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# How Not To Beet

(Continued from Page 1)  
economics. Besides, the closest processing plants right now are in western Ohio and Michigan. It would cost a lot to ship beets that far."

Eakin is not even keen on people growing sugar beets in their gardens. "Beets are only about 15-percent sugar," he said. "Raw beets don't even have a sweet taste, and they're not fit for human consumption. The extraction process is very complicated, that's why it takes an expensive processing plant. I've heard from some people who want to know if they can make

beet sugar the same way they make maple sugar, but there's no remote similarity between the two processes.

"All you have to do with maple syrup is boil it long enough. Beets need grinding, crushing, heat, pressure, chemicals - it's very complicated. You just can't make your own sugar from back yard beets."

Eakin's pessimistic comments were echoed in a letter from Gerald Coe, a research geneticist with the USDA's field crops laboratory in Beltsville, Md. One-by-one, Coe ticked off the points against sugar beets, with a single tick

in their favor. He, too, pictured an outlook that is heavily against beet production here. Coe said:

1. It takes a \$40,000,000 factory to extract the sugar from sugarbeets.

2. It takes about 3 years to build one of these factories.

3. Until 1974, the return on the capital investment in a sugar-beet factory was extremely small. I would guess less than 5 percent in most years, and in some years no profit at all. For this reason, the only factories built in the U.S. in recent years have been in North Dakota by Farmer's Co-ops, where the profit is in growing large sugarbeet acreages and not in factory operation. Knowledgeable people realize that by the time a sugarbeet factory is built the price of sugar may be back down to 11- or 12-cents a pound. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to attract outside capital into a sugarbeet factory.

4. A sugarbeet factory operates about 90 to 120 days a year. This is the maximum length of time beets can be stored after harvesting. Deterioration in root storage piles makes it unfeasible to process for a longer period. Sugarbeet factories contract acreage to growers in order to assure an adequate supply and to prevent an over-

supply. Therefore, the sugarbeets are grown rather close to the factory. Hauling costs make it uneconomical to grow beets very far from the factory.

5. Permanent factory employees spend most of the year repairing factory equipment getting ready for the next campaign (harvest season). Trained personnel to operate and repair a factory are scarce, and they do not like moving to a factory in a new area because the chances of the operation being a success are rather small.

6. Several years of experimental trials in a new area are essential to be sure sugarbeets can be grown successfully.

7. Even when sugarbeets can be grown successfully, a thorough economic feasibility study is essential to be certain farmers will grow sugarbeets year after year. Farmer ownership of the factory is one means of insuring a supply of beets, but even this will not work if competing crops are too attractive.

Unlike corn or wheat, an unusually large number of factors have to be ideal before the growing of sugarbeets is practical even in areas where sugarbeets can be grown. We have had many inquiries from people who, under present market conditions, think they would like to get into the sugarbeet business. I can only recommend that they proceed with extreme caution, get all the facts, call in experts from sugarbeet growing areas, and then get into the business when there seems to be no other alternative. Actually, this is a pessimistic point of view, but not too far from a realistic outlook."



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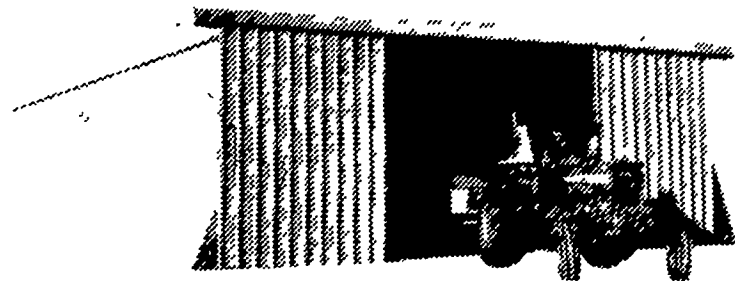
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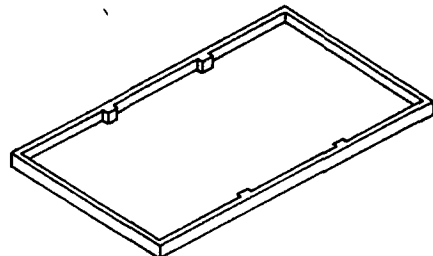
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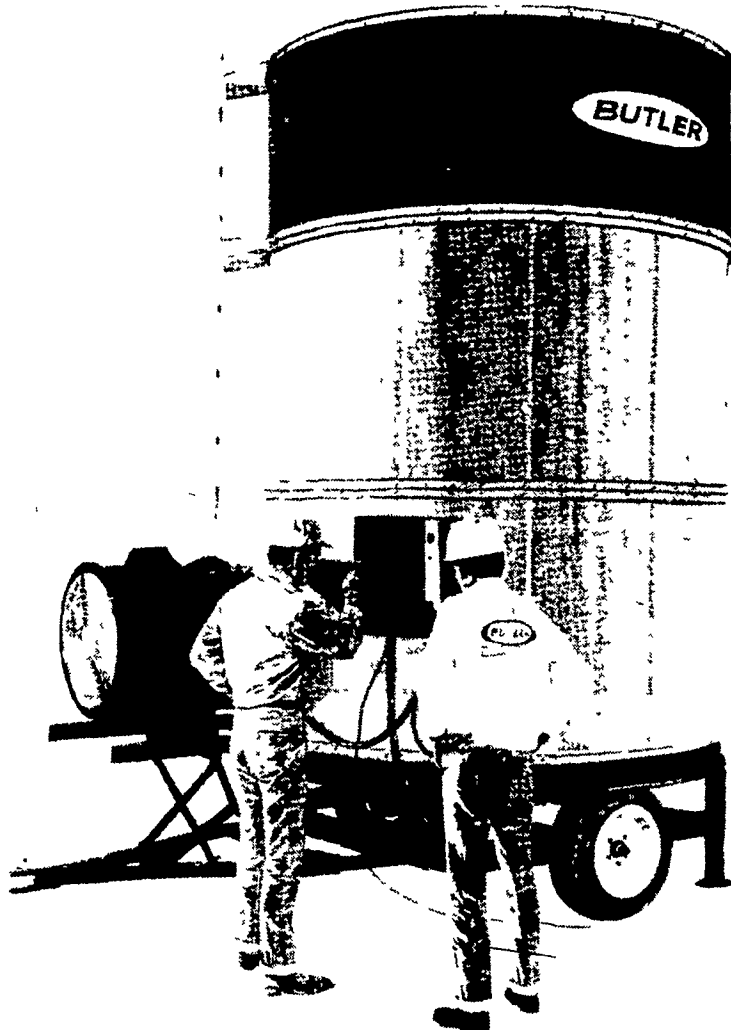
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