

Women Involved In Farm Economics

COLUMBIA, S.C. — With the hope of laughter, love and tears of joy, motivational speaker Jim Mathis closed the 26th National Women Involved in Farm Economics (WIFE) Convention in Columbia, S.C. on Saturday, Nov. 16.

Mathis offered thanks to WIFE on behalf of a well-fed America for being providers of safe, nutritionally-sound food. Farm producers and agri-business women had gathered to establish policy, elect officers, and educate themselves on agricultural issues.

Dr. Guido Schnabel, Dr. James Rathwell, and Powell Smith from Clemson University introduced WIFE members to strawberry production and marketing. Moving from matted row production to an annual hill culture system, strawberry production has grown into a thriving pick-your-own and/or pre-picked industry. Diseases and marketing were discussed. Many of the theories related can now be applied to other specialty

crops grown across the nation.

Wearing black armbands, WIFE members "mourned" the loss of family farms and ranches due to natural disasters that attacked agriculture this year.

"Agricultural security is vital to national security," stated President Cindy Cruea, Cottage Grove, Minn. WIFE members united in urging the immediate implementation of disaster aid as a means of protecting the vital U.S. food supply.

Cruea went on to say, "America is only as secure as its food supply. It is imperative now to improve the Homeland and Food Security through standardization of environmental regulations with our trading partners."

Leading the organization in 2003 will be President Ina Selfridge, Burdett, Kansas; First Vice President Marlene Kouba, Regent, North Dakota; and Second Vice President Pam Potthoff, Trenton, Nebraska.

On Being a Farm Wife

(and other hazards)

Joyce Bupp



Almost, it was too late.

Most of the garden was already history, scruffy dried stalks and stems poking up among thriving, vibrant patches of perky, cool-tolerant weeds. A few turnips, small patch of lettuce, and two half-hearted heads of cabbage hung out with less desirables running rampant following an extended fall with more than the usual amounts of moisture.

As garden years go, this year's was mediocre. Severe drought and heat took their toll, despite heavy mulching. Weed control was tolerable until late August, when a deluge of other things demands allowed no time for garden maintenance.

And the weeds knew it, turning into an unruly, wild bunch almost overnight. By early September, I was resigned to scrounging for late tomatoes among a shrub-

by forest of redroot and lambsquarters. To one side of the patch, though, from a raised, plastic-mulched row, grew a tangle of incredibly thick vines, belying the summer's incredibly dry conditions. My guess was that all the energy of these sweet potato roots had gone into leaf production.

Sweet potatoes are not a crop we normally grow, mostly for lack of space. But

a few wrinkled, leftover, old-fashioned, yellow-fleshed ones had been left from mother's garden of the year before. Sentimentality nudged me into sticking them into the ground, even as it was already under seige in early summer from lack of moisture. A sunny afternoon a few weeks ago (after frost nipped the leaves) beckoned me to tackle what lay under the mass of vines. What was there was astonishing.

Poking out and around the mulch at places were the biggest sweet potatoes we have ever seen. I gleefully carried the largest, football-sized root to the barn and bagged up some of the bounty to share. Harvest of the row had filled a lawn cart with sweet potatoes and there was no way we would eat them all before they would begin spoiling.

The first warning that all was not hunky-dory with these monsters came when The Farmer sliced into a fresh one and noted that the whitish-yellow flesh was streaked with gray. Uh, oh; not good. But it wasn't until I began peeling sweet potatoes for our family Thanksgiving feast that the extent of the potato affliction became apparent. A first, medium-sized one was fine. Then I sliced with a butcher knife through a big one...and another

big one...and another big one. And headed to the basement for more, because they were discolored and pithy in the centers.

Suddenly I hoped that no one I had shared them with were counting on these sweet potatoes as a main part of their holiday dinner. Because they were going to likely be disappointed.

To my embarrassment, the shared ones were no better. I intercepted the giant, football-sized sweet potato still in the barn office, tucked it under my arm, did an end run around the house to the kitchen and touched down with a large knife. It, too, got tossed into the end zone across the road for recycling.

The good ones are delicate in flavor, delicious with a syrup of brown sugar, butter, and maple syrup from a Vermont friend. Sadly, those are in the minority. No doubt I left them in the ground too long. But were there other factors? Too dry all summer? Too wet all fall? Too overgrown, since the smaller ones appear to be the better ones?

Gardening is sometimes trial and error. If a few of the good ones store long enough, they'll go into flower pots in spring, to start shoots for next year.

Maybe I can get it right the next time.



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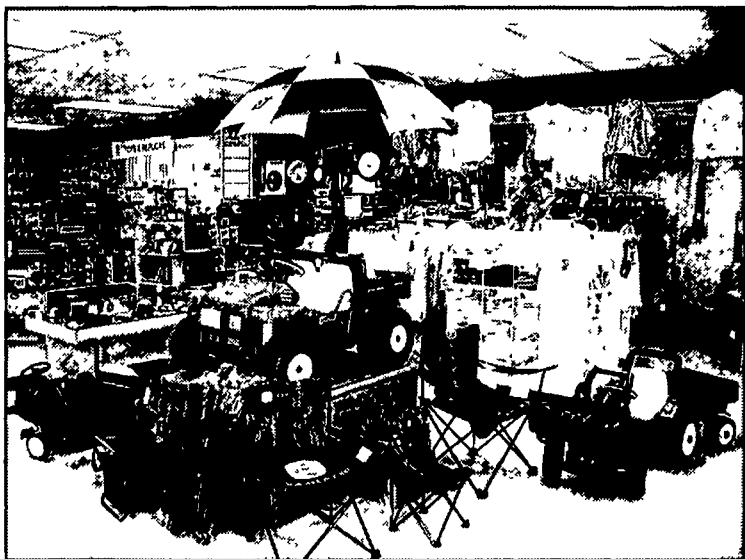
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