

# Truck farmer controls product from planting to pricing

**PINE FORGE** — Gene Wilcox is in an enviable position for a farmer. Wilcox, his wife, Mary, and daughter, Connie, own and operate a direct marketing truck farm on the fertile, gentle, rolling ridges of eastern Berks County.

Having control of his product from the planting to the pricing helps Wilcox maintain a very low debt ratio in the family business.

"We've got control of the prices and that's important," he said.

Wilcox was raised on a beef farm southeast of Quakertown. His father raised tomatoes under

contract and the family sold some at a roadside stand along with orchard fruit.

In 1946, his father bought the present 240-acre Wilcox farm in order to be nearer to the fruit supply. His father died in 1947 and Wilcox entered a partnership with his mother. He bought her share of the farm last year, making his wife and daughter full partners in the operation.

The family's retail business began in 1960, when they set-up an 8' by 10' portable roadside stand for tomatoes and sweet corn. The stand was an instant success and in 1961, Wilcox

used a Production Credit Association loan to build his roadside market. In 1975, he used another PCA loan to double the size of the building.

Wilcox raised beef until 1972, when caring for them conflicted with the operation of the roadside market. He switched to hogs but gave them up in 1976, when he learned some good customers didn't like the smell.

On a typical weekday the market sells more than 8,000 ears of sweet corn and over 200 head of cabbage. Wilcox picks his vegetables daily - especially the sweet corn

which is put in the cooler immediately to prevent the natural sugars from turning into starch.

The farm is fully irrigated. Wilcox grows 130 acres of sweet corn, 15 acres of tomatoes, and 15 acres of potatoes. Other vegetables grown include lima beans, popcorn, pumpkins, squash, onions, green beans, peas, asparagus, cantaloupe, peppers, cucumbers, brussels sprout, cauliflower, broccoli and strawberries.

Always willing to try something new, Wilcox sold fresh flowers this summer. When something doesn't sell well, however, Wilcox drops

it. Nor does he grow fruit on the farm, buying it instead from neighbors.

Wilcox credits his success on being in the right place at

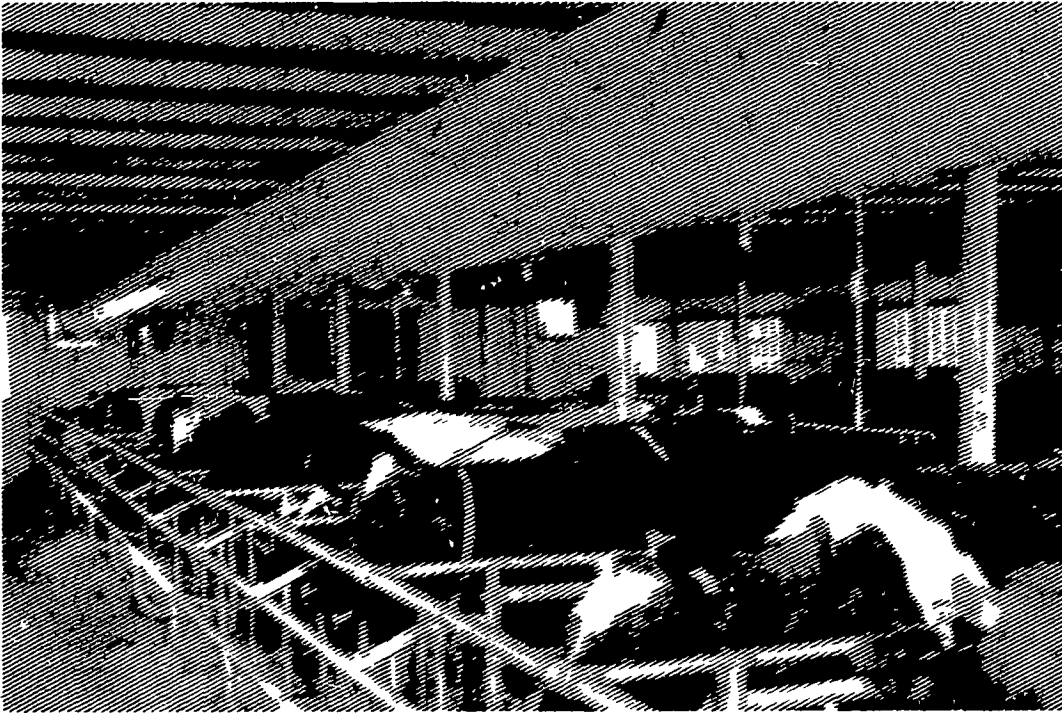
the right time. Steady customers come from nearby Pottstown and Boyertown.

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A family business, Wilcox's daughter, Connie (seated on the tractor) and wife, Mary, are full working partners. At right is daughter, Judy, and not pictured is a third daughter, Lisa.

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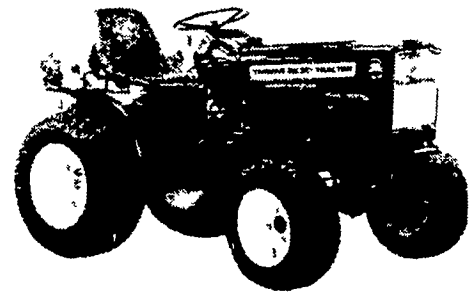
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