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ice-melter for roads and sidewalks, liquid windshield washer, packaging "peanuts" materials, and laundry detergent. Because of their corn-based origin, these new products are all biodegradable and more environmentally-friendly than much of their competition.

Sometimes the corn growers even find themselves defending development of new uses for corn. One such instance came when a television news show a few months ago cited the increasing use of ethanol fuel as raising the cost of canned corn to consumers.

With corn prices currently higher than they have been in several years, Wolf anticipates increased plantings for the 1996 season. An avid reader of ag magazines and educational materials, he speculates from what he has read and observed that corn acres are likely to increase from two to five percent.

"Some will probably come from retiring present conservation reserve acres," Wolf said. He foresees increased plantings in the South and Southeast, where hog production is growing and the corn market is deficit.

Cotton prices have been high, he explains, and drew many acres into that crop, ground not really suited to production of the fiber. Now, Wolf sees those marginal cotton acres likely to be diverted to corn.

And while soybean prices remain high on the charts, the ratio to the corn price is still not enough, Wolf believes, to

entice large acreages from corn to beans. His rule of thumb is a 2.3 to 2.5 corn-bean ratio—corn is profitable so long as the per-bushel corn price multiplied by the 2.3 ratio, is comparable to the price of a bushel of soybeans.

Wolf and his farming-partner brothers Steve and Dave grew up working on the George and Hazel Wolf-family crops and poultry farm. A fourth brother, Jim, also farmed with the family during the years when Wolf Farm Eggs was one of the area's largest producers.

Though he originally had no strong intentions to return to farming after college, Dan Wolf's agriculture roots drew him back to the home farm following his graduation from Penn State.

"I guess my heart has always been in the field work," he said. Wolf began helping with field crops early in his childhood years, when the family cropped a large acreage of potatoes. One of his first responsibilities was piloting a tractor and wagon hauling bags of potatoes in from the fields.

The Wolf brothers team up to man equipment when the heavy planting and harvest seasons are under way. Steven handles much of the planting and combining, maintains all the equipment, and fabricates machinery improvements and changes as needed. Dave keeps the trucks rolling, from moving supplies during planting, to hauling the harvest to storage, and to the commodity markets year-round.

Marketing plays a large role

in Dan's responsibilities. Part of every day is spent scanning and studying commodity price movements and the news and trends that impact planting, harvest and pricing worldwide. A satellite system hooked into the farm office originates in the Midwest and is updated several times each trading day. He also works with a market advisory in structuring the year's marketing plans.

"We make a lot of our marketing decisions for the rest of the year about early November, when we have an idea of the national market and our own crop," he said. Factors impacting the Wolf's marketing decisions include historical price trends, strategies that have worked well in the past years and cash flow needs for the farm.

Even while the corn seedlings are poking through the ground, Wolf is thinking ahead to the next planting season. Varieties, planting techniques, chemical, and fertilization results are constantly watched for successes and areas the Wolfs want to change. During the "off" season, equipment and property maintenance, conservation program changes and marketing keep the Wolf brothers busy.

Of all the cropping concepts, Wolf has tried and observed, he sees no-till as the most overwhelming change in recent times to the business of growing corn.

"We used to come home from school and go to the fields to till ground—plow, disc, harrow. Tillage was a big deal; now it's a very small item in

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Scanning the satellite service in the office at Wolf Farms is where Dan Wolf can be found several times every day, checking the commodity markets and planning marketing strategies for the grain operation.

the overall program," said Wolf, an avid, no-till advocate. "Once you get to thinking no-till, it's hard to go back. You learn the things in no-till that work for you, and you like the results."

Complementing the no-till, the Wolfs crop their rolling terrain to contours and include conservation practices like diversion strips and waterways. Cover crops are utilized, though this past year's fall weather, with early November snow and cold, limited top growth.

One development on the corn-growing horizon being closely watched by Dan Wolf is narrower rows for grain corn. Among the reported benefits of narrow rows—15 inches to 22 inches—are better utilization on sunlight, mois-

ture and fertilizer, along with a quicker and more intense shade cover which provides a better, natural weed control.

A step farther is "grid" corn, with plants spaced evenly in all directions. One producer Wolf has read about seeds corn at 7-inch spacings with a drill, then harvests slowly with conventional equipment.

"One drawback could be if you have to re-enter fields to sidedress or to spray," Wolf said. "But if you can distribute plants more equitably, you can get better yields. It could be very beneficial to those harvesting for forage use."

Another hurdle is that narrow-row equipment is not generally available on the commercial market, so growers must adapt their own. As

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