

Buffalo Valley Produce Auction--A First Year Success

BY CRAIG BINGMAN
Snyder Co. Correspondent

Not many new enterprises can boast that their 3 month old business is such a success that expansion is inevitable. But at Union County's Buffalo Valley Produce Auction, the response has been so overwhelming that plans for larger facilities are already underway.

"We're going to have to expand because we built it too small," says Maynard Loss, local producer and Vice President of the corporation. "Since we opened 3 months ago, the auction has grossed close to \$125,000 in sales."

The idea for the auction began late last summer when local growers of fruits and vegetables met to discuss a problem — overproduction. The Central Susquehanna Valley is a mecca for small growers since the soils and climate are ideal for watermelons, cantalopes, peppers, cucumbers, sweet corn, etc. Because of the increase in growers and production, a marketing alternative was needed.

Thanks to the time and efforts of many grower-volunteers as well as assistance from Penn State Extension Agents, the produce auction idea was organized in March of this year. Growers voted to form their produce auction under Subchapter S corporation, which means that it is limited to 35 stockholders. Currently, there are 31 stockholders of which all, by corporation by-laws, must be producers.

On June 16, the Buffalo Valley Produce Auction opened its doors to the local farmers from surrounding counties, which now include: Union, Snyder, Northumberland, Montour, Lycoming, Clinton, Centre, Dauphin, Juniata, Columbia, and as far away as Lebanon. To date, almost 100 growers have brought produce to the auction.

Ken Martin, local producer as well as President and Auction Manager, says that the farmers needed an outlet because the local market was saturated. "We look at it as a marketing alternative," said Ken. "We're good growers, but not good marketers. It's actually a separate business, but it has the farmer in mind."

With the money collected from the farmer-shareholders, building

materials and excavating services were obtained. The 2100 square foot building was erected by volunteers in one day while the remainder — concrete and filling work — was completed in about a week. The new facility boasts a loading dock for tractor trailers, pickups, or wagons, an office, restrooms, and a variety of equipment to accommodate the operators.

The auction building is located midway between Mifflinburg and Lewisburg near Route 45. This location is ideal for the many plain farmers in the Central Susquehanna Valley who haul their produce by wagon.

As the growing season winds down, the auction is open about 2 days a week. At the height of the produce season, Buffalo Valley was operating five or sometimes six days a week; a large increase from the original Tuesday and Thursday sales.

Ken Hassinger, auctioneer as well as shareholder and producer, is quite pleased with the progress of the new corporation. "I'm surprised that we came along this fast," says Hassinger. "But we are selling some quality produce here."

Success has been evident by the many buyers representing produce wholesalers, roadside market operators, restaurateurs, and farmers. Buyers from New York, Maryland, Virginia, as well as distant cities in Pennsylvania have all attended to purchase goods from the central Pennsylvania producers.

Current officers in the Buffalo Valley Produce Auction are: President and Auction Manager - Ken Martin, RD#3, Mifflinburg; Maynard Loss - Vice President, RD#1, Middleburg; Paul Zimmerman - Secretary-Treasurer, RD, Mifflinburg; Directors: Patrick Mitchell, RD#2, Middleburg; Leroy Sense-nig, RD#2, Lewisburg; Dale Whitenight, RD#6, Danville; Harvey Hoover, RD, Mifflinburg; Auctioneers: Kenneth Hassinger, RD#2, McClure; Neil Courtney, RD#1, Richfield.

Though the board of directors started the produce auction to provide a marketing service to grow-

(Turn to Page A34)



Ken Hassinger auctions off produce with the help of Paul Zimmerman, left, Alan Martin (2nd from right) and Ken Martin, right.



View of selling area.



Close up of building.

