

Ag-Tech Day Demonstrates Cropping Techniques

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NORVELT, Westmoreland Co. — How will products and techniques work under real conditions? Recently Penn State Extension and the Westmoreland County Soil Conservation hosted afternoon and evening sessions to discuss the process and products used in the test plots next to the Westmoreland County Fairgrounds. Ag Technology Days was an opportunity for farmers to interact directly with several experts right on the field.

According to Don Fretts, Scottsdale, who introduced the agenda for the day, this was a chance for all — even successful farmers — to pick up some pointers and see some new, helpful farming techniques. He registered about 25 different farms represented by 40-45 individuals at the two sessions.

The experts who interacted with the modest afternoon crowd of about 20 included academicians and product representatives. Demonstration and information booths for services included production credit and a service for feed value analysis.

Bill Curran, Penn State, began the afternoon session by asking participants to identify 10 common plant specimens gathered from the area. Curran used the samples to talk about weed control methods. He noted that annual weeds can usually be controlled best by spraying in the spring when the plant is small. Perennials — which regenerate from a part of the previous year's growth — usually require a different strategy. Quackgrass should be 7-10 inches high to provide enough foliage for absorbing the herbicide. When the above ground growth is smaller, the roots may survive and continue to grow.

Out on the plots, Curran introduced ways to reduce the amount of herbicide needed for weed control. The suggestions included using a combination of pre- and postemergence treatments, combinations of herbicides and timing.

The corn expert, Greg Roth, Penn State agronomy, helped participants evaluate early season corn development in the test plot. He offered some specific mathematical tables to help evaluate the variations in the corn stand. Herbi-

cide residue, weather, and equipment adjustment can all cause variations, a problem when uniformity suits mechanized farming the best. General perimeters for planting call for corn to go between 1½" to 3¼" deep.

Under wet, early conditions, the planter should be adjusted toward the shallow end of that continuum, and toward the deeper end under later, dry conditions. Roth pointed out that more variation is acceptable if the corn will be cut for silage. Late sprouting corn is about as bad as a weed if the crop is to be harvested as shelled corn.

Roth's handout included a diagram for determining the stage of early corn growth, and mathematical steps to help the farmer answer that most difficult question: "Should I replant?" Part of the evaluation included the farmer's own assessment of the soil: Good soil could support more plants than poor soil. Roth suggested that a corn field should have between 20,000 and 25,000 plants per acre at harvest for optimum yield.

In the discussion about perennial weed control strategies, crop rotation was suggested as one way to reduce the spread of perennials such as thistles and milkweed. But tillage might spread morning glory. Bill Curran specifically suggested using Banvel, Roundup, and/or 2-4-D in the fall as a way to control late growing perennials.

In two larger plots, pest control and replanting forage are being demonstrated. Kurt Kinderwater, agronomist, and Glenn Kerr, field scout, both employed by Brubakers Agronomic Consulting Service, discussed pest control. Kinderwater suggested that farmers get and learn to use the sweeping net if they are serious about integrated pest management (IPM). In the short, dry, second cutting alfalfa stand, Kurt found three leafhoppers on ten sweeps with the net. He said that the threshold for an economic benefit from control in this plot would be when 3-5 hoppers are found. Before a decision to apply insecticide is made, the owner should also evaluate how many beneficial insects may be killed.

Kerr showed a cut worm he found on a field inspection. He noted the signs a farmer should look out for, and recounted horror



In a basic introductory activity for the Ag-Tec day at the Westmoreland County Fairgrounds Farm, Dr. Bill Curran far right, asked participants to identify 10 different problem weeds from the area. Perennials and annuals, he noted, require different control techniques. And some annual species may have look-a-like perennial cousins growing in the same field (CF29). Photo by David Hiebert.

stories of entire fields being decimated — sometimes before the farmer even knows it's happening.

In a plot on the hill top, two companies had provided seed to demonstrate alfalfa planting. Ron Dodds, of the SeedWay company, noted that the Pea-Cal seed mixture contains Canadian field peas and triticale. This combination should grow quickly after planting, shading the ground for weed control without hindering the alfalfa. Harvesting the triticale — a cross between wheat and rye — is ticklish. Peak feed value is retained for only about 72 hours. The test plot also showed the effects of low rainfall: only 1 inch of rain had fallen since planting May 1. Growth which should have been 8-10 inches high was only 3-4 inches high. In spite of the poor conditions for the Pea-Cal, the alfalfa stand looked good.

Future Ag-Tec days are planned for the same location on August 4 and September 15. The plots are open for anyone to see. Contact the Westmoreland/Penn State extension office, P.O. Box 250, Greensburgh, PA 15601 for copies of the test plot procedures.

Maryland Ice Cream To Saudi Arabia

ANNAPOLIS, Md. — A cool flavor of Maryland — 23,520 pints of Baltimore ice cream — left the Port of Baltimore after Memorial Day for Saudi Arabia, according to Maryland Secretary of Agriculture Lewis R. Riley.

"The shipment, complete with two ice cream dipping parlors and related paper goods, were sold by Lee's Ice Cream of Baltimore to a firm in Saudi Arabia. It is scheduled to arrive June 13," Riley said.

"This is the first shipment of many we expect to make," said Lee's Ice Cream president Scott Garfield.

"We developed the contact for the deal at a trade show booth ar-

ranged for us by the Maryland Department of Agriculture's International Marketing Section," Garfield said.

"This shipment of ice cream is an example of the increased presence of Maryland food products in the international marketplace. We are continuing to make outstanding progress in finding foreign buyers for our products," Riley said.

For more information on the Maryland Department of Agriculture's International Marketing Program, contact the Maryland Department of Agriculture, Marketing Services, 50 Harry S. Truman Parkway, Annapolis, MD 21401, (410) 841-5770.

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