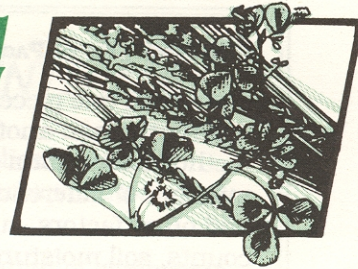


SUSTAINABLE FARMING

Quarterly



VOL. 4 No. 4 FEBRUARY 1993

WHY ON-FARM TESTING CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE

By *STUART WUEST, STEEP II ON-FARM TESTING COORDINATOR, WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY, PULLMAN.*

There is a lot of talk today about "on-farm research," "participatory research," and other types of research in which farmers play an important role. The involvement of farmers is the common theme, but the intent and form of these efforts span a wide spectrum. It is important that the reader understand my definition of on-farm testing before I tell of its value and relate what we here at Washington State University have learned about design and performance.

The term "on-farm testing" (OFT) was chosen by a group of investigators working under the federal Solutions to Environmental and Economic

Problems (STEEP II) program, focused on the dryland region of Idaho, Oregon and Washington. The goal is to teach farmers how to perform meaningful tests of alternative crop production practices on their own farms, using their own equipment. On-farm testing, therefore, is a tool they can use to answer their own questions.

The methods we are developing are appropriate for an individual farmer who is working alone to answer questions for his or her farm. They are also appropriate for groups of farmers working together on alternative practices with test sites on one or several

farms. Once the principles have been learned, on-farm tests can be designed and managed by farmers without outside help, but in many cases industry, research, and extension personnel also will become involved.

What is on-farm testing and what can it do for a grower? On-farm testing brings scientific methods to the comparisons that many farmers already do. The comparison might be of different seeding rates, fertilizer rates, varieties, cover crops, timing of herbicide application, no-till versus conventional seeding — almost anything the farmer might

MORE TESTING, PAGE 2

CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM TO RETIRE SOON

WILL DECADE OF PROGRESS BE PLOWED UNDER?

THIS COMMENTARY IS COMPILED FROM RECENT PRESENTATIONS MADE BY AERO STAFF ON MONTANA PUBLIC RADIO AND AT A CONSERVATION RESERVE PROGRAM SYMPOSIUM IN GREAT FALLS, MONT.

Within the next four years, our president and the Congress will decide the fate of millions of acres of land in the western states. This is not about wilderness areas or other public lands; it is about the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP).

Congress created the CRP in 1986, at the urging of national environmental groups and with the consent of major farm and

commodity organizations. Its goal was to prevent erosion on land unsuitable for cropping.

SEE RELATED STORY PAGE 3

The program pays farmers to take highly-erodible land out of crop production and plant "permanent cover," usually grasses. For each acre idled, the government pays an agreed-upon amount (up to \$45 in Montana) each year for 10 years — the life of the contract.

The program met its goal; soil erosion has dropped on the CRP acres. But the 10-year CRP contracts begin to expire in 1995.

MORE CRP, PAGE 6

INSIDE THE SFQ

FARMER STRIVES TO RETAIN CRP ADVANCES: PAGE 3.

WESTERN WORKING GROUP TACKLES SUSTAINABLE AG ISSUES: PAGE 5

RESOURCES: PAGE 7.

CALENDAR: BACK COVER.