

# Working for Peanuts!

Not everyone knows that peanuts grow in Ontario; in fact, they are still a fairly experimental crop in this part of the world. There are, however, a handful of growers in the Simcoe region who have successfully grown peanuts, frequently on reclaimed tobacco land, for the better part of a decade. For Camiel Duwyn, who has been farming, as he says, "all my life," the decision to raise peanuts was "sort of an overnight thing. Someone said, 'Why don't you try them,' and I thought, 'I'll try anything once...'"

This summer marked Duwyn's tenth peanut harvest, and he notes the fact with wry amusement. "I really didn't know anything about them when I started, so there was a lot of trial and error." Nevertheless, he got some advice from the OMAF research station at Delhi, initially planted 60 of his 150 acres with peanut seed in the summer of 1984...and there he was, in business as a peanut farmer.

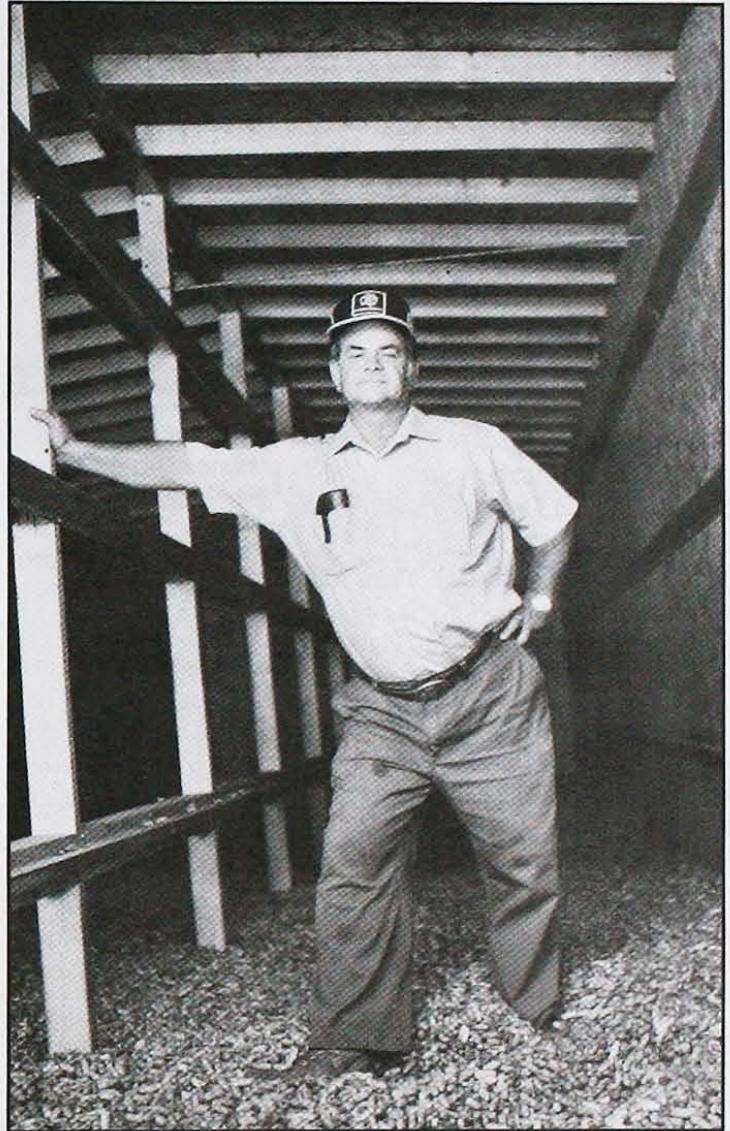
The sandy soil in this part of Southern Ontario is well suited to peanuts, and as a rule the heat units are sufficient to produce a healthy crop. Duwyn has harvested as much as 3,000 pounds of peanuts per acre in a good year.

Excessive rain and summer hail can be disastrous, otherwise the peanut plant seems to settle in easily. The only real worry through the growing season is the leaf hopper, a small green pest most emphatically to be discouraged.

Duwyn's crop is entirely Valencia variety, sown of "Ontario" seed developed at the University of Guelph. According to Duwyn, this domestic strain is better suited to our climate than American Valencia seed.

Duwyn looks for five consecutive warm days as early as possible in May, then begins his planting; this year he was out in the field on May 8. Once the seed is in the ground, he monitors for leaf hopper, keeps his fields free of weeds and "hopes to goodness everything grows." Harvest takes place in September.

Duwyn and his wife, Joyce, handle most of the work. During harvest they may bring in some part-time help. After the nuts are mechanically gathered, they are processed and prepared for both the wholesale and retail markets. The rest of the peanuts are moved into cold storage until they are sold. The Duwyns have a small retail outlet open year-round on the farm located about 9 miles west of Simcoe. They sell their peanuts roasted, made into peanut butter or as a range of peanut-based candies.



Camiel Duwyn standing amongst his peanut harvest .

Photo courtesy of Foodland Ontario.

Even for an experienced grower, according to Duwyn, "Farming is always a bit like a trip to Vegas - you're always taking a chance, and you know it." He looks back at his career and feels it's been a good life. He also looks to a time when he and his wife can relax a bit more, maybe travel and see some of the world before coming home to Simcoe.

*This article was prepared by Foodland Ontario.*