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For Manheim Grower, Difference Is In The Details

MICHELLE KUNJAPPU
Lancaster Farming Staff
MANHEIM (Lancaster Co.)—The key is finding the limiting factor. When Dwight Rohrer speaks of his approach to successful crop management, the discussion may sound like a bit of a science lesson. Which is to be expected, really, from a lifetime farmer and agronomy major. Rohrer's management techniques have helped him win the top corn yield contest in the Pennsylvania shelled corn class in 2000. Additionally he had the highest soybean yields in Pennsylvania in 1996. He has participated in local yield contests since he began farming in 1997.

Most recently, he began entering the statewide contest for the past four years. Prior to that he had entered the local Manheim Young Farmer's yield contest. Rohrer is also planning on entering the upcoming national contest. "I'm a fairly competitive person," he said. "That's probably why I participate in

the field contests I learn a lot, too." Exchanging information about what worked this season or what other producers are experimenting with provides essential help, said Rohrer. "I don't enter just to win," he said. "My goal is to be able to evaluate myself against other producers. Contests allow farmers to compare themselves to growers in their area."

"Contests show me where I'm at," he said. "In farm management your goal should be to maintain production in the top 10 percent of the industry, so competition allows me to evaluate that I also see what I can learn from what other producers are doing," he said.

Crop Management

With 65 acres on his farm, Rohrer finds it necessary to maximize production. "We just try to do the best with what we have," he said. "Since there is no underground or nearby water source available for irriga-

tion, water is his "most limiting factor."

"The general principle in any crop is that the producer needs to find what the limiting factor is and manage that the best they can," he said. "In this area, rainfall is the limiting factor, and I work to make sure that moisture is the only limiting factor of my yield, because that's the only part I can't control." Factors such as seed, fertilizer, and most pests can be managed, explained Rohrer.

"I try to buy good seed, make sure the corn doesn't run out of nutrients, and make sure there is no insect pressure or soil compaction issue to deal with to limit production."

As for advice for other crop growers, "don't worry about rain," he said. "Do the best you can with what you have, and don't worry about the rest."

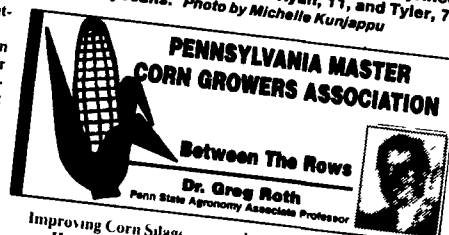
One technique he uses to maximize moisture is to intentionally deep-till in the fall to create vertical channels for water to filter.

"I've found that erosion is lower in those fields with

(Turn to Page 4)



Pennsylvania's 2000 top corn yield contest winner, Dwight Rohrer, is joined by his wife Rosie and daughter Kristyn, 5. Not pictured is Ryan, 11, and Tyler, 7. Rohrer farms 65 acres of corn and soybeans. Photo by Michelle Kunjappu



PENNSYLVANIA MASTER CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION

Between The Rows

Dr. Greg Roth
Penn State Agronomy Associate Professor

Improving Corn Silage

Harvest Timing
This is my first Between the Rows since I left last September for a six-month visit to the Miner Institute in northern New York to study corn silage and dairy cows. After going through another silage harvest here with my Miner experience under my belt, I thought a few comments on silage harvesting might be in order.

My hosts at Miner, Ev Thomas and Dr. Charlie Sniffen, continually reinforced to me the idea that to and consistent forage quality silage. The Miner staff conducted a survey of active farms a few years back in their area and found that there is a wide range of corn

silage quality being fed, dispelling the idea that "silage is silage."

There are many factors that influence silage quality, but perhaps the biggest one is the timing of harvest. Harvesting too late is especially devastating. Late-harvested silage (greater than 40 percent DM) generally has lower fiber digestibility, harder kernels, less sugar, and slightly lower yields than that harvested in the desired moisture range. It also packs less well and is more subject to yeast and molds. All of these factors could result in two pounds less production per cow, translating into a \$10,000 loss annually on a 100-cow herd.

Even though we all realize the issues with harvesting (Turn to Page 3)



John Rowehl uses Excel Version 4 spreadsheet, running on a Windows laptop, which can determine standard deviation. See story about corn seed placement page 6. Photo by Andy Andrews, editor

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