

Hausman Fruit Farm: Where The Finest Fruit Is A Few Steps From The Orchards

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—“In our business, it seems like we must be always planning ahead at least five or six years and then we are still a couple of steps behind,” said Ray Hausman of Coopersburg.

But the Hausman Fruit Farm and Fruit Shoppe has made an impressive impact with their continual efforts in improving the land and in marketing innovations.

In fact, Hausman and his son Keith, who is in partnership in the business, were named the 1991 Outstanding Conservation Farmer in Lehigh County.

“They earned the award,” said Sam High, district conservationist with the U.S.D.A. Soil Conservation Service, “for their continual practices to not only conserve their own farmland but also the acres they rent.”

The award based on a lifetime of achievement was a complete surprise to the Hausmans. But it wasn't a surprise to those who know the Hausmans and their commitment to conserving the hilly slopes for fruit and vegetable growing.

Hausman's father, George, purchased the 70-acre Lower Milford Township farm in 1916. At first, George grew potatoes on the land, but soon he developed a large poultry operation and hatchery. In 1928, his interest in fruit trees began and the orchard has been blooming ever since.

When Ray purchased the farm from his father in 1965, the first thing he did was contact the Conservation Service immediately for a plan for the 5- to 10-percent slopes. He decided to switch completely to fruit and vegetable growing and he saw a need to control erosion.

“The county has mostly Norton or Chester soil that tends to wash hard and cause gullies,” Ray said.

The SCS designed a series of conversions.

“That first summer there was a noticeable improvement. The diversions really stopped erosion,” Ray said.

But soil conservation was far from over. Extensive plans were drawn.

“Unlike most plans based on crop rotation, orchard rotation requires 25 to 30 years. We don't

want to uproot productive trees so we need to wait until the trees need to be replaced to finish the conservation plans in each orchard. The 25- to 30-year plans look really strange to most people,” High said.

When the old trees are bulldozed down, new trees are not planted immediately because the land does better if it is planted in corn or other crops for about four years before being replanted with trees.

“I don't like to see water run away so we modify plans as things change,” Ray said.

Water control structures intercept flow of storm water into a pond, which is used for irrigation.

The pond water is a big help in dry seasons. Although many farmers suffered severe drought last year, the Hausmans said that they had enough to get them through.

“We had several thunderstorms hit our acreage that bypassed nearby areas,” Ray said.

When Ray first began soil conservation, he had a 20-year-lease on 60-acre plot that he rented. “I put in diversions and did all contour planting there,” Hausman said.

That 20-year-lease has now expired, but Hausman continues to rent it and other land on a year to year basis.

The Hausmans prefer to keep most of the orchards in grasses to prevent soil erosion. They also let 50- to 75-percent sod in driveways between each 12 to 14 rows of corn.

Despite almost 30 years of soil conservation, the Hausmans are not yet finished. They recently acquired 40 acres on which they are implementing a plan for the peach orchard they intend to plant there.

They have already established contour lines for the orchard and constructed sod waterways. Eventually they will install an irrigation pond to route storm water into it.

While some farmers frown on the shorter, contour rows required in soil conservation, it doesn't bother Ray.

He said, “My grandfather always said that you can get more from a crooked row than a straight one so I guess that goes for trees also.”

The Hausmans are excited that the new acreage is virgin soil for trees. “Orchards always produce



The Hausman family includes, from left: Keith, Carol, Justin, 11; Kerl, 4; Courtney, 6; Kelsey, 9; Ray, and Miriam.

better when planted in virgin soil,” Ray said. “We don't have as many problems with soil bore and parasites. We stick with reputable nurseries to make sure we don't bring any parasites in.”

They plant trees with ¼- to ½-inch trunk diameters.

“It doesn't do any good to plant a bigger trunk because the shock on the system isn't as hard on the smaller trees. Within five years you can't tell the difference between trees that are planted with larger trunks and those with smaller ones.”

When Ray first took over his father's business, it was geared mostly to wholesale customers.

“I felt the income was too low for wholeselling so we went to retailing,” he said.

He built a store on the farm that is open year-round.

“That meant we needed more variety to extend the season,” Ray said. “We expanded from five varieties of apples and one of peaches to include 11 apple varieties, 16 peach varieties, 5 pear varieties,

nectarines, strawberries, sweet and sour cherries, blueberries, tomatoes, pumpkins, and sweet corn.”

They also started keeping the fruit in cold storage and controlled atmosphere, which means they now have apples to sell from late July through June 1.

The whole family works together, but each has his or her responsibility. Ray controls spraying of fruit trees and pays the bills.

Keith controls spraying of the strawberries, sweet corn, blueberries and marketing. Detailed records enable the Hausmans to

know that produce is operating at a profit or loss.

“We stopped raising capons because we couldn't make money on them,” Keith said. “Sweet corn is definitely profitable to retail but not very good for wholesale so we cut our sweet corn acreage.”

Tomatoes are one of the Hausman's most successful crops. About six years ago, they put up three greenhouses where they grow tomatoes. About one-third of the crop is wholesaled while the remainder is retailed.

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District conservationist Sam High, center, discusses contour planting with Keith, left, and Ray, who together were awarded the Outstanding Conservation Farmer of the year by Lehigh County Conservation District.



Ray examines tomatoes that the family grows in three greenhouses. Although growing tomatoes are labor intensive, Ray said, they are one of the most profitable crops the family grows.