A B-D HOMESTEAD

MARJORIE SPOCK AND MARY T. RICHARDS

When the drift from a neighbor's repeated poison spraying forced us to consider leaving our 2-acre suburban holding on Long Island, we were not entirely sorry. Eight years' experience of building up our soil and growing delectable BD fruits and vegetables had made us long to try our hand at a real farm. It had become disturbing to be able to raise only enough produce for ourselves. We wanted to grow much more good food to help supply an obviously mounting need. And it had come to seem unnatural to have no animals and therefore to have to buy manure for our compost.

One day we heard the spray machine across the way starting up for the fifth time that spring. Clouds of vapor floated towards our land. Our decision to leave was made in that instant. The following day we were in Chester, which harbors a considerable BD group, looking for a farm and finding one. The third day we sent its owner a down-payment.

The 142 acres thus acquired had belonged to a retired dairy farmer who had stuck by the old methods and never abused his soil in any way. The land flowed south and east in three great waves of gentle slopes working down from a high rocky wooded ridge towards a wide valley. The view was breath-taking. Here was a dream property, made all the more desirable by the proximity of so many BD neighbors.

The buildings: three handsome barns that ranged from the large to the miniature, and two old houses — were in drastic need of repairs. The soil, though fertile, had not been worked for several years. Rock piles, some of gargantuan proportions, marred the natural beauty, and there was no scarcity of other ugly dumps. Our minds were torn between impatience to deal with everything at once and create an absolute ideal and the aghast foreboding of what it was going to take out of us to do so.

The fact is, however, that though we have certainly nearly killed ourselves with over-work, we have never felt better nor enjoyed life more profoundly. Making a really going farm has come to seem the prototypal art. None of the problems we have had to face have spoiled our pleasure or dampened our enthusiasm. Today, two years after starting, we would not exchange our lot for any other. And beauty seems everywhere we look: over the woods and hills, around the buildings, in the soil, the animals, the crops.

The first year we planted big fields of corn and oats, set out grapes and raspberries, put in an orchard of assorted fruit and nut trees, with beehives among them, and started a 1-acre garden, which we ringed with elderberries as Dr. Pfeiffer had advised. We built a new house and repaired the old ones as well as the barns. Farm machinery was bought as needed. Before the year was out we had a big and smaller tractor, subsoiler, lime spreader, grain drill, corn planter, plows, rake, mower and harrows, a rototiller and a 12-gal. wheelbarrow sprayer for BD Tree Spray application, not to mention a Jeep pick-up truck. The following year we added a baler and bale-kicker, a forage wagon that doubles as a hay wagon, a manure spreader, a power take-off 100 gal. sprayer for applying Field Spray, and our combine and grain cleaner. We find this equipment a minimum essential, as renting means waiting one's turn when time is always of the essence, as well as the further risk of contaminating our good produce, since rented equipment must be suspected of being used on other, non-BD farmers' well-sprayed crops.

It took a great deal of time and effort to get the repairs done, the fields limed, subsoiled and fertilized, many miles of 4-strand fencing in, the dumps cleared, erosion mended, a pond dug near the barnyard, the garden fenced to keep out deer, and all its 32 long permanent beds laid out and raised 6 inches (a practice which we find pays off handsomely with heavy soil). Carpenters worked here two whole years. Their last job, after adding a loafing shed and two new garages for machinery, was to build four ventilated storage rooms for grain. And we had to call on hosts of other helpers to get us started with all the cultivation, the planting, the haying, the fencing, the harvesting. It was a tremendous project just to clear the land of some of the stones and woodchucks that had taken over. Now all the preliminary work is well-nigh finished. From now on, we expect to make do with Faithful John and Karl and our two selves, leaning heavily on labor-saving machinery.

For awhile we thought we could rest in winter-time. But that proved a pipe dream. There are seeds and spray materials to order, machines to repair, 48 steers and 100 chickens to take care of, composting in huge amounts, snow to plow, grapes and trees to prune, feed to grind, barns to clean, eggs to collect, wash, sort and deliver, many acres of husking corn to pick. Relaxation never really comes. But we all thrive on it.

The first year could have been a heart-breaker. Unusually

low temperatures killed several colonies of bees. Pine mice and rabbits girdled most of our orchard, and we had to start all over with it. The spring was long in coming, and so wet that we could not get onto our fields at proper planting times. Everything was late, and we therefore in a never-ending hectic rush. Nevertheless, except for oats, we had successful crops and the most beautiful garden we had ever grown. Steers that arrived sick became healthy and flourished. Eggs simply poured from the hens.

During this time, Dr. Pfeiffer stood by us, ever at the ready with help and advice. On a raw March day before we had undertaken anything but repairs, we sat together in one of the houses over a map of the land. With quick glances out the window he rapidly marked in fields and woodland, swamps, brooks, buildings. "Here, on this southeast hillside, is the ideal place for an orchard. Don't dig the holes too wide. Make it tough for the young trees and strengthen them by making them fight their way through the soil. Most people pamper and therefore weaken their young orchards. Make sure you get the proper root stock for your type of soil and get your trees from a grower to the north, not the south of you, or else they may not survive the winters here." "You can support 40 steers eventually. Put the chickens in movable pens to follow the steers around the pastures. In winter, when they are cooped up, feed them earthworms from a compost worm pit, and give them a few shovelsful of steer manure to pick in." "Your soil test shows a deficiency of phosphates. Use Lonfosco in your compost piles." "You can set up a five year rotation. Start with corn, then small grains, then grass, seeded not later than July 20th, to last two years (a mixture of 1 lb. Ladino, 3 lbs. of Canadian Alsike clover, and 2-3 lbs. of rye grass) ; then oats or soybeans. Or you could follow corn with oats and grass, and the fifth year end up with cereals." So it went, through every detail of lay-out, dates to plant and harvest, feeding problems. He came again and again, whenever we needed him, and had a suggestion to cut down the size of every crisis and meet all emergencies. Though he never soft-soaped us by pretending that things were better than they really were, his immense knowledge and practicality made it possible to avert disasters and learn much from our troubles. His encouragement was golden, his approval of our efforts wonderfully heartening. He treated us like fellow professionals, not as the novices we actually were. We felt him to be the realest of

interested partners in our enterprise. Many letters came as he pondered our difficulties and got ideas for their solution. When word of his death came, it seemed at first as though we could not possibly go on without him. Yet, on looking over the wealth of notes on past conferences, we realized that he had given us quite enough to go ahead on; hardly a question arises on which we do not find the necessary guidance already entered in these notebook pages.

It seems to be the lot of very few today to farm real homesteads. Homesteading apparently went out soon after the term "farmer" replaced the beautiful old term "husbandman." Husbandmen are always instinctive conservationists, while farmers can be — and often are — exploiters of their land. Here at Davisdale Farm we practice husbandry in the old tradition, in which land was looked upon as a beloved responsibility, like children, something whole and alive and ever-changing, needing all one's study, love and attention. How to give it this was what Ehrenfried Pfeiffer taught his students. And as we enjoy life to the fullest, working our homestead, we are mindful indeed of the debt we and its beauty and fruitfulness owe his tutelage.

SEED GROWING

HEINZ GROTZKE

Old readers may not remember, and new ones do not know, that Mr. Grotzke is now at Greene Herb Gardens, Greene, R. I.

Before the growing season starts, a multitude of seed catalogs offer their service, listing many different vegetable and flower seeds to every person who ever expressed the intention or wish to grow a plant. To some persons these catalogs are their favorite literature because so much information is given for not more than the asking. A little seed catalog, listing a few bio-dynamically grown vegetable seeds has travelled to a selected list of customers during the past two years. Persons who are not very familiar with the bio-dynamic farming practices, might have wondered and asked "Why"? The answer to this question and the necessity of seed growing can be found by everybody who really studies bio-dynamic literature or who has a feeling for the fundamental laws of life in nature.

The idea of bio-dynamic farming has always been the inte-