

Lancaster farmer's market bustles with Easter activity

BY SALLY BAIR
Staff Correspondent

LANCASTER — The arrival of Easter means increased activity at Lancaster County's farmers' markets. There's lots of fresh flowers, special candy and the enticing array of vegetables which mark the beginning of spring.

The stand operated by Amos M. Barr provides the usual spring vegetables, along with pussy willows, bunched in a wide variety of sizes. Some of the branches are so tall it seems the entire tree must have been trimmed. Even with the Easter holiday arriving early, there was no need to force these furry plants, and the demand on the Tuesday before Easter was brisk.

Another special feature of Barr's stand was the traditional Easter egg, already hard cooked and painted. Jeanette Barr, who operates the stand with her husband, said there is a demand for the painted eggs, and she usually enlists the aid of one of her grandchildren to help create the special effects. The Barrs sell only brown eggs, so the brown shells add a different dimension to many market goers.

Jeanette works at Central Market while her husband usually stands at Meadowbrook. For Jeanette, standing on market is a

lifelong vocation, beginning when she was a young child and attended with her grandparents. Her parents also stood on market as well as selling vegetables on the street, so when she married Amos it was a continuation of a family tradition on both sides. Although her family was always at Southern and Central Markets, her husband's parents stood at the Arcade Market which has since become a parking garage.

On their 100-acre farm near New Providence, the Barrs also raise steers and chickens and a lot of acreage is in corn and hay to feed the livestock. But a large portion of the land handles vegetables which are the mainstay of their market stand. They have strawberries and raspberries and about 10 acres of peach and apple orchards, in addition to the usual garden vegetables. Jeanette has two acres of flowers just for drying, and these flowers are neatly bunched for sale.

At Easter, Jeanette says, "Flowers go before food. But on Friday they'll look for fresh vegetables." Some people will search out her brown eggs, just because they are not readily available in supermarkets.

Jeanette says she always enjoyed coming to market as a child, and continues getting pleasure



Ready-to-hide Easter eggs are one feature of the Barrs' market stand the week before Easter. Jeanette says she hard cooks about six dozen eggs and paints them with help from a granddaughter. Senior citizens, especially, seem happy to have the colored eggs.

from a job that is also a lot of work. "I like seeing the different people, and associating with different people."

As the mother of ten children, Jeanette brought all the youngsters to market over the years. She says, "When they were babies I used to lay them in banana boxes. When they got a little bigger I couldn't bring them because they would get lost."

The hard work is the worst part, but even that is just a way of life for Jeanette. She said it is discouraging sometimes in the winter to go through all the work and then have low attendance at market because of weather.

When asked how early she gets up on market days, Jeanette replies, "Not as early as I should." She actually rises between 5:30 a.m. and 6 a.m. and is at market by eight for setting up. Although she acknowledges that there are some earlier visitors, she feels most people don't come to market until later in the morning. And, she adds, "After one it dies down."

The hard work is actually all done prior to market day. Jeanette says, "Most work is done a day ahead." In the summer when they have most of their own products, it requires picking the vegetables, washing many of them, bunching them, and then storing them in the walk-in refrigerator to keep them in peak condition for market.

Of course, once they arrive in Lancaster, all the produce must be transported from the truck to their stand locations. They are actually at two stands, one owned by their daughter Caroline Pannell. Their son, Amos M. Barr, Jr., also operates a neighboring market stand, so the family tradition is strong.

Displaying the produce is important to entice buyers to consider what you're offering.

Now is the time when standholders like the Barrs must be looking to summer, and they are busy preparing soil and putting in the first of the crops. Jeanette says, "We try to get things in as early as the ground is fit." She



Pussy willows are also featured at the Barrs' stand. From tiny bunches to tall branches, the furry symbols of spring have a lot of appeal to marketgoers.

lamented that the day hadn't been long enough to plant peas this week, but they hope to complete that job before the end of the week. She adds, "In April we get a lot of showers, so we have to plant between showers."

While Jeanette has many regular customers whom she enjoys seeing, she says that for the most part, customers now look for the best price, not for their favorite standholder. In the years she has been coming to market she observes that fewer older customers can get to market because of

transportation difficulties or being in nursing homes. And Jeanette points out, "Those who live in the suburbs don't have gardens, but the younger people like to go to the supermarket because they think it's a hassle to shop at market. We do see a different customer."

Summer is Jeanette's favorite time of the year, because there is lots to offer from the garden.

This weekend was a big one for the Barr's, but their work goes on at home, preparing for even bigger market days as fresh produce is ready.



Many market stands offer fresh flowers, which are not only beautiful, but fragrant as well. Fresh and potted flowers do equally well during the week before Easter weekend, and there was shortage of varieties to choose from.



Jeanette Barr waits on a customer who is thinking ahead to Easter dinner. This stand belongs to Jeanette's daughter and offers a wide variety of produce.

Homestead Notes