

Farm Talk

Jerry Webb

Farming at Disney World

How can a farm writer turn a trip to Disney World into an agricultural adventure?

That thought ran through my mind as I headed south in the old truck camper. Oh sure, there were plenty of farms to see from the window of the truck, but no time to talk with any farmers — couldn't even raise any on the CB radio.

And there were all of those millions of orange trees that we saw from an observation tower in the heart of Florida's citrus country. But my wife and I were headed for a short vacation in and around the tourist spots of northern and central Florida and agriculture didn't seem to be a part of it.

That was before we arrived in Orlando, host community to Disney World, and some other "make believe" places. We quickly learned that the area is abuzz about something called the EPCOT Center, newest addition to the Disney World complex and the most imaginative and educational thing the Disney genius has ever created.

The \$800 million complex, which opens October 1 of this year, provides an opportunity to experience some of the next century right now. Through it World Showcase and Future World, EPCOT deals with energy, communications transportation, and even agriculture.

There it was, my farm con-

nection — a multi-million-dollar Land Pavilion covering six acres and including everything from man's first efforts in farming to the most futuristic kind of agriculture the Disney creativeness can conceive.

It's a lot more than drawings and animation. The Land Pavilion will be alive with plant materials from around the world growing in the most unusual ways. Research for this farm of the future has been going on for several years in an agricultural college in Arizona.

Agricultural scientists with the same kinds of training and experience as ag scientists anywhere have been channeling their thinking toward future food production in a special Environmental Research Laboratory at the University of Arizona. They've already perfected this futuristic farming to the point where they know these far-out things will work and that visitors will have some unusual growing plants to see when they visit.

As you can imagine, setting up a Disney exhibit with futuristic farming is a lot more complicated than some kind of a make-believe moon trip. Those systems have to work and the plants have to thrive in that space-age environment — something they may not be ready to do. It's easy enough to animate a carrot in the best addition of the Mickey Mouse world of Disney, but to make plants grow out of a wall

or in space is something else.

But the plants are growing — in the labs in Arizona and in the greenhouses at Disney World. Here are some examples.

* Plants growing in a space drum while the roots, responding to the centrifugal force of the revolving drum as though it were gravity, extend outward into a mist of plant nutrients.

* Multi-level cropping systems with several crops growing on the same plots.

* A superstar gourd with seeds that are 35 percent oil and protein, and roots that are 50 percent starch.

* A winged bean with spinach-like leaves, beans that are 37 percent protein and roots with 10 times the protein of potatoes.

* A tropical food crop that can be baked, boiled, fried, or ground into flour.

* Tropical plants and temperate climate plants thriving in the same environment, and interplanting of crops like soybeans, eggplant, and luffa gourds to produce food, oil and fiber from the same space.

The list of miracle plants and unusual farm techniques goes on and on. And it's not just a collection of the odd and unusual. The EPCOT planners see the Land Pavilion as a practical experiment in futuristic farming — as a way of producing more food for more people.

They intend to entertain and they plan to educate, and along the way they hope to learn some things that

will help our future food supply. That's a pretty heavy challenge. No doubt an organization that turned a mouse into a multi-billion-dollar industry will be highly successful at future farming, also.

It occurs to me that in the years ahead, more people will learn more about the land and the agriculture it supports through Disney World than probably any other single source — perhaps even any combination of sources. After all, 100 million people visited that complex during its first 10 years of operation. No doubt the traffic flow will increase with the opening of

EPCOT in the Fall. Where else do people go in great numbers to learn anything about agriculture — past, present, or future?

The Land Pavilion can be a tremendous showcase for American agriculture — something farmers themselves should see. Something they can be proud of because they are a part of the story.

One final thought — wouldn't the EPCOT Center be a great place for a farmer's tour next winter? It could provide the reason for a well-deserved vacation and something interesting and enjoyable to do.

Del. Soybean Board funds research

DOVER, DEL. — The Delaware Soybean Board announced that it will be providing funds for seventeen market development and research projects this year.

The Board chairman, Joe Hughes explained that the Board will continue to place its emphasis upon market development and applied research projects that will benefit that will benefit local producers. A total of \$54,540 was granted for projects in the second year of the soybean farmers' self-help programs.

The Board selected this year's projects from twenty-seven

proposals that had been submitted. Hughes said the Board has expanded its market development efforts by providing \$8,400 for two local projects and \$15,000 towards the American Soybean Association's international programs. The research projects range from evaluating cropping rotations to developing controls for giant ragweeds. Recipients of grants are the American Soybean Association, the Delaware Cooperative Extension Service and Delaware Agricultural Experiment Station.

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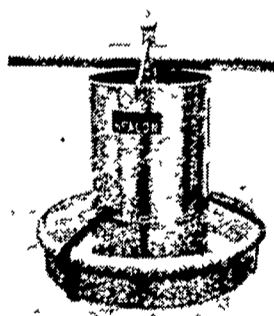


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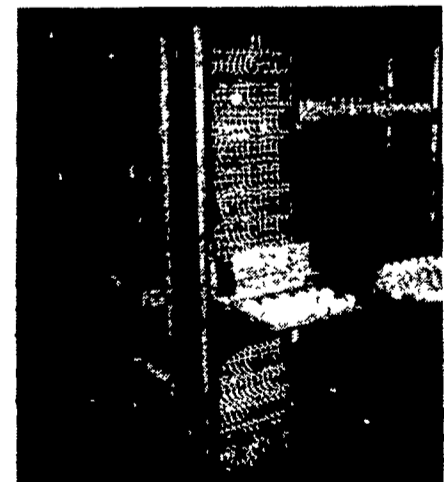
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