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Truck Farming in Philadelphia County



ISSUED BY
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PHILADELPHIA CHAMBER OF COMMERCE

PRESENTED TO THE
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FEB 28 1918

Educational Pamphlet No. 5, issued by the Educational Committee
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Truck Farming in Philadelphia County

By ALBERT W. DUDLEY

Those of us who live in the heart of the great city of Philadelphia can scarcely realize that about one-third of the area of Philadelphia County is under cultivation. Few of us know that about thirty thousand acres of Philadelphia land are devoted to the raising of many kinds of vegetables, fruits, poultry, live stock and dairy products.

The farm land is mostly found north of Frankford, in the neighborhood of Holmesburg, Bustleton, Somerton, Fox Chase and Olney, and also in the southern part of our city. These latter farms, however, are rapidly being sold for building lots, so that the northeastern part of Philadelphia is now the principal farming area.

The farms of Philadelphia are worth more than twenty-eight millions of dollars, and the crops are worth annually about two millions of dollars. The farmers of Philadelphia raise celery, lettuce, beets, potatoes, carrots, turnips, corn, sugar corn, tomatoes, peppers, rhubarb, asparagus, radishes, cucumbers, egg plant, parsnips, parsley, onions, wheat, chickens, eggs, apples, pears, peaches, strawberries and many other articles.

The dairy products are worth \$166,191 yearly; the poultry is worth \$82,975; cereals are worth \$126,170; hay is worth \$506,573; fruits are worth \$167,688, and vegetables are worth \$249,243. The farm machinery is worth \$540,509; the farm animals are worth \$519,991. There are 3,524 cows, 2,233 horses, 6,737 hogs, 136 sheep and 29 goats on Philadelphia farms. The annual farm expenses amount to \$635,890, of which \$154,989 is spent for rent, \$118,055 for fertilizers, and \$176,200 is spent for feed. (See Plate I.)

You may want to know what becomes of all this quantity of food. The farmer or huckster who sells produce to your mother from his wagon carries many articles raised within the border of our own city. It is impossible to tell how much of this two million dollars' worth of produce is peddled around the streets by the farmer and huckster.

Probably every boy and girl has gone to a real market house where farmers bring their vegetables on Tuesdays and Fridays. There are just twenty-five such market houses in Philadelphia. It is indeed a sight on market days to see the farmers drive up with their heavily loaded wagons, unload them and spread out their produce on their stands. Then come men, women and children with empty baskets, buy the farmers' vegetables and carry their heavy baskets back home again. Then the farmer pockets his money, loads up his wagon with empty



Plate I. Courtesy of Henry F. Michell Co.

After grass has been cut and dried, it is thrown into the wagon with a hay loader as the team goes around the field.

boxes and drives home to raise more and get ready for next market day. This is too interesting a sight to have been missed by any boy or girl. Most of these market houses are now owned by private individuals and companies, to whom the farmer must pay rent just as other people pay rent for their stores and homes. There is, however, a market house in the middle of North Second Street, and another in the middle of South Second Street, which are owned by the city. Formerly there were many of these street markets. One was located in the middle of Market Street, another in the middle of Spring Garden Street, another on Girard Avenue. The Mercantile Library on Tenth below Market Street was

formerly a market house, as you can readily see by looking at its peculiar market house architecture. Where market houses are too far away, the city allows the farmers to have a curb market; that is, the farmers unload their vegetables on the sidewalks and sell to those who pass. We have seven of these curb markets in Philadelphia. In addition to these markets we have the Vine Street Wharf at Front and Callowhill Streets, and the Dock Street Wharf at Front and Dock Streets. If you happen to be at either of these places at one or two o'clock in the morning, you will see hundreds of heavily laden truck wagons unloading at the commission merchants' stores, hucksters and storekeepers busily engaged buying from the great stacks of foods, and hucksters' and grocers' wagons of all kinds as busily loading up this food to be carried all over Philadelphia.



Plate II. Chinese way of drilling wheat.

Two men pull the crude drill. The men behind shakes out the seed. A single man with a modern American power wheat drill can plant twenty rows at a time.

You must not suppose that all of the vegetables that we eat are raised by the farmers of Philadelphia. Probably less than half is so raised. We get food also from other farms near Philadelphia. All night long Jerseymen are crossing the ferries with their loads of truck. Besides this, train loads of food are daily coming into Philadelphia from the South and from the West. Indeed, you can thus readily see that the Philadelphia farmers raise but a small part of what you and I eat.

We may say, however, that "our farmers" are among the most scientific and best in America if not in the whole world. One farmer with only eight acres of land raises a big two-horse load of truck every

day. Another trucker with one hundred acres of land raises a thousand dollars' worth of truck every week, and keeps fifty men constantly employed. Another truck company raises so much truck that it keeps its own wholesale store to sell the same.

Suppose we visit one of these hundred-acre truck farms near Holmesburg. Let us suppose that it is the beginning of April. The stable manure already has been spread over the ground. The usual amount for trucking is about one carload per acre. The ground is being plowed to a depth of about eight inches. The plow is made that the manure is completely "turned under" for the roots to feed on later. A roller is crushing the bigger clods of earth and an acme harrow is pulverizing the soil. A man is drilling in seeds with a drill which may be so regulated as to plant seeds at any distance apart. (See Plate II and III.)



Plate III. A modern American hand drill planting onion seed.
Modern drills plant seed any depth, any distance apart, in rows or in hills.

If we return in a couple of weeks we will see the men at work hoeing out the weeds and thinning out the plants where they are crowded too closely together. Others will be pulling and bunching radishes, onions and rhubarb, or cutting lettuce and spinach. Still later they will be pulling beets, carrots and turnips, and picking peas, beans, potatoes, berries, etc. On rainy days we find the men out in the rain planting cabbage, lettuce, tomatoes and celery. The crops are constantly cultivated with various kinds of cultivators which are pulled up and down the rows by horses or hoed by hand. (See Plates IV and V.) This



Plate IV. Cultivating Beets with Wheel Hoes.



Plate V. Cultivating Rhubarb.

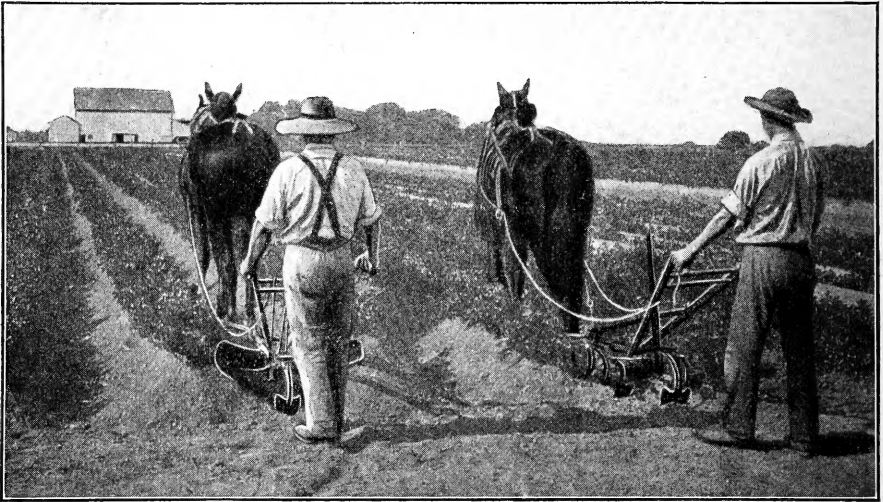


Plate VI. Hilling up earth around Celery to bleach it.

is done in moist weather to kill weeds, for a good farmer never lets his weeds get very large or go to seed. The seeds will lie in the ground and make weeds next year. In dry weather the farmer cultivates his vegetables to keep the ground loose. This keeps the moisture from evaporating. If we come back in the fall of the year, we will find the farmer "banking" away his turnips, carrots, celery, etc., and clearing up for another year. (See Plate VI.)

Formerly our truckers had thousands of hot bed sash under which they raised lettuce, radishes, parsley and pansies in winter and early spring. They also raised their early plants for planting in the fields in April and May. But now the trucker of the South can raise his vegetables in the open and ship them in refrigerator cars more cheaply than the Philadelphia trucker can raise his under glass. He, however, still keeps a few sash. Indeed, many truckers are now raising fine cut flowers and plants in hot houses heated by steam. The beautiful roses and carnations that we see during the winter, and the plants at Easter time are raised in these hot houses or green houses as they are sometimes called.

Within the last five years another change has come over our local farming. Our truck farmers used to lose valuable crops in dry weather. Now, however, many of them are irrigating by the overhead method. In the dry parts of the West, the farmers let the water run over the land through ditches. Philadelphia truckers run overhead pipes and turn on the water so that it sprinkles the ground as rain does. This



Plate VII. Overhead Irrigation.

practice saves so many crops and has become so profitable that the area of irrigated land near Philadelphia has doubled within the last year. (See Plate VII.)

In this connection it may be well to say something about the value of stable manure. Some people think that manure contains a great amount of plant food, but this is not the case. It contains very little. Its chief value is to hold the water in the soil for the plants to draw on. When the manure is thoroughly mixed with the soil, the soil becomes spongy and will absorb and hold moisture much better for the supply of the fine roots.

Really most of our plant foods are already in the soil. The three plant foods are potash, nitrogen and phosphoric acid. Most soils contain sufficient potash. Huge quantities of potash, however, are imported from Germany. Nitrogen is extracted from the air by little plants that live at the roots of clovers, beans and peas. It is also taken from the air by electricity, and is imported in the form of sodium nitrate from Chile. It may be interesting to note that sodium nitrate when treated with potash becomes nitrate of potash, which is used in the manufacture of gun powder. The phosphoric acid is obtained by treating bones, or the mineral apatite found in the South, with sulphuric acid. Not more than one or two hundred pounds of any of these plant foods is necessary per acre of ground.

You and I can scarcely realize how much we are indebted to the modern trucker for the food we eat. A hundred years ago, except in the summer time, everybody lived almost altogether on bread, meat, eggs,

milk products and dried beans. Today we are supplied with fresh vegetables and fruits every day, and at a very much less relative cost than formerly.

To be sure our modern truckers do not have to work nearly so hard as did their fathers. They know better how to truck and every conceivable kind of tool has been invented to lighten their labors. (See Plates VIII, IX, X and XI.) An intelligent industrious trucker may make a good income and live in a very comfortable manner.

Perhaps you would like to be a trucker. If you will learn every detail of trucking and are willing to work hard and save your money, you can own a farm in a very few years.

[Plates II to XI inclusive, are printed through the courtesy of the Philadelphia firm of S. L. Allen & Co., one of the largest manufacturers of farm machinery in the world, and selling Philadelphia-made farm implements to every important country in the world.]

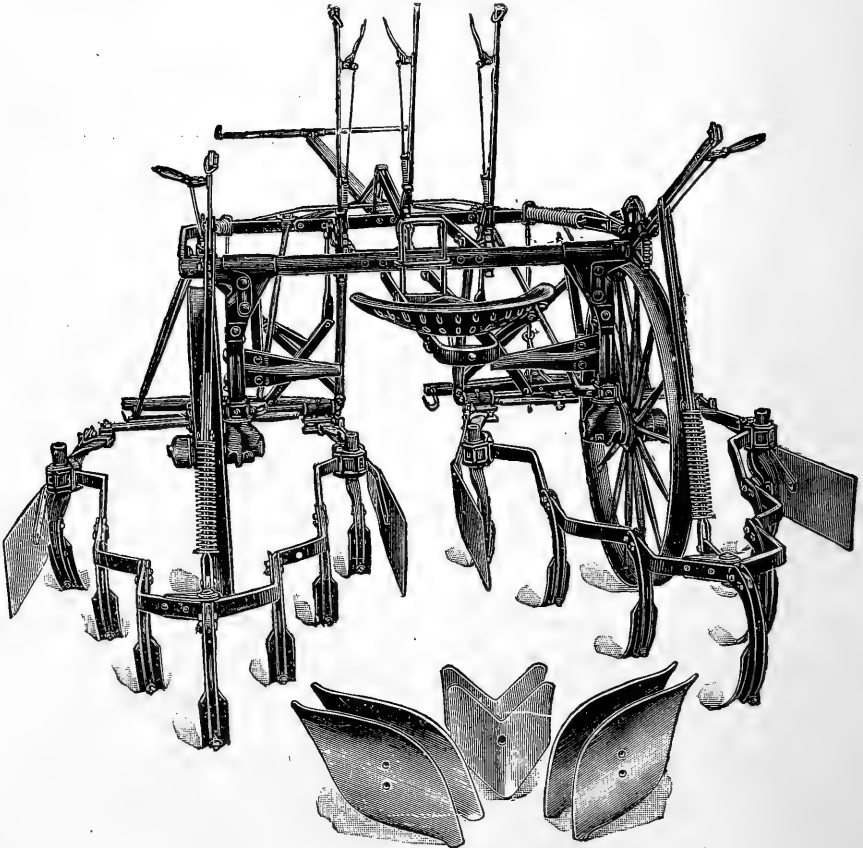


Plate VIII. Two-Row Pivot Wheel Cultivator, Plow, Furrower and Ridger.
 Equipment: Fourteen $2\frac{1}{4}$ x 8 in. cultivator steels; Two pairs reversible 7-in. plows;
 Two 8-inch shovels; Two pairs plant guards; Spring lift.

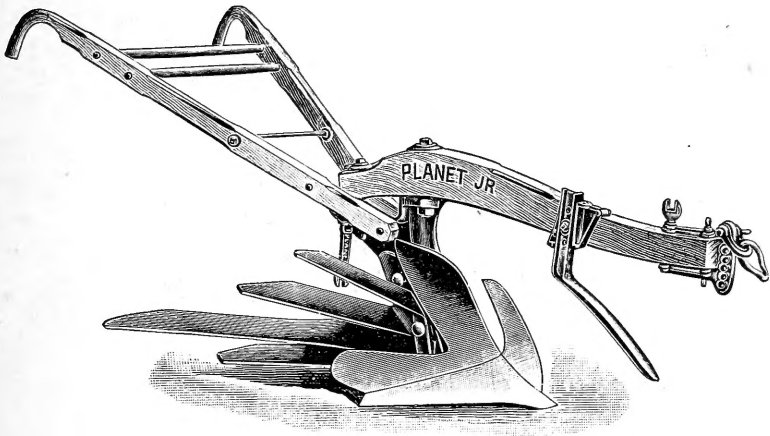


Plate IX. Potato Digger.

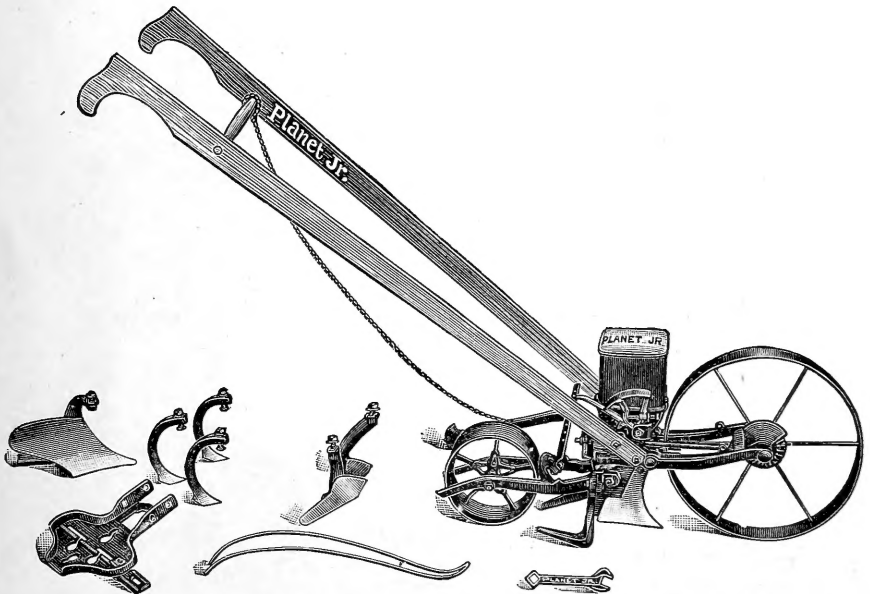
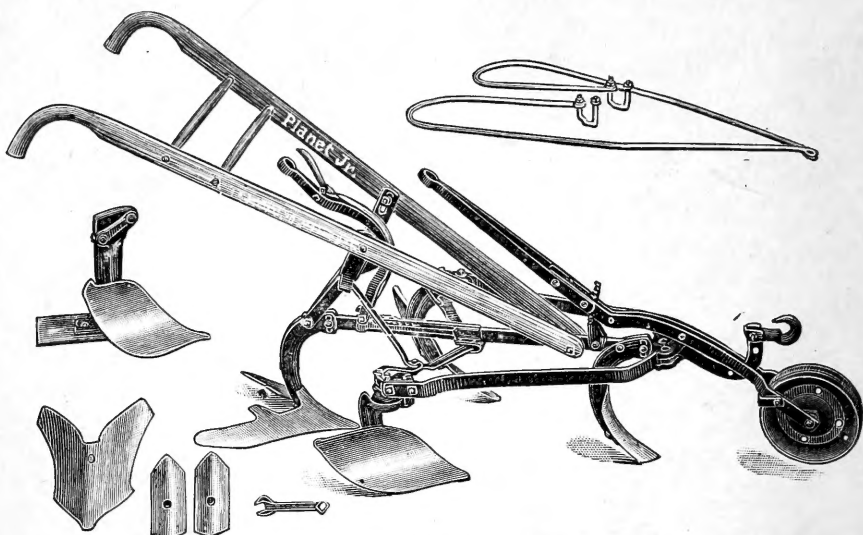


Plate X. Hill and Drill Seeder, Wheel Hoe, Cultivator and Plow Combined.

Equipment: One pair 6 inch hoes, Three steel cultivator teeth, Large garden plow (all oil tempered); Improved double leaf guard; One marker; 1 1/2 inch steel wheel.



Plates XI. Combination Farm and Garden Horse Hoe, Cultivator, Furrower, Plow and Vine Turner.
Equipment : Three 3 x 8 inch cultivator steels ; One pair 6 inch hillers ; One plow attachment , One 15 inch fingered sweep ; One 10 inch furrower ; 1 vine turner, lever expander and lever wheel.

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