

Five Farmers Interviewed

(Continued from Page A1)

other counties in the state, says Hess. Western counties with shale soil and other counties with sandy soil are more susceptible because these soils do not have the ability to retain moisture.

In Upper Dauphin County in southcentral Pennsylvania Earl Keefer reports winter springs are running strong now and surface moisture is sufficient, but, again, the subsoil is dry. But he is optimistic due to the strength of the winter springs.

Keefer farms 270 acres with 150 acres in corn, 100 acres in alfalfa and the remaining acreage in small grains. In 1988 and 1987 Keefer's corn crop was less than half of its normal yield. "I know two years in a row is unlikely, but we had that last year. I think it is unlikely to happen three years in a row, but in the 1960's we had five out of seven years that were bad," said Keefer. "But I doubt if we will see this year what we saw last year."

The Keefers had crop insurance for several years, but dropped it. This year they are considering it. They have up until April 15 to decide. However, they are taking some action to give them a little more insurance. They will be using more no-till than usual to conserve the moisture they have in the soil.

"We have been seeing a little more no-till and conservation tillage each year in our area in these past few years and I think we'll see a lot more of it, too," added Keefer. Harteis' corn yields in Cambria

County were off by 50 percent due to the 1988 drought, but crop insurance is out of the question for Harteis.

"The ASCS office has an unrealistic low established yield on my fields. They say normal is 83 bushels when it is actually 119 bushels. Yields must be 35 percent below normal to collect. That means that before I can collect penny one, my yield would have to be below 50 bushels an acre," said Harteis. "Prior to this year they never set foot on this farm. They told me if I checked my yield with them for the next five years then maybe I can get it changed. A lot could happen in the next five years. I could be out of business by then. I'm hostile. Their yields are totally beyond reason."

Harteis is going to make some changes for 1989. Last year he seeded down 70 acres for alfalfa and plowed under sod to plant 70 acres of corn. What he got was a large cash outlay and not much in return. This year's going to be different.

"My older stands of hay are going to get an extra early shot of fertilizer and I'll get a good cutting early. I'm going to cut my cash outlay and make sure I get some good tonnage," said Harteis.

Crouse in northern Lancaster County doesn't see crop insurance in his farm's future either. "Well, you're taking a chance by not having it, but farming is nothing but a big gamble. I can't predict another drought," said Crouse.

Hess in the southern end of the county agrees with Crouse. He has no plans to make any changes in crops this year. His corn yields were only 20 percent below that of normal years. He said he was lucky and planted his corn the right time last year and plans to continue to doing things the same as always.

In northcentral Pennsylvania, David Norman, a Tioga County farmer, said there appears to be plenty of moisture in the soil now, but he believes it is only on the surface.

"The frost is just coming out of the ground now and the surface is very wet and we can't get into the fields to spread manure. But I know we need at least two to three inches of rain to really get a good start this year," said Norman. "We are definitely starting off on the dry side."

Norman crops corn, hay and oats on his 200 acres near Liberty. Corn yields were as good as they have ever been for him, but he says most of his neighbors were not as

lucky. Many of the farmers in the Liberty area had less than 50 percent of their normal yields due to the drought and the crop damage caused by deer.

Planting his corn after the heavy rains in mid-May worked out in his favor this year. Hay yields were down, but quality was very good.

His first cutting was 50 percent of a normal yield and second and third were from 60 to 75 percent of their normal yields.

Norman has no plans to purchase crop insurance this year. But he is planning to get his oats early to catch all the early moisture.

Disaster Payments To Pennsylvania Farmers Reach \$32 Million

HARRISBURG — Over \$32 million has been paid to Pennsylvania farmers through mid-March 1989 as a result of various disaster programs administered by the Agriculture Conservation and Stabilization Service (ASCS) for the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

ASCS State Executive Director Don Unangst said that the amount represents only about two-thirds of what farmers can expect in payments by the end of the programs on May 31, 1989.

"Farmers need to remember that the deadline for sign-up for

disaster programs is March 31st," Unangst said.

Payments covered include those made for crop losses on a wide variety of grains, vegetables, fruits, and trees as well as under feed assistance programs for dairy and other livestock owners.

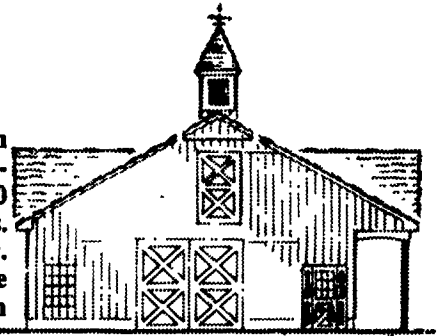
ASCS county offices are working with producers to complete processing of applications for program payments. Under the law, many of these will require Federal Crop Insurance for next growing season and conservation plans for covered acreage before payments can be issued.

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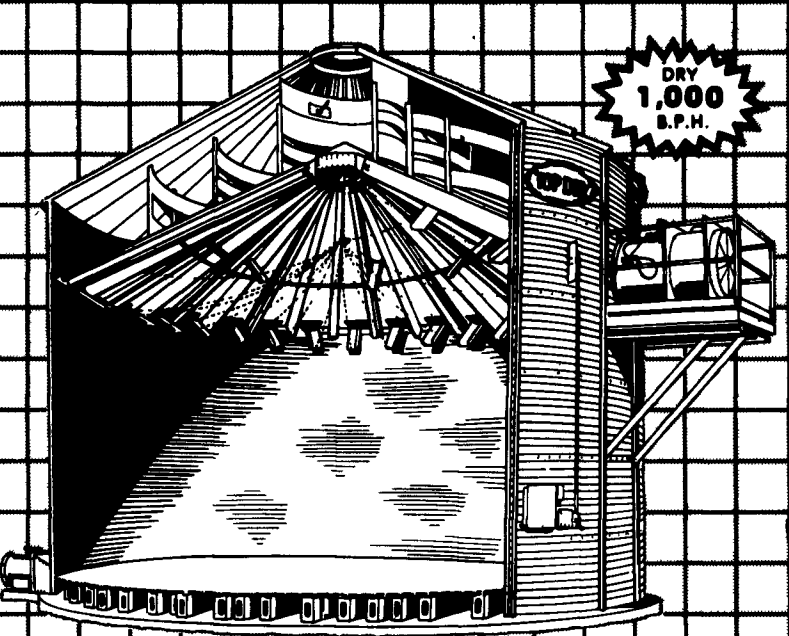
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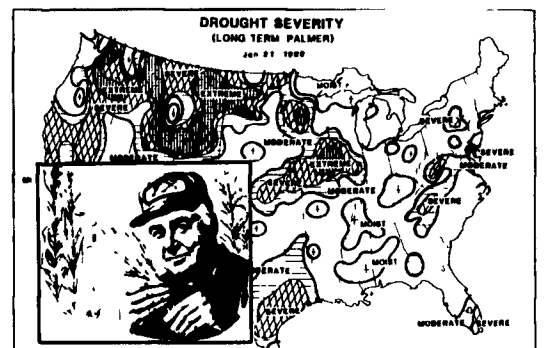
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