

Suburbia didn't crush this orchard

LANGHORNE - A Bucks County fruit and vegetable grower, who combines high quality production with direct marketing expertise, has been named a Master Farmer for 1977.

Thomas W. Styer, 45, of Langhorne, owner and operator of Styer Orchards, will receive the coveted award sponsored by the Pennsylvania Farmer magazine, Harrisburg, and the Cooperative Extension Service of The Pennsylvania State University.

Formal award presentations will be made January 10 at a special luncheon in Harrisburg. Styer will be inducted into the Pennsylvania Master Farmers' Association whose membership consists of all former award winners. The

program was established in 1927.

Farming land worth \$10,000 to \$25,000 an acre may sound like a luxury few people can afford. However, until Act 319 was passed, the farmland preservation law, Styer was paying \$200 an acre taxes on some of his land. Now the highest tax assessment is \$35 per acre.

"If it weren't for Act 319 we wouldn't be in business," he said. "It's hard for people in other parts of the state to realize how valuable this law is to farmers. Without it we would be taxed out of business."

The backbone of Styer Orchards is apples, 200 acres. But there also are 85 acres in peaches, 80 in sweet corn, 70 in strawberries, 25 in pumpkins, 10 in can-

taloupes, 10 in pears, and smaller plots of cherries, plums, tomatoes, and other vegetables.

It's one thing to produce hort crop, but it's equally important that the products are marketed efficiently and at a profit. The Master Farmer felt marketing on the farm was the best approach when he took control of the operation in 1965.

His farm store closely resembles the produce aisle of a supermarket. "People just won't drive out of their way if the only thing they can buy is apples," Styer notes.

There are at least a dozen supermarkets within a five-minute drive of the farm market. Half of his customers are looking for low prices and the other half

want quality goods no matter what the price is. For this reason, he spends one-third of his time in the fields and two-thirds on marketing problems.

In addition to the various fruit sold year round, he markets about 125,000 gallons of cider each year. For the smaller and poorly-colored apples, he makes candy apples. His customers munched their way through 150,000 of them last year.

Styer attempts to buy as many of the food items he markets from local suppliers. Ground beef, potatoes, dairy products, and grapes are purchased from Bucks County farmers. He imports citrus products and some frozen pies.

"Last year we sold 150,000 home baked pies. The farm's ovens have a capacity of 400 10-inch pies or 600 8-inch pies per hour. And the ice cream freezer holds 2,000 half gallons. The average weekly cone sales during the summer run about \$1,000. We also market chow-chow, jelly, pickles, and grapes under our label," Styer said.

No farm or farm store is so good that people come by without some prompting. So Styer regularly advertises in newspapers and on radio. "I'm a firm believer that advertising should be heaviest when sales are the lightest. About 40 to 45 weeks of the year we have a special of the week or some other sale."

He has other sales
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Thomas W. Styer, Bucks County fruit and vegetable grower, farms land valued as high as \$25,000 per acre. He credits the Clean and Green Act for saving him from tax strangulation.

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