

Tomato knowledge

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tying and suckering them three times. He prefers to stake them, he said, because tomatoes on the ground will get ground stain and rot. Spray material will not penetrate and the set is often not as good. Because of the labor involved in staking and suckering, more and more growers are going to indeterminate stalks which grow on the ground.

Heisey recalls the formation of the Washington Boro Tomato Growers Association in 1934, organized to market the tomatoes grown in the area. He credits founders Emerson Kane and Abram Eshleman, who served as secretary-treasurer, for helping the association get organized. He says, "It was a depression occupation." Many farmers jumped at the chance to market the tomatoes, and Heisey says he was not accepted the first year, but was allowed to join in 1935, when he was growing tomatoes on his father's farm.

It succeeded, he said, because, "Everybody came to Washington Boro for tomatoes. They had quality, and they had them earlier." The Association tried marketing other products, but nothing else succeeded.

Those first tomatoes were sold strictly for table use, and were marketed widely. Later, Heinz and Campbell came into the picture, buying tomatoes for processing.

Heisey says proudly, "Tomatoes put me through school." He said that he grew tomatoes, then took

two years off to go to Messiah College, paying part with tomato money, and part by "working everywhere."

He and his wife raised seven children and the tomatoes helped put them all through college.

The Growers Association dissolved in 1968, according to Heisey, because "the second generation didn't want to do it. They found easy money and easier work. There were not sufficient growers to continue the organization, so they sold the stock and divided the profits among the growers." Funk Brothers purchased the facilities and continue to use them today for their extensive tomato operation.

Heisey doesn't mind sharing his thoughts on being successful in the retail business. He says simply, "Any person who wants to make a success has to learn to have it before anyone else has it." He offered the example of his green beans this year when he received a premium price for them early and now "you can't give green beans away. You must be a little ahead of the season."

This means primarily early planting for any kind of vegetable, something Heisey couldn't do this year because of the move to a new location and problems with wet weather. He usually has his early sweet corn in by April 20 and green beans in by April 10. "Green beans won't freeze off," he says.

He credits university research with many of the advances in growing vegetables, saying, "Research helped sweet corn. The older varieties wouldn't pollinate at cooler temperatures."

He gives Cornell University

credit for their help, having received much information on growing plants from them. He contends that Penn State is losing out on research in this area.

He thinks more farmers should consider retailing as a way of marketing their goods because of keeping control over the product offered, and laments that many consumers get used to second class quality in fresh produce.

"I think every farmer should have a good course in chemistry," Heisey states. That subject has done me more good - in nutrition, in fertilizer, in everything. You don't get caught by quacks if you understand chemistry."

When he farmed his truck farm Heisey says they dug a well and used irrigation, which helped get them through years like last summer. This year he is just enjoying the results of so much rain. "It is clean and green everywhere. I love it."

Although the rain delayed some things, it has been mostly beneficial, and corn, which began two weeks late, quickly caught up and is now on time. Heisey points out that he used the same amount of fertilizer this year as last, but plants are enjoying two years' worth because most of it was not released last year.

There's another benefit of the rain. Heisey says. "There are no insects - no cucumber beetles, no bean beetles, no mites and aphids. They can't stand wet weather."

Heisey markets his tomatoes through his stand at Columbia Market, and a few on a wholesale basis. He said that he first went to market with his father who sold butter, cheese, eggs and "whatever garden vegetables they

had." He pointed out that every stand was taken then. "Farmers were glad to get cash to take home."

Now Heisey believes most people don't want the work, and if the family doesn't help, it is difficult to have that kind of business. Heisey's daughter Ruth Gerlach helps at market and Ruth's sons, Deric, 13, Ryan, 11, and Darin, 8, take turns helping. A fourth son, Devon, 4, isn't quite ready.

Heisey is not afraid of competition, which has virtually disappeared, and says that retailing is a good way to make money. Getting a jump on the season means getting a premium for scarce produce. He said the tomato market is usually a seller's market until July 15. "There is never an overproduction of something like this."

At one time Heisey even raised greenhouse tomatoes, "I would have them on the first of May, then put in a fall crop and have them until February 1. I would have only three months off. I loved that operation." Because of the labor involved, he stopped that part of his business two years ago.

With all the tomatoes, does he

ever tire of eating them? Heisey smiles, "I could eat them three times a day, seven days a week."

He handles Florida tomatoes at his stand during the winter, but says many customers prefer to wait until he has his local ones. "The people look forward to it, and they'll pay anything for good quality tomatoes. There is no comparison between the Florida ones and mine. Those are bred for shipping and are hard and tasteless - they hold up regardless. They just don't have the sugar content."

Heisey also grows plenty of sweet corn, cauliflower, broccoli, beans, peppers, and other fresh produce. He used to grow a lot of cantaloupes, but has reduced the amount he grows. He specializes also in seedless watermelons which he grows on an acre of land near his home.

Heisey is justifiably proud of the tomatoes he grows and the tradition which brings interest to Washington Boro tomatoes. He is carrying on that tradition and says quite honestly, "I don't want to retire." That's good news for Washington Boro tomato lovers who just can't wait each year for that first red ripe tomato!

Birth adds excitement to 4-H Goat Round-up

KIMBERTON — A young doe decided she didn't want to compete in the doelings class at the 4-H Goat Round-up at Kimberton on Sunday, July 22, so she gave birth to a doe kid, and 40 minutes later was showing in the milkers under two years class.

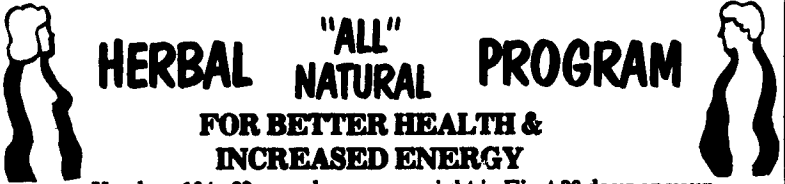
The birth added an extra package of excitement to the day's proceedings. Grand champion showman and fitter went to Susan Miller of Furlong. Reserve grand champion showman went to Josh Weinstock of Phoenixville. Reserve champion fitter honors were taken by Jennifer Seber of Limerick.

In type competition, grand champion and senior champion were awarded to Joshua Weinstock

with his 4-year-old milking doe. Reserve grand champion and reserve senior champion honors went to Susan Miller with her 3-year-old milker. Junior champion honors were awarded to Linda Kerrick's of West Chester. La mancha senior kid, and reserve junior champion honors went to a nubian doeling owned by Mamie Rose of Trappe.

Joshua Weinstock took first place in the dam-daughter competition. Judge Rich Stoneback commented that it was a pleasure to judge such a fine group of mature goats and kids. He remarked that the quality of the animals owned by Chester County 4-H club members was outstanding, and encouraged them to continue to excel in their projects.

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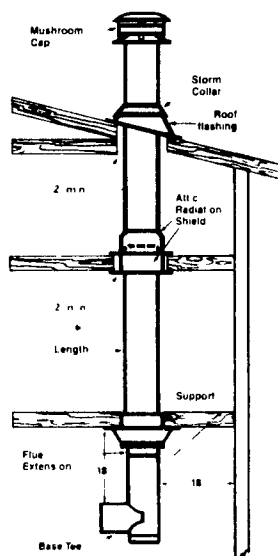


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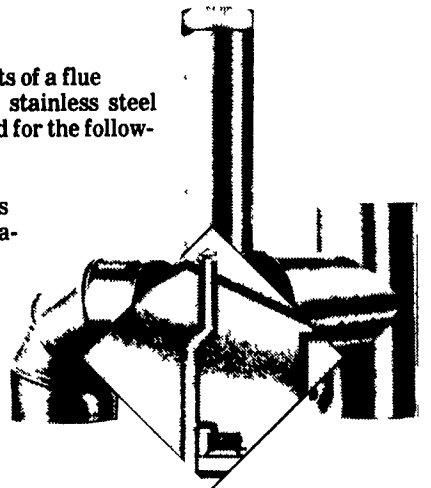
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