

ifo news

Sept.-Oct., 1997



Innovative Farmers of Ohio

IFO Membership
3083 Liberty Rd.
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1842 Bell Rd.
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Announcing

ANNUAL IFO COOPERATORS MEETING

Date: December 10, 1997, (9AM to 3PM)

Place: Stratford Ecological Center, Delaware, Ohio

The annual Cooperators Meeting will be held this year on December 10th at the Stratford Center from 9AM to 3PM. The meeting will focus on farmers helping each other by sharing information and developing their own research projects for the 1998 growing season. Farmers who have developed their own innovative farming systems will talk about their successes and failures. Research results from 1997 will be presented. The meeting will also give participants an opportunity to meet and talk with Phil Rzewnicki, who has just recently been hired by Ohio State University Extension as their On-Farm Research Coordinator. Phil will be working closely with IFO members to assist them in developing and carrying out their own research projects. Look for a program to be in the mail to you soon; but, in the meantime, make note of the date of this important IFO event and plan to attend. The program is free and lunch will be provided.

From the Milking Parlor...Joe Hartzler, IFO President

Did you ever wonder where applying your manure would give you the best bang for your buck. Did you ever ask yourself "Is fertilizer my only option for a starter in corn?" or maybe "Can cover crops improve my rotation?" These are some of the questions asked this year in IFO on-farm research plots.

What is on-farm research, you ask. It is research based on questions that farmers ask and research conducted by farmers with assistance from OSU researchers, extension agents and other IFO farmers.

This is the third year that I have personally participated in this kind of research. And the results of the research have helped me make specific decision for my farm. In the first year, my questions was "would open pollinated corn increase corn silage yield?" The second year I wanted to know which cover crops would work best in my rotation. This past year I was interested in learning whether 48 % bran meal could be used in 2nd year corn to increase yield.

On-farm research gives farmers an important tool to use in making management decisions. I would like to encourage you to attend the cooperators training program coming up in December to learn more about how on-farm research is conducted. There will be technical support made available to you if you choose to conduct a research project on you farm and, in addition, some financial support will be available to help defray your costs. Speaking for IFO, we hope you will join with other farmers and participate in the 1998 IFO research program

the constructed wetland, which involves only two 4 by 80 foot beds (each 18 inches deep filled with gravel), replaces 1,000 feet of conventional leach line. Live flowering plants are placed in the rock beds and act as biofilters that convert the waste water into plant nutrients, thereby, removing organic materials suspended in the effluent coming from the septic tank. The Eselgroth system is an experimental one for Ross County although it has been successfully used in other states.

The key to lowering input costs on the Eselgroth farm is the rotation system that Charlie proudly notes was used by his father for many years. The system is a corn-soybean-wheat (undersowed with clover and timothy)-hay rotation. After the last rotation the hay is not harvested or "mined" as Charlie put it but rather incorporated to build soil organic matter and increase nutrient availability for subsequent crops. His soil tests show that the system works well without the use of commercial fertilizers. In fact, Charlie will be applying for organic certification on 17 of his acres next spring, followed by additional 17 acre fields until he has a total of 78 acres certified. Charlie believes that the premium price currently being paid for organic soybeans will provide the small farmer an opportunity to make money in an environmentally sound way.

Weeds provide a challenge to all growers—especially to those who do not use herbicides. To manage weeds in corn, Charlie chisel plows in the spring to thin thistle, disks once and uses the field cultivator two times and the rotary hoe three times. When asked about soil compaction Charlie said that he can minimize this problem by not taking his equipment onto wet soil. As a neighbor said to him years ago, "you're always money ahead to wait until the ground is dry." He finds that planting soybeans heavier than usual helps control weeds in that crop.

In the near future Charlie plans to build a beef cattle herd that can be rotationally grazed. He believes that having animals on the farm will complete his long-range goal of having a diversified operation in which nutrients are recycled. It was clear to the folks who visited the farm that Charlie and Jamie Eselgroth are committed to preserving not only the land they farm but also the quality of life that family farming can offer. It was evident, too, that the Eselgroths are respected members of their community.

David and Elsie Kline's Farm, August 16, 1997, Holmes County

Threatening thunderheads just barely held off for the first field day IFO has sponsored on an Amish farm. On August 16, about 100 guests enjoyed visiting with David and Elsie Kline on their dairy farm in Holmes County. Attendees came from near and far, even as far as the upper peninsula of Michigan, and were intensely interested in seeing first hand how the Amish farm and in learning more about Amish ways of life and philosophy. The Klines have a profitable and productive 120 acre farm which supports their family--about 28 Jersey cows, replacement heifers and calves, 6 Belgian draft horses plus buggy horses, 21 pigs, 75 chickens, three dogs, barn cats and a rich array of birds, butterflies and other forms of biodiversity. They have agreed to be part of a Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE) grant aimed at gathering information about sustainable Amish farming practices that could be adopted by non-Amish farmers.

The Klines farm their 70 acres of tillable land in the old tried-and-true German-Swiss rotation of: hay-hay-corn-oats-small grain, started by their Anabaptist ancestors centuries ago. Manure and legumes are the primary source of fertility, with some high-calcium lime being applied when needed. Shallow tillage (about 6 inches plow depth) and cultivation for weed control are accomplished with horses. Because of the lighter weight of Amish equipment, Amish farmers can get into their fields sooner and under wetter conditions than tractor farmers. David uses modern hybrid seed varieties, although he tends to buy from local "mom and pop" companies as much as possible. Some atrazine is used to control stubborn quack grass and thistle. He sprayed insecticide for leaf hopper on alfalfa for the first time in 20 years this year. Minerals and some soybean meal are purchased if the hay crop is poor, but the farm is usually self-sufficient. Pastures are rotationally grazed as are the hay and cornfields after harvest. Hay is cut and baled with horses; but in David's church, members can use a tractor to haul the loaded wagons to the barn. Small grains are cut and shocked by family members. When dried, a community threshing ring is called in to thresh the shocks. Silo filling is also done with shared community labor. Elsie has a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) garden in which she raises vegetables for their family and seven subscribing families. The cows are milked by family members using a milking machine. Milk is chilled in a diesel powered cooling tank and sold to Holmes Cheese Company.

Our research on the Kline's farm shows that this small farm is extremely efficient ecologically, which contributes substantially to its profitability. Very few purchased inputs are required and productivity is usually high—David harvested 187 bushels of corn per acre last year without the use of any commercial fertilizer. Surprisingly, our data show that in some years the Klines are able to net as much cash profit from 27 or 28 cows as farmers milking 100 to 180 cows. David says "I probably spend more time sitting on the front porch than they do." In the two years of our study, the Klines have kept an average of 47 percent of their gross income as net cash profit. This is one of the strongest arguments we have seen against the idea, proposed by many agricultural economists, that getting bigger is the only way to stay in farming. In addition to low input costs, shared community labor is an important part of the profit picture of the Kline's farm. It is also an important part of their quality of life. "Shared labor is the exchange of work and fellowship, like the noon meal that we have after church." So, in addition to lowering input costs, direct marketing, value adding, etc., maybe we should add community cooperation to our lists of things farm families can do to be more sustainable. (Deb Stinner)

A Sense of Community.....by David Kline

This morning it was 55 degrees with patchy fog when I walked up over the east hill to get the cows. Even though the moon is waning toward its last quarter, its light, filtered by the fog, still illuminated the cowpath enough that I did not need the flashlight.

To the right of the crescent moon was Orion, on his back, and shimmering Sirius hung low in the southeast. When I reached the top of the hill I stopped to listen. The quietude of the early morning was so complete that the katydids grexing from the woods a quarter of a mile away to my left sounded only an arm's length away. So did the screech owl's quavering call from the farmstead to the right.

I waited. Then I heard the first one—a farmer calling his cows. A low "kummsaaaaa"(the sa as in salve) from the next farm. Melvin's sort of a low-key guy and doesn't use the wild and free cry most of his neighbors do. I thought it was time for a wake-up call so I cupped my hands to my mouth, filled my lungs and with the night-chilled air, let lose with a high-pitched "Whoooooo, whoooooo." The echoes hadn't died out before two other neighbors joined the chorus with their finest calls.

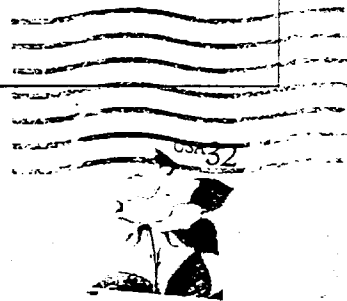
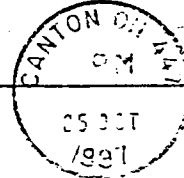
Dennis has a wonderful repertoire; at least half a dozen different musical yodels. A joy to behold. Of course, he is also one of the best singers in church.

From Bert I learned a beautiful split "who/ooo". It is a melodious call passed down through his family that was fine-tuned in the Alpine meadows of Switzerland. But I hadn't heard from him yet. Since he is an early riser he likely had the cows in the stable already.

I decided to check Bert out. Tempt him. (Usually when a farmer oversleeps he's very discreet about it and may not even call his cows; he simply fetches them.) I sent my finest version of the split "WHOOOO/ooooo" reverberating up and down the valley. Immediately Bert answered with a fine tenor, "WHOOOOOOOO/ooooooooooo". Aha, he did get up a bit late. Five instead of four-thirty. From a mile west Enos answered.

Soon I heard soft lowing from the fog. Glow complaining about her arthritic hip. Then came Patsy and Gertie and Linda and Nell and the rest of the herd walking single file down the path toward the barn.

Since more I inhaled the sweet chill air rich with ripeness of summer and called "WHOOO/oooo". Not for the cows this time, but a call in celebration of a new day.



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