

Low-Input Farming

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in oats. Stoltzfoos is experimenting with his hay fields and leans more toward mixes such as orchard grass and alfalfa. This year he put 20 units of nitrogen in the form of ammonia sulfate on his hay, which usually gets nothing, to see how it works out.

Hess looks into low input

For the past 11 years, Claude Hess has avoided using drugs and antibiotics in his pullet operation. He reported that the birds are laying more eggs, and the eggs are of a better quality than he had been getting.

"Then I began wondering if I couldn't do the same thing with my soil," he said. That's when he became interested in low-input farming.

Three years ago Hess got into land in a big way when he began purchasing land on to which to spread his chicken manure. Currently he has more than 600 acres scattered around southeastern Pennsylvania, the home farm is in Manheim.

Hess, a member of Professional Farmers Institute, began sending away for information on low-input farming, signing up for courses, and talking to people. He also hired an agronomist to take care of recordkeeping, soil tests, crop checks, and recommendations.

"I'm going slow because I'm not sure where I'm going (with low-input farming). I'm in the learning and question stage," stated Hess.

The winter of 1986-'87 Hess began to implement some of the ideas he'd been hearing about. He spread calcium in the form of high-calcium limestone and chose alfalfa clover, because it is a natural nitrogen source, to spread in with 35 acres of wheat for a cover crop. The next fall he left the shredded fodder for residue, which he incorporated into the soil with a chisel plow the following spring.

This spring Hess hydroseeded 80 additional acres in alfalfa clover, putting seed in liquid nitrogen and spraying it over the field. He also used liquid N and 10-20-20 starter

in the fields where chicken manure wasn't available. Where corn had been the year before, he sprayed Furadan and herbicides. Limestone had been applied earlier in the year while the ground was still frozen to avoid compaction. Insecticide use has been cut by about 25 to 30 percent, and herbicides have been cut 25 percent for soybeans and clover.

Hess uses a chisel plow on his fields as well as a field cultivator with a 5-row spike harrow. He also purchased a new cultivator that works in no-till and ridge-till applications. He wanted this flexibility in case he decides to try his hand at ridge tilling. The cultivator is reputed to aerate soil between rows thereby supplying air and water.

Hess believes in crop rotation, not using muriated potash, and keeping the manure in top layer of the soil because "if it is plowed under the ground and it gets no oxygen, it can get into the drinking water more quickly. Manure and trash should be near the surface so they'll decompose aerobically."

He also believes that farmers should use calcium generously. "Don't cheat on calcium: it's cheap, helps balance the soil, and, in calcium carbonate form, you can get carbon in the soil."

Underlying message

The underlying message from both Hess and the Stoltzfooses is that a farmer interested in low-input farming should do his homework. Like Hess, the Stoltzfooses did quite a bit of research before they began working with low-input farming so that they wouldn't have a crop failure. And that's the route they recommend for any farmer interested in changing his farming practices.

"When farmers call up and ask how I did it, I tell them we got away from muriated potash, excess nitrogen, and chemical pesticides," said Stoltzfoos. "We suggest experimenting with small plots in different parts of the farm such as the orchard, garden, hay, and corn to see how it works."

Although the farm is much improved, the Stoltzfooses feel they still have a long way to go before their crops, soil, and animals are in balance with each other. "We're still suffering from

chemicals," they said. "We'd like to get the soil in better shape, get the chemical residues out and build humous and organic matter so the soil is less erodible."

Hess also feels he's got a long way to go, but he's taking his time so he can achieve a balance between using chemicals and not

using any additive. "The bottom line is dollars and cents," he explained. "But coupled with that is stewardship of the soil. Too many farmers are mining the soil. You should feed it so it will feed you and your children and grandchildren."

PSU College Of Ag Students Win

Speaking Contest

UNIVERSITY PARK (Centre) — Six students in the College of Agriculture received cash awards this spring for their winning presentations in the annual Guldin Speaking contest at Penn State.

First prize went to Jill L. Kutz, daughter of Du Wayne A. Kutz of Tunkhannock, for her presentation, "Promoting Nature's Most Nearly Perfect Food." Her speech dealt with the promotion of dairy products, including promotional trends in the 1980s. Jill is a junior majoring in agricultural economics with a minor in speech communications.

Second place went to Ann Grumbine, daughter of Ray and Martha Grumbine of Myerstown. Her speech, "Just Plants," focused on the aesthetic quality of house and landscape plants and said that they enrich the quality of our lives. Ann is a junior majoring in horticulture.

Laurie Winward, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. John Winward of Whitehouse Station, New Jersey, won third place. Her speech, "Chemicals In Our Foods," focused on sorbic acid and how and when it creates problems of toxicity. Laurie is a senior majoring in food science. Other winners were:

David E. Blank, son of Elam R. and Dorothy Blank of Parkesburg. His speech, "Farmland vs. Urban Pressure," was concerned with the issues of farmland preservation and outlined current measures to protect agricultural land. David is a senior majoring in agricultural education.

William Hoffman, son of Lynn

and Pepper Hoffman of Pennsylvania Furnace, gave a speech on "Chemical Pest Control: Issues and Answers." It focused on the use and misuse of pesticides in agriculture. William is a junior majoring in agricultural economics and rural sociology.

Jose A. Alcantara, son of Claude and Evelyn Adams of Northumberland gave a talk on "Agroforestry." He discussed the use of biomass (the volue of minute animals and plants such as protozoans and blue-green algae that live in a given habitat or area) as a potential source of fuel. Jose is a senior majoring in forest science.

The Guldin Speaking contest is made possible through funds donated in memory of Paul R. Guldin, an agricultural leader and poultry farmer in Berks County. It is sponsored by the Coaly Society, the student honor society in agriculture at Penn State.

Finalists were judged by a panel of students and faculty. This year's faculty judges were Maureen Montgomery, coach of the Penn State Speech Team, Dr. Robert Wideman, assistant professor of poultry science and Dr. Connie Baggett, assistant professor of agriculture and extension education. All students in the College of Agriculture are eligible to compete.

RCMA Asks Members To Avoid Boycott

BATAVIA, N.Y. — The Regional Cooperative Marketing Agency issued a reminder on Friday to its members, supporters and interested parties that it is the group's policy not to "support, participate in or condone any activity which might be considered a boycott."

According to William Zuber, RCMA president, RCMA appreciates the support it has received from many sources during its battle to secure fair farm prices. However, Zuber said that RCMA in no way supports a consumer boycott of supermarkets which purchase milk from dealers who oppose RCMA.

"Participation by RCMA or its members in a consumer boycott could be viewed as illegal and RCMA has worked very hard to avoid any suggestion of illegality," he said.

Zuber pointed out that members can help RCMA improve farm income by signing-up neighbors who have not joined the organization. "We'd like everyone to direct their actions in a positive manner: 100 percent membership," he said.



The Stoltzfoos farm in Kinzer, a town southeast of Lancaster. From left, Lucy holding three-month-old Charlene; Hilda, 6; Roman; Delmar, 2; and Dwight, 8.



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