

Agricultural Info Sheet

Field Crops in Chester County

Agriculture is the number one industry in Chester County and field crops play an important role in that equation.

General Facts

Why do field crops grow well in Chester County?

Chester County has some of the best non irrigated farmland in the country. The combination of soils, about 45 percent is classified as prime farmland, and the average rainfall of 47 inches annually creates an excellent environment for crop production.



“Chester County has some of the best non irrigated farmland in the country.”

What field crops do I see around the county?

Although some farmers grow corn, soybeans and wheat for human consumption, most of these crops are used for animal feed.

Farmers grow many things, but typically those growing field crops produce corn, soybeans, wheat, hay and a variety of forage crops. (Hay is made from dried alfalfa and grass/clover. Forage crops include corn, alfalfa and grass/clover but they are harvested while still green and fed to livestock.)

There are more acres of land used to grow corn than any other crop, followed by hay, then soybeans and wheat.





Amount of land in field crops

Crops are grown on approximately 60 percent of Chester County's 150,514 farmland acres. These crops occupy approximately 91,590 acres, which represents 19 percent of the total land area of the county.

Conservation

What conservation practices do farmers in Chester County use?

Most farmers use conservation practices to protect soil health, prevent weed development, stabilize soil structure, maximize nutrient and moisture retention, and decrease erosion.

Farmers know that **crop rotation**, planting dissimilar crops in the same field in successive seasons, maximizes benefits for the soil, improves weed and pest control, and enhances crop productivity.

Farmers often rotate growing corn with soybeans since corn requires a lot of nitrogen and soybeans help replenish some of this critical nutrient back into the soil.



Approximately 22% of farms plant a **cover crop** over the winter, such as winter wheat or rye, as soon as the corn or soybeans are harvested in late summer and early fall. The plant cover provides protection and reduces loss of soil from rain and wind.

They use a conservation practice called **no-till farming** where the soil is not disturbed by a plow or similar equipment. Approximately 39 percent of field crops produced in Chester County are grown using no- or low-till methods.

What are field crops used for?

A majority of Chester County crops are used as ingredients in animal feed for major **poultry** and **livestock** producers. Wheat is used in processed food products such as pretzels, cereal bars, candy bars and other confections.



What is custom farming?

Custom farming is when farmers lease land for crop production from landowners who need help managing their acreage or who may be looking for a source of extra revenue. Each arrangement is unique and developed to best suit the needs of the landowner, farmer, and market conditions.

Custom farmers help keep large amounts of land in agricultural production, and without them, it would be difficult to maintain the quantity of field crops that are the underpinnings of our agricultural industry.

Agricultural Relationships

The **diversity** of our agricultural industry is what helps to keep it strong; different sectors rely upon each other for materials and their own success.

Many **dairy** and **livestock** farmers grow their own forage and grain from corn to feed their herds because it is much more economical than purchasing it, however, this requires that they have access to crop land.

Our sizable **equine** industry also requires a significant amount of high quality hay, as hay makes up 50-100 percent of a horse's diet. As a result, this industry also imports hay from surrounding counties.

Chester County is ranked 1st in the nation for **mushroom production**, a farming practice that requires hay to produce the substrate (growing medium) on which mushrooms are grown.

Once the substrate is used for growing mushrooms, it can be turned into mushroom compost, a soil amendment, and spread onto crop fields to increase soil fertility.

