

Organic

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research. Most of the research is done by people who have things to sell to the farmer, and those companies aren't going to look for projects that are going to hurt their sales."

At the same time, Hartz said he thinks there's a lot of good work being done by farmers and small labs across the country but they never hear about each other. Funds are so limited that there's no way of spreading the word, he feels.

"We do have some supporters," he said. "Some of the younger agronomists and soil scientists are thinking about non-chemical farming

methods. We have some supporters in the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, like Jim McHale, but he's pretty controversial."

One of the problems with getting the story out about organic foods, Hartz said, is that the image of the industry has been tainted by a few radicals who seem to get all the attention. The abuses and extreme claims made by some marketers haven't helped either.

Hartz is more moderate in his views about organic farming. He feels that the organic farmer should be able to compete on an even basis with the chemical practices of his neighbors. "There's an unlimited market for quality farm products," Hartz said, "and if we can learn how to

produce it at a good price, we won't have any trouble selling it."

"This whole chemical approach is too new. Soil changes too slowly for us to really know what's happening, and I think one generation just reaps the woe of another. Fifty years from now we might discover that all those chemicals really are good for the soil. But I think 50 years is too long a time to take that many chances."

Hartz doesn't feel the whole country could switch to organic methods overnight, because the initial yield reductions would cripple the nation's supply. He does feel, though, that the right kind of research could yield a farm technology that could produce just as much without chemicals as we do today with chemicals.

Even though he opposes their indiscriminate use, Hartz doesn't entirely disdane chemicals for special cases. "I had a sod waterway that I wanted to get established, so I gave it a shot of nitrogen," he said. "Nitrogen can produce quick growth, but the long-term answer to fertility lies in the soil, not the fertilizer truck. If I have sick animals, I'll medicate them before I'll let them die. Some organic producers wouldn't do that, but I just can't watch my livestock die."

Beef is the main source of income for Hartz, and he sells most of it to consumers who come right to the door of his house. "We used to sell quite a bit through natural food stores," Hartz, "but we ran into pricing, packaging and transportation problems. The individuals stopping here are buying just as much from us as the stores used to take.

"Our prices now are pretty competitive with prices for non-organic beef in the regular supermarkets". When we sold through a store, we had to get our price, of course, and the store added their profit margin and that priced the product way out of line."

What's an organic steer? "I really don't know," Hartz said. "We don't use any medications here on the farm, of course. But it's impossible to buy feeders that haven't been medicated. And I don't know if I'd want to try to ship a calf without some kind of vaccination.

You could say that because an animal has been medicated at some point in its life it's no longer organic. I can't go along with that."

In his feeding program, Hartz uses his own grain, and he uses raw soybeans for his protein source. He adds calcium, minerals and vitamins to his corn silage, and also feeds some hay. Dried kelp, the organic movement's wonder stuff, is in his feeding regimen, but Hartz said he's not too sure about the economics of kelp feeding.

No diethyl stilbesterol has ever gone into a Hartz steer, and he says it never will. "If beef farmers were smart," he said, "they'd try to get DES outlawed. All that bad publicity about DES has created a bad image for beef, and I think it's hurt sales."

Hartz bought his last load of Virginia feeders through the Pennsylvania Farmers Association. They're Holstein steers and he says the animals have had no problems on the organic ration. "I'm not completely satisfied with my program," he said. "I still haven't quite licked some respiratory problems, but I'm making progress. I've learned that you don't automatically solve your health problems when you switch over to an organic program."

While beef sales are the biggest item in the Hartz operation, he has no intention of expanding the number of animals. "I think we've turned the corner on beef sales," Hartz said. "I don't think the American consumer is going to keep on buying more and more beef. They're going to more of a vegetable and grain diet, and I think I can serve that market."

The whole grain market is making big strides, Hartz feels, and if producers can get quality to where it belongs, he thinks more people will buy whole grain products. He already produces whole grain wheat flour with a small mill in his basement salesroom, and this is sold directly to consumers. He also sells some soybeans, and is working on an open pollinated corn program.

"If people want more of a grain diet, quality becomes more of an issue," Hartz said. "You can't feed them corn with a six percent

protein content. My open pollinated corn varies anywhere from 6.3 percent to 10.4 percent protein and it can go as high as 13 percent, if I get my soil working better."

Last year, Hartz experimented with several open pollinated varieties and hopes to try more this year. Eventually, he thinks it might be possible to plant his entire acreage in open pollinated varieties. The problems he feels need to be licked are ear height, stalk strength and stalk height.

Weed problems are handled with a rotary hoe and a cultivator, which is admittedly a lot of work. "You have to be kind of a die-hard to stick it out," Hartz said. Weeds in soybeans are handled the same as for corn, while there are very few weed problems in the wheat crop.

Weeds are at least par-

tially a soil problem, Hartz feels, although he has no idea now how to solve the problem. Soil fertility is at the very root of organic farming methods, and there are dozens of approaches in this area. "I don't have the answers," Hartz said. "We've got green sand, rock phosphate, compost, and green manure. We need to find out the best cost vs. yield figures, and we need to do it on a lot of different farms. We also need a soil testing lab that will make recommendations based on the way we want to farm."

Paul Hartz believes in organic farming and he'll continue honing his methods until he's convinced he can be competitive with chemical farmers. He's the first to admit, though, that there are problems. What's the biggest problem? "We need a quicker way to go from chemical to organic farming," he concluded.

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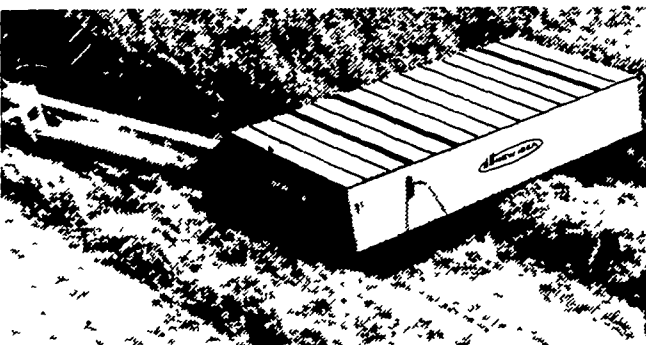
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