

# Planned, Installed Correctly

(Continued from Page 1)

and because they came to market sooner than expected, Burns has decided to return to growing only muskmelons and tomatoes this year.

For the cantaloupes, Burns grows two rows placed six feet apart. Plants are grown right to the end of the tunnels. The cantaloupes are under black plastic with irrigation lines underneath. The muskmelons were planted May 1, about a month or more earlier than conventional crops.

The tomatoes are grown on a wooden 6-foot stake and weave system, two feet apart, on three rows inside the high tunnel, Burns noted. Planted were an early variety, Bush Early Girl, a "very good, early variety, with large fruit size," he said. Also planted was Big Beef, a beefsteak tomato.

Because of high temperatures the past summer, the Big Beef tomatoes experienced "catfacing," or deformed fruit. This year Burns wants to test out another beefsteak variety, Goliath, to see if it is resistant to catfacing.

Burns pays for his seeds and conducts his own trials. He also

wants to try different mulch colors.

High tunnels are an ideal way to ensure early crops. For one thing, growing degree days are increased because of the heating. The leaves stay dry, which keeps fungal problems away. The past growing seasons, "we didn't spray any fungicides, and got very little early blight on the tomatoes," he said. However, the sides of the houses needed to be rolled up because there is some leaf moisture, in the morning from normal condensation.

The varieties of tomatoes were cared for and sold by Burns' sons, Dan, 14, and Pete, 12. The cantaloupes went to St. Marys and Ridgway in Elk County and the Emporium in Cameron County.

For heating when needed, Burns used a small 20-pound propane heater. But it wasn't used because of the mild nights last spring.

Tomatoes are brought to harvest about six weeks early. Growers can pay for the cost of the tunnels "the first season," Burns said.

Burns has faced a few challenges with the high tunnels.

Where Penn State rolls up the sides of the tunnel on the inside, because of problems with post screws on the frame sides, Burns was faced with rolling the 6-mil plastic on the outside.

During the winter, the plastic was left on the greenhouse-like structure. It was "easy to do," he said. "We used a broom to gently knock the snow down."

Fortunately, last winter wasn't too hard on the small growing operation. But with significant snowfall, the worry is that the structure could collapse.

Burns noted during the Ag Progress Days tour that the tunnels are valuable because they can stretch the tomato production season until the second week of October.

They also tried growing some basil with the houses, which "does well," said Burns.

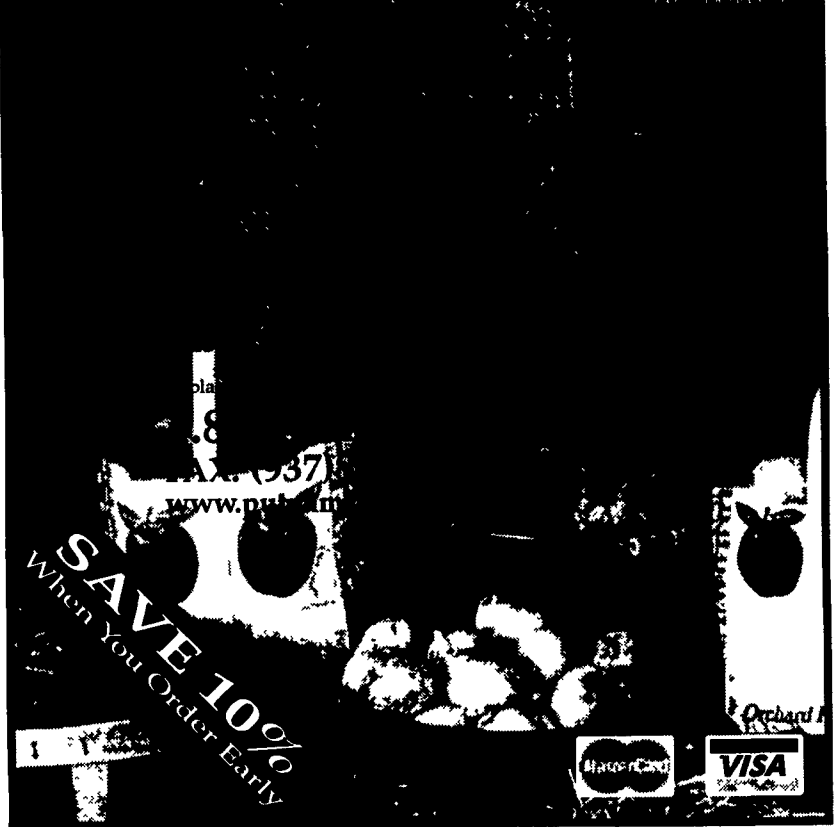
The extension agent was concerned that because of the nearly enclosed system, pollination would be affected. But he didn't find that to be the case. The vine plants pollinated well.



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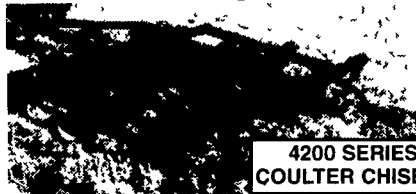
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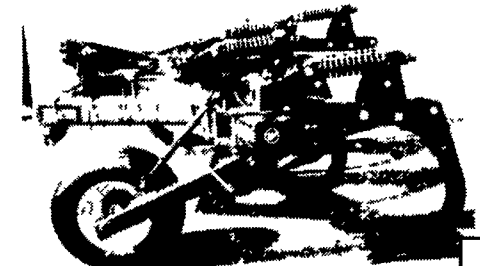
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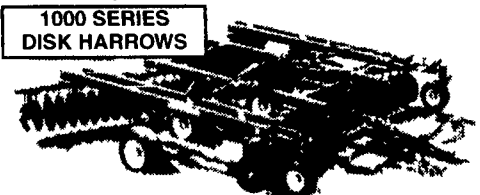
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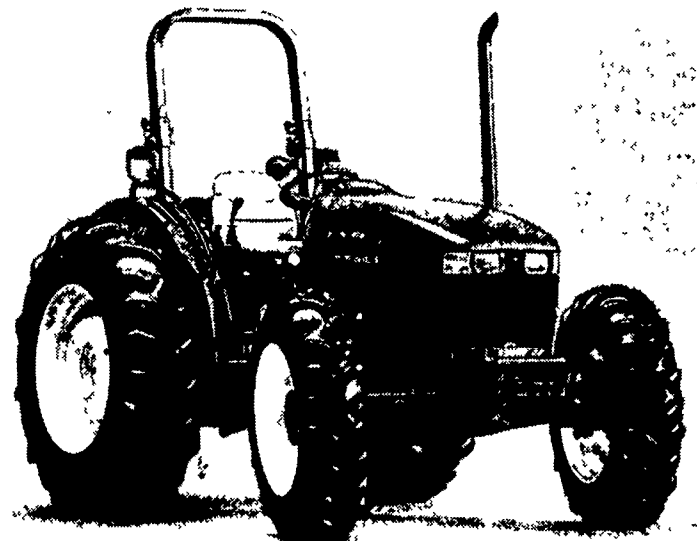


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