appreciative of the generosity of other farmers to do this, but this thing has become a political

ballgame with each governor and agriculture secretary trying to get the most publicity. Where will these people be after election day?"

"Iredale County has more dairy farms and beef farms than any other county in North Carolina and we haven't seen a bale of free hay yet. Besides, the restrictions say you can't have more than a 25 day

supply of feed stored on your farm to qualify for any of this hay. If you have a dairy and not more feed than that, what good is 50 bales of hay going to do you?"

"The ones we've seen getting this hay should be left fall by the wayside. I know that sounds cruel, but you could feed them for 2-3 years and they still couldn't make it. They're just not good managers.

The other people getting this hay are people with off the farm jobs who have made no effort to plan for winter feeding."

"If people want to donate fine, but they should have some idea of where it is going. It might be best to earmark donated money for transportation costs. What I'd like to see done is to have each farm's needs analyzed. If you're

(Turn to Page A25)



North Carolina dairyman Gene Harris views his 130 head Jersey milking string. Due to poor conception in the heat, the Harris' run a bull with the herd from June to September. They fear the reproduction of their herd may be damaged from the long drought.

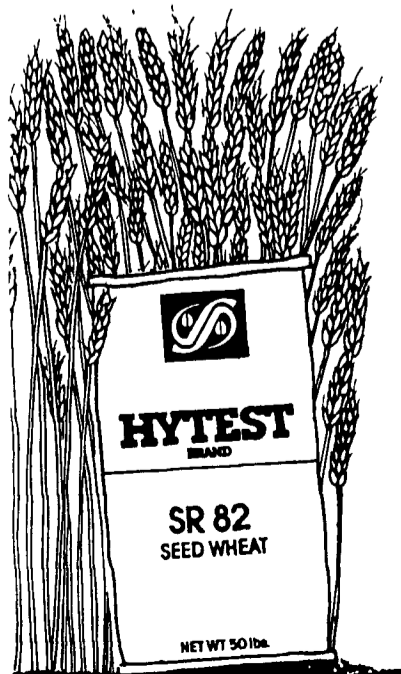
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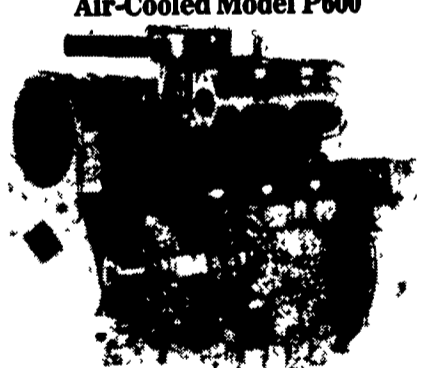
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