

Dauphin Conservation Farmer Believes In Looking Closely At Soil Particulars

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LYKENS (Dauphin Co.) — For conservation farmer Gerald Wiest, soil sampling on his farm started about 1969 — culminating in rec-

ognition as Conservation Farmer of the Year last week by the county district.

Wiest maintains about 50 sows on his farrow-to-finish farm and manages about 300 acres. He said

conservation work has always been an important part of his life, ever since he helped farm with his father, Woodrow Wiest, a hog and beef farmer in the Lykens area. Gerald Wiest obtained his first



Gerald Wiest, Dauphin Co. Conservation Farmer of the Year, recently built a circular concrete manure storage structure to replace an old concrete-lined timber facility on his farm.



Wiest employs the use of strip crops, contour strip crops, terraces, and grass waterways, such as this one, on his farm.

soil sample in 1969. "I've been soil sampling ever since," he said.

The soil sample taken 23 years ago was part of an ASCS cost-share program for the application

of lime. In a recent interview, Wiest pointed out that soil sampling wasn't new then — farmers had been using it for years. But the importance of analyzing the nutrients of the farmland was in Wiest's operations because he believes in the importance of keeping and maintaining good soil conditions.

Soil conditions

"I was always amazed at how many farmers, large operators and small, fell into the rut of the traditional, 'well, if we're planting small grains, we use so many hundred pounds of a certain analysis fertilizer,'" said Wiest, "regardless of what manure was applied or what the soil conditions really were."

Wiest said that his degree in biology from Mansfield University (Tioga County) helped him understand the interrelationships between soil fertility, yield, and the importance of conservation practices. Also, after the floods caused by Hurricane Agnes in 1972, Wiest worked for the Soil Conservation Service restoring streams, which helped him gain hands-on knowledge about conservation practices.

"My background in the sciences told me that things should be more accurate than that — there're ways to keep a closer tab on the particulars, especially the nutrients, to get a good balance, to get a good crop," he said.

On the farm based northwest of Lykens, Wiest owns about 57 acres and rents an additional 250 acres. He markets about 200 tons of hay per year. Last year, Wiest managed about 120 acres of corn, 50 acres of soybeans, 50 of wheat, 40 of barley, 30 of alfalfa, and 50 of timothy hay. He grows most of the crops necessary for the 50 sow farrow-to-finish (he markets about 350-400 finished hogs to Hatfield Meats, and another 300 or so he sells to growers).

Fit into rotation

He grows wheat and barley to fit into the rotation for corn weed control, and barley is fed to the gestating sows. The remainder of the crops are sold on the cash market.

He said the soil conditions on his acreage are good for most crops. The land is Calvin-Leckhill based, which includes deep, well-drained soils. Because of the existing shale conditions, nutrient control is top priority, and there are many practices Wiest uses to maintain water control and stop nutrient and soil runoff.

Wiest employs the use of strip crops, contour strip crops, terraces, grass waterways, stone-lined waterways, water control structures (such as drop inlets and underground tiles), and he uses no-till and conservation tillage in designated areas.

Manure is applied to fields depending entirely on nutrient needs, according to soil tests. "I've just always done that," he said. "If it meant hauling (manure) six miles, that's where it went."

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