

Oriental Mushroom Promises Health, Nutrition And Unique Flavor

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Perhaps a distinctive orangish-brown mushroom has already appeared on the shelves of your local supermarket. If not, it is the fervent hope of David Kim, president of Green Empire Inc., in Montour County, and other shiitake (pronounced sha-tok-ee) growers that you will soon have the opportunity to experience the unique flavor of mushrooms grown in oak logs and once reserved for Chinese royalty.

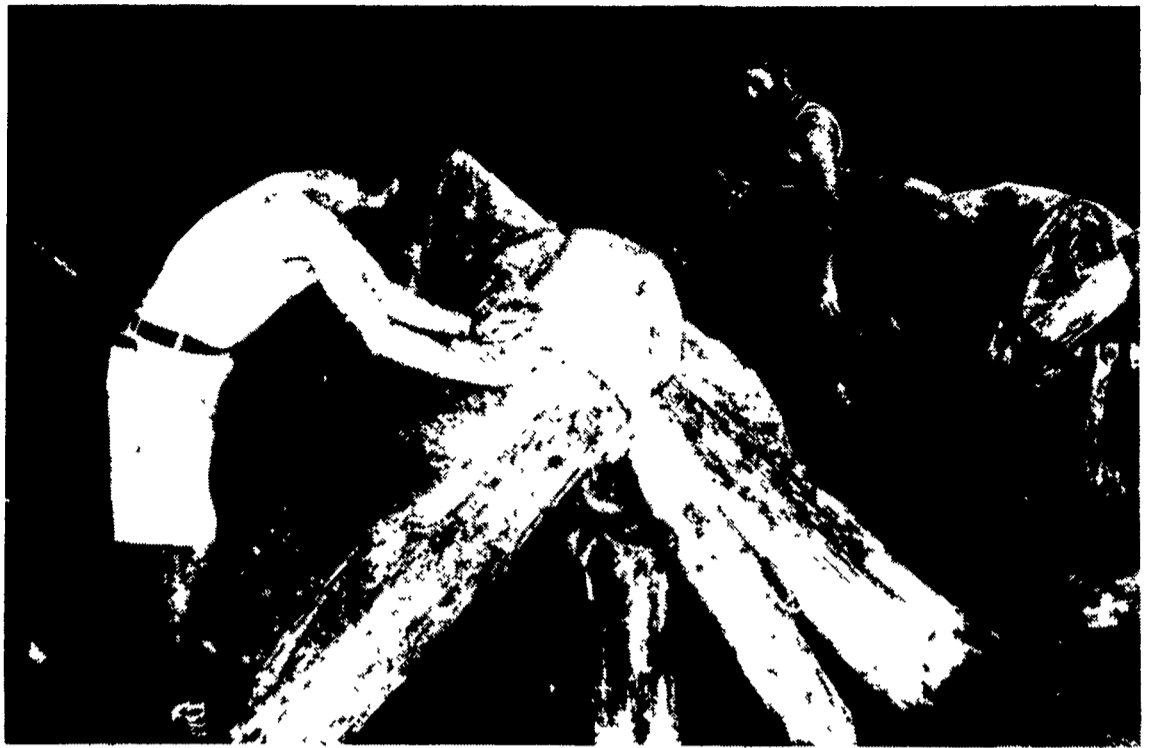
Although Green Empire Inc. is almost four years-old, Kim and three partners purchased the company from its original owners six months ago. With the help of Clarence McMichael, a neighbor who owns a small shiitake operation,

Kim is in the process of learning the finer points of growing shiitake mushrooms. McMichael explains that the market for these mushrooms is presently so large that there is little danger of Kim and he becoming competitors for some time and currently they are of mutual benefit to one another.

According to McMichael, the shiitake mushroom also known as the oak, oyster and enoki mushrooms in this country, has occurred naturally for thousands of years in the forests of Japan and China.

McMichael says residents discovered if they ate the mushroom which grows almost exclusively on oak logs they felt better.

Information supplied by Kim supports this claim by noting that,



The mushrooms are grown in four foot logs. Here growers arrange the logs to lean at a 45 degree angle during their growing season.

"The oak mushroom has been served as the elixir of life to orientals for its unique taste and flavor for a long time and as a nutritious food containing proteins, sugars and various vitamins... which contains large amounts of thiamine, riboflavin and especially Vitamin D."

At first, McMichael says, the royalty tried to keep this unique mushroom to themselves. By roping off the forests where the mushrooms grew and posting guards, they kept the peasants out. Later they discovered they could transport the logs to woods near their homes and harvest the mushrooms there. According to McMichael, that was the beginning of the cultivation of the shiitake mushroom.

In recent years, Kim says, oriental countries such as Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan have become major producers of cultivated oak mushrooms. At the present time Japan supplies almost 80 percent of the total world consumption.

Shiitake mushroom production is a relatively new industry in the United States. For a time, McMichael reports, the Japanese shipped the mushrooms to the United States. But due to shipping costs, a more plentiful supply of oak logs in the United States, and what they regard as a large potential market in this country, growers have been establishing shiitake mushroom operations here.

One of the oldest and biggest shiitake mushroom plants in the United States is Elix located near Richmond, Virginia which is six years-old. McMichael notes other plants are located in Michigan, Wisconsin, and northern California.

Declining to describe the flavor of the shiitake, McMichael merely says that it has a distinctive taste quite different from other mushrooms.

"The main thing is the flavor of it. It has a unique flavor. There is not another mushroom like it," McMichael exclaims, "It gives off flavor, it doesn't take it in."

While noting that other mushrooms take on the flavor of the food with which they are prepared, McMichael stresses, "this is definitely not the case with shiitake mushrooms," and he chuckles at the thought of someone



Clarence McMichael shows a log that has purchased spawn the size of a thumb pressed into drilled holes spaced five to six inches apart.



David Kim, president by Gwen Empire, Inc., hopes grocery stores everywhere will soon carry shiitake mushrooms.



Shiitake mushrooms are ready to be shipped to supermarkets.

sprinkling shiitake mushrooms on a pizza.

McMichael says he prefers his shiitake mushrooms sauteed, while Kim's favorite way of eating his product is stuffed with crabmeat.

A visitor to Green Empire Inc. will see only a few small buildings

in a forest clearing unless he searches the woods where the 40,000 4'x7' diameter logs that are the heart of the operation are located. Dispersed among the trees, the logs are either leaning at a 45 degree angle against a wire or stacked horizontally depending

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Homestead Notes