

Lebanon Produce Auction To Open

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LEBANON (Lebanon Co.) — Just north of the city of Lebanon, along Rt. 72, Paul Horst has created a meeting place for local producers and buyers. It's called a farmers market.

On Thursday, the 6,000-square foot market site is getting an added dimension — a 4,000-square foot produce auction.

The reason Horst has started the business is mostly because he said he sees a need for the facility and an opportunity to provide a reliable market for area vegetable and fruit growers and a place for local retail businesses to purchase fresh, locally grown produce.

It is not without a little risk. Horst said he sees the risk, but feels strongly that it will work; that local producers, from Lebanon, Lancaster, Berks, Dauphin and Schuylkill counties, will be able to benefit from having a facility where their home-raised goods can be offered for sale.

Local businesses will also be able to know that the goods they buy are not day-old rejects from a grocery vegetable bin.

In fact, that's why Horst said the auction doesn't start until 3 p.m.

"That's so the farmer has time to pick fruit or vegetables in the morning when the moisture content is higher. The freshness is better and it is better for handling than if picked the night before and let sit until the next day," he said.

That means added value for the producer, a chance to market his produce at its peak. And it means a better product for the buyer.

"We have a lot of professional growers in the Hegin Valley, and in the Berks area, etc., and there just is no operation like this in the area. None that is a farmer's market and auction," he said.

He said he believes in it and he is working to make it happen.

"What are all the tobacco growers going to do?" he said, referring to the severe drop in security in a tobacco crop, which has historically been a consistent cash crop for many in southcentral and eastern Pennsylvania.

Vegetables and fruits can also be high-value crops. But Paul said that the outlets for these locally produced items are limited.

Especially in Lebanon County and headed west into Hershey, Hummelstown and Harrisburg.

Sure, there is the summer farmers market in the parking lot of the Farm Show Complex. But that isn't what the produce auction is to be.

This is to be the place that serves as a conduit for local fresh, full-flavored produce to get into the homes and bellies of the people in the area. It's not to be a place where a rejected shipment of produce from California gets sidetracked as a last resort to get a return on the investment.

"I fell strongly that it'll work. That's why I'm making it," Horst said.

Though he didn't mention the market by name, years ago there had been a farmers market north of the city of Lebanon that had been similar to some of those still operating in Lancaster County. It was big and open air and smelled of



Paul Horst stands next to the sign along Rt. 72, north of Lebanon city, at the entrance to his farmer's market, auction facility. Horst has used a part of his family farm to start up a center where the rural/farming grass roots producers can meet and do business with retail buyers or local bulk purchases.

apples and baked goods in the fall and was full of people most of the time.

It burned to the ground and wasn't rebuilt the same way.

Horst said he missed the old market place and after talking about it with some other people, decided he could build a place on his farm.

Horst started the farmers market in 1991. He sacrificed part of the 200-some acre farm his grandfather first started working in 1919, and with the help of his two teenaged sons, dug out and graded a flat area to construct the market.

Son Nathan, then 14, did most of the combining that year on the 184 tillable acres left on the farm. He also ran the pan, while younger brother Jeremy, then 12, ran a grader.

"Everybody has a job to do," Paul said, proud of his sons' abilities and eagerness to help. On Wednesday, his sons were helping to build a four-dock loading pad to the auction part of the facility.

Paul drives truck for New Penn, an occupation he grew into having been raised on the fruit and vegetable farm his grandfather J. Morris Horst started, his late father Ralph

M. Horst (he used to work for the Farm and Home Administration locally) continued, and that he was born into.

Paul said he used to drive produce truck into markets in Philadelphia, New York and New Jersey.

"Years ago we hauled to Philadelphia, New York ... and we were at the mercy of the broker. You drop (the produce) off, and he'd send you a check. You didn't know who bought it.

"At an auction, a seller can know who the buyer is. You can't (Turn to Page A40)

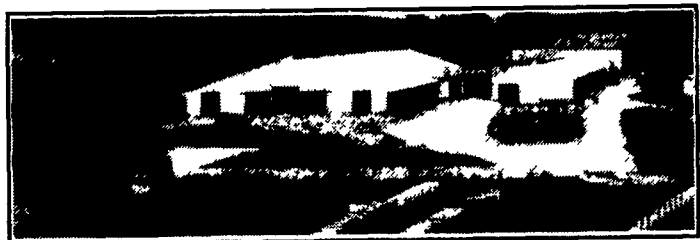
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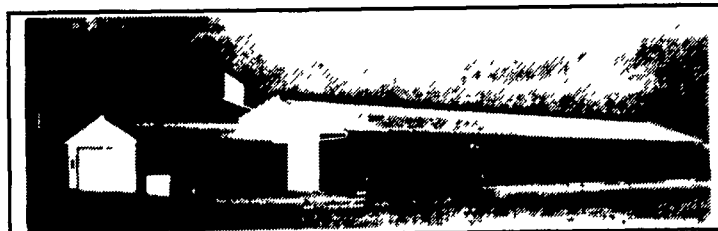
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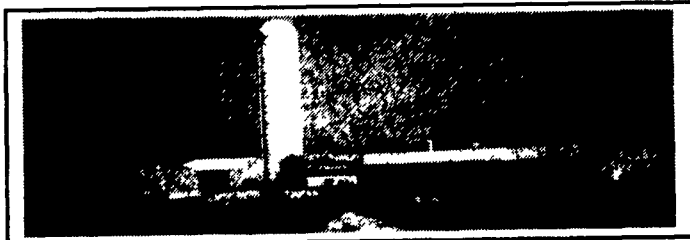
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