

# Survey Documents Crop Rotation Practices

**Greg Roth**  
Penn State Agronomy  
Associate Professor

Many dairy farmers grow corn and alfalfa in rotation. There are many variations on the standard corn alfalfa rotations, however.

The length of rotation can vary, some farmers double-crop corn following alfalfa, and some include nurse crops such as oats or triticale in a corn/alfalfa rotation. We are interested in determining the potential for shorter corn/alfalfa rotations. This would help to reduce some of the problems associated with corn grown in long rotations.

Recently we conducted a survey of 153 dairy producers who manage a total of 38,000 acres of crops in Franklin and Lycoming counties. Our objective was to study crop rotation practices of producers in the counties.

Our study showed that a surprising number of growers were using rotations that included three years or less of corn. Thirty-nine percent of the growers surveyed indicated they used a 3-year corn/3-year alfalfa rotation of some kind. We also asked the producers what factors they consider in rotating alfalfa back to corn: 91 percent indicated they considered stand density, 40 percent

considered stand age, and 23 percent said they considered feed needs. So most growers are making the decision to rotate based on the density of their alfalfa stands.

We also found that double-cropping corn after alfalfa is also relatively popular. About 41 percent of the producers in Franklin County reported that they double-crop corn after alfalfa most of the time. In Lycoming County, where the season is a bit shorter, 24 percent reported double-cropping corn after alfalfa most of the time.

Alfalfa management practices also vary among producers. Nurse crops such as oats,



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field peas, or triticale are popular in these areas, with 68 percent of the Lycoming respondents and 31 percent of the Franklin County producers reporting the use of a nurse crop. The use of no-till alfalfa also varied among the counties with 18 percent of the Franklin county dairy producers reporting that they used no-till most of the time. In contrast, none of the Lycoming County respondents reported using no-till most of the time.

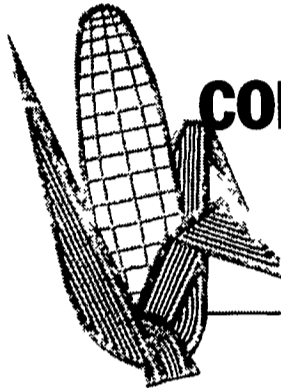
One factor that is critical in considering shorter rotations is the number of cuttings of alfalfa you harvest in the seeding year. In Franklin County, 75 percent of the producers reported harvesting three (61 percent) or four (14 percent)

times in the seeding year. In Lycoming County, only 33 percent reported harvesting three (30 percent) or four (3 percent) times in the seeding year.

Our study demonstrates that crop production practices vary somewhat between the two counties and that there does seem to be potential for short rotations in both areas.

A significant number of producers are already using relatively short rotations. This study also indicated several barriers to adopting shorter rotations — low use of no-till alfalfa, cost of reseeding alfalfa, and only one or two seeding year harvests in some areas.


Understanding these factors will help us target our research programs for the future.



## PENNSYLVANIA MASTER CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION

### President's Message

**Chris Kimmel**  
President, PMCGA



(Continued from Page 1)

services every minute.

- 12 babies are given to the wrong parents each day.

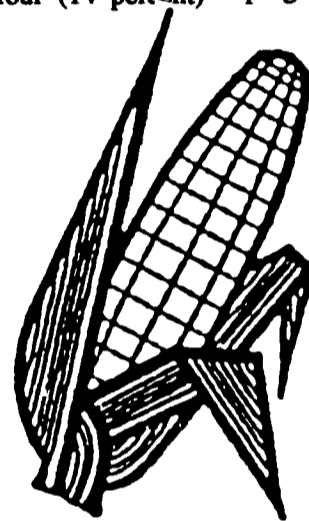
The PMCGA board is looking into ways to get some current research done by working with extension, chemical, and seed companies. If you have ideas on some research projects that you believe would be important to Pennsylvania corn growers, let one of your local directors know or myself. Contact me at Chris Kimmel, R.D. #2 Box 155, Shelocta, PA 15774, (724) 354-2568.

For the western Pennsylvania corn growers, we are in the process of planning a workshop for next December in the Mercer area. If there are subjects that you would like to see covered, or if you know of a good speaker, please let us know. The regular Pennsylvania Corn/Soybean Conference will still be held next year around February.

If you are a corn producer in Pennsylvania and have not yet joined the PMCGA and want to help support your industry, now would be a good time. You will still get a free bag of

seed corn with your three-year membership for \$75.

This will also give you a membership in the National Corn Growers Association. You need to support the industry that you depend on for part of your livelihood! Don't make other people pay your way!



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