

# Foreign Student Studies Vegetable Production At Local Celery Farm

BY SUZANNE KEENE

**EAST PETERSBURG** — Most college students are vacationing or working at summer jobs in July, but 20-year-old Netherlander Paul De Koning is continuing his education at Hodecker Celery Farms in East Petersburg.

A student at a horticultural college in the Netherlands, Paul came to Lancaster County nine weeks ago to get hands-on experience at an American celery farm. While internships are a required part of the curriculum at his college, an international experience like the one Paul has undertaken is strictly optional.

Students who chose an international internship must handle their own arrangements, including finding a business that will work with them and a host family, Paul said.

Paul found his way to Hodeckers through an ad he placed in the Pennsylvania Vegetable Grower's Association publication indicating his desire for employment. Mervin Sherk, manager at Hodeckers, responded to the ad and the two exchanged a few letters before the arrangements were finalized.

During his term at Hodeckers, Paul has been helping with "almost everything they usually

do," he said. That includes pulling plants, weeding, planting and trimming. He has also made trips to Central Market and Root's Country Market and Auction where Hodeckers sells some of its produce.

In the Netherlands, Paul's family operates a 10-acre celery and vegetable farm similar to Hodeckers. And while celery is grown in much the same way in both countries, Paul has noticed a few differences in production techniques.

One major difference Paul has observed is that farmers in the Netherlands plant several crops on the same acreage, while farmers here plant a single crop. At home, Paul said, spinach is planted first, followed by celery and finally lettuce.

One possible reason for this difference, Paul suggests, is that farms in the Netherlands are smaller and farmers have more time for several crops. At Hodeckers, he said, a single crop on 30 acres provides plenty of work and allows little time for another crop.

Another difference, Paul noted, is that celery is machine-planted here, while all planting in the Netherlands is done by hand.

Having had an opportunity to see both methods in action, Paul said he prefers hand planting even though it is more time consuming.

"Planting by hand is a little slower," he concedes, but it allows farmers to plant the celery much closer together, yielding a greater harvest per acre. Here, he said, celery is planted 30 inches apart, allowing ample space to drive a tractor through. In the Netherlands, the space between rows is narrowed to 15 inches, allowing for twice as many plants per acre. In both countries, spacing within the row is 9 inches.

In addition to their use in planting, tractors are used to place the plastic used for blanching celery. This step in celery production is by-passed in the Netherlands, Paul said, because most of their celery is marketed for cooking, not for eating raw.

Another benefit of not using tractors on the fields, Paul said, is less soil compaction. "You will never get the soil as good as it was before," he said, adding that greater rainfall in his country makes soil compaction an even greater threat. "I like it much better without the tractor."

In the Netherlands, Paul said, celery is sold at large auctions. Here, he noted, Hodecker's market their celery and other produce at their own store and at Root's and Central Markets.

"Our auctions are 10, maybe 20 times bigger," Paul said, with the largest auction selling \$140 million of vegetables a year. Paul noted that growers here put more work into selling and receive slightly higher prices than farmers in the Netherlands. By marketing at an auction, "We have more fluctuation in price," he observed.

Preparing the celery for sale is similar in both countries. "It must look very good," Paul said, before it goes to market. In the Netherlands, celery is graded and "only the first grade may be exported to other countries." The top-grade celery sold for export usually brings a higher price.

Paul hasn't spent all his time in



Paul De Koning, a horticultural student from the Netherlands, spent nine weeks this summer working at Hodecker Celery Farms in Lancaster County. Here, Paul trims celery in preparation for market.

the United States learning about celery production. He has visited Washington, New York, Philadelphia and Niagara Falls. He also visited Penn State University, where he toured the horticultural department. Penn State, he said, is much larger than his own college, which has about 300 students in the horticulture department.

education next year, he will return to the family farm as a partner and will eventually take over.

He said he is one of only about 20 percent of his class who will go home to the farm. The other students will find jobs with agribusiness firms or in research.

Getting started in farming without the benefit of a family farm is very difficult because land

is so expensive, Paul explained. Farmland brings an average price of \$10,000 per acre, but "In some places, the rates are going four times that or higher," he said.

Farmland is not yet in short supply in the Netherlands, but "The cities are growing bigger and bigger," Paul reports. Farmers are encouraged to move their farms to other areas, but are reluctant to do so because they fear they will lose their markets.

Paul returned to the Netherlands late this week with new knowledge about celery and vegetable production and a set of friends an ocean away. Someday, his host may return the visit and Paul will have an opportunity to share his farm and country with an American.



## BACK HOME

By Michelle S. Rodgers

### Berks Extension Home Economist

#### Packing Up

Well, the hottest weekend of the summer turned out to be the time we would move all of our worldly possessions from one house to another. I just don't know how any one family can accumulate so much "stuff." And I came to realize that moving can be traumatic — even for the family dog!

Statistics prove that we were not alone in our moving. Nearly 40 million families will disrupt their summer for a move to a new location. That is the average number of families who move to a new home each year. And for some reason, Americans have convinced themselves that the best time of year to move is between June and September — when the kids are out of school.

Experts are now telling us that this is an unfortunate myth and that a summertime move may cause more problems than it prevents. The thinking behind this is that school is the one place kids make friends most rapidly. A move during the summer months puts kids at a disadvantage for meeting friends their own age, unless the new neighborhood was chosen specifically for its population of children.

At the start of school in September, then, the new student may be overlooked. It will be assumed that the new child knows the floorplan, rules, and routines of the school. A teacher with an all new classroom of faces will not easily notice "the new kid in town." A visit to the school and a meeting with the teacher or guidance counselor may help to alleviate these problems.

For families with preschool children, the time of year for moving doesn't make much difference, but there are some other considerations to be aware of. Small children will be very

threatened by a move when they thank about leaving everything they are familiar with and walking into the unknown. That makes it very important to maintain some continuity in the child's surroundings.

The best way to ease the trauma of moving for everyone is to have the whole family involved in the preparations. If it's possible, take them along when you house hunt or for a visit after the purchase of a home. We even took our dog along to "sniff" out her new backyard. If visiting the house in advance is impossible, bring pictures back to show family members what to expect.

When moving time comes, have each child pack one special box of his or her favorite toys and clothes. Label each box with the child's name and try to get them on the moving van last. When you arrive at your new home, the kids will have their special boxes to keep them busy while you supervise the rest of the unpacking.

The first few weeks after a move will be very busy with the major unpacking job, but plan to take a break and explore your new community. After a busy day of cleaning and unpacking, we took a relaxing stroll around the block, giving us a new bearing on "home."

During our move, we discovered that the assistance of friends and family helped to ease the trauma of moving — even when it was only two miles away. So even if you are not moving, but know someone who is — think about lending a helping hand. Many times a meal, a refreshing dessert or another pair of hands to clean or unwrap dishes is immensely appreciated. We're thankful to those who helped take the trauma out of moving for us. Now, if we could only get the dog adjusted to her new Dalmation neighbors.

## Financial Planners: No Longer Just For The Wealthy

**NEWARK, Del.** — As their financial options increase, families and individuals sometimes benefit from the objective, professional help a financial planner provides. Financial planners no longer serve only the wealthy, but middle-income clients as well.

"Financial planners are generalists who take an overall look at your financial situation," explains Debbie Amsden, University of Delaware extension home economist. "Then they design a strategy to help you meet your financial goals."

Financial options can be confusing, particularly when your income status changes. "When this happens, engaging the services of a planner may be your best initial investment," the home economist says. A new job, marriage, divorce, widowhood or a substantial inheritance often requires reworking financial strategies. Planners can be important resource people during these times and can help clear up some of the confusion.

Before consulting a planner, Amsden says to decide what kind of help you want. Compare the services different planners provide, and compare the costs of their services. "As the client, it's up to you to investigate a planner's credentials," she says, "and to decide whether he or she can provide the information and services you need."

Also keep in mind that the financial planning professional is relatively new and no state or federal regulations govern use of the title. So shopping for a planner requires careful research.

One thing to look for is the person's level of experience. Amsden suggests considering someone who has served an internship with an established financial planner.

Some planners have also completed correspondence courses at one of three non-accredited financial planning institutes. The College of Financial Planning in Denver, Col., the American School in Bryn Mawr, Pa., and a program operated by the American Bankers Association, the National Trust Graduate School, all provide study and certification in this field.

"Before selecting one, interview prospective planners about their previous occupations and professional training," Amsden advises. "See if your areas of need correspond to a planner's area of expertise." Also check references from clients or professionals who have worked with the planner.

Find out if the planner works directly with clients, delegates responsibility to someone else, or requires clients to maintain their own accounts once a strategy has been planned. Knowing this ahead

of time can help prepare you for any responsibilities you may have to assume.

It is important to understand all the products and services being offered when working on a plan. And always find out about fee schedules ahead of time. Generally, planners are paid in one of three ways: an up-front fee, a commission earned on the insurance and/or securities sold, or a combination of fee and commission. Decide which type of payment plan will be best for you.

Another way to learn more about financial planning services is to attend one of the free seminars which are sometimes offered by planners and institutions. This will demonstrate the planner's style and expertise.

Not everyone needs the help of a planner. "If your will needs updating, or if you are looking for a tax shelter, you may need a specialist such as an attorney or an accountant," Amsden notes. "Or if household expenses are just being met by income, it may be helpful to work at budgeting and money management skills before going to a financial planner."

