

Sunflowers increasing as cropping alternative in Pa.

BY MARGIE FUSCO

DANVILLE — Sunflowers are on the increase in central Pennsylvania. "They do especially well in the Pennsylvania climate, and we have a local market to offer farmers," explains Larry Breech, Danville grain farmer and an agent for Bay-Mor Pet Feeds of Cressona (near Pottsville).

Sunflowers are taking hold as a second or third crop in the Lancaster area and in the Susquehanna Valley. They're a new crop with a growing market as pet seed and oil seed. Some farmers are trying sunflowers as silage, although Breech can't

recommend that use.

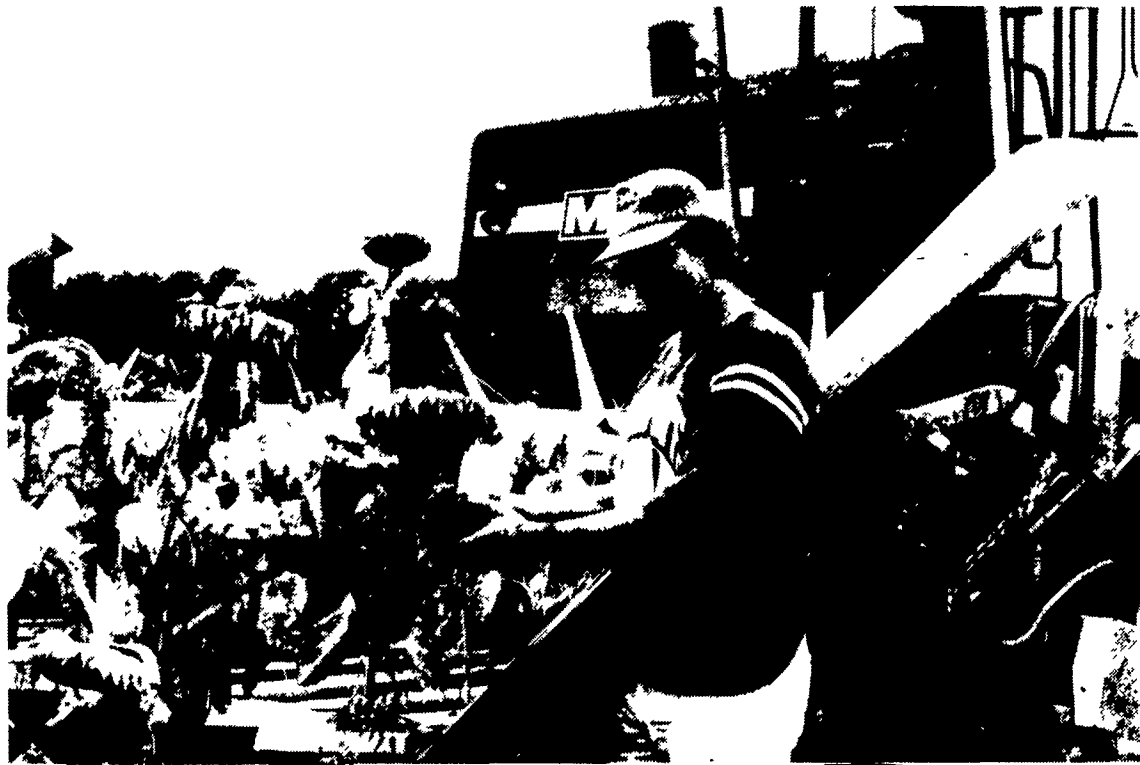
"They offer a double cropping option and make an excellent three-crop rotation," Breech says. "They also offer good dollar return for minimal investment." Sunflowers require only \$6.50 an acre for herbicides, he said, and can be planted with most conventional corn planters. Breech has found that conventional harvesting heads cause too much crop loss. This September he brought a special sunflower head into the upper Susquehanna Valley to run the first major harvest. The special head will adapt to most combines and will allow farmers to harvest twice

as many acres of sunflowers per day as they do with soybeans.

Breech has put 50 of his 500 acres in sunflowers and has area growers doing as much as 125 acres. Next year, he plans to increase his own sunflower acres. Although sunflowers are a poor choice for farms with major deer problems or fields near marshes (since blackbirds thrive on sunflowers), Breech says they work well on most Pennsylvania farms.

Bay-Mor Pet Feeds offers a basis premium for growers versus the more distant Midwest market. Sunflowers weigh half the cost of

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Larry Breech, of Danville, is among Pennsylvania farmers turning to sunflowers as alternate crop. It is being marketed as pet bird feed.



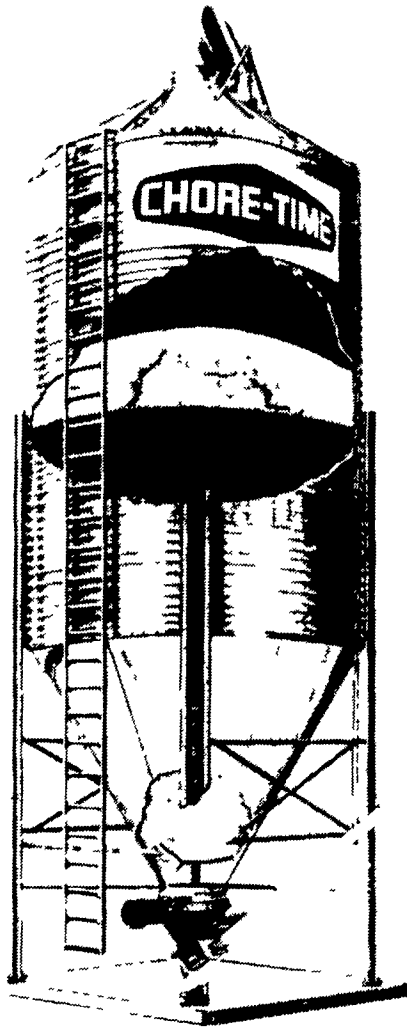
Special harvesting head is used by Larry Breech, of Danville, in his sunflowers. Head has nine-inch row pans with long teeth to accommodate long stalks. Drum contains staggered cutting fingers. The head out of sunflower country in North Dakota costs less than \$3,000 and reduces harvesting losses.

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