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FARMING IN AN URBANIZING ENVIRONMENT

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One of Pennsylvania agriculture's greatest strengths is its proximity to urban markets.

Unfortunately, as the urban dwellers increasingly encroach on farming areas, the closeness of agricultural production and consumers can also be a liability.

Too often we have read the unhappy headlines announcing "residents band together to oppose poultry operation" or "neighbors file complaint over flies." One of the key skills required to be a successful manager in the nineties is the ability to run one's enterprise in such a way as to generate praise rather than animosity from the non-farmers in one's neighborhood.

One must routinely seek better ways to run the farm operation. Simply saying "I was here first" is no longer a sufficient answer when dealing with neighbors. An honest assessment of problems is an important function of farm management. When current or potential problems have been identified, one needs to seek solutions which will correct the problems before they become a public relation's problem in the neighborhood.

Aesthetics is very important on today's farms. Sloppy operations are simply not acceptable. An attractive landscape is important to presenting a positive image of your operation. Planting a buffer strip of trees between you and your neighbors or a highway is a good idea. Out of sight, out of mind really does work. A buffer strip of trees will also help with odor and dust reduction.

Getting to know your neighbors is always a good idea. Giving them some poultry products over the holidays or compost for their garden in the spring builds good will.

Use common sense when scheduling your farm activities. Don't spread manure next to your neighbor's backyard the day before a spring or summer holiday, for instance. Incorporate manure as soon as possible when spreading near urban neighbors. In addition to reducing odors, this can help reduce the field hatch of flies.

Flies are probably the largest potential source of friction between poultry farms and nonfarm neighbors. An aggressive fly prevention strategy should be in place at all times. One of the best ways to prevent fly problems is to keep the manure dry to disrupt the life cycle of the flies.

The ideal moisture content of the manure for breeding flies is 50 to 85-percent. Reducing water leaks and increasing air circulation in high-rise houses are keys to keeping the moisture too low to be suitable for fly breeding.

Feeding larvacide as needed and using insecticides are also important tools for fly control. Insecticide bait pans and space spray or mist sprays are important for controlling adult populations. Residual insecticides can be applied to the walls at clean-out time. Remember to rotate the class of insecticides used to prevent a buildup of insecticide resistance in the fly population.

Composting of manure and mortality is a management tool which has several benefits, including fly control. The heat generated during the composting process will destroy the fly larva. The enables one to get the upper hand in the battle with flies without a major cash outlay for insecticides.

Composting also converts manure and carcasses into a marketable fertilizer. This can be an extra source of revenue in addition to solving a nutrient management problem on farms where more manure is produced than can be utilized on crop land.

All involved in agriculture today need to make a "good neighbor" policy a high priority. Planning ahead to prevent problems can go a long way toward building a positive image, which is important for the success of any business.

Wet, Flooded Fields May Need Special Management

NORCROSS, Ga. — This year's extraordinary weather obviously affected much of the 1993 crop. Unfortunately, the negative effects will not stop with the current crop because soil properties were affected that will impact next year's crop as well.

Much of the Midwest and northern Great Plains had near record low soil nitrate levels last fall and this spring. Weather conditions frequently did not allow normal nitrogen applications. Conditions were ideal for denitrification and leaching losses of what little nitrogen was present. Cool temperatures during much of the growing season likely caused less than normal organic matter mineralization and release of nitrogen from legume residues and manure. The net effect is soils nearly devoid of plant available nitrogen this fall. Adequate nitrogen fertilization will be a must for profitable crop production in 1994.

Soils are teeming with microorganisms that are active in releasing and supplying many nutrients to crop roots. Their activity goes unnoticed until something happens that interfers with that activity and with crop nutrition. Such is often the case for crops grown in fields that were either fallowed or flooded the year before. Most crops normally have a beneficial fungus called mycorrhizae, colonizing their root systems. This fungus aids in the absorption of phosphorus by crop roots. Mycorrhizae activity is often depressed following fallowing or flooded conditions, resulting in severe phosphorus deficiency in crops the next year. A reduction in the amount of phosphorus supplied by breakdown of organic matter contributes to the problem.

Corn appears to be the most sensitive crop to the syndrome, with soybeans being affected... but less severely. Use of a high phosphorus starter fertilizer at rates of 40 to 70 lb. P_2O_5/A normally corrects the phosphorus deficiency. High soil test phosphorus levels can also correct growth problems, but the minimum level required has not been defined. In one midwestern study, corn grown following fallow at a Bray test of 15 ppm (Medium) was severely phosphorus deficient, while at 45 ppm (Very High) growth was normal.

Aerial views and field investigations this summer frequently indicated that substantial soil compaction occurred from traffic and tillage on wet soils. Research has demonstrated that potassium management increases in importance under compacted conditions. High soil test potassium levels and band application of potassium can reduce the negative effects this new compaction may have on crop yields in 1994.

The year(s) ahead will not be easy as agriculture in the Midwest recovers from 1993. Operating dollars will likely be short, and spending decisions will need to be made carefully. However, past experience tells us that fertilizer inputs will likely give terrific returns in 1994. Start planning now to make 1994 the best crop year that conditions will allow.

For more information, contact Dr. Paul E. Fixen, Northcentral Director, PPI, P.O. Box 682, 305 5th Street, Brookings, SD 57006. Phone (605) 692-6280.

Farm-City Activities

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Mansfield.

The Robsons have 90 registered Holsteins, with a milking herd of 56 on their 150-acre farm, and are active in the agriculture community, having worked with 4-H and junior livestock clubs for several years.

Robson told the group, "I guess I really didn't know what we were getting into with the splash here tonight, but I guess we can hack it."

Commenting on how his family has served as hosts for cattle tours, a strawberry festival, and helped with the parking during the Primitive Rendezvous held nearby this past September, Robson was confident on their ability to successfully coordinate at least one portion of Farm-City Day when he said, "We got a family that knows how to park cars!"

Robson and Welch accepted the challenge of surpassing the success of previous Farm-City days with their event in 1994. Robson expressed confidence in himself and his co-chair as he said, "I'm sure Sherri (Elder) thinks she can put on a Farm-City Day, but J.W. and I will get right in there and show her how it's really done."