

The 'Farmer's Daughter' offers roadside ingenuity

BY JOYCE BUPP
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SHREWSBURY — It was mid-summer of 1967, and motorists regularly traveling Route 851 west of Shrewsbury often saw the youngster sitting beside the road. From her small lawn chair she'd wave an American flag, hoping to catch commuters' attention so they'd stop to buy from her supply of greens beans on the little step-stand.

The beans had been picked by 7-year-old Megan Shaub from her father's field, planted for harvest by the Hungerford Packing Company. Gleaning behind the pickers, or from missed edges and corners, the enterprising youngster was getting her first taste of the business world.

"A 'quarter a quart' for the beans became sort of my trademark," grins the all-grown-up entrepreneur, punching numbers into a shiny digital cash register, "we kept the string beans at that price for five or six years, until the costs of everything made us put it up."

From that modest three-shelf stand with its boxes of beans, has developed the attractive, rustic country-store-charm establishment known as "The Farmer's Daughter." One of just 130 certified farm markets in the state, the quality produce and unique garden and craft related items combine into a roadside sales business that is a dream come true for Megan Shaub.

She's quick to credit her parents Bob and Margaret Shaub for their support, both moral and physical, since that first day she sold beans from the front yard.

"I wouldn't be here if it weren't for dad growing things for me to sell over the years," she insists. Too busy stocking and arranging produce, plus assisting customers, Bob Shaub declines to even stop and have his picture taken.

The greatly-expanded Farmer's

Daughter market made its debut in April, enticing gardeners with fertilizers, bedding plants and seeds. In addition to the usual variety of fresh produce, customers also find tastefully arranged displays of jams, jellies, relishes, salad dressings, canning and freezing supplies for "putting up" food for the winter, spices, milk and eggs.

And, like most of the previous additions to Megan's retail business, the new building was already outgrown before it was even completed. In fact, expansion at the Farmer's Daughter has become routine.

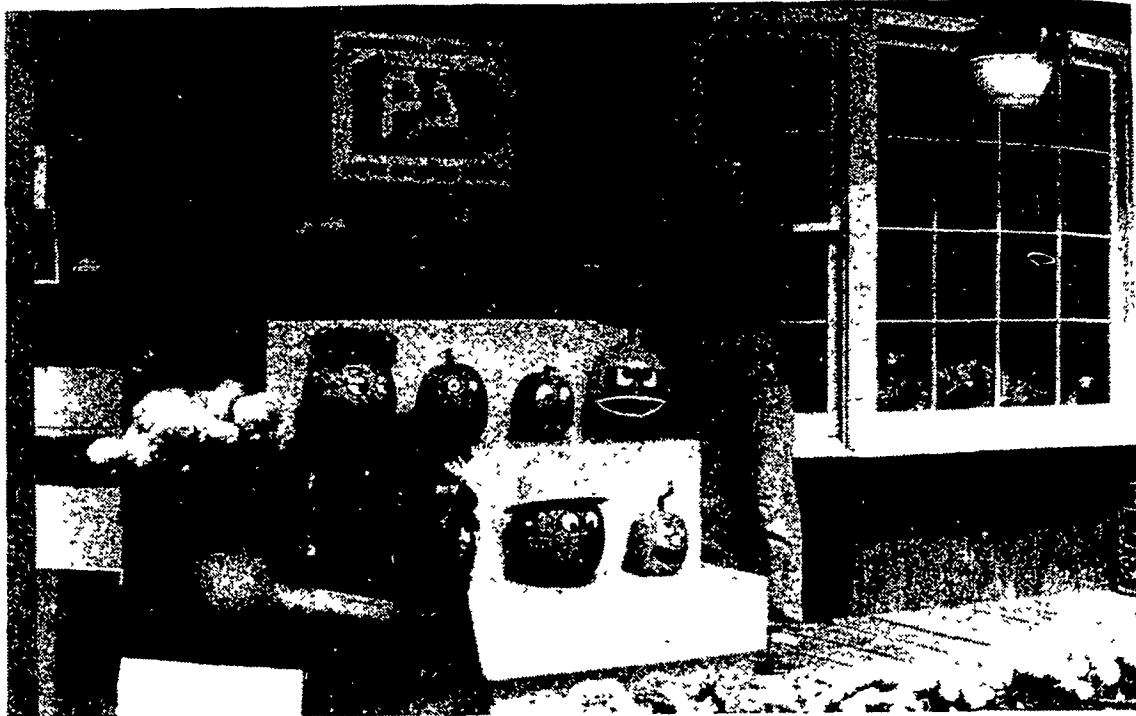
At first, additions were small ones, like the umbrella Megan swiped from her dad's combine back many years ago. After all, afternoons in July are hot, and a little girl could use the shade when she fell asleep in the chair, waiting between bean customers.

But by 1970, the shelf-stand had been outgrown, with the addition of corn, tomatoes and squash. Across the road was an old brooder house of the Shaubs', no longer needed for poultry. With a bit of remodeling, it became the "Flea Shop," where Megan could sell her garden produce, along with the displays of items collected by her father, including bottles, rocks and minerals, and postcards.

"But we soon had to take his things out, because it got too full of vegetables," Megan remembers.

Renamed The Farmer's Daughter, the business expanded into refrigerators for cooling; and each year, more variety has been added for customer selection.

Sweet corn was one of the first additions, with Bob Shaub planting about half-acre of yellow-kerneled corn that second year in business. It all ripened at the same time, and after peddling all they could in nearby towns, the Shaub's finally loaded the remaining ears on a truck to be hauled to the packing company.



Attractive displays of seasonal merchandise, such as the cheery chrysanthemums and her father's custom-painted pumpkin faces, entice Megan's customers to browse and buy, here, at her own business - The Farmer's Daughter.

Staggered plantings the following year, eliminated that problem. Sweet corn remains one of the backbone sales items for the summer business, although some of today's customers say they've never heard of yellow sweet corn, and white has become by far the favorite seller.

Megan's enrolling in the 4-H program played a large part, she says, in the progressive interest she found in the produce growing and sales business.

Signing up her first year for flower and vegetable projects, the youngster planted her small gardens near the stand. Customers not only bought the tomatoes, squash and peppers, but requested bouquets of the colorful annuals next to the stand.

As in any business, there were occasional set backs, in spite of the

fact that building additions were needed each year to keep up with the growth.

"One year, I planted about a dozen pepper plants right back of the stand," recalls the young proprietor. "That was the wrong place, because they didn't get enough sunlight and never amounted to anything. I never did that again."

By fall of most years, buyers were accustomed to stopping at Megan's stand, and the Shaubs saw a need to provide alternative merchandise as the summer's vegetable crops tapered off. Thus, the Shaubs' well-known pumpkin patch was born.

The first pumpkin planting, about 1970 was, just a small experimental one, and yielded one wagonload of pie and Jack-O-Lantern material. The Shaub's

pulled the loaded wagon beside the roadside stand where customers could make their selections.

Vandals - the first of many to invade the Farmer's Daughter merchandise over the years - damaged many of the pumpkins, slicing along them with sharp knives.

And pumpkins remain a favorite target of roadside troublemakers. Early this month, at 3 a.m., one morning Bob Shaub discovered pumpkin thieves at work inside the fenced-in pumpkin sales area. Caught in time, all the vandals grabbed was one rotten, cast-to-the-side, pumpkin patch discard.

Some customers prefer the decorative pumpkin faces painted, a talent Bob Shaub discovered he had some years ago. Each year, he paints bright faces on dozens of the orange vegetables, and is preparing to teach Megan the finer points of pumpkin make-up.

Along with both painted and unpainted pumpkins, the Farmer's Daughter customers can find other seasonal items such as gourds, Indian corn, and an array of potted chrysanthemums in brilliant shades.

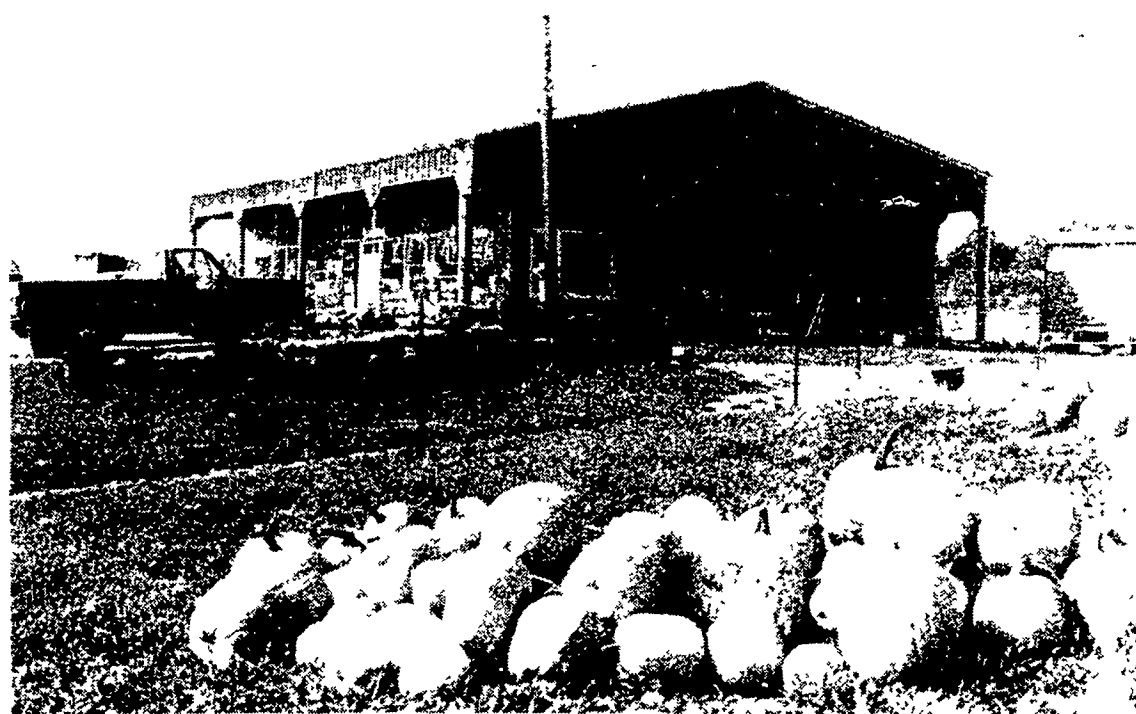
As her roadside business mushroomed, so did Megan's involvement in 4-H and its related Junior Horticulture Club, to which horticulture project members can

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Fresh produce, much of it grown on acres bounding the market, continues to be a Farmer's Daughter's prime sales item. In off-season periods, and for more exotic varieties, the all-night wholesale produce markets near Baltimore offer Megan a source of dependable, quality fresh fruits and vegetables.

Homestead Notes



By small leaps, and one giant bound, The Farmer's Daughter produce sales business has grown steadily over the past decade. Its recent recognition is a Certified Farm Market assures customers that rigid standards of freshness, cleanliness, and sales accuracy are maintained.