Italian vegetable grower

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Hochmuth, who took him to see cucumbers being harvested and packed at Papen Farms. They also toured a Sandel pepper and pickle processing plant, and visited Fifer orchards and two soybean farms. Coltelli was interested in seeing how Americans handle soybeans, since his family is growing some for the first time this year as part of their grain/vegetable rotation, along with field corn, wheat and sugar beets.

While he was downstate the young Italian visited a pick-your-own farm—a marketing idea which clearly amazed him. Apparently, few Italian consumers would think of climbing into a car and driving our into the countryside to pick fresh produce at a farm. Roadside stands were another novelty, as was the American passion for fresh sweet corn. Of all the foods the young vegetable farmer tried in this country, I got the impression this was the strangest. Though he said the corn tasted O.K., somehow it didn't seem right to be eating food usually eaten as a grain, and then, mostly by horses or other livestock.

Coltelli noted many differences between cropping practices in this country and Italy. For one thing, most Italian farms are much smaller--intensively cultivated units of only 50 acres are common.

At 100 acres, his family's farm is considered quite large. Most of that land is in vegetables--tomatoes, cantagoupes, cucumbers, eggplant and zucchini grown under plastic for the early, high-value market, plus lettuce, celery and parsley raised in consecutive plantings outdoors all season long.

During his Delaware stay, Italian farmer Marco Coltelli (in dark jacket) toured U of D ag college and attended a livestock management lab with Jennifer Powell (center), daughter of his Camden, Del. host family.

Coltelli watches as Jeenifer Powell (Camden) halter breaks calf during U of D [illegible] science lab. Jennifer is a general ag major and plans a career in the Extension Se[illegible]

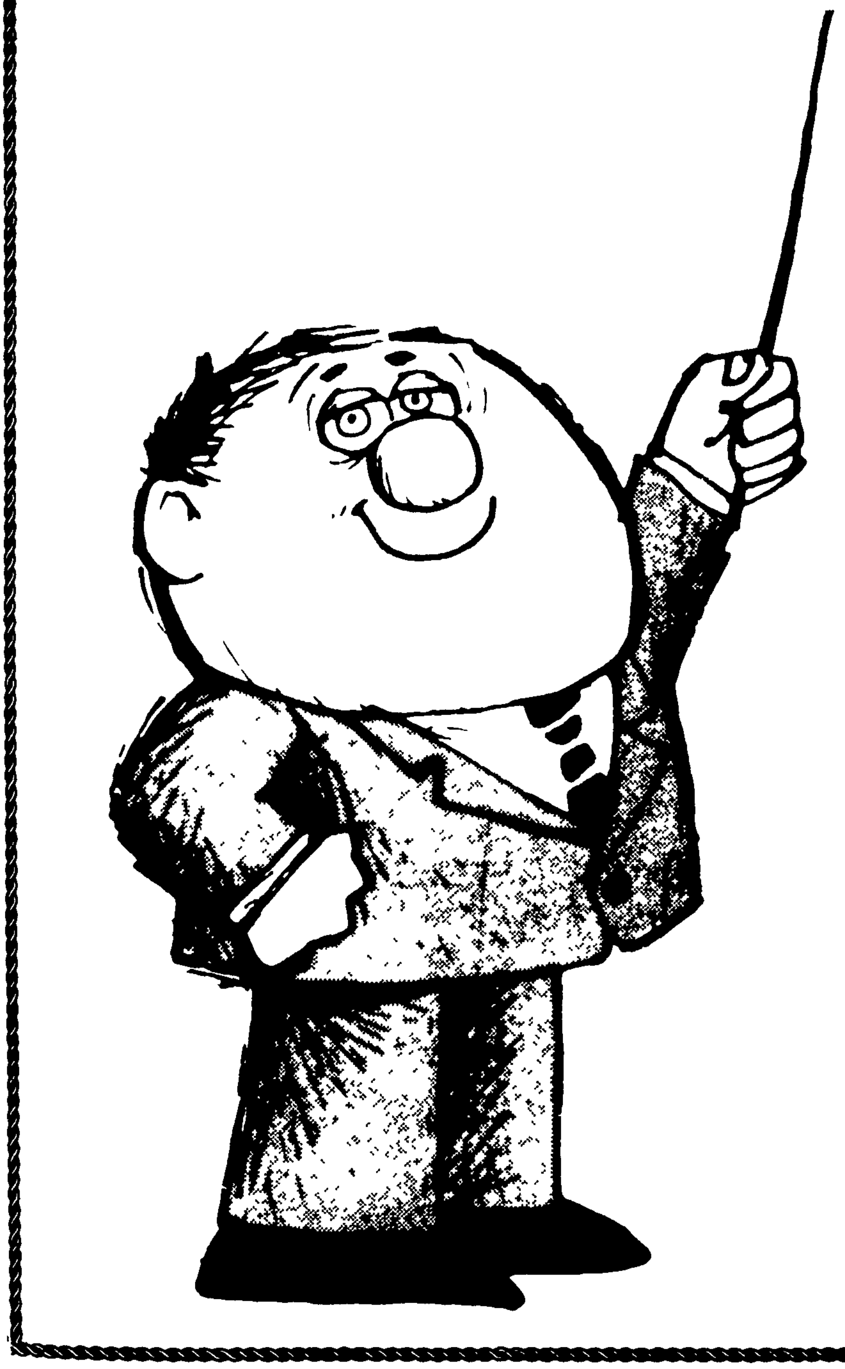
The produce is graded and packed on the farm. Then most of it is driven to a farmer's cooperative in Bologna for sale to wholesale customers; the rest is trucked to a few area supermarkets under contract arrangements.

The heavy soil on the farm compacts easily and requires deep plowing. Coltelli showed me a photo of the plow they use—a monster blade needed to cut through the 18 inches of top soil.

His father and uncle began growing vegetables in 1950 and the business has thrived. Today, his mother, sister and he also are involved in the operation, which employs about 15 migrant workers from southern Italy each year. Seedlings are grown in heated plastic covered greenhouses over the winter, then transfered to unheated ones in March. Inside the earth-floored, 12-foot high plastic tunnels, plants aregrown on clear plastic mulch over black drip irrigation tubing. Rows of stationary overhead guns spaced about 50 feet apart spray vegetables in the field with a fine mist. Two wells supply the water, and plants are fertilized through the irrigation systems.

Every member of the Coltelli family has certain responsibilities: Marco's father supervises crop production; his uncle (due to retire next year) handles equipment and chemicals; his mother supervises sales; Marco repairs and drives farm machinery and helps with productin and harvest, working closely with his sister, who keeps the company books and also helps with cropping and harvest. She has an agricultural degree from the University of Bologna; Coltelli is working on one, too, but does most of his studying at home—a common practice at Italian universities.

Marco Coltelli said he has enjoyed his visit to the U.S. and hopes to return sometime, but this is probably the last chance he'll have to travel so extensively. With his uncle's planned retirement, he will be needed full time on the farm.



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