



It's open season on fresh Pennsylvania blueberries

Diversity gives Highland Orchard



Production manager Stuart Constable checks the progress of this young cherry tree and guides its growth with clothes pins which will help spread the branches for early production.

BY TRISH WILLIAMS
WEST CHESTER — About midway between Coatesville and West Chester, near the small village of Embreeville lies Highland Orchards in a hillside patch work of fruit tree groves and vegetable plots.

Highland Orchards, Inc. is a diversified produce farm that grows primarily for retail sales from their own farm market. A wide variety of small fruits, tree fruits, and vegetables are grown on the farm to provide a full line of fresh produce throughout the summer months.

Fresh summer produce is coming into full swing now, with blueberries, cantelopes, cucumbers raspberries, squash, in full production, and peaches, apples and tomatoes just starting to be picked.

Highland Orchard offers the customer the option to PYO (pick your own) produce or buy it already picked and graded in the farm market.

Production manager, Stuart Constable says, the pick your own operation reduces the labor need for pickers, while allowing the customer to get the freshest fruit possible.

Constable who works hard year round to produce the summer harvest, says he enjoys seeing people from neighboring communities in the fields and orchards picking the fruits of his efforts.

And as I learned on my first

experience at picking my own blueberries, it's fun! With the blueberry bushes full of fruit and the choice of five different varieties of blueberries, my picking tray soon filled with plump berries. According to Constable the extreme hot weather in recent weeks is causing the immature white berries to blush up quickly to a deep purple-blue.

Anyone who has an interest in gardening or farming would probably also enjoy just walking around the fields and orchards to learn how the fruits and vegetables are grown.

Constables says that they are gradually going to more and more PYO fruits and vegetables. For this reason they must change the cultural practices used to grow the crops. Fruit trees are being trained to grow on a trellis, for ease of picking.

General Manager, Robert Hodge, says that he finds the smaller trees grown closer together work better on the steep hillsides, than the older plantings of large fruit trees.

Hodge and his wife, Elizabeth started farming at Highland Orchards in 1957, the farm and orchard had previously been owned and operated by her father. At the time they started farming, there were 50 acres of apples, 20 acres of peaches, a small planting of plums, two-and-a-half acres of cherries, as well as hay, field corn, sweet corn, and pastureland. The

operation has flourished in the last 26 years and two smaller farms have been acquired. Today 100 acres of peaches are grown as well 100 acres of apples, and a complement of small fruits and vegetables.

Highland Orchards became incorporated when Hodge's children and personnel in the company wanted a financial interest in the business.

The agri-business corporation employs over 60 persons during the summer months, and around 20 employees full time in the winter months. Located in an area undergoing residential development at a rapid rate, neighbors welcome the open fields, and many nearby students are grateful for the

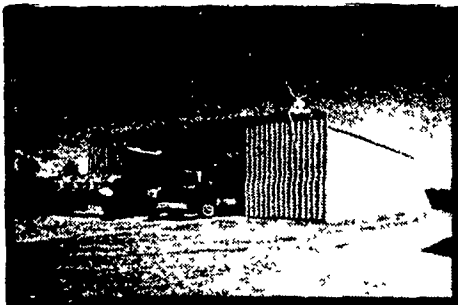
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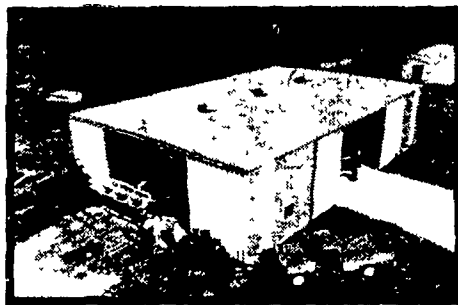
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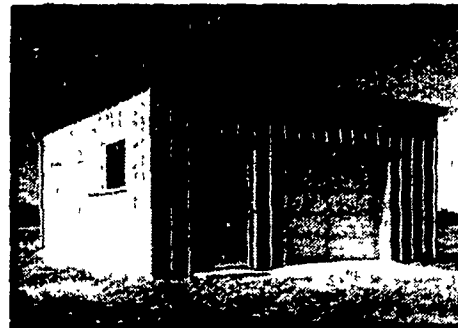
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