

'Entertainment Farming' Educates Consumers About How Crops Are Grown

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BUCKINGHAM (Bucks Co.)
 — Every year in mid October, central Bucks County produce farmer Bill Yerkes opens up the doors on his farm, rolls out the hay wagon, brings in the bluegrass band, and invites people from all over to see and enjoy his pumpkin festival. None Such Farm Market's Annual Pumpkin Festival, held Oct 15-16, drew thousands of visitors to the farm for two days of pumpkin picking, hayrides, pony rides, bean bag tossing, face painting, a bluegrass band, and all kinds of food.

But along with this concept of "entertainment farming" comes the effort of educating an increasingly nonaware public about many aspects of farming, according to Yerkes.

While it may be hard for many traditional truck farmers to survive on wholesale prices for their products, Yerkes has other plans. In a recent interview with *Lancaster Farming*, Yerkes believes there are opportunities for truck farmers,

if they can sell their produce retail and build up a sufficient customer base.

But first comes education. "One of the big problems in a rapidly developing area as we have here in central Bucks and Buckingham specifically is that a lot of people don't have an opportunity to visit a working farm," said Yerkes. "And they're completely out of step."

Yerkes said one day, as he was cultivating and fertilizing his three acres of cantaloupe, a securities salesperson visited the farm. The salesman asked Yerkes, "Does cantaloupe grow below ground or above ground?"

Shrugging, Yerkes said, "If I didn't know any more about your business than you know about mine, then I'd be in deep trouble." Yerkes said the visitor was "a grown person, a 35-year-old man!"

To combat farm ignorance, year-round, None Such Farm keeps a careful schedule of tours from various groups in the community. Yerkes, who farms 217



Last week, 4-year-olds from St. Paul's Growing Together Nursery School in Doylestown toured the pumpkin patch and saw the animals at None Such Farm in Buckingham. Photo by Andy Andrews



For the farm market, Bill Yerkes tills about 350 acres altogether, including nine acres of strawberries, 10 acres of pumpkins, 3 1/2 acres of broccoli and cauliflower, three acres of tomatoes, an acre of raspberries, one acre of peppers, eggplant, and zucchini, and grows 13 acres of oats, 3 1/2 acres of alfalfa, 25 acres of clover/timothy for the steers, and 125 acres of field corn. He also grows about 120 acres of soybeans. The market has been in business since 1978.



Yerkes, here pulling soil samples, believes he is fortunate to have proper soil drainage. That was specially challenging, since the farm recorded 15 inches of rain in five weeks at one time. Yerkes said that one time, more than three inches per week fell, twice as much as ideal, with one four-inch rainfall coming in a 24-hour period.

acres at the central location with his brother John and family, invites many organizations onto the farm, including the local Buckingham Elementary School, various preschools, day care centers, kindergartens, churches and other organizations.

Ethel McCulloch, office manager of the farm, keeps a careful record of when the tour groups arrive and helps conduct the tours. Last week, a group of 4-year-olds from St. Paul's Growing Together

Nursery School in Doylestown toured the pumpkin patch and saw the farm animals.

Yerkes also finishes out about 75 head of beef each year. Half of the meat is custom butchered for his farm market's freezer beef sales and the other half is sold to local processors.

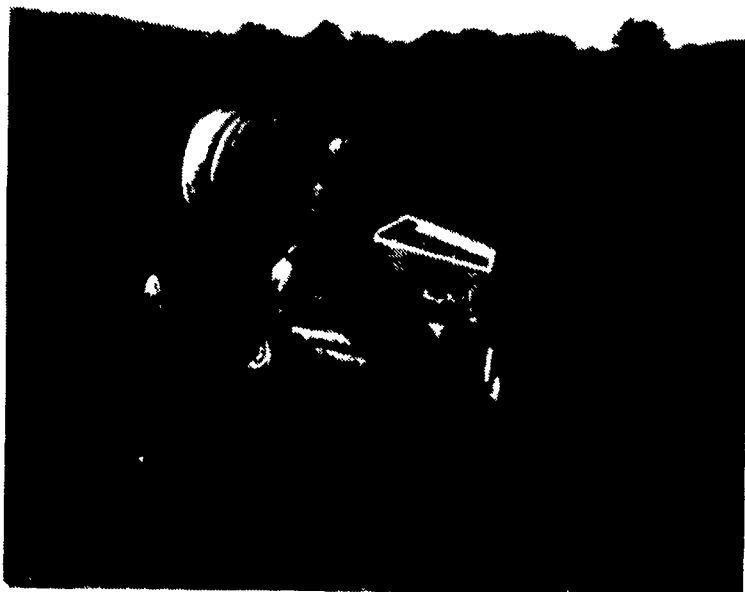
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Yerkes has 10 acres in pumpkin production, including many varieties (Howden — the face variety; sugar; spooky; Big Macs; and others). Demand is up for the face, or carving pumpkins, but down for the cooking or neck pumpkins.



The annual pumpkin festival is growing so fast that "we're having trouble keeping up with it," said. "The whole thing is geared toward kids. It's a fun time for families, particularly the kids." Many pumpkin figures greet the visitors down the farm lane.