

PP&L producing hydroponic tomatoes

YORK — Pennsylvania Power & Light Co.'s Brunner Island coal-fired power plant is producing tomatoes, as well as electricity.

The tomatoes are part of an aquaculture experiment PP&L is doing at its Brunner Island plant that includes a greenhouse/fish hatchery and a fish farm.

PP&L is using a "water-cooling" system to heat the greenhouse/fish hatchery and provide ideal water temperatures for rapid fish growth.

"What we are trying to do here," said Todd Beck, supervisor of the Brunner Island project, "is demonstrate that in addition to

commercial food-production potential, this new technology — if practiced on a large scale — could produce benefits to PP&L and its million customers in central eastern Pennsylvania."

Beck observed, "We have beautiful tomatoes because we're using the 'hydroponic' method to grow them. We can maintain a carefully controlled environment in which the roots are surrounded by water and nutrients in a soilless system."

The plants' stems run on the floor of the greenhouse, with the fruit-bearing part of the plant tied up vertically. Tubes carry

nutrients and water to the roots, which are enclosed in plastic. Beck explained that the tomatoes are grown year-round, and are picked within days of peak flavor. This allows the tomatoes to ripen naturally on the vine without having to be treated with ethylene gas to bring out the color, he said.

Since May, about 1,000 tomato plants have been producing about 1,000 pounds of tomatoes per week, said Beck. The plants will continue to grow — some to about 30 feet in

length — and bear fruit through the end of the year. The tomatoes are being sold in York County through grocery wholesalers. They have a suggested retail price of \$1.99 a pound.

The greenhouse also contains a fish hatchery, where PP&L has been hatching fish and raising fingerlings since last year. The fish grow to a certain size and then are placed in the facility's concrete raceways until they are ready for sale.

PP&L is now experimenting with raising striped bass and striped bass hybrids at the facility. He expects to add to its "crop" list by beginning soon to grow cantaloupes, cucumbers and lettuce using the hydroponic method.

"What we're trying to do here at Brunner Island is prove that these growing facilities are commercially viable," said Beck. He said once this is demonstrated, the company hopes to sell or lease the operation.



Water and nutrients flow around tomato plant roots at Pennsylvania Power & Light Co.'s Brunner Island aquaculture project south of Harrisburg in York County. Todd Beck, supervisor of the project, picks ripe tomatoes, which are grown year-round at the facility.

Ayrshire event today

DOYLESTOWN — Delaware Valley College is hosting the 1983 Field Day of the Pennsylvania Ayrshire Breeders Association today at the Doylestown campus. The annual event goes back into the 1940's says Secretary-Treasurer Milton Brubaker, but no one is certain of the exact number of field days. According to Brubaker, it wouldn't be too inaccurate to call this one the fortieth.

He said that during the 40's there were more active local clubs than there are today. That number has dropped by half in the last forty years.

The state club has 300 members, of whom 75 are active in the organization. Brubaker said that there are more than 400 Ayrshire herds in Pennsylvania, but hastened to add that these range in size from 200 animals down to a single 4-H project cow or calf. He

said that 15 to 20 new people bought Ayrshires at the last state sale, and it appears that more people are buying them in preparation for protein pricing.

The field day is largely family oriented, and there will be judging contests for men, women and children. There will also be haylage identification, seed, weed and grass identification and a daughter-dam identification contest.

Events will start at 10:00 am, and will run continually until lunch. In the afternoon there will be recognition of herdsmen by Barbara Weas, field representative of the National Ayrshire Breeders Association, and also state production and DHIA awards. A formal tour of the campus with special emphasis on the dairy will round out the day's events.—H.S.

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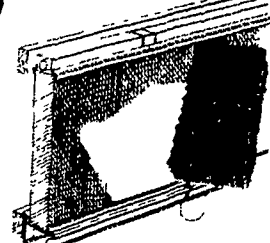
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