

## Amish Family Raises Non-Traditional Crop

LOU ANN GOOD

Lancaster Farming Staff

CHRISTIANA (Lancaster Co.) — Traditionally Amish families are full-time farmers.

It's what Mervin and Sylvia Allgyer, a young Amish couple, would like to do.

But farmland is expensive. So the couple has found a way to use the 1½ acres on their rented property to raise a non-traditional crop while living a traditional Amish lifestyle.

They raise herbs from which Sylvia makes jellies and vinegars to market both wholesale and retail. The items are marketed under the name Lower Valley Gardens, which refers to the peaceful valley where they live in the southeastern part of Lancaster County. They also grow fresh produce such as baby pear red and yellow tomatoes for a restaurant supplier.

Pennsylvania Dutch cooking for which the Amish are famous does not use herbs in cooking. The idea was foreign to Sylvia at first. When she and her husband were first married, they had the opportunity to move on the property where the owners were already growing herbs and marketing them in Philadelphia.

After they rented the property, Sylvia read about using herbs in cooking and became intrigued. Eventually she developed a line of herbal jellies and vinegars. Although her mother and sisters like using culinary herbs, Sylvia said, most Amish families stick to traditional cooking.

Herbs are grown intensively in raised beds. When cut back, they grow again allowing continual use each growing season. Some varieties such as chives bloom only once during the year and must be harvested and used immediately, but most herbs can be harvested whenever convenient from mid-April through October.

Most herbs are perennials and need only to be thinned or dug out every five years. Some such as cilantro need to be sowed annually.

Consumers have a growing interest in medicinal herbs. The Allgyers do market some herbal extracts from a supplier. While Mervin is fascinated with the formulas needed to prepare medicinal herbs and would like to dabble in that area, his wife prefers to stay with culinary herbs.

She said that herbal vinegars can be used in many ways. Here are some suggestions:

■ Substitute herbal recipes calling for apple cider or white vinegars. Try to select a herbal vinegar that compliments the main ingredient in the recipe.

■ Substitute herbal vinegars for wine in recipes by diluting one part vinegar with three parts water.

■ Marinate meats in herb-flavor wine vinegar to tenderess. The sourness cooks away, leaving the flavor of herbs and wine.

■ Add a teaspoon of garlic-flavored wine vinegar and ½ teaspoon mustard to a pound of ground beef for better tasting burgers.

■ To keep gelatin firmer in warm weather, add a teaspoon of vinegar. Add a teaspoon of vinegar to pies and other desserts to enhance flavor and to reduce over-sweetness.

Sylvia said her favorite vinegar is one called Best Salad Vinegar, which includes dill, mint, and garlic in an apple cider vinegar base. "It's great for salads, dressings, mustards, and with pork," she said.

Her favorite jelly is a toss-up between garlic jelly served with cream cheese on a bagel or hot pepper jam served on cream cheese and crackers.

Sylvia markets her products in area stores and at craft shows. They supply items for a Philadelphia market standholder but do not attend market themselves. They also have a list of wholesale dealers.

Lower Valley Farms grow 20 varieties of fresh cut herbs. The most popular are sweet, lemon, and purple basil, chives, garlic, marjoram, sweet mint, Greek oregano, rosemary, sage, salad burnet, summer savory, French tarragon, and English and lemon thyme.

Herbs are wholesaled by the pound for wholesaling and by the ounce for retailing and is packed to the buyer's specifications.

The gourmet herbal and fruit vinegars are sold in 12.7-ounce bottles with 12 bottles per case, mixed or matched according to the buyer's preference. Some of the vinegars that Sylvia prepares include Basil Vinegar; Basil, Chile, Garlic Vinegar; Best Salad Vinegar; Blackberry Vinegar; Chive Blossom Vinegar; Fiesta Vinegar; Italian Garden Vinegar; Lemon Pepper Vinegar; Mint Vinegar; Red Raspberry Vinegar; Rosemary Vinegar; Sage Vinegar; Tarragon Vinegar; and Tarragon and Garlic Vinegar.

Gourmet herbal jellies and jams are packaged in 5-ounce jars with 24 per case, which can be mixed or matched. These include Chamomile; Cinnamon Basil, Cranberry Rosemary; Garlic; Hot Pepper Jam, Lemon Basil; Mint; Pineapple Sage; Rose Geranium; and Grape Thyme.

All Fruit Spreads with no added sugar and fruit picked at its peak come in the following varieties: blackberry, black raspberry; blueberry; red raspberry; and peach melba. A chocolate raspberry spread is sold to be spread on cheesecake, pound cake, and in thumbprint cookies.

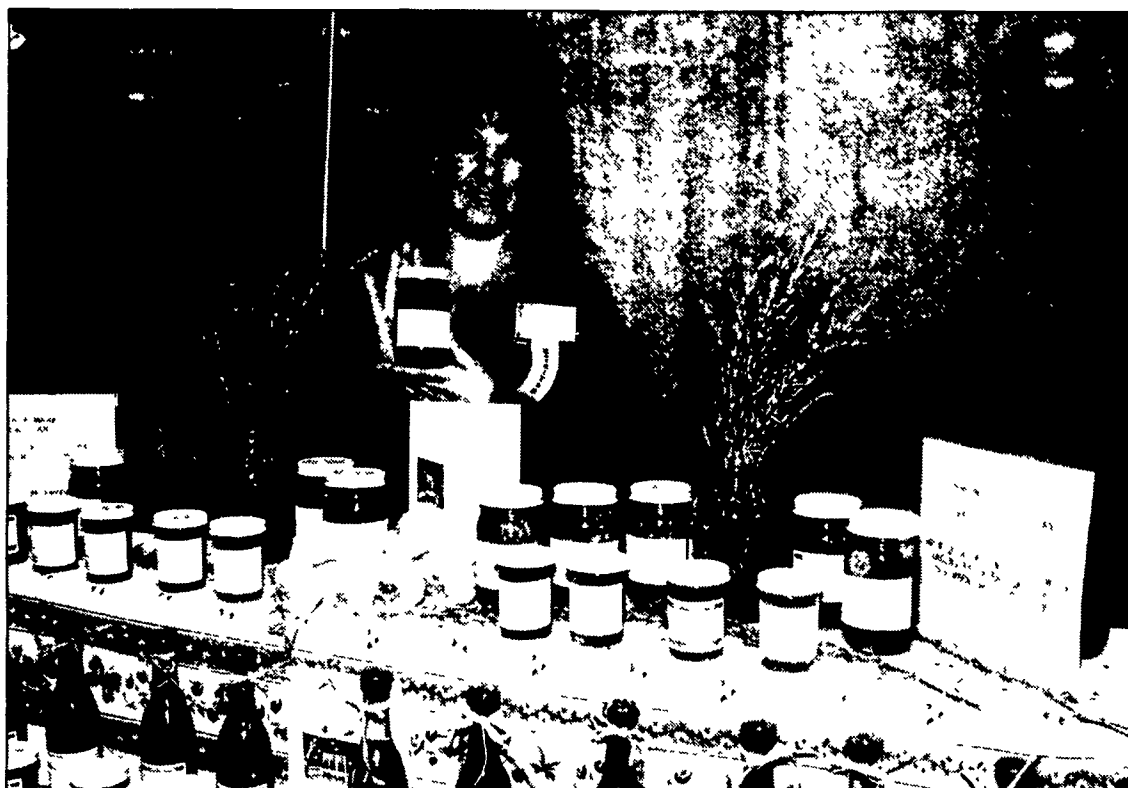
Fruit jellies without seeds and jams are available in the following varieties: blackberry, black raspberry, candy apple, and red raspberry.

Relishes and pickles include corn relish, pickle relish, salsa, bread and butter pickles, sweet dill, pickled beets, and chow chow.

Three days a week, Mervin works as a self-employed carpenter. He makes attractive crates to gift package the jellies and vinegars. Also he installs replacement windows and makes house repairs for customers.

Marvin recently started raising registered Morgan horses. This breed is used by the Amish for driving horses. Training a colt and mare requires lots of time. Mervin said it's important to spend at least 30 minutes daily for six months with the colt and mare they are training.

The Allgyers expect they will eventually sell their herb business and move to another state



Patricia McAlevey helps her neighbors, Mervin and Sylvia Allgyer, promote Lower Valley Gardens' herbal jellies and vinegars.

where they can afford to buy a farm. They aren't sure where but Mervin prefers a mountainous area.

The couple have three children, Lydia, 6; Erma, 5; and Ephraim, 3.

For more information or a brochure about the items they mailorder, write to Lower Valley Gardens, 117-A Lower Valley Rd., Christiana, PA 17509, or call (610) 593-5667.

Here are some of Sylvia's recipes:

### FRUIT DRESSING

Use this dressing for fruit salads. Vary the juice vinegar and herbs used. Yields ½ cup.

¼ cup fruit juice  
2 tablespoons fruit vinegar  
2 tablespoons canola or safflower oil  
1 tablespoon fresh anise hyssop, mint, lavender, or angelica, minced

1 teaspoon honey  
Combine all ingredients in a bowl. Cover and chill several hours before using to allow flavors to blend.

### MINTED CARROTS

1 pound baby carrots  
1½ cups water  
½ cup unsweetened mint vinegar  
1 tablespoon fresh spearmint, minced  
½ teaspoon fresh thyme, minced  
Salt and fresh ground pepper to taste

Peel carrots if necessary and place in saucepan. Add water, vinegar, mint and thyme. Bring to a boil over medium heat and cook until carrots are tender, about 10 minutes. Season with salt and pepper. Serve carrots warm or chilled.

### ROSE FROSTING

Mix together:  
3 ounces cream cheese  
1 tablespoon milk  
3 tablespoons rose geranium jelly  
Few drops red food coloring  
Mix well and spread on top of favorite white cake recipe. If desired, sprinkle with almond or pistachio nuts. Use fresh rose petals as a charming garnish.

### DILLED PASTA SALAD

½ pound angel hair pasta  
¼ cup best salad vinegar  
3 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil  
2 tablespoons red onion, minced  
2 tablespoons fresh dill  
1 tablespoon fresh parsley  
1 tablespoon sweet red pepper, minced  
Salt and fresh ground pepper, to taste

Cook pasta until al dente, drain, rinse with cold water thoroughly. Place in a large bowl. Mix with 1 tablespoon olive oil. In another bowl, whisk together vinegar, remaining olive oil, onion, dill, parsley, sweet pepper, salt and black pepper. Pour over pasta and toss to coat. Cover and chill several hours before serving.

## Spell Success

(Continued from Page B12)

it," Junia said of PDPPS. "Jan (Harding, who is director) and the board of coordinators are just great to work with."

Junia composed a survey to find out what's worked and what hasn't in county dairy promotions. "But I can't say what's worked in your square hole will work in someone's else's round one," Junia said of the need to be openminded. At the same time, she has learned that sometimes, something as small as a communication problem can spell the difference between success and failure.

At home, Junia has three cats and two dogs to pamper. A former manager of a Hallmark store, she found it convenient to collect Merry Moo Moos and Hallmark collectibles.

Junia's office is located on her farm at 23515 Range Rd., Union City, PA 16438. Questions and suggestions are welcomed. Phone (814) 694-2661 or e-mail: juniapdpps@aol.com

PDPPS

## Spring Home and Garden Care Classes

WESTMINSTER, Md.—The Carroll County Cooperative Extension office announces the following classes for Spring 2000:

**Hazardous Household Products and Some Alternatives**, March 9, 1:30-3:30 p.m. No charge. Extension Educator in Family and Consumer Sciences, Madeline Green will lead a fascinating and surprising look at some of our most common household chemicals, their dangers and some suggestions for alternatives that are safer and less expensive.

**Xeriscaping and Drought Damage**, April 12, 9:30-11:30 a.m. \$5. Did you know that much of the damage from last year's drought will only begin to show up on your plants this summer?

Join Extension specialist and master horticulturist Ray Bosmans as he discusses how to spot drought damage in your landscape and what can be done to limit it. He will share insights on how to design a garden that will tolerate dry conditions. All

classes will take place at the Carroll County Cooperative Extension offices. Registration is required. Seating is limited.

For more information or to register, call Lisa on Mondays or Thursdays. The phone number is (410) 386-2760.

## Healing Herbs

RUTGERS, N.J.—Herbs are the fastest growing trend in the dietary supplement industry.

Currently, there are no laws or regulations overseeing the purchasing of herbs.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension will be offering a program "Healing Herbs: Safety & Effectiveness." This program will be held on Wednesday, March 15, 1:00-3:00 p.m. and on Wednesday, March 22, 7:00-9:00 p.m. at the Rutgers Cooperative Extension, Rt. 31, Flemington, NJ. The instructor is Kathleen Klotzbach-Shimomura, Family and Consumer Sciences Educator. Fee is \$3. Call (908) 788-1342 to register.