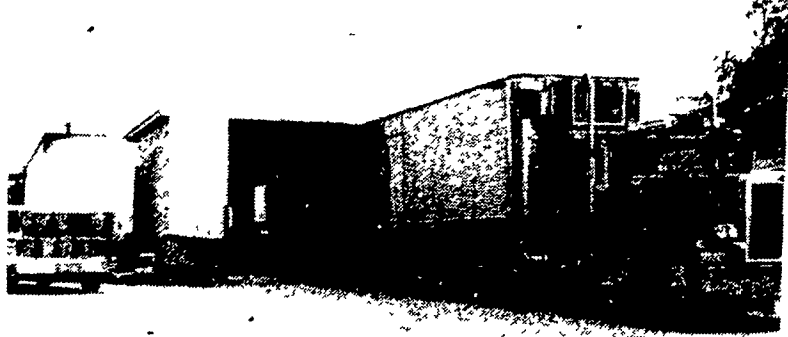


## Farmers find cash in tomatoes

(Continued from Page D2)  
plant. The huge machines carry them through a washing and drying channel complete with

brushes and heat lamps. The tomatoes are then coated with wax for protection against bruises. Good tomatoes — those that are



The tomatoes on the left will end up on the tractor trailer to the right after a brief stint in the plant. Ressler was able to fill 20 trailer loads last year and hopes for 40 this year.



Giving credit where credit is due, Ressler says he'd never be able to run the operation without the help of his bookkeeper, confidante and wife, Susan. Here, Susan does the paperwork on a load of tomatoes Daniel Metzler of R1 Pequea delivered. Metzler, a dairy farmer says he maintains four acres of tomatoes because he "was born into it."

firm and round, green in color and free of blemishes, are packaged immediately. Tomatoes sporting a light red color are packaged separately for a more localized market, and bad tomatoes are sent back with the farmer.

The tomatoes move through the machine with the help of a huge black conveyor belt. Circles have been perforated on the belt to allow the smaller tomatoes to drop to another level for packaging so that sizes of tomatoes remain relatively consistent in each box.

As this process is occurring, a crew of four or five employees stand on each side of the machine and pull out the inferior and the red tomatoes, placing them in other boxes.

As the noisy, hurried procedure continues, the green tomatoes lucky enough to pass the critical eye of the employees, are placed in boxes capable of holding 25 pounds each. Ressler says these boxes cost him \$.90 each and come in bundles of 11,000.

The boxed tomatoes are then hauled from the plant to their markets on tractor trailers of which Ressler himself, owns two. However, most of the markets send their own truck for the produce.

Ressler, a tall, lean man, proud in disposition and quiet in manner, readily admits that he doesn't see markets changing drastically, or the demand for his tomatoes increasing, because "most people grow tomatoes in their backyard, so the sales volume isn't there. Stores can't compete with this so the market isn't expanding much."

However, there is at least one area in Pennsylvania that would disagree with Ressler. For it is in the northeastern counties of Lackawanna, Luzerne and Wyoming that farmers boast figures of 2,000 to 2,500 acres,

## Helms urges action on farm storage ad '83 programs

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Sen. Jesse Helms last Friday urged the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture to take further actions to strengthen the farm economy, in light of recent estimates of record-breaking fall harvests.

"America's farmers are proving yet again that they are the most abundant producers in the world. Unfortunately, there may not be adequate storage for such production, unless further action is taken," Helms said.

In a letter to Secretary of Agriculture John R. Block, Helms and four other Senate leaders urged the regulations on USDA's farm storage facility loan program be broadened to encourage more on-farm storage. The Senators also urged an early announcement of the 1983 commodity programs for

feed grains, upland cotton, and rice.

In addition to Helms, the letter was signed by Sens. Robert Dole (R-KS), Finance Committee chairman; Thad Cochran (R-MS), Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee chairman; Howard Baker (R-TN), Senate Majority leader; and Pete Domenici (R-NM), Budget Committee chair-

"We commend you for the early announcement of the 1983 wheat program and the approval of \$40 million in loans for on-farm storage facilities. We hope you will also announce the 1983 programs for feed grains, cotton and rice as soon as practicable so that farmers may make their planting plans the Senators said.

"After the storage facility loan program was announced on July 14, more recent crop estimates have shown that corn and soybean production will reach record levels. In light of the larger crop estimates, we hope that the regulations on eligibility for storage loans be revised to encourage more storage.

"Such action will help farmers, complement your management of current programs, and fit the parameters of the budget," the Senators wrote. "In combination with the export promotion and paid diversion measures recently adopted by Congress, these actions should help strengthen the farm economy."

collectively, for tomato production in 1982. Fifteen years ago that figure was a mere 500 acres.

In addition to the packing plants in this three-county area, Erie and Snyder counties — both recognized for their production once-upon-a-time — can now report one packing plant each.

Tom Jurchak, Extension agent and green tomato specialist estimates total acreage for Pennsylvania at around 3,500. With simple arithmetic, it's easy to calculate that the 500 boxes per acre at a rate of about \$5 each adds up to close \$2,500 for an acre of green tomatoes; making the produce nearly a \$9 million business for Pennsylvania last year. nearly a \$9 million business for Pennsylvania last year.

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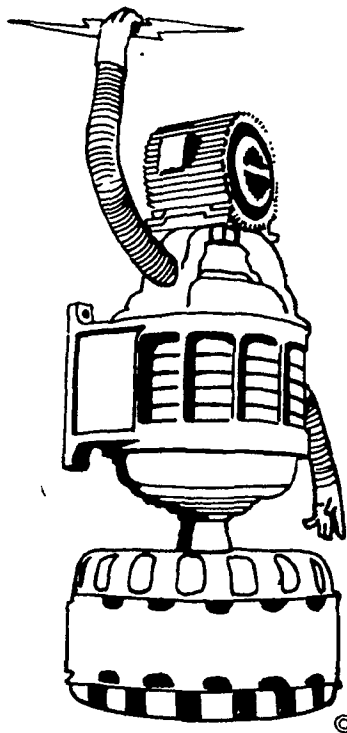
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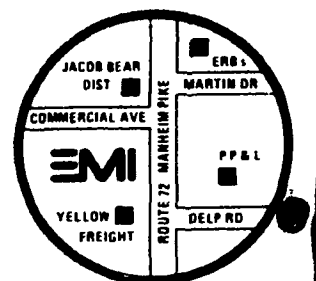
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