

First-Time Five-Acre Corn

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More is always ready to try new things, and has worked closely with the Penn State Cooperative Extension service in the past. This year he cosponsored a crop field day at his farm and a neighbor's farm. He is also always searching for new hybrids that meet his needs.

"Each year we have certain varieties that we test. They may be new varieties that are coming on the market or they may be some varieties that I've had in the past that may be very good yielders but may have some other traits that I didn't like very much. We still give them another chance," he said.

When the six to 12 varieties that he tests are harvested, More carefully determines yields by weighing the corn.

"It's very hard to eyeball it," he said. "If you're talking yields of close to 200 bushels per acre, and you miss it by 20 percent, that's 40 bushels."

He also looks for good standability, stalk strength, and depth of root system.

All of More's crop is custom harvested. After drying and storing the grain, More has it custom hauled to the buyer. The hauling expense might soon be a memory for More, however, because less than a mile up the road, a new mill is under construction.

"Normally when you get the grain hauled, it's like 15 cents per bushel," noted More. "Now that it's right next door to me, I'll do the hauling and it will give me a savings of about \$6,000 in a year."

More has again entered the Five-Acre Corn contest for the 2000 crop year and has also signed up for the soybean contest. Plentiful rain this year proved to be a double-edged sword for farmers in some areas. A wet spring caused late planting and more disease throughout the season. Low summer temperatures also proved to be a challenge.

"Because of the wet conditions, I started to plant this year on April 29. Usually I start around April 20," said More.

The wet weather also caused an increase in some plant diseases such as rust, blight, and gray leaf, but proved beneficial in the long run.

"I don't remember ever seeing a crop year when my corn didn't suffer some stress from lack of moisture," he said.

More also struggles to keep predators out of his crops. Deer damage in his soybeans is high and he has experienced a lot of corn crop damage from wild geese.

"The worst thing with the geese is that they're regulated by the federal government. Normally if you have a problem with a state animal, it's no problem. The game commission works with you to remedy the problem. This is

an altogether different situation. You have to go through a lot of different regulations to try to get a permit to take out so many birds. Just because you apply for a permit and spend \$25 for a permit doesn't mean they're going to give you a permit," he said.

In spite of weather conditions, disease and animal damage, corn yields this year are expected to be high throughout the state and nation.

"The county as a whole will be above average, the state will be above average and the nation, as far as the USDA is projecting so far, is going to be one of the largest crops that was ever produced. When that happens, our prices in this area are dictated by what happens in the corn growing belt out west. As it stands now, prices have been very soft in the past few months. We're at some 10-year lows on some prices,"

explained More.

Like other commodities, bountiful crops mean that it will be harder to make a profit farming. Add to that the higher fuel prices and times get tougher.

More calculated that diesel fuel in March of 1999 was \$.56 per gallon. Today it's \$1.29 per gallon or 135 percent higher than last season.

"Because of the low prices from the last two seasons and most likely this season, a farmer must have top management skills to keep the books in the black," said More.

More credits the government for helping farmers survive the rough times.

"If the government wasn't involved, I don't think you can keep the books in the black," he said, alluding to the many programs that are available for today's farmers.

As far he can see, it will be unlikely that another generation of Mores will crop farm and continue the family tradition.

"The farmer wants to

farm, but also he wants to receive a return on his investment. He's not received that for a number of years. When I look forward, I don't see anything different happening. I have a daughter and a son, and I don't see them being involved in this business," said More.

More also operates a home heating business in which he spends a great deal of time, balancing two self-employed operations.

Also, to help protect his farming investment, More belongs to a local grain marketing group, The Central Susquehanna Grain Marketing Club, which meets and trades options. They also share information about the price of inputs and other things to improve production efficiencies.

"We're comprised of about five counties," noted More.

He also is a member of the Farm Bureau, the NCGA, and different associations that are trying to develop other uses for grain.

If things are to become

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