



Bird seed and pet food is available through Farmers Supply also. Here Ted Alspach owner and manager of Farmers Supply weighs some bird feed for a customer.

Farmers Supply

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anywhere in Lancaster county for a minimum \$5.00 order, or a \$10.00 order of garden seeds. "We have three trucks on the road. We hit the southern end first where it gets warm a few days earlier, then move north," Alspach relates.

Orders begin coming in volume - and going out - at the end of February or the beginning of March. Helping along the seed order business is an order sheet mailed to about 40,000 boxholders throughout the county. The order forms list most of the extensive inventory available through Farmers Supply.

Of course there are big favorites among customers, with peas, beans and corn making up the biggest volume of sales. Silver Queen is the most popular corn, although Alspach says he notices other varieties making a gain. Most of their seeds are purchased through the Charles Hart Company which acts as "legman" Alspach said.

Although they carry seeds for almost any plants, they also will have a complete line of bedding plants available and Alspach says he recommends buying plants for

items like kohlr crops and tomatoes.

He also mentions that there are new varieties available each year, often with improvements over the previous varieties. Alspach said he talks with growers and checks the market before going ahead with new items. He also tries new varieties in his own garden for firsthand experience. He laughs about his tomato experiment, where he carefully planted six different kinds which all ended up in Maple Grove swimming pool when his garden flooded.

Right now, Alspach says the "hottest vegetable" is the sugar snap pea, which he says is doing "fantastic." According to Alspach it is popular because "you get tons of fruit from the plant and it is delicious cooked or raw." Nevertheless he predicts there will always be a big local market for the regular sugar pea, because "some people still like the small, flat pea."

Sugar peas can be one of the earliest vegetables planted because the seeds resist cold weather. Alspach said he has known people to "scratch the frost and put in sugar peas."

He noted that people in Lancaster County tend to be conservative. "The people like an old standby."

Planning in a farm and garden supply business can be risky, as Alspach points out, "We try to think three to six months ahead."

Alspach has been at Farmers Supply for five years and has now taken over the interest in the firm from A. Lloyd Groff, one of the original owners and founders. John McGrann, the other founder, is now deceased.

The business started with seeds and other farm supplies, but was well known as the largest toy dealer around. Alspach says the firm got out of the toy business when discounters came into the picture and then got into the building contractor supply business as a way of stretching income throughout the year. In the garden business, spring, summer and fall are healthy seasons, but things can be a little lean in the winter.

From December on, Farmers Supply now does brisk business supplying the needs of tobacco growers.

Alspach got to know the business when he went there for supplies as a worker for a construction company. Eventually he made Groff an offer, and has come to love his new enterprise. He said, "I can't learn everything overnight,"

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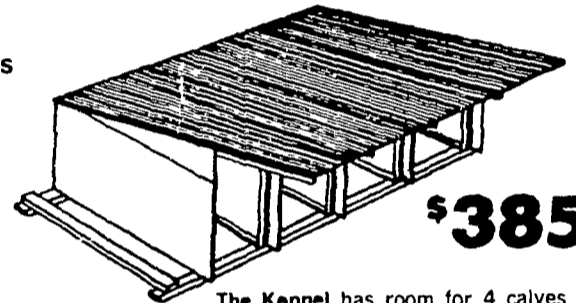


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