

Corn/Soy Confab to Focus on Ups, Downs In Agriculture

NEWARK, Del.—Robert Hutchison and his brothers run a choose-and-cut Christmas tree business on their farm in Cordova, Md. It's a good sideline on the farm that grows corn, soybeans, barley and wheat, he said, but it's "a lot of hard work." To stay afloat in the 21st century, he thinks farmers will have to be proactive and move toward strategies that take advantage of the needs of population around them, such as Christmas tree, turf or recreational farming.

Bruce Lambertson of Lambertson Farms, Inc. in Stockton,

Md., would like to retire someday, "at least on paper," he said with a chuckle. In the meantime, he and his brother, Curtis, have no time for growing specialty crops, but he's very interested in learning more about GPS—global positioning systems—as a way to maximize his planting efforts and keep feed and fertilizer costs down.

Pat and Temple Rhodes already use GPS on their combines and tractors and credit new technologies with their ability to stay competitive in business. They're not ready to give up one particular low-tech prac-

tice, though: their whole family—four daughters, one son, 14 grandchildren and assorted in-laws—all pitch in when needed, which keeps labor costs down.

All three families are multi-generation farmers on Delmarva and all three agree: changes are coming quickly in agriculture, and with these changes, problems and challenges their parents and grandparents could never have imagined. It's not just drought, lack of markets or labor problems that face farmers in 2000. It's federal regulations, genetically enhanced crops and risk management that hold their attention as they are confronted with serious decisions, including the most serious of all: can we afford to continue farming?

Bruce Lambertson, Robert Hutchison, and Pat and Temple Rhodes will share their history, experiences and concerns on the future of farming in personal conversations with local farmers at the 20th Annual Delmarva Corn and Soybean Technology Conference. This year's theme is "Beyond 2000—Remaining Pro-

fitable in Agriculture in the New Century."

Using a new format featuring roundtable discussions on some of the questions and issues challenging farmers today, conference sessions will be held at three locations across the Delmarva peninsula

•Thursday, Feb 10: Asbury United Methodist Church, West Mount Vernon Street, Smyrna, Del. Guest speakers: Pat and Temple Rhodes

•Friday, Feb 11 Carolina County 4-H Park, Decatur Road off Highway 16, Denton, Md. Guest speaker: Robert Hutchison

•Saturday, Feb 12: Pocomoke High School, off U.S. Route 13, Pocomoke City, Md. Guest speaker: Bruce Lambertson

All sessions will run from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., with a one-hour break for lunch. Roundtable discussion topics are "Shaping the Farm Business Strategy"; "Grain Marketing—Adding To Your Bottom Line"; "Biotechnology and the Consumer"; and "Managing Risk Through

Government Programs."

"We're planning a very interactive meeting this year so farmers can participate in the discussions as much as they like," said Gordon Johnson, cooperative extension agricultural agent for the University of Delaware and chair of the Corn and Soybean Conference planning committee. Instead of a trade show, the conference will center on roundtable discussions featuring guests from the farming community, agribusiness community and consumer groups as well as experts from the universities of Delaware and Maryland.

The conference is sponsored by Cooperative Extension at land-grant universities in Delaware, Maryland and Virginia and by agribusinesses serving the Delmarva peninsula. However, there will be no commercial or educational exhibits at this year's event.

The \$5 registration charge for each meeting includes refreshments and lunch. For more information, contact your county cooperative extension office. Register early—seating is limited at each location.


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But to be successful, the right kind of crops have to meet the needs for the right buyers, and the quality has to be high to compete with southern produce, noted Leinbach.

"Everything has to be done right, from A to Z," he said.

Most auctions, including Weaverland Auction in New Holland, begin the auction season in late March or early April with flowers, bedding plants, and baskets and operate until about Thanksgiving. Several auctions also have Christmas trees.

Neil A. Courtney, manager of Buffalo Valley Produce Auction in Mifflinburg, sells wreaths and Christmas trees. The Christmas tree auction is a "vital part" of the auction, and will be conducted over two days this year, he noted.

The auction has about 1,700 consignors from central Pennsylvania, Florida, Connecticut, and other areas. The auction hosts up to 900 buyers.

Courtney pointed out that growers should learn the concept of produce auction. The auctions are strictly a business of "averages," he pointed out in the convention's proceedings. Growers must use the auction consistently and not be concerned about day prices, but prices over a long term. "No price is too low and none too high at the auction," he said.

Most of the auctions use produce, including cantaloupes and watermelons, from southern growers.

Weaverland auction, according to spokesperson Moses Sensenig, has 400 regular growers and about 75-100 buyers, operating in its second year, located three miles north of New Holland.

Farmers in the area are gradually changing from growing tobacco to vegetables, according to the report supplied by Daniel Martin of the auction in the proceedings.

Commissions are the same at most, including eight percent at Leola, Weaverland, and Leinbach, and 10 percent at Buffalo Valley. Buffalo Valley charges an extra two percent for services, Courtney noted.

Leinbach said all charge about eight percent because "Leola and others charge eight percent," he said. But it's a lot cheaper than the terminal market, which charges 15 percent and additional service charges.

Though some of the auctions have handled organic produce, there was minimal success, mostly because organic produce remains an inconstant market.



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