

State Sugar Beet Crop To Be Harvested

Harvest of Pennsylvania's first commercial sugar beet crop will begin in early October with every indication yield per acre will exceed the national average of 17 tons, according to State Agriculture Secretary Leland H. Bull.

This newest commercial crop venture includes 1,300 acres grown in four counties — Bucks, Berks, Lehigh and Northampton.

Beets were grown by Pennsylvania farmers under a contract arrangement with a sugar processing industry with price depending on tonnage as well as sugar content.

In addition to sugar, other important uses of the "sweet root" include beet pulp and molasses, by-products extensively utilized in animal feeds.

The best crop will be harvested mechanically and the roots loaded on rail cars at Morrisville in the Bucks County area and at Macungie in the other three counties.

Processing will take place at Easton, Maine Original plans to process the beets at Montezuma, N.Y., were altered when facilities there could not be readied in time to handle the Pennsylvania crop.

Yield and sugar content checks will be made by the Finger Lakes Sugar Beet Growers' Association, acting in the interest of the Pennsylvania growers.

Sugar beets were introduced to Pennsylvania in the spring of 1969 following an extensive study of the potential in the Commonwealth.

The seed is a monogerm type imported from Germany and differs from normal beet seed in that a single plant-producing germ is planted rather than the common seed which usually contains several germs capable of producing several plants.

Young beet plants are rather hardy and growers strive for early plantings — late March or early April.

Seeds are planted at intervals of three to four inches in row spacing much like that used for corn and other row crops. Weed control is obtained by spraying with herbicides over the rows at planting time.

Cultivating begins as soon as plant growth is visible and includes all except a three-inch band containing the plants.

This three-inch band is weed-

ed and the plants are thinned to seven or eight inch intervals by hand labor as the beets attain a growth of three to four inches.

Cultivation continues until no longer practical, usually when the beets reach eight to 10 inches in height and the leaves provide a full canopy of shade over the rows.

Prior to harvesting, the beets are generally topped, usually with a rotary mower.

A mechanical harvester com-

pletes the topping job and concludes the field harvest as a pair of discs set at angles "pop" the roots out of the ground, conveyors separate the roots from the soil and other trash and the beets are carried to a wagon or bin.

Beets, upon arrival at the processing plant, are piled carefully for storage with air ducts provided to control the temperature and prevent a premature chemical breakdown process which would greatly reduce the value of the crop.

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