

Worm production crawling along well

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Staff Correspondent

HAMBURG — Earl Bailey, Ridge Avenue, Hamburg, is not a typical farmer in the sense that most people would imagine, but Bailey does raise a member of the animal kingdom as a commodity to be sold at a profit, as any farmer tries to do.

These animals are not raised in a barn or feedlot but in wooden boxes in Bailey's basement. Bailey produces worms.

Only starting last September, this is a new endeavor for the Baileys but one that is likely to expand. Presently this worm producer has become a distributor for a worm company which got him started and he has been actively helping other people get started also.

WHAT TAX AUDITORS ARE LOOKING AT

Here's timely advice about what tax auditors are looking for these days: A large accounting firm reports IRS tax auditors have been especially interested lately in comparing taxpayers' bank deposits with their reported income, in social security payments for domestic help, in amounts of interest earned, and in deductions for offices in the home.

A public service of the Pennsylvania Institute of Certified Public Accountants.

"Raising worms is becoming increasingly popular in this area," Bailey told Lancaster Farming. "There were relatively few producers in this area when I started but more and more people are beginning to raise them," he explained.

Surprisingly, Bailey finds that many of the people interested in producing worms are women. There is very little work involved and women don't have to go out of the home to do it, he explained. The hardest thing to do is build the beds which are usually made of plywood and oak, fir or cypress. The boxes can be of any size but Bailey finds that 4 feet by 4 feet or 3 feet by 5 feet boxes seem to work best for his purposes.

Mrs. Bailey also agreed about women's interest in raising this unusual creature. "Before we started raising them I never wanted to come as close as stepping over a worm in the yard," she exclaimed, "but now I too, find them interesting."

Once the worm beds are established, only several minutes per day are necessary to care for them. The worms are usually fed once per day or less, depending on how readily they consume the feed. Then, to keep the beds moist, they are sprinkled down with water every day.

The material used for bedding can be manure or a commercially prepared

organic fiber. Bailey finds the fiber is more desirable in his operation since it does not have an offensive or toxic odor and it does not have to be monitored for pH or have tendencies to heat up.

Once prepared, the beds are started with approximately 12,000 or 13,000 worms and are fed and watered daily. Worms are very prolific and multiply rapidly. The worm population can be expected to double every 60 days, but the beds should not be harvested or split until after the first four months, advised Bailey. After the initial growing period of 120 days the beds can be harvested monthly, he explained.

Bailey keeps lights on the worm beds continually to keep them from crawling. Another way to prohibit this tendency is to place a fine screen over the beds.

The worm feed is a mixture of laying mash, peanut shells, and minerals. It is put directly on top of the beds and covered with a damp burlap bag. Also, the temperature of the beds should be kept between 50 and 70 degrees Fahrenheit for optimum egg laying ability, advised the worm grower.

There are several types of worms which are raised commercially. Bailey raises a red worm which is very high in protein, about 70 per cent, and which is also very good fishing bait since it stays alive and active under

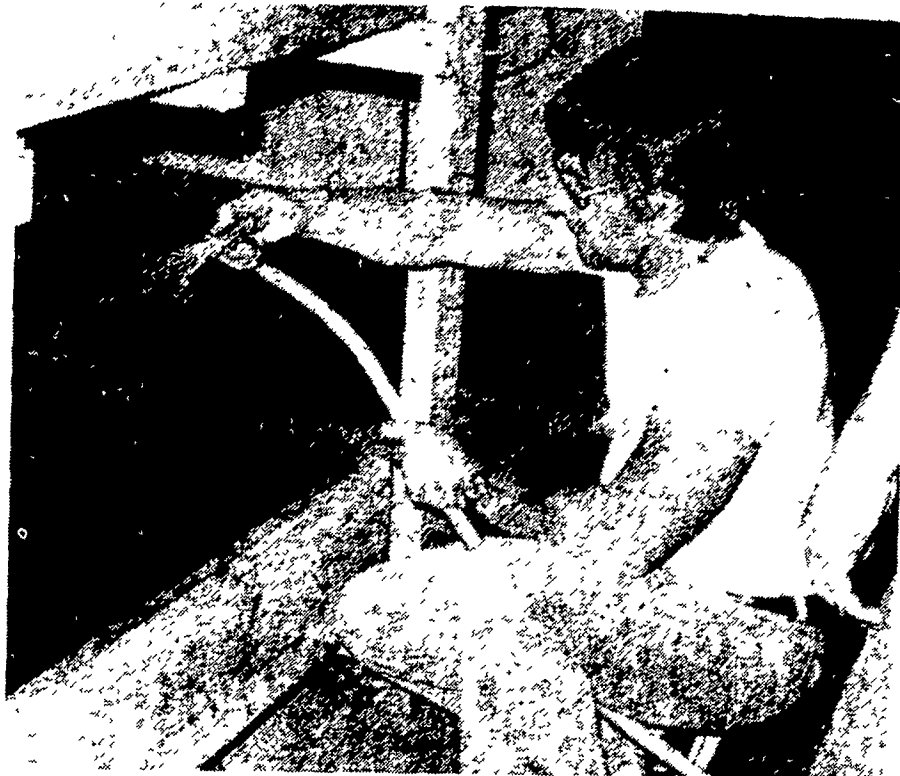
water for long periods of time.

"The demand for worms is very high which is causing a high demand for growers," Bailey stated. The company which this producer is affiliated with has recently built a dehydration plant which will begin operation in mid-Summer or Fall and will process all the worms it's producers can raise. Once dehydrated the worms will be used as protein additives in livestock feed or as a protein source for human consumption.

Bailey emphasized that there are many other available markets for his produce as well. Worms are raised as fish bait, food for zoos, fish hatcheries and frog farms. They are used in research, organic farming or gardening, soil conservation, and pet food.

Once the beds are ready for harvesting, mechanical harvesters are available to do the work which would otherwise be a long and tedious process.

Bailey noted that there are many companies which supply worms for commercial production but warned that interested people should be careful before buying them or starting this endeavor. This producer suggested that the company be checked out first to see what services are available to the grower. Some companies supply a market for the worms and guarantee to buy them back while others do not he explained.

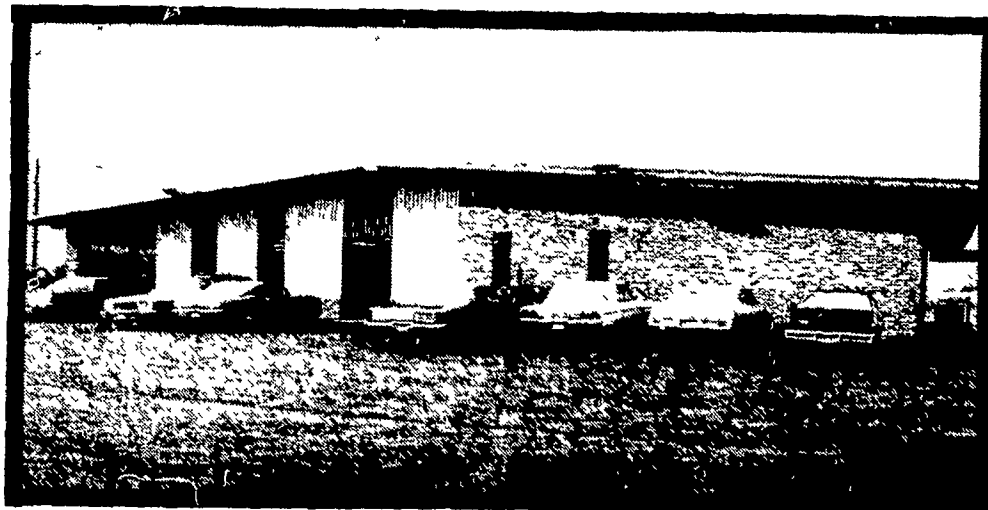


Earl Bailey of Hamburg is one of the pioneers in worm production.

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