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A Most Unusual Experiment

by Stanley Rachesky
Entomologist, University of Illinois

What's new in the pesticide world? A very interesting experiment will begin this summer at Rockome Gardens, located about 185 miles south of Chicago on Interstate 57.

Thirty-five demonstration plots containing flowers and crops that many homeowners grow in their backyard will be put to the test of how well they produce under different conditions. These plots are being planned by the Arcola Chamber of Commerce and the University of Illinois Douglas County Cooperative Extension Service. The plots will contain corn, soybeans, tomatoes, cabbage, potatoes, muskmelons, sweet-corn, apple trees, broccoli, zinnias, and marigolds. Each crop will be grown with and without insecticides, herbicides (weed killers) and fertilizers.

Each of the 35 plots will be 174 feet long and 30 inches wide—thus each row will equal exactly 1/100 of an acre.

The main purpose of this interesting demonstration is to educate consumers on improving the environmental quality of our country, while at the same time reducing pollution through the use of pesticide.

Quality of the products grown will then be evaluated. Yield production will be an important factor, because it will demonstrate the difference in the amount of food we can grow using insecticides, herbicides, and fertilizers as opposed to varying any of these three factors, or using none of them. Equipment costs, labor, and materials will all be included in the evaluation.

At present it is believed that if pesticides were eliminated altogether our food production would drop 40 per cent in one year. It's not the farmer who would suffer. He will still grow enough food to feed his family. But he still must be paid for the goods and services he produces, whether he produces 50 head of cabbage per acre or 5,000. The ones who will suffer will be the city folks. Demand for food becomes greater each year as the population increases; but food availability and quality would drop, and prices would skyrocket. Foods generally taken for granted would soon be considered delicacies, etc.

If you have a spare weekend the latter part of the summer, take a trip down to the quaint Amish community of Arcola and visit the beautiful flower gardens, the shops, and of course the demonstration plots.

PRECIPITATION DATA

1970 was the wettest year in Chicago history. The U.S. Weather Bureau reported a precipitation of slightly in excess of 46 inches for the year.

Where the boundaries of an 18 hole golf course encompass 150 acres in area the above mentioned precipitation indicates that 187,362,600 gallons of water fell on the 150 acre area; this in turn equals 781,798 tons of water.

The previous precipitation record for the Chicago area was set in 1954 with 45.92 inches.

The average yearly precipitation for the Chicago area is 33 inches.

C. E. (Scotty) Stewart