

# Lancaster County Farmers Have Highest State Corn Yields

**ANDY ANDREWS**  
Lancaster Farming Staff  
LANCASTER (Lancaster Co.) — Compared to 22 years ago, it costs more than twice to run a farm. But Lancaster farmers should be happy because they have the highest corn yields in the state.

"Farmers in the northwest part of the state are griping that they don't have the soils you have," said Dr. Greg Roth, Penn State corn specialist, to about 250 farmers at the 29th annual Lancaster County Crops and Soils Day at the Farm and Home Center on Tuesday.

"Despite a wet spring and hot August, Lancaster still came out as the top yielding area in the whole state," Roth said, speaking about trends in the Pennsylvania Five-Acre Corn Club Program.

Roth called 1989 a "strange year" where the yields varied "a lot, depending on where you were, the soil, and the nutrient conditions at the time." Costs in the state varied from location on a per-acre basis — on land, anywhere from \$6 to \$110, herbicide from \$6 to \$61, and fertilizer from \$15 to \$101.

### Operating a farm

The study looked at 1968 costs in same-year dollars and compared them with the costs of operating a farm in 1989. Overall, to produce 1 acre of corn in 1989, costs were at least 2.5 times greater than 22 years ago. Now, it costs about \$225 to produce 1 acre of corn at an average yield, in Lancaster County, of 140.2 bushels per acre.

Seed costs rose the most, about four times what they were in 1968. Land costs rose about three times.

"There has been no upward trend in production to compensate an increase in cost," said Roth. "There is a little uncertainty in



There has been no upward trend in corn production to compensate for increased costs of farming, indicated Dr. Greg Roth, Penn state corn specialist, at the Lancaster County Crops and Soils Day.

what lies ahead for corn growers. There is not a lot of predictability about what price is going to be."

### 10 to 15 studies

Roth discussed the work done by the extension in soil nitrogen testing. The extension performed 10 to 15 studies to find a pattern of nitrogen use and its relation to corn production.

"We noticed the same tendency in other states — when nitrogen exceeds the crop requirements, it will accumulate in the soil," he said.

As much as 200 pounds of nitrogen per acre can remain in the soil during the fall, causing potential



Applying herbicides is "a game of being a little smarter than the weed, finding out how the weed is growing, and what the best time of year is to get at the weed chemically to get disposal," said Lynn Hoffman from Penn State's agronomy research department at the Crops and Soils Day.

spring groundwater pollution problems if farmers don't learn how to test and manage their soil nitrogen content.

Up to 40 percent of the nitrogen laid down in the fall can be gone by the spring, Roth said. "In one case, we found 40 percent of 300-400 pounds of nitrogen an acre leached into the groundwater. We need to find these kinds of fields that are way out of line."

100 pounds per acre  
There should be no more than 100 pounds per acre of nitrogen in



Luke Burckhart, representing the Pennsylvania Dept. of Ag Region IV, speaks to farmers about important new pesticide laws in the state.

the soil after the corn harvest and through the winter months. Farmers must take steps to minimize the amount of nitrogen left over in the fields that could contaminate groundwater, Roth said.

"There are some uncertainties in Pennsylvania, such as leftover legumes, manure, and alfalfa," he said. "But the nitrogen test helps reduce the amount of uncertainty."

Nitrogen sampling, either through a Penn State lab test or a Quicktest kit (available for \$280 retail) can be used by the farmer to find out the amount of nitrogen in the soil.

"Pennsylvania is one of the leading states to reduce its consumption of nitrogen fertilizer," said Roth. "Farmers pay attention to manure use and it shows up in our figures."

### Nitrogen testing

One aspect to nitrogen testing newly discovered, according to Roth, is that the test should be taken not necessarily at a certain date, but one week before sidedressing, when the corn crop reaches 12 inches tall.

A little more than half the farmers in the survey had normal nitrogen parts per million (ppm) readings of 10-25. Only 23 percent had less than 10 ppm of nitrogen and only 22 percent greater than 25 ppm.

"We're satisfied with the people in the field who ran the test before and came pretty close to the field recommendation levels," Roth said. However, the test must exhibit uniformity, and farmers should ensure that samples taken are not from areas of the field where manure spreading is higher than any other.

### Stop weed growth

Some Lancaster County farmers benefit from cultivation to stop weed growth. But "those who were cultivating weeds without some form of chemical weed control notice that cultivation is only one part of weed control," said Lynn Hoffman, from Penn State's agronomy research department.

Hoffman explained to the farmers that weed control "is a very, very young science. It's not unreasonable to assume we will make some mistakes, especially for a science that is so young."

Hoffman said farmers should try for a "marriage" of chemical and mechanical methods of weed control for their crops. Short-term crop rotation will help prevent the spread of weeds. Some of the technology available to dislodge weeds, by using discs or hoes, can be of help to some farmers.

Hoffman emphasized the importance of applying a light amount of chemical early to hold the crop to no weed pressure. Par-

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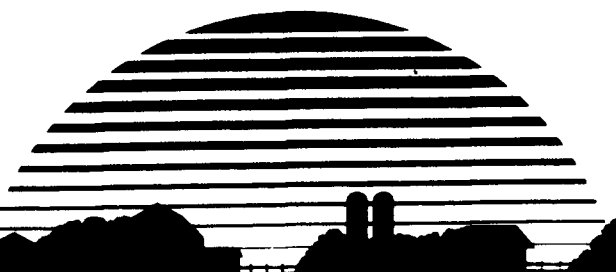
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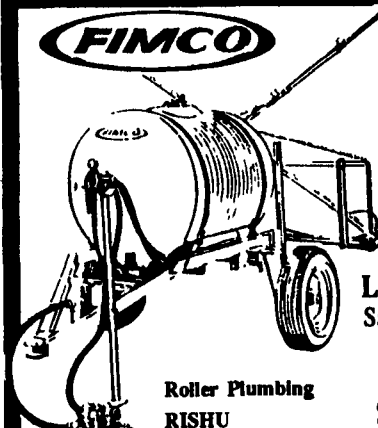
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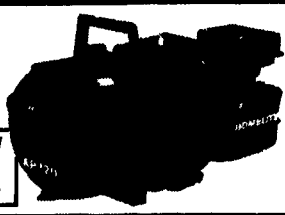
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