

# Butler Co. poultryman wins egg marketing success and Master Farmer award

VALENCIA — A Butler County poultryman who serves as a national leader in the various aspects of egg merchandising and marketing has been named a Master Farmer for 1981.

W. Robert Park of R4, Valencia, is president and general manager of Park Products, Inc., which has 45,000 laying hens on the home farm and contracts producers' eggs from another 30,000 to 35,000 birds. The modern egg processing plant can handle 140 cases an hour; and a fleet of trucks service egg customers within a 200-mile radius of the farm.

"I've seen the egg industry move from floor layers and range-reared pullets, to tiered roosts and slats, to flat deck cages, and presently to the tri-deck cage systems now so popular today," Park says.

In spite of charges of "unfair" by various animal welfare groups, cages are here to stay, the Master Farmer says. They offer definite advantages both from the bird's standpoint as well as producer

economy. We will have real problems "feeding the world" unless we continue to keep the laying hens in cages, he adds.

The veteran egg producer-marketer points out that one of the problems of agriculture is more emphasis is placed on producing products than marketing them. Too often, he says, eggs have been priced a lot higher at the retail level than they should have been. Food stores often continue to take their regular price markups on eggs even when the wholesale market is on the downside.

"If stores would drop the price accordingly, more eggs would be sold. Everyone, from producer to marketer, would benefit," Park emphasizes. "I'd much rather see food chains featuring eggs at a minimum profit level than the more drastic 'loss-leader' price approach now used."

The Master Farmer says he is trying to develop merchandising programs to help both the producer and consumer. He

currently is vice chairman of the American Egg Board, first serving as a director and treasurer. He has been vice president of the Northeast Egg Marketing Association and a director of United Egg Producers. At the state level, he was president of the Pennsylvania Poultry Federation.

This involvement, along with efficient poultry management practices, helped Park earn the Jaycee Farmer of the Year Award in 1960 and the Pennsylvania Poultry Federation's Egg Industryman of the Year Award in 1978.

The award winner has always been "market oriented" in the poultry and egg business. He started "peddling" eggs as a 16-year-old farm boy in Butler County. At the age of 25, he purchased a present farm of 42 acres and started a poultry business with 500 birds.

By 1952, the flock was increased to 1,000 laying hens and 800 broilers started every four weeks. Over the years broilers were phased out in favor of more laying hens.

There have been other changes, too, besides a simple expansion of bird numbers. The Master Farmer experimented with drying the manure from hens with an oil-fired dryer, then selling it bagged to the retail trade.

"A nagging odor from the dried manure prompted me to switch sales instead to the mushroom trade. This worked well but problems of weather and manure consistency still popped up at times," Park points out.

He now uses the poultry manure on corn ground as a fertilizer. Last year he grew 235 acres of corn on owned and rented land. Yields ranged upwards to 180 bushels per acre. This corn is the basis for the homegrown feed mix.

Park Products, Inc. always has been a family affair with three of the Park's four children still active

in the farm operation. They incorporated in 1971 when son, Roy, graduated from college and returned to the farm.

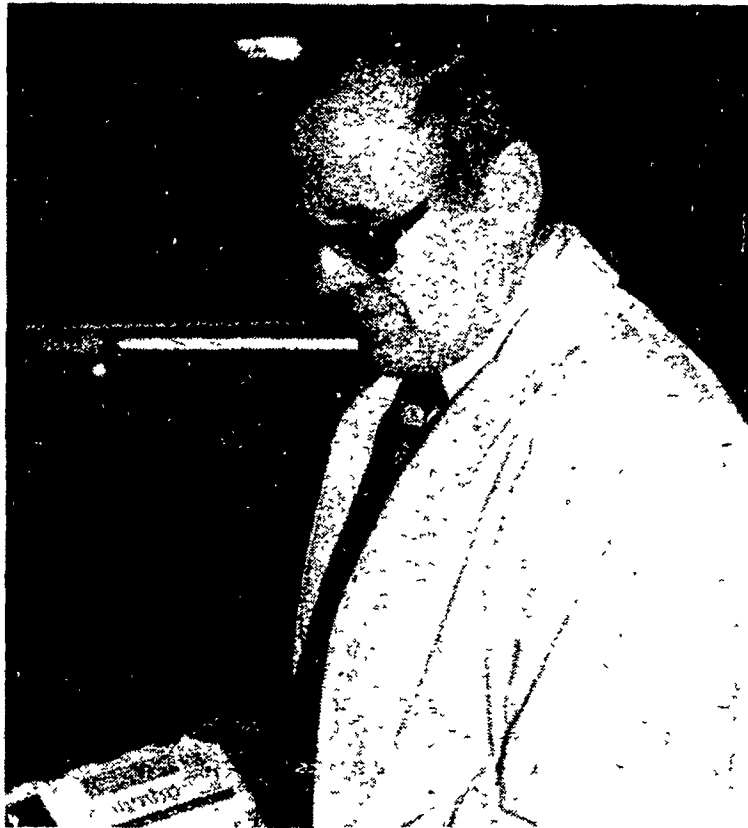
Under the present corporate structure, the Master Farmer is the general manager. Roy is vice president in charge of production, egg processing, and the cropping program. Another son, Robert, directs the firm's fleet of 14 trucks.

A daughter, Kathryn Yingling, is in charge of promotion and public relations. Another daughter, Peggy Weymouth, is the only family member not with the

operation. She and her husband live in Illinois.

"We've had our share of problems through the years," Park relates. "A disastrous fire destroyed the laying house and packing plant in 1963. Then in 1979, another fire completely destroyed the manure drying plant."

The Butler County poultryman is a member of the Valencia United Presbyterian Church and Masons. He formerly served as a school director and member of the township planning commission.



W. Robert Park, general manager of Park Products, Inc. successfully operates a modern egg processing plant in Butler County, with the help of his family. The 1981 Master Farmer stresses the importance of marketing agricultural products along with producing them.

## Ashcombe Greenhouses

(Continued from Page E2)

than ever, and he's seen a tremendous demand recently for seeds and bulbs.

Ashcombe continues the vegetable growing business, some of the product retailed through the garden center and others marketed as U-pick. Strawberries and blueberries have also been added as Ashcombe has expanded over the years.

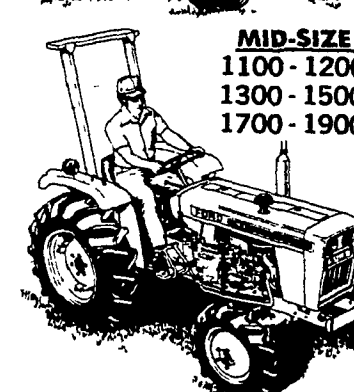
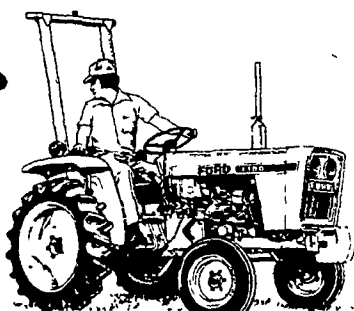
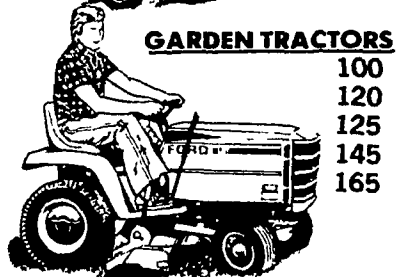
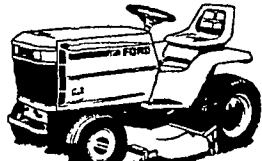
But the sagging economy has affected greenhouse operations, just as it's caused a slump in nearly every segment of American business.

"There's a definite downturn trend in sales over the last four months, and that's a first for us," worries Gross. "But other

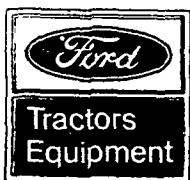
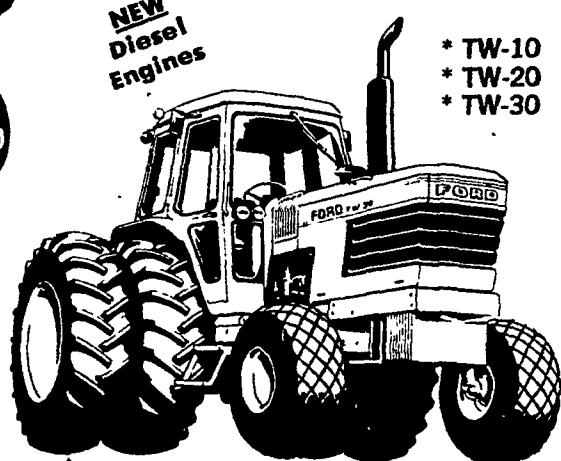
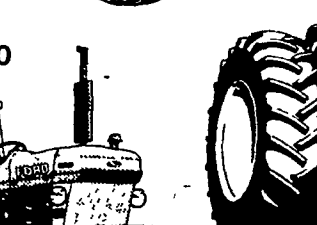
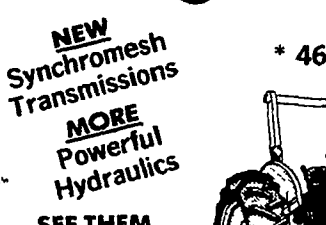
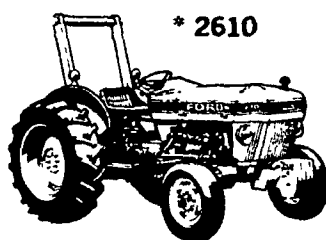
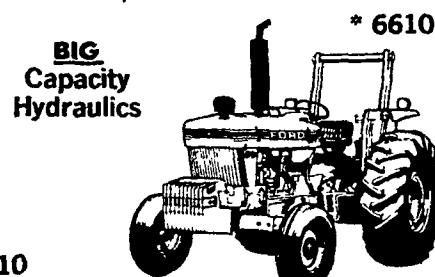
operators I've talked with say exactly the same thing." As Spring approaches, and planting fever grabs hold of winter-weary gardeners, that's likely to change. In times of slack economy, the American public has traditionally turned back to gardening at home, supplementing their incomes with backyard vegetables, and creating their own inexpensive entertainment and beauty with floral cultivation.

And, whether they know it or not, it's a good chance the home gardeners of southcentral Pennsylvania, in fact gardeners up and down the mid-Atlantic area, may be burying their roots of Ashcombe Greenhouse plants into their patio and porch planters come Spring.

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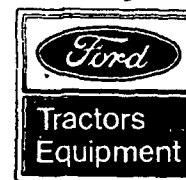
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