

Tough Tops Are Key To Carrot Harvest Success

BY HELEN KELCHNER

Columbia Co. Correspondent

BERWICK — Twenty acres of carrots were harvested at the Carl Shaffer farm, Mifflinville, Columbia County, after approximately 14 weeks of careful nurturing.

The crop averaged 20 to 25 tons per acre. Shaffer feels he got a good yield; 18 ton is considered average.

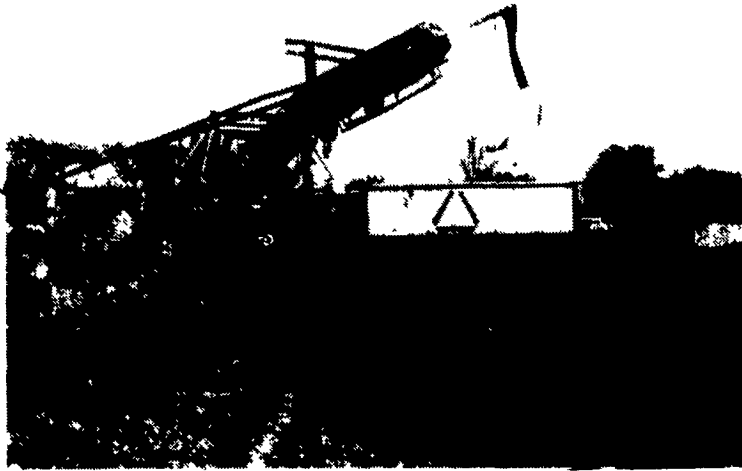
Carrots are not an easy crop to grow. The critical period is when the fragile plant pushes through the ground. Loose, sandy loam and adequate moisture are essential to prevent a ground surface crust from forming. Regular cultivation aids in maintaining acceptable soil conditions during development.

An unusual feature of the carrot crop is the necessity of a good, strong top. During harvest the plant enters the machine (an FMC harvester) where a pulling pressure is applied by way of the carrot top, while a shovel lifts from the bottom. The carrot is carried along a track by its top to a point where the top is sheared off and the carrot drops on an upward conveyor leading to a wagon. If the top is weak, it tears off as the machine passes over and the carrot remains in the ground.

Certain measures are taken to develop strong tops. It begins with



One of Carl Shaffer's average size carrots can serve five adults.



Harvesting carrots is a three-man operation. One pulls the wagon, one pulls the harvester and Carl mans the side of the harvester to watch for clogs.



Carrots fall from the conveyor into a potato wagon.

heavy urea application during soil preparation prior to planting. After the plant shows green, precautions are taken to control leaf hoppers and blight. From mid-July until harvest, the crop is sprayed every ten days to two weeks. Subsequent nitrogen applications during plant growth aids in strong top and vegetable development.

Hanover Foods urged Shaffer to try carrots eight years ago. He is one of the few growers in this area who continues to grow the crop. The variety is a dicing carrot and can reach a five-pound size. All but

20 percent of the crop is bought by Hanover. Campbell Soups in Delaware takes the balance.

A Planet Junior seeder (an implement designed for small seeds) is used to sow the carrots in early May. Harvest is a three-man operation. One man pulls the FMC harvester with a 756 International. A second man pulls a "potato" wagon which must run along side the harvester close enough to catch the carrots as they drop off the conveyor. Carl mans the side of the harvester from a platform to insure proper operation. He can

(Turn to Page D15)

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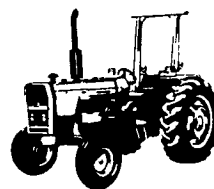
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