

Producers Learn About Economy, Pests At Chester County Conference

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GUTHRIESVILLE (Chester Co.) — Recently producers gathered for a four-day mid-winter conference addressing various aspects of agriculture. The 2003 Southeast Pennsylvania Crops Conference was sponsored by Penn State Cooperative Extension and various ag industries.

More than 60 producers attended the meeting conducted in Guthriesville. Other locations included Allentown, Creamery, and Leesport.

Lou Moore, ag economics professor at Penn State, opened the day with a presentation about what the future holds for local producers. The ag economy has been affected by the abundance of milk, meat, and eggs, sluggish exports, and a deep drought.

In addition, U.S. crop production continues rise, even with the challenge of last year's drought, and Moore looks for the long-term trend for yields "to continue to go up," he said.

On the national level, net farm income for 2002 was \$36.2 billion. Close to half — \$17 billion — came from government payments. "We can't afford not to bother with the program," he said.

As for the future, "the good thing is that we've been getting rains, so a drought is less likely," said Moore. However the corn belt of the U.S. is still dry (water levels are at almost-record lows) "so it looks like next year corn production could be down in those areas," said Moore.

He also commented on the Farm Bill — a legislative measure that costs each consumer four cents per meal each day. "I think of it as an investment because we're producing it (food) cheaper than we'd be selling it to consumers otherwise," he said.



At the conference in Guthriesville, speakers included, from left, Lou Moore, Penn State; Phil Staudt, PDA; Joanne Whalen, University of Delaware; and Blair Hower, PDA.

Moore advised that producers go to their local Farm Service Agency office to maximize the benefits — "don't try to operate without partnering in the farm programs."

Blair Hower, PDA, discussed pesticide storage, security, and disposal, a program developed the Penn States pesticide education program.

In view of the threats posed to our country, pointed out Hower, PDA has requested stepped-up vigilance from producers, who should immediately report suspicious activity.

Hower also advised that producers keep copies of labels for each product. Websites bluebooktor.com and greenbook.net also hold useful label information.

To avoid cross-contamination, producers should store different types of containers separately from each other.

"This is particularly important with herbicides," he said. Storing dry materials above liquids elimi-

nates problems in case of a leak. Using metal shelves (which will not absorb product and clean easily) is also preferable to wood.

Maintain an updated product inventory with product names, date of purchases, quantity, an location in storage area, said Hower. In addition, application equipment stored off site should be locked and disabled.

Joanne Whalen, University of Delaware, discussed insect pest management, since "knowing a little bit about potential pests can go a long way," she said.

First on Whalen's list was the seed corn maggot, a fly that overwinters as a pupae and can emerge as early as February. The pest prefers moist, freshly-plowed soil with plenty of decaying organic material to lay eggs.

The eggs hatch in 1-9 days and feed on the field's seeds, effectively killing the seeds or causing poor germination for the seeds. The flies are more of a problem on no-till fields.

Cheap, effective hopper-box treatments "might be the way I would go at this point," said Whalen.

Wireworms also feed on seeds, besides the roots and growing plant. They overwinter as a larvae and may stay in the soil for up to five years as a larvae. The adult form of wireworms are click beetles, which emerge in the summer.

They also prefer high organic matter content in the soil. Seed treatments generally provide better control than liquid and granular insecticides, said Whalen.

A producer can identify the work of grubs if the fields plants are uneven — a poor-doing plants scattered among more robust neighbors. The adult is the Japanese beetle.

A grub may also spend multiple years in the soil. Conditions favoring grubs are rotations behind pastures and double cropped soybeans.

They affect corn but "we are starting to see activity in soybeans, too," she said. Seed treatments can work under low to modest pressure.

Cutworms eat the base of the plant and leaves, and may emerge as early as March. Tank-mixing insecticides with herbicides can be used for control, applied immediately before planting.

Whalen is cautious about new seed treatments used for controlling cutworms, she said. Cutworm control seems to work well on small worms, but may not give complete control if worms are large at planting time of the population is high.

"Producers still need to scout and treat if threshold levels are present," she said.

Slugs, which overwinter as

eggs, feed on the whole plant. They prefer cool, wet springs and no-till conditions. Good seed slot closure — "making sure the pressure wheels really close the furrow because they'll go right down that furrow" — she said, is essential.

Baits tend to work better for slugs than treating. The soybean cyst nematode — identified by tiny cysts on the root and yellow, stunted plants — can be controlled with crop rotation or resistant varieties of plants. Small grains, corn, and sorghum are non-hosts, according to Whalen, who recommended a minimum of two years using non-host crops or resistant varieties.

"Rotation, rotation, rotation — if I was a nematologist, that's what I'd be up here saying to you," she said.

Phil Staudt, PDA, gave an updated on Pennsylvania's ongoing ChemSweep program. "You can still get rid of unwanted pesticides," he said.

In approximately 10 years, officials have disposed of more than one million pounds of pesticide through the program.

The program costs the user nothing, as it is funded mainly by the registry of products by chemical companies, according to Staudt.

"Check your particular site, if you have any of that material that you want to get rid of," he urged the audience. "Your responsibility in this program basically is advising us to what you have," he said. "You bring it in to the office and from there it is our responsibility."

The material is sent to an incinerator.

Producers received two core and two category pesticide credits for the day's session.



No Matter How Close You Get

you can still miss something.

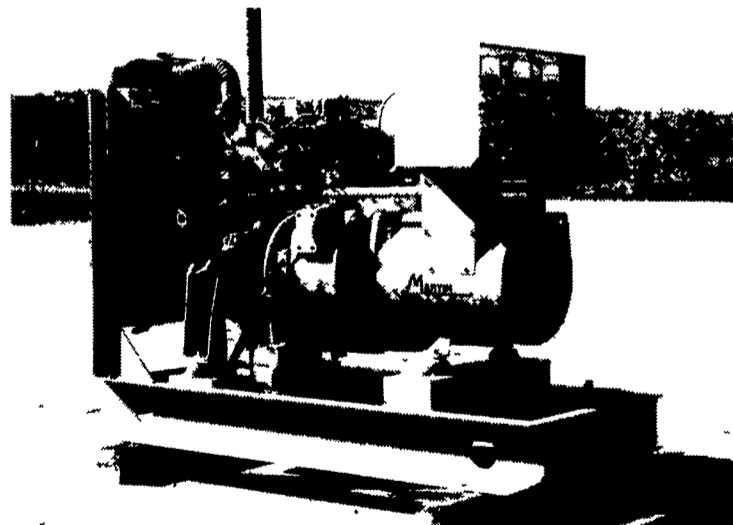
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