

with electronic colour sorters. Today, electronics are not as important since colour is not as critical to the processor.

Over a five-year average, Kent farmers outyield Essex. But processors like to keep a small percentage of Essex farmers in business who grow on lighter soils, because if there is a wet September they can still harvest. "And besides," Clair noted, "whole-packers still like Essex tomatoes better due to the colour. Although this isn't as important to juice, ketchup and paste processors."

At one time, Clair explained, the government paid farmers to tear out bushes and tree-lines to clear more land. "It has turned Essex County into a prairie," he said. "Now," he added, "the government is paying us to plant tree-lines over a ten to twelve year time frame." In the mean time, Essex tomato farmers are practicing rye stripping as a short-term solution and are keeping cover crops in as long as they can.

Today, Clair explained, "we have to learn how to work our land less to preserve the moisture as much as possible. We have to learn how to make fewer trips across the field, to farm sloppier to protect our soil, and preserve moisture for the dry season coming on. Tomato growers have got to learn how to farm more efficiently. If they can't learn, they're not going to stay in business."

And besides, Clair added, "the average age of farmers today is well into their fifties. There are not many young farmers tackling farming. If it wasn't for people like my son, I don't know what would happen to farming. It scares me. There are not many coming on stream. There are too many other ways to survive in this world to take the risk and all the hard knocks."

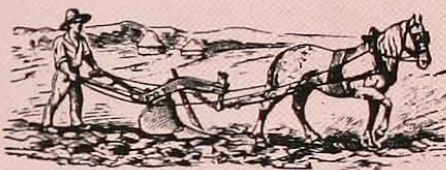
"Farming has treated me good," concluded Clair. "I am optimistic that it will treat me good in the future. I enjoy farming."



The Annual Cycle of Work on a Plug and Tomato Farm

November, December, January, February

- plan for the upcoming year, for both plug and tomato operation
- establish contracts and prices with tomato processors
- establish land base and choose fields
"There's more to growing tomatoes than just pulling into the field in May and planting. Choosing what to grow in what field is a complex process involving rotations, and whether you get a ten or thirty ton crop depends on your decisions."
- repair and/or revamp machinery for modern technology
- attend conferences and meetings involving growers, processors, chemical companies, etc.



March

- plant tomato seedlings or plugs from mid to the 25th of March in greenhouses

"We seed the number of trays according to the processors needs. So if the processor needs 1.5 million seedlings for the first week in May, we seed about the 25th of March."

"We seed in a 288 cell tray in peat with vermiculite on top and hope for 250 seedlings. The trays are then placed in a germ chamber for 72 hours at a high humidity and 80 degree temperature. After, they are spread out in the greenhouses and kept there about 42 days until planting. And they are watered and fertilized depending on the weather conditions."

April

- prepare the land, including ploughing, fertilizing, fumigating and the planting of rye strips for wind erosion

May

- transplant tomato seedlings in the fields

"The planting start date is set by the processors. This year it was May 6th. Processors like to have all varieties planted in about a 21-day period in the month of May. But planting can take about 30 days from the start date. If there is a frost scare, like this past season, planting is stopped altogether since new plants are more volatile."

June

- cultivate and spray tomato fields

"Today, the tomato grower's biggest enemy is the colorado potato beetle. Trap crops are planted around the edges of fields and they do help."

July

- hand hoe and spray tomato fields

August, September

- harvest tomatoes

"Harvesting occurs in a six-week period from about August 20th through to the end of September. But harvesting can still occur into the first week of October."

"During the harvest months we work long hours. We work all day and fix machinery half the night to be ready for the next day."

October

- finish harvesting and clean-up fields and equipment.