

Food drying

(Continued from Page C15)

TOMATOES — Loosen and remove skins and cut the tomatoes into slices or halves. Steam for 3 minutes. Dry in a dehydrator for 3-5 hours, oven 6-8 hours or sun, 8-10 hours.

PEARS — To dry pears, cut in half lengthwise and core. Cut into quarters or eighths. Treat with ascorbic acid. Steam blanch for 5-20 minutes or treat in a sodium bisulfite solution. Spread in a single layer and start drying at 140° F. Increase the temperature to 150° F. If possible, reduce to 140° F. for the last hour. Dry until springy and suede-like. Halves should be dried 15 hours, slices, 6 hours.

APRICOTS — Dry fully ripened but not soft apricots. Wash, cut in half, and pit. Do not peel. To prevent darkening, coat with ascorbic acid solution or sodium bisulfite for 10-20 minutes depending on size and ripeness. Arrange the apricots in a single layer on trays, pit side up. Under controlled heat, start at 130° F, and gradually finish at 150° F. Drying time for halves is up to 12 hours until leathery and pliable.

PEACHES — Any good freestone variety of peach which is ripe but not soft may be dried. Peel, cut in half and pit. If desired, cut in quarters or slices. To prevent darkening, use the ascorbic acid solution. Steam blanch halves for 10 minutes, slices 5-7 minutes, or sodium bisulfite halves in solution 15-30 minutes. Arrange in a layer, pit side up and start under controlled heat at 125° F. Increase heat to 155° F. Dry until leathery and pliable. Drying time is 12-15 hours for halves and 6 hours for slices.

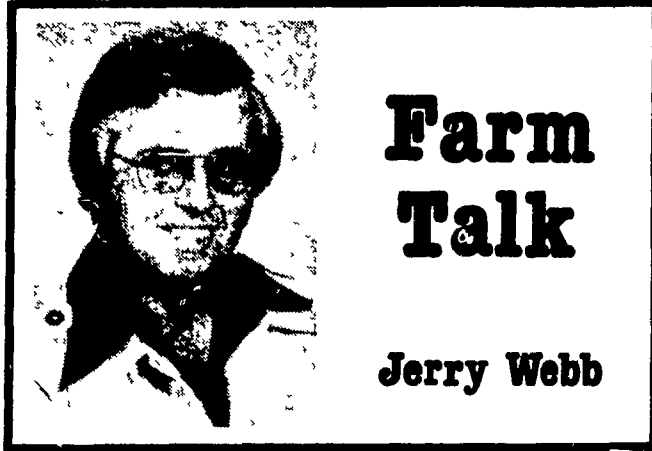
PEANUTS — Before frost in the fall, dig entire peanut plants with the peanuts attached to the roots. Hang the plants in a dry airy place. Remove the pods when they are well dried and roast at 350° F. for about 20 minutes. Store the peanuts in the pods in a cool, dry place, or shell them and keep in sealed containers.

HOT PEPPERS — Pick hot peppers when they are mature and red. String and hang them in a dry warm, airy place or pull the entire plants and hang them. Be careful not to get juice on your skin or in your eyes. It can burn. Store completely dry peppers on their strings in a handy warm, airy place. Or seal them in small, airtight containers. A little hot pepper goes a long way.

SUNFLOWERS — Protect maturing heads with cheesecloth or bags to keep birds away. Harvest the heads before heavy frost. Let them dry further in a warm, airy place. Then shell the seeds and store them in tight containers.

MISCELLANEOUS — Celery leaves, parsley, mint, sage, onion tops and cress are easily dried. Wash them well, drain and wipe off excess water. Place on racks and dry very slowly in an oven or food dryer.

Making your own convenience foods and seasonings is simple with food drying techniques. Seasoning salts, instant soup mix, salad enhancer, cornmeal, parsley flakes, dried mushrooms, dip chips, energy snacks and herbs are all covered in an information sheet prepared by the Lancaster County Extension Office, called Creative Drying Economics. For a copy, call 717/394-6851 or write, Lancaster County Extension Office, 1383 Arcadia Road, Room 1, Lancaster, PA 17601.



Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

The Bureau of Census has been playing games with the farm count, and so Delaware now has more farms than it used to have. Preliminary reports recently released on the 1978 Census of Agriculture list the state as having 3615 farms. That's 215 more than it had when the 1974 census was tallied.

There aren't really more farms—it's just the way they're being counted. Census bureau officials call it "a significant improvement in data collection procedures." But in straight talk it has to mean that the 1974 census was wrong, and hopefully, the 1978 census is right.

Using the new calculations, the census folks have recalculated Delaware's farm numbers for 1974 and they figure that instead of 3400 farms, there were probably as many as 3580. They don't bother to explain why the state sprouted some 35 additional farms since then.

At any rate, the 1978 census shows those farms with an average \$89,000 in farm sales from 189 acres, valued at \$268,000.

As usual, the census data shows poultry and poultry products as Delaware's big farm income earlier—more than 193 million dollars. That was 60 percent of that year's farm income, crops took a distant backseat at 102 million.

There's a small flaw in the census data for Delaware

since it considers the farm value of company-owned broilers as farm income. The statisticians take that hypothetical value and add it in with actual farm sales of things like hogs and soybeans, to come up with a grand total of 324 million dollars in total farm sales. That, then, is divided among the 3615 farms to get the average per farm.

It's a bit of statistical hocus-pocus, which leaves a lot of farmers wondering what happened to their share of sales. And it has to be a little confusing to any dedicated farm watcher who knows that actual farm sales are being averaged in with statistically assigned farm values.

Here are some other data out of the 1978 Census of Agriculture that sheds a little light on the Delaware farm picture: 3,155 farms out of 3615 were operated by individuals or families; 287 were partnerships and only 160 were corporations. Of those corporations 144 were family owned. Nine out of 10 farmers owned all or part of the farms they were operated and more than six out of 10 listed farming as their principle occupation.

Three-fourths lived on the farms they operated, and 237 Delaware farms were operated by women and a fourth of all farms had sales of \$100,000 or more.

More data on the 1978 Census of Agriculture will be forthcoming when the final report is issued. No doubt

there will be more data than anyone really wants to study.

The preliminary report, however, gives the feeling that agriculture continues to prosper in the First State, with the number of farms, size and value of farms increasing, and total farm sales a staggering sum.

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