

Chinese cabbage may prove to be lucrative crop

By JOANNE SPAHR
LANCASTER, Pa. - Moses Chu, 2833 Lincoln Highway East, is always seeking new avenues in which to market goods and to utilize the resources around him. At the present time he sees a small, but lucrative market in growing Chinese cabbage and selling it to Chinese restaurants in the major cities along the eastern coast with New York City, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. the main distribution points for Lancaster County produce.

Chu maintains that at least 800 large or small Chinese restaurants in the New York district (which includes Long Island and New Jersey areas) desire this variety of cabbage as a staple. And, while there are already six Chinese vegetable gardens in New Jersey who supply the needs of New York's Chinatown, their capacity is far below the demand. The rest of the supply is purchased from California. However, growers in Lancaster County should be able

to produce better quality cabbage for one reason, says Chu. That is, Chinese cabbage develops a sweeter taste with cooler weather. So, while California vegetable growers are picking their produce, Lancaster growers could be allowing their cabbages to develop to a more desirable quality.

Other characteristics of the cabbage are that it is an elongated variety which grows upright and packs its leaves tightly around the center core. As the weather grows colder, the outer layers and inside layers come together, causing the cabbage to become very hard. Because of this, Chu says the moisture stays in the cabbage and it is easier to transport if it weren't so hard.

As far as the nutrients contained in Chinese cabbage, it is richer than common cabbage in phosphorus, iron, sodium, potassium, and Vitamin A, and it contains almost the same quantities of calcium,

Vitamin B1, and Vitamin B2, but is lower in Vitamin C.

According to Chu, one of the distinct advantages to this variety is that it is one of the few leafy vegetables which can be kept for several months in the garage under normal conditions and temperatures in the winter. It contains 95 per cent water in comparison to 92 per cent for common cabbage, a factor supposedly suitable for longer storage.

Chu, who has been growing the cabbage in his garden for two consecutive years, plants them in 20-inch rows during early or mid-July, thinning them constantly. They must reach maturity by August 15.

Chu grows his crop organically, stuffing bones into the soil around each plant to replenish the nutrients required. He also does not use insecticides.

Instead, he daily checks for caterpillars and garden slugs which are both destructive.

Advising the novice gardener, Chu says,

"Especially during wet weather, evening checking would be the best. Bring a torch and a long sharp needle with you, and you will be able to wipe out all the garden slugs within a very short time.

"The first or second frost will not do much harm to the plants," he says, but cautions that harvesting should be done immediately if snow or a strong, cold wind which could freeze the ground is forecasted. At picking, each cabbage should weigh three to seven pounds.

Since Chinese cabbage is in high demand during the Chinese New Year celebrated anywhere from January 21 to February 16 due to the Lunar calendar which the Chinese follow, Chu advises that the cabbage be stored until then in order to get the best prices for the produce. To do this, he suggests a storage method used in his home of Manchuria, China. That method is to dig a vault into the ground and to place the cabbage inside. Then, the vault is covered - first with planks, then thick straw, and finally, soil. The cabbage will stay fresh and hold its moisture for quite some time.

"At home we kept it for three months," says Chu. "While the temperature may be freezing outside, the temperature inside may well be above 40 degrees with relative humidity remaining at 95 to 100 degrees," he adds.

After three months, New York City will be right at the heart of its biggest demand for cabbage, and that is when Chu believes the market will be its best.

"During New Year and



Chinese cabbage varies from common cabbage. It is more elongated and grows vertically. Usually, it weighs anywhere from three-and-a-half to seven pounds. Moses Chu, who advocates the growing of this vegetable, says that the weight could go as high as 10 pounds.

Christmas," says Chu, "farmers should be able to get 18 to 20 cents per pound for the cabbage."

At other times of the year, Chu thinks it possible to get 17 to 18 cents per pound sold direct. Currently, a 45 pound crate of the cabbage is offered for \$7.50 to \$9 for delivery to the buyer's store

in New York City. In comparison, common cabbage is sold at five cents per pound, wholesale.

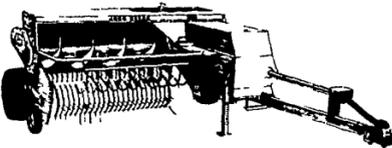
There is a catch to this, however. The grower must obtain the correct type of Chinese cabbage for winter. The seeds can be gotten from

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