

Va. Corn Growers Field Day Highlights Marketing Options

BY JULIE GOCHENOUR
Virginia Correspondent

BEALETON, Va. — Nearly 600 farmers turned out for the Virginia Corn Growers Association's field day at Wilbur Ritchie's Inglewood Farm near Bealeton, Virginia, last Friday. In addition to viewing dozens of test plots and more than 40 exhibits, the corn producers toured a nearby ethanol plant and heard reports from both the National Corn Growers Association and the U.S. Feed Grains Council.

Morning activities during the field day included horse and wagon rides to outlying test plots on the 1800-acre Fauquier County farm, as well as a soil compaction demonstration by VPI's Extension agronomist, Dr. George Hawkins. Farmers also had the opportunity to study the Ritchie operation, meet visiting Trade Teams from Taiwan, North Korea and the Republic of China and to visit the exhibitors show.

Many producers were particularly interested in the ethanol facility, Virginia Solid Fuels. According to Bill Kovarik, with the Virginia Ethanol Fuels Association, Virginia ethanol producers will use four million bushels of corn this year and a projected eight million bushels in 1987. Nationwide, he said, ethanol producers added ten cents per bushel to 1985 corn prices. Yet "agriculture in the energy business" as Kovarik calls ethanol production, is politically controversial and he urged corn producers to support and promote the use of ethanol.

At nearby Virginia Solid Fuels, plant manager Frank Whitlock led farmers on a tour of the ethanol "drying" facility. There the proof of the corn alcohol is brought from 194 percent to 199 percent making it suitable for fuel. The plant has been in operation since December of last year and has the capacity to dry six to seven million gallons of ethanol. Tax incentives, however, place a three and a half million gallon cap on production, Whitlock explained, adding that without tax incentives there is no profit in ethanol production.

Rich Watts, Director of Field Services for the National Corn Growers Association, also addressed the subject of ethanol when he spoke on new uses for corn. Although livestock feed is still the single largest use for corn, two hundred and forty bushels of corn was used for ethanol production in 1985, a 40 percent increase in the 1984 figure. Most ethanol is used as an octane enhancer in gasoline, he reported, with Virginia blending 17 percent of its fuel with ethanol to make it fifth in the nation.

Even more impressive, Watts continued, is the 500 million bushels of corn used to make high fructose corn sweeteners. Furthermore, Staley Continental has come up with a crystalline fructose that should increase the use of corn "by a couple hundred million bushels," he said. Watts also called the National Corn Growers Association's search for new products "our reason for existing" and outlined the work by the Association's new starch

utilization committee.

The work of this committee, the director of field services explained, is to investigate some 13,000 patents for starch utilization and to promote the development of the most likely. Three strong

possibilities include a non-corrosive de-icer already marketed by Chevron for home use, bio-degradable plastics which the Coca-Cola company has researched as a possibility for their bottled drinks, and "super-

slurper", the extra absorbent material found in heavy-duty disposable diapers that could perhaps be used to treat seeds, fight fires, and to absorb unwanted water in fuel filters.

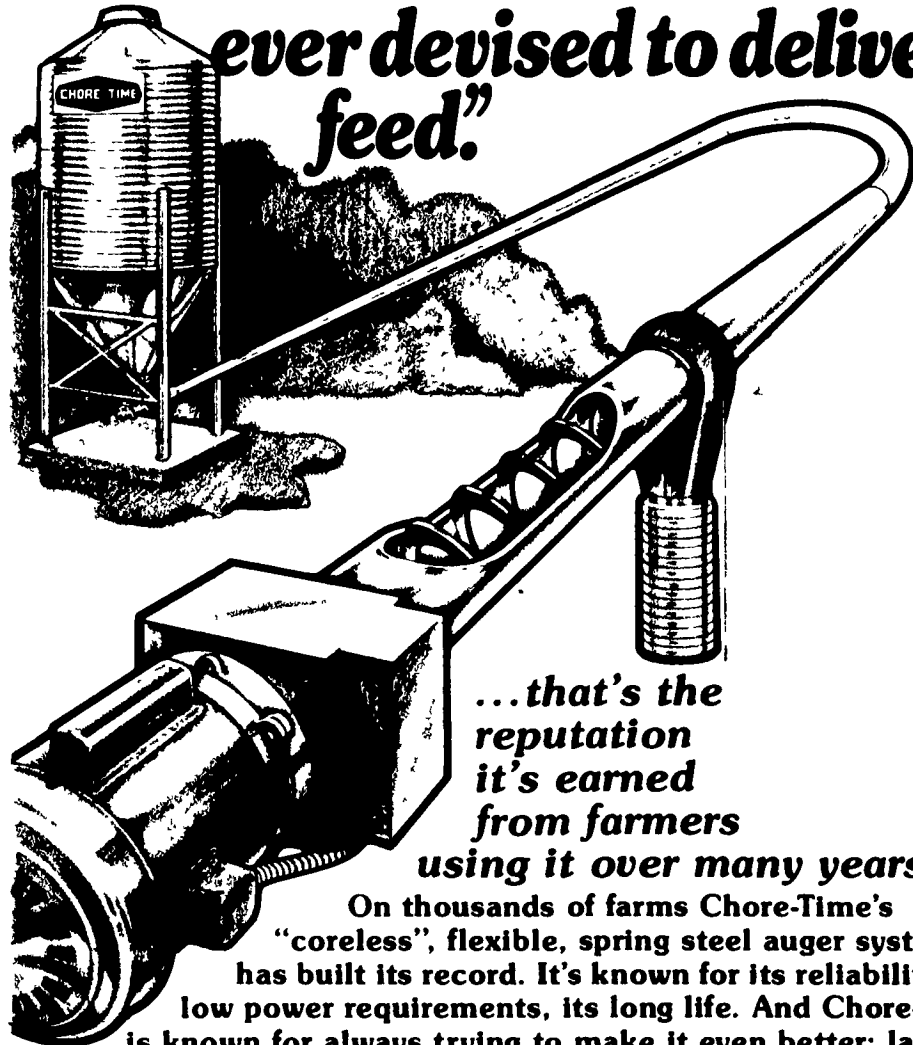
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VPI Extension agronomist Dr. George Hawkins (right) found himself in a hole during a soil compaction demonstration held in conjunction with the Virginia Corn Growers Field Day.

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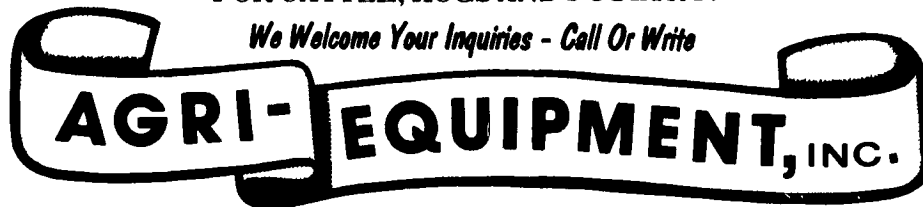
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