

# Delaware Farm Pushes for Efficient Land, Labor Use

Today's farming operations require top management know-how and an efficient production program. Bill Haas Jr., of Middletown, Delaware, has made maximum use of these two ingredients in developing one of the top vegetable enterprises in the state.

Farming in partnership with his father, F. W. Haas Sr., the 34-year-old farmer produces more than 500 acres of vegetables for processing. The crops include 200 acres of peas, 200 acres of lima beans, 60 acres of tomatoes, 45 acres of asparagus and 20 acres of cucumbers.

From planting to harvest, the five-crop vegetable program promotes the most efficient use of land and labor.

We start out cutting asparagus and planting peas in April," explains Haas. After the peas are in, then we have to plant tomatoes and cucumbers and get ready to harvest the peas.

Once the peas are finished, we plant lima beans, and by the time the crop is in, tomatoes are ready to be harvested," he points out. Thus, we keep our help busy throughout the growing season; there is no slack period during which labor can become dissatisfied.

Although he has not experienced many problems in obtaining labor to handle his crop production, Haas feels farmers will have to mechanize their operations to stay in business.

The rising costs of farm labor is a serious problem in agriculture. Wages paid farm labor plus the costs of other benefits continue to increase each year," he says.

"It won't be long before we are forced to phase migrant labor out of the American farming picture. As long as farmers are expected to produce everything at the very minimum cost, we will have to continue to reduce our costs. Replacing labor with more machines is one way to accomplish this."

Haas has planted some direct seeded tomatoes this year to determine whether or not once-over mechanical harvesting of tomatoes is profitable. He notes that "many New Jersey growers are harvesting tomatoes mechanically, and I think we will have to go this route on the Peninsula before long."

One of the most serious problems associated with mechanical harvesting of tomatoes in the past is that not enough fruit would mature at one time to obtain a profitable return. Haas hopes this can be corrected with a new planting technique.

Using a planter owned by Campbell Soup Company, his direct seeded tomatoes were planted on eight-inch spacings in five-foot rows. Instead of dropping one seed per hill, the planter released from four to six seeds. When the plants begin to compete for moisture and nutrients, growth will be slowed due to the crowded conditions, and the plants will only produce one set of fruit rather than three or four, as is the case with transplanted tomatoes.

But Haas points out that a field of tomatoes planted in clusters of four to six plants per hill should produce a higher total yield from one setting than a similar field planted in the conventional manner. More importantly, if nearly all of the fruit matures at one time, growers can use mechanical harvesters with only a small percent of the crop being left in the field as green fruit.

Efforts to improve his farming operation have not been limited to work with tomatoes.

Lancaster Farming presents this account from the University of Delaware of an efficient farm operation in Middletown, Delaware.

While some of the particular crops may not have any particular application here, most farmers in this area, we think, will appreciate the sound thinking and management practices which underlie the Haas operation.

Each phase of Haas' total farm program receives careful attention to assure the highest returns.

To help obtain optimum yields from his plantings, Haas has the University of Delaware run complete soil analysis on his fields. The tests are then

used to determine the recommended rates of lime and fertilizers needed for each crop.

This grower also rotates his crops on a regular basis to maintain good soil structure. And as soon as the last crop is taken off, he protects his land by planting a cover crop of soy or grass over the winter.

Irrigation also plays an important role in Haas' vegetable production. He uses portable laterals to irrigate from three wells and a farm pond at the rate of 850 to 900 gallons per minute.

"Although it takes more labor to handle the lateral move irrigation system, we prefer it for vegetable crops," says Haas. "You get more uniform coverage with the portable unit than with the big volume guns. And the smaller nozzles on the line

result in less compaction of the ground."

A sound management program has paid off in high yields for this grower. Haas consistently produces one of the highest yielding crops of lima beans in Delaware. Last year's crop averaged 2,700 pounds per acre. Peas average around 2½ tons per acre, with a few fields hitting the three-ton mark.

Last year, asparagus yielded between 2,300 and 2,400 pounds per acre and cucumbers from 300 to 400 bushels per acre. Heavy rains at harvest resulted in substantial reductions in the tomato crop, but Haas still averaged better than 11 tons per acre.

The Haas operation is not limited to vegetable production. Turkeys have been an important part of the business for

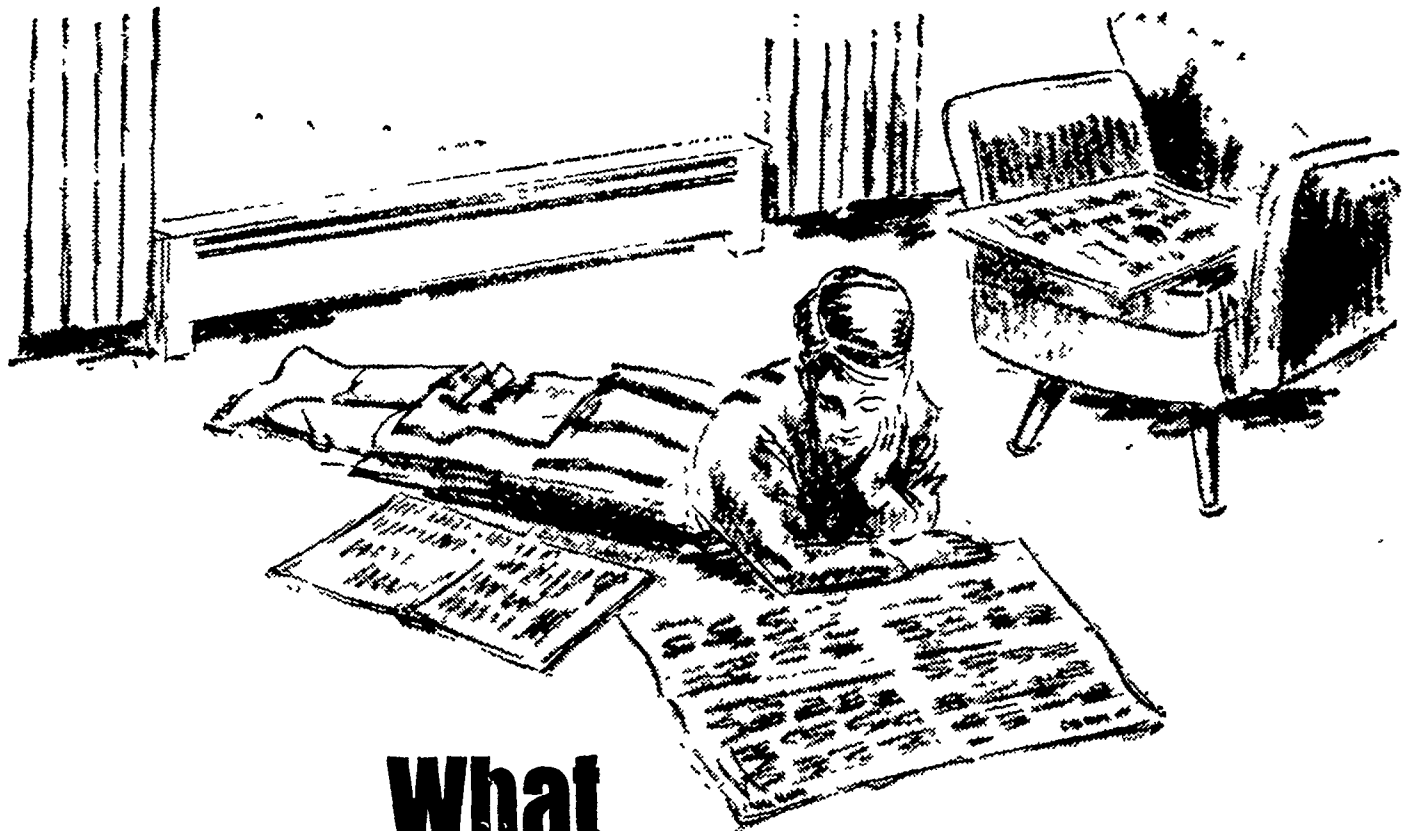
nearly 20 years. Close to 22,000 birds a year are marketed from this phase of the farm program.

Although approximately 5,000 birds are processed on the farm and marketed in Delaware during Christmas and Easter, most of the turkeys are sold to a processor in New York.

To house these birds, Haas has two 300 x 48-foot buildings with capacity for 6,000 birds each, and a smaller 300 x 24-foot unit for another 5,000 turkeys. Two full-time employees feed the birds and keep the units clean.

Haas says early detection of health problems is the key to producing efficient gains with turkeys. "This is why we still feed our birds by hand," he explains.

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