

Horseradish farmer is glad some like it hot

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DOVER, DEL. — Without it, cocktail sauce would merely be zestless ketchup, corned beef on rye would be just corned beef on rye, and Tiger sauce would be tame indeed. Some people hate it and some people tolerate it but those who like it hot wouldn't be caught without horseradish.

If you're like most people—even those who eat it regularly—you probably thought horseradish was manufactured, not grown, or else you never thought of it at all.

Horseradish is, however, cultivated in this country and the farmers who grow it give a great deal of thought to this unwieldy annual root crop. In fact, Delaware horseradish producer Don Appenzeller thought about it the entire two months his 50-acre crop was frozen into the ground this Winter.

"Actually, that's the best way to store it," he says. "But we were beginning to wonder if we'd ever get a chance to harvest it."

Appenzeller farms 450 acres in the small town of Magnolia, on the outskirts of Dover. Though his primary crops are potatoes, soybeans and peaches, he also manages to get in a small cash crop of horseradish each year. He plants it in early Spring but doesn't begin harvesting until November since horseradish makes its greatest growth during the late summer and it "takes a good frost to kill the leaves before we begin digging the roots," according to Appenzeller.

Harvest usually extends well into January, yielding an extra crop during what are otherwise unproductive

months. But this year Appenzeller barely got his horseradish out of the ground before it was time to plant it again.

If it seems fitting that a small state like Delaware should produce a small crop like horseradish, consider that the state's two growers—both located in Magnolia—produce a sizeable portion of the East Coast supply of this hot root. Though the national crop is too small for accurate records (farmers must list it under "Processing Vegetables" on the Crop Reporting Service forms), Appenzeller estimates that about 10 per cent of the country's horseradish is produced here. Other than a small cluster of growers in the St. Louis area and scattered acreage in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Maryland and California, there is no commercial production in the U.S.

Not really a radish at all but a Member of the mustard family, horseradish is more than a kissin' cousin to the turnip and the rutabaga. The major difference, of course, is the horseradish's strong, hot flavor. It is so hot, in fact, that most insects and diseases won't touch it.

Thus Appenzeller was understandably alarmed in the Winter of 1976 when—after 20 years of producing the solid, white horseradish root preferred by the processors—he found that much of his crop was hollow in the center with brownish-colored inner walls.

"It was still edible," he says, "and the processors accepted a lot of it, but they wouldn't have for long. What it boiled down to was: either solving the problem or going out of business."

Appenzeller went to his county agent for advice. From Kent county extension agent Bob Mulrooney, he learned there was a possibility his horseradish was suffering from a boron

deficiency. And, though he never sprayed his horseradish crop for anything, he set about planning a spray program.

"We had had some minor problems with flea beetles and leaf spots in the past," he says, "So I decided to hit all of the possible trouble areas at once. We sprayed with boron, a fungicide and an insecticide all at the same time. We did it first in July with a ground rig and then came back in August and flew it on."

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Horseradish is a labor intensive crop and Appenzeller's workers were kept busy this year, separating the roots from the multitude of "run-

ners." Native to southeast Europe, horseradish was used as a home remedy even before it gained notoriety as a tart condiment.



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