

# Fulton County Grower Manages Under Unique Conditions

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small grains and manages timberland as well.

But McLucas has also developed systems that work for growing and handling corn. While he's experiencing his share of drought loss this year, some of the fields are producing moderate to good yields.

"The best word I can give you is 'erratic,'" he said of the corn crop. He noted yield estimates ranging from 11 to more than 150 bushels per acre, with a good part coming in at around 90-100 bushels.

According to McLucas, those figures would be a lot worse without the management practices he employs on his limestone-based soils that contain a lot of alluvial sandstone and shale in the top layer.

The key to maximizing corn yields is the no-till or minimum tillage approach he has been using for more than 20 years. In the past four years, he has switched to a strip-till planter, which works a narrow band for each row.

The difference in soil quality and moisture conservation between no-tilled and plowed ground is significant, McLucas said. After years of observation, and one recent experience with planting corn in a chisel-plowed field, he is ready to put the plow away.

According to McLucas, chisel plowing opened up the soil to greater moisture loss and contributed to a crop failure.

"Never again," he said of using the plow to prepare corn ground.



McLucas looks over his land in "The Narrows" area of Great Cove.

No-tilling also helps prevent erosion in McLucas's fields, many of which have fairly steep slopes.

For planting wheat after corn, McLucas makes one pass with a heavy-duty disk harrow. It's necessary to work the corn stalks down to reduce disease pressure on the wheat, he said.

In addition to moisture shortages and other challenges, McLucas estimated that deer cause him upward to \$30,000 corn crop damage a year.

A possible advantage to farming here is what McLucas calls a "micro-climate," which creates unusually heavy fogs and dews each spring and fall. This phenomenon occurs in a relatively small area of the valley, including the land he farms. According to McLucas, these waterings can contribute significant moisture for crops.

McLucas makes sure of

this: the corn he does harvest will be dry, high-quality grain that brings a premium price.

His propane-powered dryer system can dry shelled corn from 25 percent to 17 percent moisture as fast as it is harvested by his four-row Gleaner combines and hauled to the pit where it is augered to the dryer.

"If you start the dryer at 6 in the morning, by 10 at night it will do 4,000 bushels," he said.

According to McLucas, the

drying costs about 7 cents per bushel, including propane and electricity to run the dryer fans.

When the corn is dried to 17 percent, it is augered to a 16,000-bushel round steel bin equipped with a commercial aeration setup, which completes the drying process. This is accomplished by a high-powered fan that forces air from the floor of the bin upward through the corn.

Once corn comes into the bin in the fall, the fan runs continuously until January to ensure dry, quality kernels. It takes about \$35 worth of electricity per month — a small price to pay, according to McLucas. He doesn't take chances on corn going bad.

"The grain bin people tell me I'm overventilated, but on the other hand, I don't have moldy grain," he said.

McLucas starts harvesting corn at 25 percent moisture in order to head off field losses. By the time harvest is completed, the corn is at about 18 percent moisture in the field, he said.

For hauling corn, as well as hay and small grain, McLucas has another solid system in place. His son-in-law, Donald Truax, runs a trucking busi-



Relatively small but filled-out ears are characteristic of McLucas's crop this year.

ness, mainly hauling ag commodities.

"I guess you could say it's an in-house trucking company," McLucas said.

In addition to farming, McLucas was recently named secretary of the Pennsylvania Corn Growers Association. He is also hosting field corn trials on a number of varieties this year.

McLucas contracted his entire corn crop this August to ensure the benefit of a relatively high corn market. What does he think of the price?

"It's close to what it ought to be," he said. "It's getting there."



A T-shirt held up at bin door demonstrates significant amount of air being forced up through corn from below by a fan aeration system. The bin here contains shelled corn about six feet deep. McLucas said that even when the bin is full, there is no appreciable loss of air movement.

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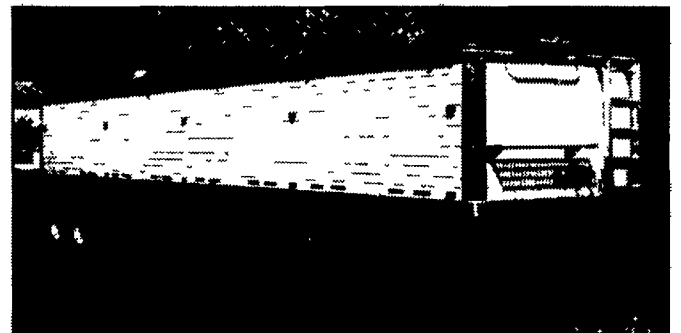
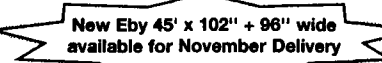
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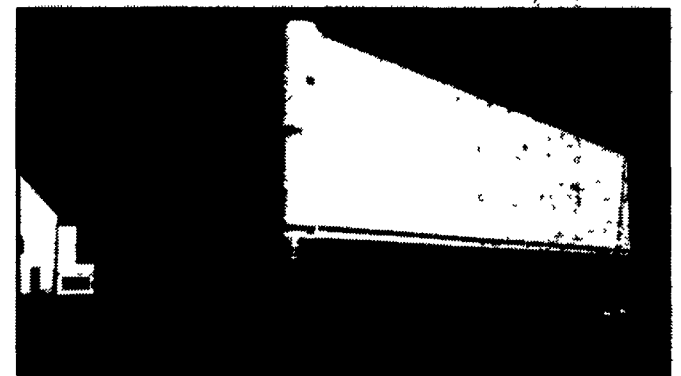
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