

Markham Mushroom Company

Mushrooms on the move



Danny Paglia uses a sharp knife to cut the full-grown mushrooms. He's co-owner of Markham Mushroom Company in Box Grove.



Fresh white mushrooms are nutritious, flavorful and low in calories and they're selling

better than ever. Mr. Paglia should know. He sells 180,000 pounds of them each year.

Fresh fungus a sell out in Box Grove

Danny Paglia spends long hours at his work, producing 180,000 pounds of fresh white mushrooms each year.

As owner of the Markham Mushroom Company, located on 14th Ave. just east of 9th Line, he says the delectable fungus requires rapt attention seven days a week.

The company employs six people, including Mr. Paglia and two partners. Together they maintain a watch over the climate in the growing sheds, ensuring that the humidity, temperature and lighting is conducive to growing mushrooms.

Mr. Paglia explained that

the mushrooms begin as spawns in flatbeds of fertile soil. They're kept in total darkness until picked. When full term, the mushrooms are sliced with a knife just under the soil and trucked daily to a wholesale food terminal.

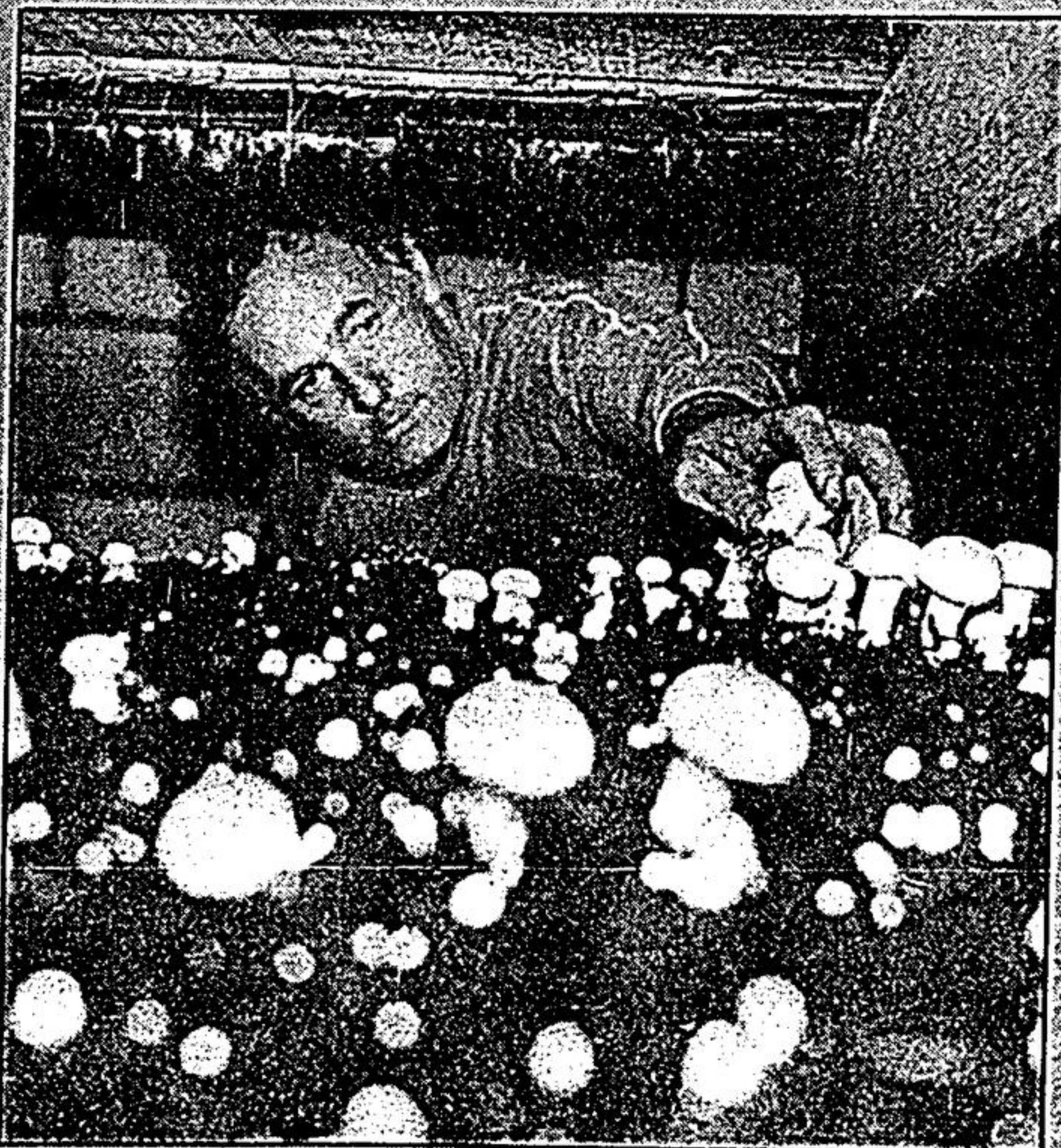
Mushrooms fetch \$6.50 per five-pound package, and the growers claim they can sell as much as they can grow. All of their produce is bought by Queensway Food Terminal. That's why, he explained, they have no great interest in selling to the public at this time.

Although the hours are long in mushroom farming, conditions can be controlled to a much greater extent than other

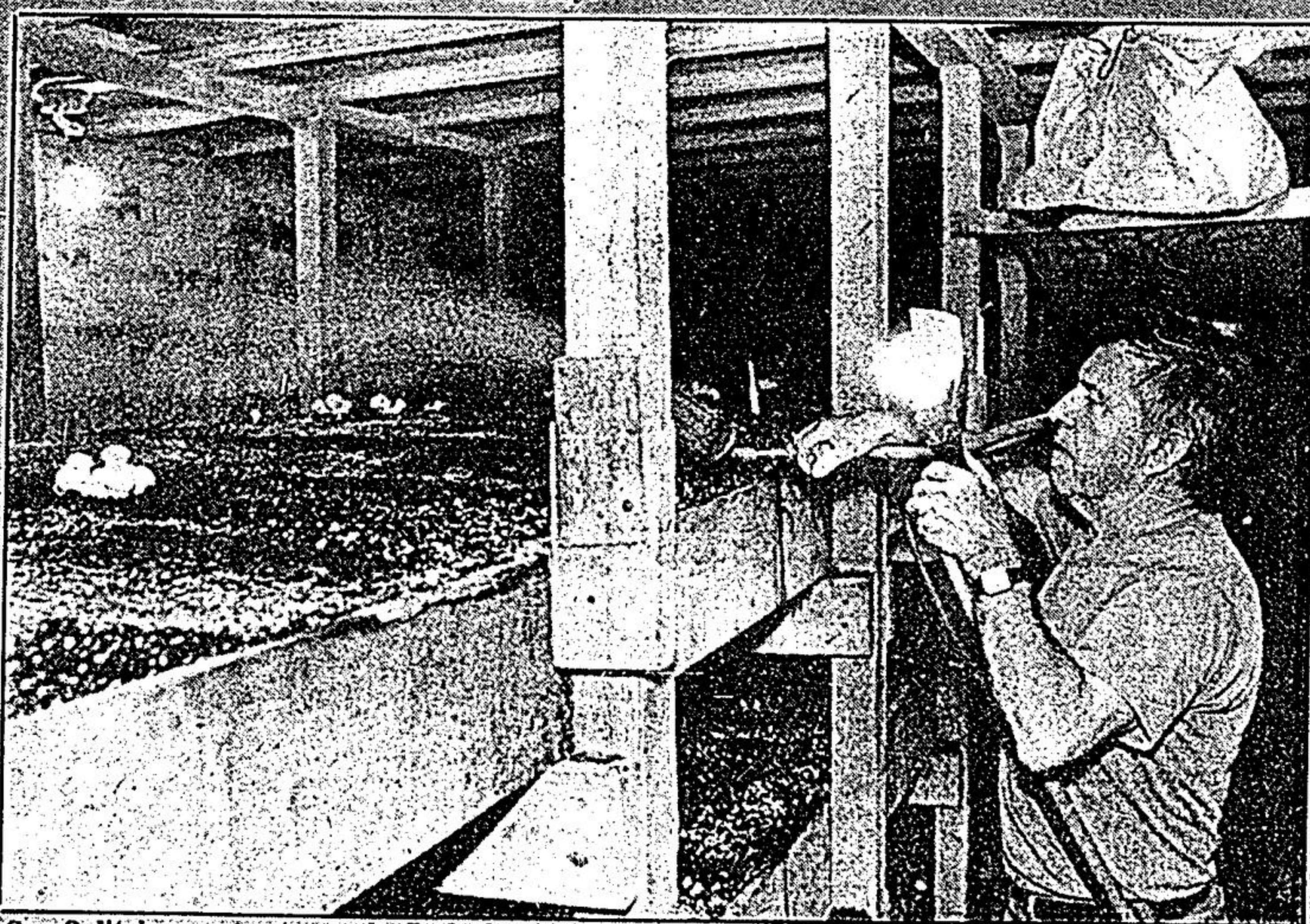
agricultural crops. There's less risk and prices remain fairly stable.

An added plus is that mushrooms have been gaining popularity among consumers in the past few years, a fact which has helped Mr. Paglia's business. He passes the credit for increased public awareness of mushrooms to a job well done by the Canadian Mushroom Growers Association.

The association produces recipe books full of nutritious mushroom ideas, but according to Mr. Paglia, the best way to enjoy them is either in spaghetti sauce or in a pork stir-fry.



Danny Paglia checks the maturity of this crop. It must be kept at consistent temperature for good results.



Guy Calitri sprays water on the flatbeds which must be kept moist for the spawn to mature.

Photos by Bill Lanning