

# Cannery closings don't dim Delaware vegetable outlook

LAUREL, Del — News of two recent cannery closings won't affect Delaware vegetable growers as seriously as some people fear, says University of Delaware extension vegetable specialist Mike Orzolek.

Though farmers who have been counting on contracts with these particular firms will have to find other outlets for their peppers and some may need to switch to other crops, they still have plenty of good market options, he says.

About 1500 acres of peppers were grown for processing in Delaware last year. Acreage could be down to around 600 because of the closings. But the rest of the land will probably remain in vegetables of some sort, rather than going into corn or soybeans, predicts the specialist.

For one thing, despite the closings, there are still about 40 processors of fruits and vegetables on the Delmarva peninsula.

Many Delaware farmers already have contracts with these other firms for everything from sweet and hot peppers to sweet corn, peas, limas, snap beans, tomatoes, carrots and cabbage. And demand for processing vegetables could well be up this year.

Many carry-over processed vegetable stocks — both canned and frozen — are way down from 1980, while unfavorable weather in some parts of the country has reduced anticipated yields, so don't write off the processing market, says Orzolek.

There are also plenty of fresh market opportunities for

Delaware-grown produce. In recent years there's been a steady gain in fresh vegetable acreage in the state — up 15 percent to 20 percent each year, he estimates. From about 12,000 acres in 1979, production rose to about 15,000 last year and he expects a similar increase in 1981.

Total processed acreage came to about 30,000 acres in 1980, mostly because the return on vegetables grown for processing is lower than fresh and farmers compensate by planting more.

Even so, the profit from vegetables grown for processing is as great or greater than that from corn or soybeans. This is one reason he doesn't expect to see former pepper acreage switch back to these crops.

A good manager can make more growing sweet corn, pickling cukes, tomatoes or hot peppers. And though they pay less, peas, limas and snap beans (for processing) are also very competitive with Delaware's two main feed grains.

Peas probably pay more to grow than most small grains and, being a legume, they provide nitrogen for the next crop planted, which cuts down on fertilizer costs. They also can be double cropped, so they're a nice, profitable early cash crop.

Some of Delaware's major fresh market crops are potatoes — about 5000 acres were harvested in 1980; sweet corn — 2000 acres last year and going up; cucurbits like cucumbers, watermelons and cantalopes — 6000 to 7000 acres.

Other vegetables grown for fresh distribution include peas, snap beans, limas, sweet peppers and cole crops like cabbage, cauliflower and broccoli. Some of these are retailed to supermarket chains. Some are sold at roadside markets, and some are available on a pick-your-own basis.

Melons did so well last summer that there's some danger that farmers may get carried away, plant too many this year and flood the market, warns Orzolek.

There's been a lot of interest in raising staked tomatoes for fresh market use on the Eastern Shore of Virginia, he notes. Some Delaware growers have been considering the idea, too. But he's counseled those he's talked with to adopt a wait-and-see attitude.

The practice is very labor-intensive and there may not be enough consumer demand to make the crop competitive with cheaper, mechanically harvested ones.

Incidentally, there's a strengthening demand for mechanically grown tomatoes

right now. Processors are planning to increase local acreage and fresh market opportunities are also very good.

Rising transportation costs have affected long-distance shipment of fresh produce, giving Delmarva growers a competitive edge in reaching major Northeastern markets. But some local farmers are afraid they won't be able to compete with producers in the Southwest or Florida on a yield-per-acre basis.

This was once true, but it's no longer so, says Orzolek.

"We're just hitting the tip of the iceberg as far as boosting our yields per acre here," he says. "But growers can do it if they're willing to update their practices."

For instance, lima bean yields could double over the next five to 10 years, just by switching to improved varieties. Improving fertility and management practices will also mean cranking out more vegetables per acre.

Looking over these and other prospects, he says he is optimistic about the future for vegetable production in Delaware.

## Cumberland honors 4-H dairy members



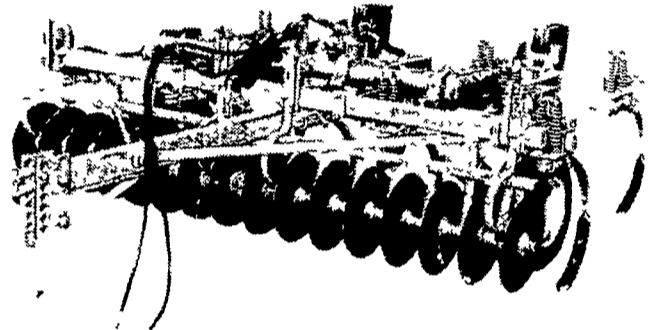
Shown at the Cumberland County 4-H Dairy Banquet, from left, are Sharon Cornman, past President of the 4-H Dairy Club, newly elected President, John Stamy, IV; and Galen Smith who was presented his 15 year 4-H Leader Award. John was also recognized as a finalist in the Pennsylvania Holstein Distinguished Junior Member Contest. The banquet was held last week.



At the Cumberland County 4-H Dairy Banquet Raymond Shoemaker, left, Eastern Milk Producers, presented Doug McCullough, Newville with the Outstanding First Year Member Award and Sam Glesner, Newville, received the Outstanding 4-H Dairy Member Award from Ron Hoffman, representative from Farm Credit Association. The banquet was held at the South Middleton Fire Hall.

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