

Highest PFGC Award

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I've been a member for 34 years, been on the board for six years, was president a couple of times, and served on a couple of committees. I go to the meetings when I can. They deal with forage-related matters—better varieties, fertilizer, seed, equipment. The emphasis used to be mainly forages. Now it's pastures, too."

Jim and his wife, Pat, farm 220 acres in Ferguson Valley, Mifflin County. He plants 75 acres of corn, 80 acres of alfalfa, and some grass hay. Ten acres of pasture frame the front part of the barn. The dry cows pasture in five acres. He and his hired help of 10 years, Pam Bilger, milk 55 Holsteins for a 19,000-pound herd average.

"The best soil on our farm is Frankstown," Hostetter said. "We have some Edom silt loam and small amounts of Elliber and Huntingdon. I get five to six tons of forage, which is good for these soil types. The highest producers get six to eight tons per acres. I have scales that I used a lot, especially on yields that

look good. That way we know exactly. One year, we had a three-acre piece of corn in the corn club, and we weighted all of the corn for total production."

Hostetter utilizes his 20-year-old manure pit to help manage manure in order to lower fertilizer costs. He believes he provides better feed for this cattle and can produce milk less expensively than with heavy grain feeding.

Hostetter's emphasis on forage began long before he started farming on his own. He was raised on a

farm in Lancaster County, then moved to Mifflin County in 1953 and worked as a DHIA tester for 12 years. There Hostetter learned about forage production and was given information to be passed on to the farmer.

"Then for six or eight years, I participated in a state alfalfa growers contest. The object was to see how much quality alfalfa could be produced per acre. We had to keep complete costs of production, including machinery costs."

Fifteen years ago, spurred by his desire to conserve soil Hostetter purchased a no-till drill even though he couldn't find much information about no-tilling alfalfa. He remembers one time in particular when the

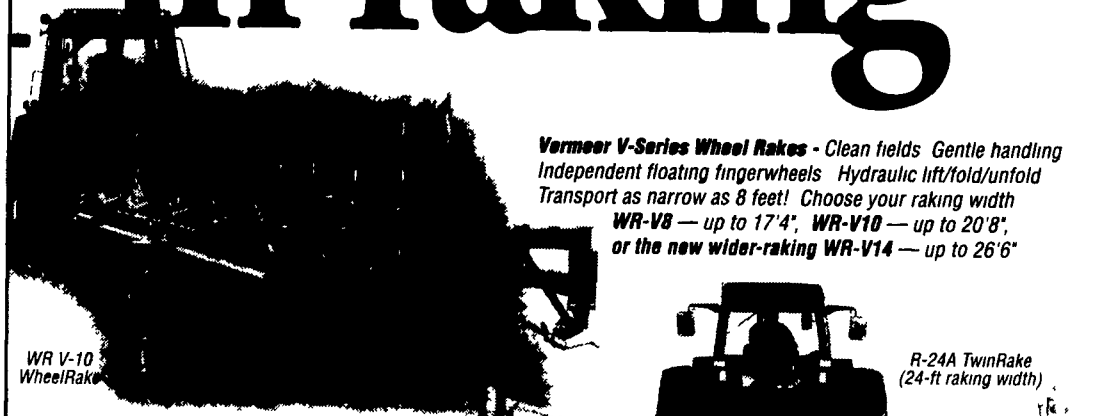
soil and seed in a conventionally-tilled field washed away in a hard rain one hour after planting. Now he sows all his alfalfa no-till as soon as the ground is ready.

Last year, Hostetter tried a leaf-hopper-resistant variety and was pleased with the results. He planted more this year with a "we'll see" attitude.

"Even the best manager must deal with the variables associated with fertility, planting, and harvesting conditions, and weed and insect control. Forages are top-notch feeds for cattle and you're also raising a good conservation crop with little soil erosion. We're told often that we haven't reached full potential for forages."



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