Soil Organic Contents High — So Are Yields On Chester County Corn Grower's Farm

(Continued from Page 2)

crop is rotated to soybeans.

For many of his Chester County fields, there was also some shattercane, but below economic threshold levels.

Most growers saw their season saved by a mid-July rainstorm, which provided welcome relief from a persistent drought most of the summer. "That was a million-dollar rain, with some additional numbers in front of it," Mitchell said. The rain came at the time of com pollination, saving the com harvest season for lots of

Corn in the Reinholds area was helped along dramatically, according to Mitchell, by a 3.5-inch rainfall on June 19.

Machine harvest was conducted late in October at a grain moisture of 28 percent. Much of the grain went to Lancaster County mills.

Mitchell attributes the high organic matter in the soil to the use of high levels of a cover crop that was tilled into the soil as green manure. That was a practice followed by Jeff's father, Walter Mitchell, who farmed in Chester County in the early 1950s until retirement.

Walter was a "real believer in cover crops," and would chew up the cover crops and incorporate the "green manure," adding more moistureretention ability to the soil.

The award-winning plot, once a pasture for a number of years, gradually saw an increase in organic matter, essential for high corn yields.

What is amazing, according to Mitchell, is how two similar fields can yield different

Mitchell pointed out, according to the lab soil test, how field 7 compares to the awardwinning field 2. Field 7 has similar readings, except for the organic content. And that field only yielded 90 bushels per acre, compared to 206 for the winning plot.

A challenge Mitchell faces is taking the "red clay" soils of northeastern Lancaster County, that can often turn hardpan easily in a hot, dry summer, and make them top producers.

The key is to continue to use cover crops and building the soil's organic matter content, which goes a long way toward water absorption. Using no-till on the red clay soils is a challenge, also — Mitchell believes that they turn easily to hardpan and may require some tillage to break them up to allow moisture penetration and avoid runoff.

On the red clay soils of Reinholds, Mitchell harvests an average of 158 bushels per acre of corn.

"I was pleased with the yield," said Mitchell. He plans to use chicken manure and cover crops in the rotation to raise the production level of the corn crops. He also uses a lot of different corn varieties with varying maturity dates to spread the risk during unpredictable growing years.

Increasingly, Mitchell is slowly watching challenges for



Susie Mitchell and son Matt inspect the steers at the Reinholds home farm.

growing good crops in Chester County slip away. A great deal of prime farmland has been lost to development.

Now, he is content to meet the same challenges of farming in northeastern Lancaster County.

Of note is the attention to detail he has noticed growers use on reading the results of the 5-Acre Corn Club contest, of which the results are included in this issue of Corn Talk.

"Some growers take it very seriously," he noted. "I look at it and learn some things." Mitchell pointed out one interesting item — the trips across the field.

Some growers had six,

seven, even eight trips across the field. With even a few trips, Mitchell worries about compaction, and uses deep tillage equipment. He noted one chart which indicated a couple of growers took 14 trips across the field.

"What can they possibly be doing, taking 14 trips across the field?" Mitchell said with a laugh.

Jeff farms with his wife Susie, a registered nurse who left the profession to care fulltime for their son. Matt. 3. A son, Ben, 13, helps Jeff maintain the fields in Chester County. A daughter, Becky, 17, is a junior at Downingtown High School.

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MHS Student Takes Top Honors In Corn-Growing Contest

HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) - Milton Hershey School (MHS) Student Solomon Melson received first place honors in a corn-growing contest sponsored by The Pennsylvania Master Corn Growers Associa-

Solomon, a senior, yielded the most corn per acre in Dauphin County, totaling 188.42 bushels. His yield ranked 10th for the state of Pennsylvania.

Each contestant registered five acres of com. During harvest, judges observed and measured the yield of each parcel.

Solomon, who competed largely with professional farmers, maintained 10 MHS acres

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of corn as part of a summer internship in the School's Agricultural and Environmental Education Program. In addition to caring for the field, Solomon researched ways in which he could produce optimal growth, including pest management and use of fertilizers.

Solomon will receive a plaque for his efforts.

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