

**TOMATO HARVESTERS ECONOMICAL ON LARGE SALE PRODUCTION**

Tomatoes, the leading Pennsylvania vegetable crop for

processing, can be harvested more economically by machine than by hand, it was announced Feb. 9 at the annual Vegetable Conference at Penn

State.

The savings in machine harvesting can equal \$6 to \$10 per ton over the cost of hand picking reports Dr. R. William Hepler, associate professor of plant breeding at Penn State. In experiments during 1970 and 1971, machine harvesting costs averaged \$10 to \$14 per ton, compared with \$20 per ton for hand harvesting. These costs include labor and depreciation on equipment.

The studies were the first full-scale, farm-based Penn State experiments to harvest tomatoes by machine. Dr. Hepler spoke for four College of Agriculture faculty members conducting the studies.

Preliminary findings indicate that 40 to 50 acres is an economical size planting for machine harvesting, Dr. Hepler affirmed. Machine harvest yields ranged from 12 to 28 tons per acre with an average yield of 18 tons per acre, he stated.

Findings to date refute the common belief that hand harvesting recovers all of the tomato crop. Comparisons on large scale acreage in 1971

found that hand picking re-

covered only 62 percent of the crop. Machine harvesting, while retrieving only 60 per-

cent of the crop, yielded the best grade of tomatoes. Acreage planted to tomatoes, and cost of a harvester are obviously limiting factors

in economical machine harvesting, Dr. Hepler observed. He said western harvesters, such as those used in the leading tomato state of California, cost over \$35,000. Harvesters for eastern acreage are being developed and manufactured for \$15,000 to \$20,000.

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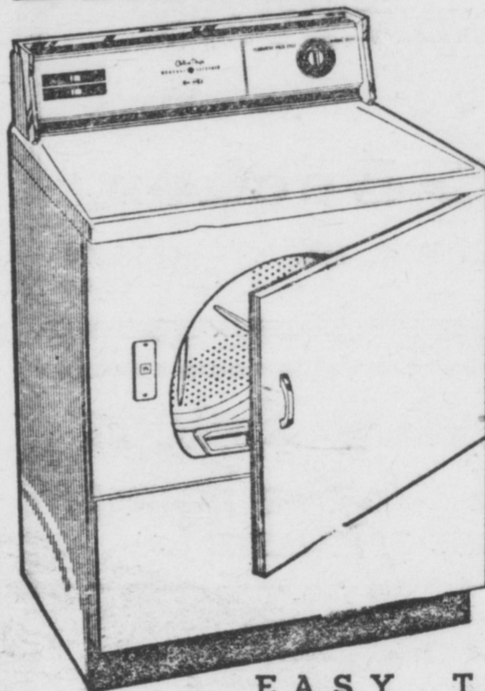
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