

Artichokes double as cash crop, silage

BY BARB MILLER

Staff Correspondent

WILLIAMSPORT — There's a new crop gaining acceptance in Pennsylvania. According to Wayne White of Spring Mills, Centre County, it is one that has markets waiting to be filled. White recently opened PLOT, 1, Inc., an artichoke processing and storage plant, in South Williamsport. As far as White knows it is the only one of its kind in the east.

White will process 260 acres of artichokes from central Pennsylvania this year and has contracted 500-600 acres for next year.

These are not the artichokes for which California is famous, White explains. Those are grown above-ground on a thistle-like plant. Rather, these artichokes are tubers, thick fleshy roots, such as potatoes, carrots and beets.

Known as Jerusalem artichokes, they are a member of the sunflower family and grow 10-15 feet high with yellow daisy like flowers. The whitish bulbs are edible and may be used raw in salads, pickled, or made into high protein flour. The tops may be harvested as silage for farm animals. Artichokes can also be used to make ethanol for fuel.

An acre of artichokes yields 20,000 pounds of tubers and 18,000-20,000 pounds of tops for livestock use. Farmers under contract to White receive eight cents per pound for the tubers.

"It's an excellent crop for livestock feed, and as a cash crop," White says.

Tom Dunlap of Jersey Shore R.D. 4, who grew 20 acres of artichokes for White this year agrees, "I think it will be a good cash crop for farmers. Right now there's no money in corn or soybeans."

According to Joyce Dunlap of Jersey Shore, R.D. 4, manager of White's Williamsport operation, artichokes are similar to potatoes

in planting and harvesting. Like potatoes they are planted in rows, hilled and even dug with a modified potato digger. But unlike potatoes, artichokes may be planted and harvested in either the spring or fall. Most farmers prefer fall for both operations because they have more free time. Also, tubers planted in the fall give an increased yield.

When a farmer plants artichokes, he must make a decision as to their use, White says.

"The farmer has to decide whether he wants a high protein level for livestock feed or lower protein and a bigger tuber yield," says White.

If the farmer opts to use the artichokes for animal feed, he may make as many as three cuttings of the tops during a season, but his tuber yield will be smaller. If he's growing them primarily for tubers, he'll make fewer or no cuttings from the tops.

White says more and more farmers each year are growing artichokes for use as a high protein animal feed. Ralph Reisophl of Blair County who has 45 acres under cultivation and Geoge Martin of Vicksburg are area dairy farmers currently growing and using artichokes for livestock feed.

What has been the effect, if any, of the artichoke rations upon milk production?

"They have seen no drop in milk production," White reports, "but (have seen) a drop in bulk protein."

Pennsylvania State University, according to White, is monitoring artichoke tops for yield and protein and within the next year will have completed additional research concerning their use for livestock feed.

One third of White's artichokes, he says, will be sent to Philadelphia to be made into pickled artichokes, another third will be used for fresh food, and the



Wayne Robinson and his 10-year-old son Dusty sort artichokes on the conveyor at the plant.

remaining third will be kept for seed stock for next spring.

White would like to see more acreage devoted to artichokes.

"I got markets I can't fill," he says. "We need a larger acreage so that some of the market area we can get into on a year around basis."

White's involvement with artichokes began a little more than two years ago in a somewhat unusual manner.

"All I did," he says, "was take a negative and turned it into a positive."

At the time, White who had farmed most of his life, was under contract to grow 20 acres of artichokes. White planted the tubers, but before the company was able to buy them back it went bankrupt. White was left with 20 acres of artichokes and no market in sight.

So he consulted an agronomist at Penn State University. He discovered he had an excellent livestock food. Additional research led him to learn of the variety of uses of the plant.

Then White developed markets for the artichokes and just recently purchased the former Hurr's Dairy Store in South Williamsport because it had the refrigeration equipment needed to store the tubers. According to White, the building is capable of storing 4 million pounds of artichokes at the required 28 to 30 degrees temperature required by the tubers. Eventually, White hopes to process other tubers as well.

And does White have a favorite way of preparing the artichokes to eat.

"I like them raw or hot pickled," he says.

Outlook for '86: Expenses - and prices - to go lower?

ITHACA, NY — The 1986 economic outlook for America's farmers is not encouraging, despite projections of stable or, in some cases, lower operating expenses, a Cornell University agricultural economist says.

In 1986, farmers will be paying about the same or even less for fuel, fertilizer, feed, and other inputs, but unfortunately they will be receiving lower prices for much of what they produce, predicts George L. Casler, a professor of agricultural economics in the New York State College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Cornell.

"Generally, farm expenses will be about the same or a little lower next year, but most farm prices will be lower as well," Casler said. Casler made his remarks while discussing the 1986 economic outlook for the nation's farmers during the Agribusiness Outlook Conference held at Cornell recently.

The lower prices farmers will receive for their grain and some other products are largely due to an "oversupply" situation, Casler said. American farmers continue a high rate of production in spite of a slow-growing domestic market and increasing foreign competition.

As farmers continue to receive low prices, he said, some step up production to make up for the decreased revenue. That stepped-up production, however, makes the oversupply situation even worse.

"The 1985 U.S. corn crop is projected at 8.5 billion bushels, but

the market for the following year is expected to be only seven billion bushels," Casler said.

That projected surplus of 1.5 billion bushels will create more downward pressure on corn prices, and it also will increase storage costs for farmers and government agencies that will store the surplus corn.

Previewing the 1986 farm expenses and income prospects, Casler said that the costs of feed and fuel should be down slightly, while interest rates and prices of chemicals, pesticides, and machinery will "essentially be unchanged."

"That won't help things, however. I don't think the cost side, except for the interest rates, worries farmers today," Casler said. "It's the income side that worries them, and farm income, especially from grain, won't be good."

Some grain farmers will be helped by federal price supports, which in some cases make up the difference between the market price and the target prices for farm products.

In the short run, low grain and feed prices will reduce the operating costs of the livestock farmers, but, in the end, they too will face the same price squeeze as the grain farmers do, Casler pointed out.

"Livestock feed prices will be lower in 1986," Casler predicted. "Some improvement in hog and beef prices is expected in 1986, but profits from these products will be small at best."

NJ Farm Bureau crowns queen

TRENTON — Bonnie Higgins of Belle Mead was crowned Queen of the New Jersey Farm Bureau during the organization's recent annual convention.

The 20-year-old junior at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pa. is studying journalism and pre-law.

She is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roy Higgins, a livestock and grain farmer in Somerset County.

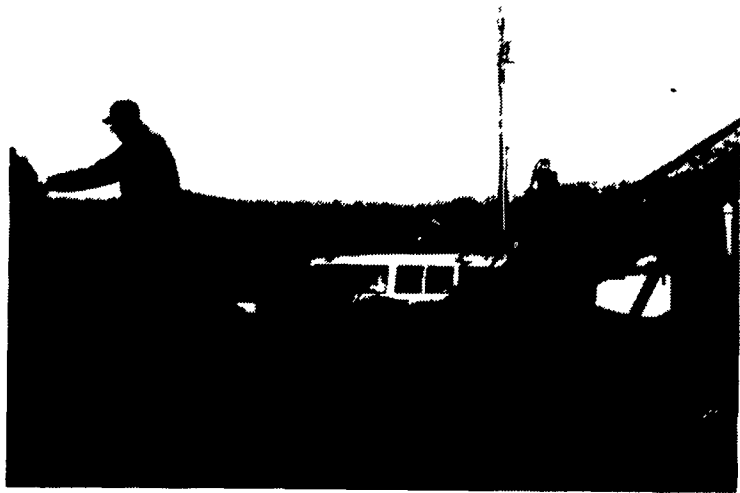
First Runner-Up in the competition was Jeannette Rea of West Cape May. A student at Rutgers State University, she is studying home economics and hopes to pursue a master's degree and become a county agricultural agent. Jeannette is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Rae, who produce lima beans, field corn and hay.

Bonnie was selected as Queen from among seven contestants who were judged on their farm

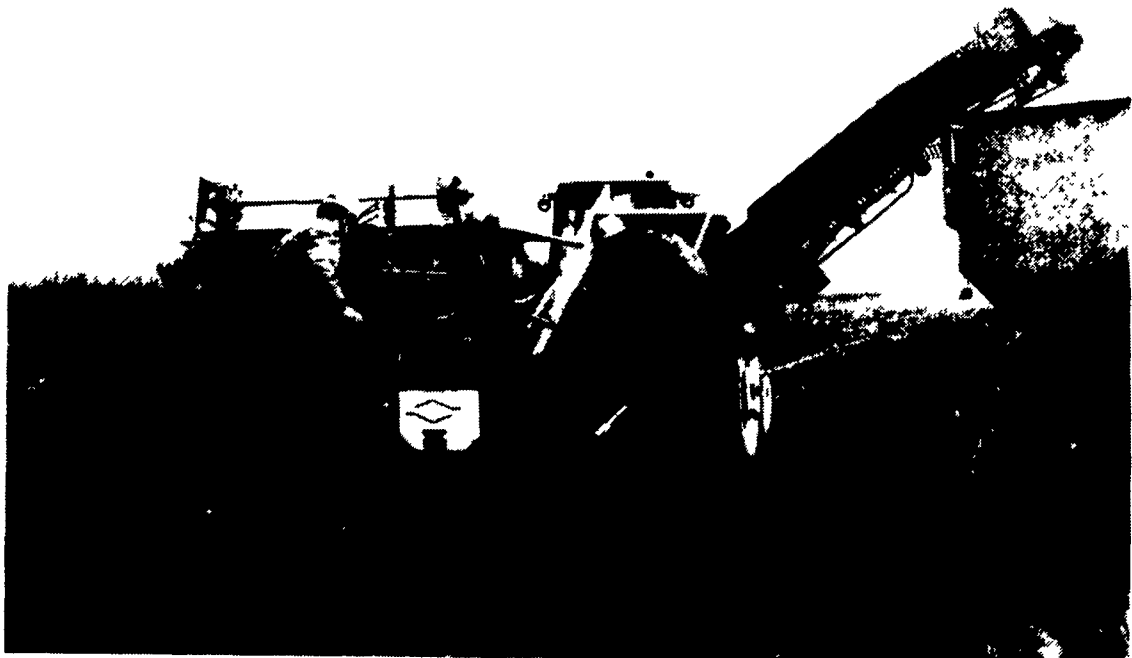
background, maturity, personality, poise and appearance. The event is sponsored by the Farm Bureau Women's Committee.

The final judging took place during the New Jersey Farm Bureau annual convention, in Cherry Hill. Acting as judges were Mrs. Karen Kleinschuster, wife of Stephen Kleinschuster, Dean of Cook College; Anaeline McTighe, wife of Farm Bureau attorney Art McTighe, and Charles Simon, Vice President of Farm Family Insurance. Acting as master of ceremonies during the final judging was Arthur Jarman of Monroeville.

The Queen will receive an all-expenses-paid trip to the American Farm Bureau Federation annual convention in Atlanta, Ga. in January, and a bracelet with an engraved charm.



Tom Dunlap and his son Tom unload artichokes into a 25-ton rig, checking first for stones, roots and other foreign material.



Harvesting artichokes with a slightly modified potato harvester are George Huet, left, and Wayne Robinson, right.