

Lancaster Sets First-Ever Conservation Exposition

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Lancaster Farming Staff
ELIZABETHTOWN (Lancaster Co.) — For the first time, the Lancaster Conservation District is sponsoring the Lancaster County Conservation Exposition on Saturday, August 27, from 9 a.m.-3 p.m. at the Dave Becker Farm here on Hereford Road.

The exposition will focus on ways that farmers can make successful use of contours and grass waterways to help control soil erosion. Also, tillage demonstrations of various sorts and equipment displays from dealers will be provided.

This summer has been especially trying to many farms, with the heavy downpours and sudden flooding.

Becker spoke about his nearly 3,000 feet of large waterways that separate various carefully contoured fields of corn and soybeans during a recent interview at his 100-acre farmstead.

"If you come here in a heavy rain, you can definitely see the advantage of contour farming," said Becker. "You don't see, too often, any mud coming out of my fields and onto the highway. After a rain, you have water in the waterways, but it's not real muddy. The waterways filter it out."

Becker said that he maintains about eight feet of grass strip all the way around the farm. While the additional feet is taking land out of production, it is providing a retention for soil near roadways and other erodible sections of land.

Too often, in many parts of the county, that's not the case. The district has had to handle a barrage of phone calls from people complaining about mud on roads all over the county.

Waterways "make a big difference," said Jim Shirk, Lancaster conservation technician. "We're getting a lot of complaints because of the heavy rains."

"It's doing us some good, because we're getting guys talked into more strips and stuff like that (on the farm)," said Shirk.

"We're getting more urban neighbors, with the houses and everything, and you got to keep your act a little cleaner, or you're going to hear about it," said Becker.

Becker farms about 200 acres on the home farm in Elizabethtown, which includes rented ground. He also maintains some ground at the old farmstead in Donegal.

Becker finishes out about 200 head of beef cattle each year for a private contractor. He also manages about 200 head of dairy heifers for a major supplier.

Becker purchased the farm in 1980 and immediately signed up with the district. He purchased the farm on Hereford Road from Thome Farms, an egg wholesaler.

"This was all laid out in contour strips when I came here," said Becker. The work was completed by Thome. Becker said that on the farm in Donegal, he did all the contour work.

Becker has about a half acre in feedlot that is exposed to the weather. A heavy rain works on the manure in the lot, but is funneled through a concrete thruway into a 200,000-gallon capacity circular in-ground concrete storage structure. The structure, installed in 1991, is emptied twice a year.

The structure captures runoff to prevent it from going into a large spring, which feeds into a nearby stream.

All the corn acres (175) are contoured in Becker's operation. Also, the 175 acres of soybeans are contoured.

Becker uses a combination of nutrient management techniques to match his requirements. Included is about 100 pounds of liquid nitrogen per acre applied before planting, and for remaining acreage, about 100 pounds per acre of dry starter. He plants the corn on 30-inch rows for a plant density of about 27,000 per acre. He no-tilled about 40 acres of corn.

Becker was able to obtain a 150-170 bushel per acre harvest last year. Half of the corn goes to silage and the other half to high moisture corn.

For the soybean acreage, Becker plants about 50 acres of early beans, and then doublecrops barley beans. He harvests about 60 bushels per acre of early beans and about 25-30 bushels per acre of barley.

Becker also maintains about 20 acres of tobacco, a crop he calls the "mortgage burner."

Farmers will benefit by seeing some slit tillage by the district, according to Shirk. The program promotes soil conservation and helps reduce the effects of compaction, according to Shirk. The slit tillage demonstration will take place at 9 a.m. on August 27 during the exposition. The district, said Shirk, has two different slit till implements for rent at \$2.50 per acre.

The demonstrations will run from mulch management equipment to slit tillers. Various equipment dealers were invited to attend.

Also scheduled will be discussions regarding rotational grazing from Ed Rits, a nitrogen quick test

demonstration by county agent Bob Anderson, information on lawn care and maintenance by horticultural agent Bruce Heckerick, and a demonstration by Marvin

Stoner on septic system management.

Admission is free, and the exposition will be held rain or shine.

For information about the Lancaster County Conservation Exposition, contact the conservation district office at (717) 299-5361.



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"If you come here in a heavy rain, you can definitely see the advantage of contour farming," said Becker, left. "You don't see, too often, any mud coming out of my fields and onto the highway. After a rain, you have water in the waterways, but it's not real muddy. The waterways filter it out." At right is Jim Shirk, conservation technician.



A heavy rain works on the manure in the lot, but is funneled through a concrete thruway into this 200,000-gallon capacity circular in-ground concrete storage structure. The structure, installed in 1991, is emptied twice a year, according to Dave Becker, right.



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