

Big numbers, small growers attend organic meeting

BY DICK WANNER
Staff Correspondent

LANCASTER — There's a lot of interest in organic gardening, these days, and if you needed proof of that, you had only to be at the Lancaster Farm and Home Center last Saturday along with 200 other people who came to hear M.C. Goldman, executive editor of ORGANIC GARDENING Magazine.

If you needed more proof than the size of the audience, you'd have gotten it when Goldman told his listeners that his monthly magazine, published in Emmaus, near Allentown, goes out to a million-and-a-half subscribers.

However, this reporter has been attending farm gatherings in these parts, off and on for nearly a decade, and there were not a lot of familiar farm faces in the crowd.

Although organic methods seem to work very well in small plots, there is little support for the organic movement in commercial agriculture, and the audience last week seemed to bear out that fact.

Not that organic gardening isn't important. "There are 35 million

Americans with home gardens," Goldman told his listeners. "Not all of them are organic, of course, but the value of the food they produce has soared to \$14 billion annually. Homegrown food is better for you. It takes less energy to produce and it certainly takes less energy to get it onto your table."

In response to questions from the audience, Goldman outlined the basic principles of organic gardening.

He said composted garden and kitchen wastes could replace purchased fertilizers in home gardens. Weed and insect pests can be controlled by biological agents - predators, parasites and specific disease organisms - instead of chemicals. Or weeds can be pulled out and bugs can be squashed.

One of Goldman's interested listeners was associate Lancaster County Ag Agent Arnold Lueck. After the meeting, Lueck said he thinks organic methods are good for the small-scale production of crops of all kinds.

"The big advantage this technique has for home gardeners is the attention it focuses on the soil itself. Once a garden's soil needs are satisfied, and the soil is fertile, good things begun to happen.

"But for the average and large farming operations, organic methods cannot provide enough soil nutrients to support high, economical yields. There simply aren't enough sources of organic matter to supply the needs of the millions of crop acres required to produce our

livestock feed and human food."

Lueck said farmers and ranchers use fertilizers to boost crop production to more profitable levels.

Nor does Lueck believe in the feasibility of biological controls for weed and insect pests.

"Insects, plant diseases and weeds are major threats to commercial agriculture," he said. "Biological methods can just not adequately control all of these pests. Consumers demand pest-free fruits and vegetables. And that's what farmers have to produce. They can't

do that job without chemicals."

Lueck did say there's a trend now to reduce the use of pesticides in agriculture.

"There was a period in the Sixties when chemicals were probably used too freely, and they were building up in the environment. Fruit and vegetable growers for some time have been using an approach called integrated pest management.

"It is a combination of organic and chemical methods and it's an approach I think we'll be seeing more of the years ahead," he said.

Spring time is forest fire time

HARRISBURG — Spring may be weeks away but already officials in the Department of Environmental Resources are concerned with the increasing number of wildfires across the Commonwealth.

Eugene F. McNamara, Chief of DER's Division of Forest Fire Protection, said that while wildfires are normally a spring-time problem, 25 fires involving 120 acres have been reported in the first five days of February.

"If fires continue to increase this month at this rate we may break the record of February, 1976, when there were 173 fires affecting 916 acres."

McNamara said there has been one fire-related death in Columbia County caused when a sixty-one year old

man suffered a heart attack while attempting to put out a brush fire as it spread out of control.

"Current conditions for fire are ideal," McNamara said. "Vegetation is dry, the ground is frozen and high winds can spread even a small fire quite rapidly. The situation is especially critical in the valleys and areas of the state which have no snow cover."

People who dump hot ashes from coal stoves and fireplaces outdoors have created another problem.

"This problem will probably continue until people use common sense and realize that ashes - hot or cold - should be deposited in a fire-proof container equipped with a tight lid," McNamara said.

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COMBINES

JD 7700, JD 6600 side hill, 3 JD 45, some with corn heads, 2 JD 6600, JD 4400, JD 40.

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