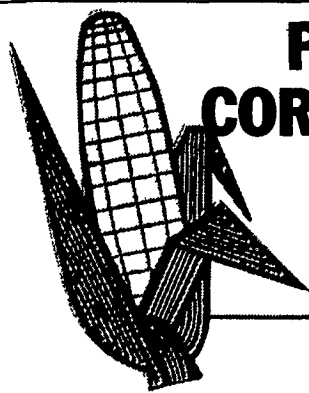


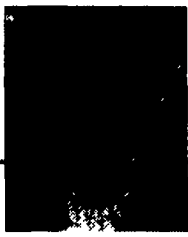
PENNSYLVANIA MASTER CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION



Between The Rows

Dr. Greg Roth

Penn State Agronomy Associate Professor



The curtain is closing on another season and it was another learning experience for most corn growers this year. As this season draws to an end, lets take time to take one look back at some interesting events of 1998 and one look to the future.

First a look back. Although we had a rough start, fortunately, for many it turned out to be a good year after all. This year reinforced one concept that I have grown to find true — corn can often overcome ugly conditions in the early season to do rather well. I saw one field where part or the field got all of its nitrogen at planting, before "the rain" in early May. Another part of the field didn't get any nitrogen until late

May.

In early June, the part of the field that got nitrogen was vigorous and dark green and the later fertilized corn was pale and short.

When I returned in August, I was surprised to find the situation had completely reversed. Now the corn that got nitrogen after the rain was tall and dark green was going to win the yield contest in the field.

The take-home message — don't let early season appearance totally dominate your management decisions. In this case, the best option probably would have been to split the nitrogen into two applications to get the best of both works — good early season growth and late season

nitrogen availability.

I was also impressed with a number of examples of appropriate and successful uses of new technology. Here are a few I saw this year.

One group we worked with wanted to grow corn with a minimum of residual pesticides at the request of they landlord. They killed an alfalfa sod in the fall and followed with Roundup Ready corn in the spring. Weed pressure was low and single Roundup application and no insecticide did the trick.

Another example I encountered was when two of my colleagues modified their planter to have both a frame-mounted no-till couler followed by row cleaners. The result appeared to be great

stands in high residue fields and more consistent success than they had with the row cleaners alone.

I took my own advice and stuck a few Bt hybrids in one of my late planted population test plots along with several good non-Bt hybrids. Corn bore pressure in this field was significant and the Bt hybrids were showing their trademark excellent standability while others were lodging by late September.

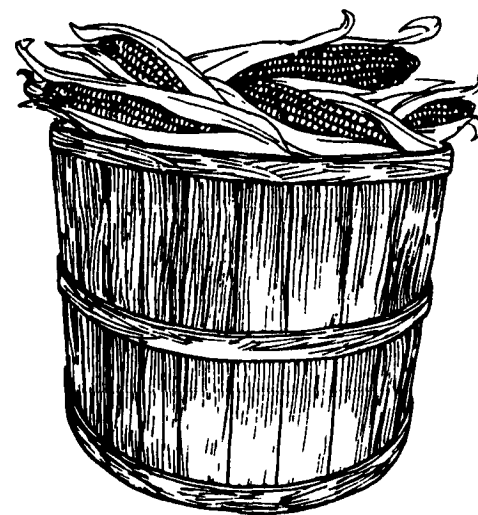
And now for a look forward. The new plateau for grain prices that some predicted was on the horizon has never materialized. In fact, it appears we have gone to the valley floor instead. Current corn prices will likely mean some belt-tightening in the season ahead.

As you go through the though the thought process of those things you are going to

cut back on, be careful. Remember to still prioritize those inputs that we know are cost effective and have a solid payback. Quality seed, weed control, nitrogen, lime and insecticide (where necessary) are fundamental inputs to bank on. When investing in new technology, put it to work where you'll see the biggest return.

Also look carefully at some fixed cost decisions. Can equipment be shared or used for custom operation Can a good servicing make equipment last another year before replacement? Also look hard at the economics on high priced or low yielding ground.

Try to keep a positive attitude. Keep in mind that low cost commodity producers are those who generally prevail. And remember, as I recently saw on the Internet, the best cure for low prices is low prices.



Rumbaugh Works On Leading Edge

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association, but on other issues affecting farmers.

According to Roth, the association today has three main functions: to share production information, create better corn markets, and to educate the public about issues facing corn growers.

The Pennsylvania association is an affiliate of the National Corn Growers Association (NCGA). The

state association sponsors the five-acre Corn Club that receives about 150 entries each year for its yield contests, and sponsors a couple of conferences each year with outside speakers.

About nine billion bushels of corn are grown in America each year, Roth said. Of that total, five billion bushels are used for livestock feed, two billion bushels are exported, and about one billion bushels

are used for industrial purposes. Approximately 600 million bushels are used in the production of ethanol, which the association considers to be a domestic, renewable source of energy.

The state association has 310 members.



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