



# Agronomy Notes

## Capital Region

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# EXTRA EDITION

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## New Incentive Payments For Good Conservation

Are you an agricultural producer located within the Schuylkill Watershed, the Lower Susquehanna-Swatara Watershed, or the Chester Sassafras Watershed? Are you practicing good conservation? If you answered “yes” to both of these questions, you may be eligible this year for a new USDA program. It is the Conservation Security Program. The program provides incentive payments to producers with a documented history of land stewardship to continue and expand their conservation efforts. It is administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). The 2005 Conservation Security Program will have a 60-day sign-up period beginning March 28, 2005, and ending May 27, 2005.

Each year the Conservation Security Program is only available to producers in certain priority watersheds. This year in Pennsylvania, producers within the Schuylkill Watershed, the Lower Susquehanna-Swatara Watershed, and the Chester Sassafras Watershed will have an opportunity to sign-up. Only farmers within the watershed boundaries are eligible to apply. A map of the Pennsylvania 2005 watersheds is located at <http://www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp2004/html/csp.html>.

Farmers within the watershed will be able to attend community meetings where they will receive more detailed information. Farmers should contact their local NRCS office for more information on those meetings. Farmers must complete a self-assessment, including a description of their conservation activities, to help determine eligibility. The self-assessment is available at and in NRCS offices on compact disk or as a printed workbook. The self-assessment can also be completed on-line or downloaded at the following website: <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/csp>.

Upon completing the self-assessment, producers submit an application at their local NRCS office. Based on the application, description of conservation activities, and a follow-up interview, NRCS determines in which program tier and enrollment category the applicant may participate.

The producer and their operation must meet the basic eligibility criteria. The land must be privately owned and the majority of that land must be located within the boundaries of one of the selected watersheds. The applicant must be in compliance with highly erodible and wetland provisions of the Food Security Act of 1985, have an active interest in the agricultural operation, and have control of the land for the life of the contract (5-10 years). The applicant's Adjusted Gross Income must be less than \$2.5 million. The applicant must share in the risk of producing any crop or livestock and be entitled to a share of the crop or livestock marketed from the operation.

Total payments are determined by the tier of participation, the unadjusted stewardship rate and the acres enrolled. For Tier I, contracts are for 5 years and the maximum payment is \$35,000 annually. For Tier II, contracts are for 5 to 10 years and the maximum payment is \$20,000 annually. For Tier III, contracts are for 5 to 10 years and the maximum payment is \$45,000 annually. To learn more about the Conservation Security Program contact your local NRCS office or visit the state NRCS Web Site at: <http://www.pa.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/>.

## Farm Safety Inspect Farm Equipment This Spring

Take time to inspect farm machinery for safety, and make repairs and upgrades as necessary, before taking equipment out to the fields this spring.

Here are some items to pay particular attention to:

- ❖ **Check safety signs and emblems on equipment-** especially those stickers containing important safety messages from the manufacturer. Over time, they become difficult to read. The suggestion is for farmers to replace worn-out stickers with new ones from equipment dealers.
- ❖ **Inspect your “Slow Moving Vehicle” (SMV) emblems.** If the paint is faded or the tape has begun to peel off, replace the emblem with a new one. Also, make sure SMV emblems are securely attached to equipment by tightening bolts and nuts.

- ❖ **Make sure there is a safety chain and safety hitch pin** on all equipment that will be towed.
- ❖ **Inspect the PTO shield and all other guards** to make sure they are securely in place and not damaged. Repair or replace all damaged or missing guards.
- ❖ **Check for damage to seat belts and roll over protective structures (ROPS).** Repair or replace them if there is damage. To work properly, the seatbelt latch must “click” when it is fastened. A seat belt must be used with ROPS – equipped tractors. According to the National Safety Council, the ROPS/ seatbelt combination is about 99% effective in preventing death from a tractor roll over. If your tractor does not have an ROPS and a seatbelt, now would be a good time to have it retrofitted with this life saving equipment.

**Jere Wingert, Extension Educator  
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## **Estate Planning for Farmers**

### ***What would happen if you became incapacitated and were not able to transact business? The Durable Power of Attorney***

In this article we want to discuss the fear we have if someday we become seriously ill and unable to handle our own affairs. Who would act on your behalf to pay bills, make bank deposits, watch over your farm and business and deal with the paperwork that accompanies collecting income or any benefits you may have? Preparing a durable power of attorney for finances is a reliable way to ensure your finances stay in the hands of a trusted advisor. If you do become incapacitated, the durable power of attorney will likely comfort your family to know your finances will be cared for.

- **What is a durable power of attorney?** - When you create a power of attorney, you give another person legal authority to act on your behalf. A durable power of attorney is valid even if you become unable to handle your own affairs due to incapacity.
- **When does a durable power of attorney take effect?** - A durable power of attorney can be drafted so that it goes into effect as soon as you sign it. This would be appropriate if you were going to have an operation or some type of incapacitating illness. Or, you could specify the durable power of attorney does not go into effect unless a doctor certifies you have become incapacitated. This allows you to keep control over your affairs unless and until you become incapacitated.
- **What does the power of attorney do?** - You can give your attorney-in-fact broad power over your finances. But you can give them as much or as little power as you wish. Whatever powers you give the attorney-in-fact, the attorney-in-fact must act in your best interests, keeping accurate records, keep your property separate from his or hers and avoid conflicts of interest.
- **What happens if you don't have a durable power of attorney for finances?** - If you become incapacitated and you haven't prepared a durable power of attorney for finances, a court proceeding is probably unavoidable. Your family will have to ask a court for authority over at least some of your financial affairs. If you are married, your spouse does have some authority over property you

own together and to pay bills from a joint bank account. However, there may be limits on your spouse's right to sell property owned by both of you. If your family has to go to court to get someone appointed to manage your financial affairs, they must ask a judge to rule that you cannot take care of your affairs, which becomes a public situation for a very private matter.

- **When does the durable power of attorney end?** - It ends at your death or when you recover from your illness to revoke it.

To ensure your durable power of attorney satisfies your personal situation, it is recommended you have an attorney draft your durable power of attorney. None of us want to think about becoming incapacitated, but a little planning can prevent problems for your family if it should happen. If you have additional questions do not hesitate to contact one of our financial professionals.

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## **Late Season Cornstalk Nitrate Test**

Nitrogen (N) management is one of the most challenging areas in corn production because of the many factors that influence N availability including: form of N applied, timing of application, impact of weather, etc. This is especially true when manure is part of the system. Standard N recommendations take into account many of these variables and early in-season tests such as the Pre-sidedress Soil Nitrate Test (PSNT) and Chlorophyll Meter test are very helpful in reducing the uncertainty in N recommendations. While this uncertainty can never be completely eliminated, it can be minimized. A key to improving N management over time is having reliable feedback on how well your N management program is working. While good yields and dark green plants are clear indicators of adequate N, they do not tell you if you have too much N which can especially be a problem for fields to which manure has been applied. Similarly, visual symptoms of N deficiency may be observed late in the season, but they are not always associated with decreased crop yields.

The Late Season Cornstalk Nitrate Test has been demonstrated to be a reliable end-of-season indicator of crop N status based on research performed throughout PA as well as other states. It provides a good assessment of whether the crop had the right amount of N or too much N or whether it ran out of gas. This information combined with records of N management can be very useful for making future management decisions. While you could test all fields, testing a few representative fields will probably be adequate to provide a good assessment of your N program.

To perform this test, print the submission form and sampling instructions from the web site [http://www.aasl.psu.edu/Corn\\_stalk\\_nitrate.html](http://www.aasl.psu.edu/Corn_stalk_nitrate.html). Sampling instructions should be followed carefully. Send the completed submission form and samples with payment to the Agricultural Analytical Services Laboratory. The test costs \$10.