

A patch of sunshine amidst clouds of drought



John Hershey prepares to bring in tobacco.

Book-a-mal-doh

BY DICK ANGLESTEIN
LANCASTER — A patch of sunshine was shining through the dark clouds of drought in Lancaster County this week.

In most areas of the county typical farm scenes depicted:

--Parched-brown cornfields, dried leaves and stalks rustling noisily in the Autumn wind, or others already chopped to stubble.

--Soybean fields, prematurely yellowed.

--Hayfields, struggling unsuccessfully to yield

another cutting before frost heralds the end of another season.

But along Landis Valley Road, it was quite another scene. A crop, not exactly indigenous to this land of tobacco and corn, was in full bloom and providing a bright, golden sight that contrasted sharply with the prevalent drought-spawned rural panorama.

Yes, it was truly a patch of welcome sunshine in the form of about an acre of blossoming sunflowers — something more expected to

be seen in the distant dry regions of North Dakota or Minnesota.

The sunflowers are being grown by the John B. Hershey family, 2151 Landis Valley Road, as a double-cropping experiment following wheat.

About an acre stands next to their home and another two acres in the Delp Road area off the Manheim Pike in another section of Manheim Township.

"Until I made up my mind whether to try the sunflowers, I lost a couple of weeks in getting them in," Hershey explains.

"I want to see if they'll mature and what kind of a yield can be achieved. If the weather holds off and a killing frost doesn't come too early, I should get an idea of how they'll do as a second crop. Then, I'll have a better idea of what to do next year."

Ruth Hershey describes her husband as a "book farmer," who does a lot of reading about his second occupation. John works for the township road department operating a grader.

The Hersheys farm about 160 acres, all but three rented from some 11 landlords. They grow corn, soybeans, wheat, tobacco, strawberries, sweet corn and, this year, the sunflower experiment.

John read about sunflowers in the Farm Journal and decided to give them a try after harvesting wheat. But a bit of indecision delayed their planting until the last of July, putting them a few weeks behind schedule.

Since sunflowers are not exactly a common Lancaster County crop, the Hersheys had a bit of a mild hassle getting them in.

"It took me about two hours to convince our seed people that we were still serious about putting them in. Then, we had to get some plates for the corn planter. They were just hanging on the wall of our supplier."

Ruth Hershey is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Clarence Zeager, who once farmed in the area of the Alcoa plant along the

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It's a sea of sunflowers along the Landis Valley Road in Lancaster County.



Hershey children in sunflowers include John, 14; David, 12; Jim, 10; and Anita, 6.



If you look closely, you'll see a couple of bees at work on sunflower.



- Anita shows size of sunflowers growing next to her family's home.