

HOME & GARDEN

Home gardens offer food supply security

By PAT LEUCHTMAN
Recorder Columnist

The problem California is having with an infestation of the Mediterranean fruit fly is not only California's problem. There are ramifications for the rest of the country and that news hit the front page of last Sunday's New York Times. Harold Breimeyer, professor of agricultural economics at the University of Missouri, was quoted as saying that, "The Northeast is deplorably, foolhardily vulnerable to any breakdown in food processing."

It appears that the consumer is not only vulnerable to the former's longtime adversaries like pests, disease and bad weather but to those modern disasters like fuel shortages and truckers strikes. This is because most food consumed by the inhabitants of the Northeast is produced far away. People are depending more and more on frozen and processed vegetables, food that is grown on large agribusiness farms that typically grow only one crop which is then trucked to the processing plants and then trucked to distributors and supermarkets. With the rising cost of gasoline, transportation costs involved in the processing of food becomes higher and higher and, of course, that cost is passed on to the consumer.

Even fresh produce is more often than not produced outside Massachusetts so people pay more for produce that is less fresh.

But the higher cost of food is only one problem. What if Cal-

BETWEEN THE ROWS

ifornia were quarantined and its crops were not available at any price?

These are some of the reasons I garden and try to preserve as much of my harvest as possible. I want to garden in a responsible way. I know that an agriculture that demands three crops a year is heavily dependent on petroleum-based fertilizers, herbicides and insecticides that are instrumental in killing the life of the soil causing tons of top soil per acre to blow away on the wind every year, but they also run off the soil polluting our waterways.

I want to opt out of that agricultural system as much as possible. I grow my garden, tilling the soil gently, enriching it with manure, lime, rock phosphate, compost and green manures. These things all help the soil without harming anything else.

I grow foods that I can eat fresh and that I can preserve in a variety of ways. I grow stringbeans for freezing and soup peas and beans that I can dry and have available for hearty winter meals. I freeze many other vegetables like peas, broccoli, cauliflower, corn and berries. I can jam and jellies, pickles, relishes and some fruit like pears and applesauce. Onions are dried and stored in a cool place along with tough skinned winter squash and carrots are stored in boxes of

damp sand in the basement.

I try to grow as many different kinds of things as I can, vegetables and I also plant more fruit trees and berry bushes every year, always choosing varieties that are the most resistant to the cold as well as to disease and insects.

A big portion of everyone's food budget goes for meat and I am fortunate enough to have the space to raise my own poultry. I realize that I have to buy grain that comes from the midwest, but still I have control of production and save some transportation costs. I also know that I am not saving much money by raising my own eggs and eating chickens and turkeys, but I am producing superior products and my family and I are reducing our dependence on American agribusiness. As a bonus, I also get to collect all that rich poultry manure for my garden.

Here in the Greenfield area we are fortunate to have many farm roadside stands where we can buy local produce, supplying ourselves with fresher, cheaper food as well as supporting our small local farmers. In addition there is the Saturday morning Farmer's Market that benefits producer and consumer. It's also more fun to shop there and a little different from the often harried runs up and down supermarket aisles.

I think it is important to recognize how dependent we are on out-of-state foodstuffs and with that realization give some thought to how we can reduce that dependence.

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