

U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
SOIL CONSERVATION SERVICE

INFORMATIONAL ACTIVITIES

Name of paper *Davis Co. Republican*Where published *Bloomfield, Ia.*Date of issue *6-8-'71*Sent by *Carle Arnold*S. C. D. *Davis-45*Stationed at *Bloomfield, Ia.*

CLASSIFICATION:

Weekly column ☐

Story (SCS) ☐

(Other) ☒

Feature (SCS) ☐

(Other) ☐

Editorial ☐

Advertisement ☐

Cons. picture ☐

June 8, 1971, Davis County Republican, Bloomfield, Ia.

County tree farmer—

Grafting nut tree is finished

By MARY RUNKLE
Farm Feature Editor

Tree farmer Norman Hansen just finished grafting several nut trees and is getting to trim 50,000 pines on his 405 acre place about seven miles northwest of Drakesville.

In connection with his work on pine and in developing nuts better suited to Iowa climate, Hansen is current president for the Iowa State Horticulture Society, also secretary-treasurer for the Iowa Nut Growers Association and a member of the Iowa Christmas Tree Growers Association. The last two groups are affiliates within the parent "Hort" society.

After graduating as a teacher at Ames, Hansen came to Davis County 15 years ago to do experimental work through the Iowa Horticultural Experimental Station. The

project was for improving productivity of Soap Creek timber by conversion to pine from oak and hickory. When the work stopped, Hansen stayed on, buying the place where he now tends trees.

He is doing most of his nut developing work with the Carpathian, which is a smaller, hardy variety of what the average consumer would call an English walnut.

Through his nut-growing friends, Hansen obtained waxed sions, pencil-sized sections of wood dipped in wax to keep fresh—for the recent grafting he's been doing. (Some of Hansen's stock trees are wild walnut seedlings that grew in his yard where squirrels buried seed.) He also recently collected pollen from Melrose walnut trees for fertilizing nutlets on his own trees here. Hansen said such

practices of exchanging sions and sending pollen by mail are common, as is trading ideas for new grafting technique.

Says Hansen, who flies the U. S. flag in his front yard and carries a "pollenizing" artists brush in his shirt pocket, "Most of the people working to develop new nut varieties are in their 60's, 70's, and 80's because such work takes much patience and time." He added that nut growers are an interesting, lively group who didn't give up with retirement but find propagating and cross-breeding plants a satisfying hobby.

He said that while most trees are usually grafted before they leaf, research proves nut trees start their healing process necessary for union at higher temperatures. So his grafting is put off until late May and early June. He also noted that cuts on walnut trees "weep" — sap runs out. For that reason, he saws off the branch to be worked on a week or so ahead of time, then retrims it before sealing on the freshly cut-to-fit sion with grafting tape.

"Indians were Iowa's first horticulturists," says Hansen. He added that it is believed the nomadic Indians carried nuts—hickory, walnut, pecan—with them and planted them in favorable spots along the river so they might harvest nut crops on future trips through that area.

Working on nut trees only since 1967, Hansen hasn't had time yet to develop his own outstanding varieties through experimenting. He said cross-breeding for improved nut crops was a very slow process because it took several years for a tree to produce nuts and then not all of them would bear every year.

His pine include Austrian, Scotch, White, Red, Jack, Virginia, and Shortleaf and are sold as Christmas trees or left to grow for timber. Right now, they're a combination of dark green needles and light green "candles", which are not-long spikes of this year's new growth. For the first few

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years after planting, Hansen shears his pine as he's doing now to force outside branches for a thick, well-shaped tree.

In addition to nut trees and pine, he has his own kiln in which he makes charcoal from pole-sized hickory. In the kiln he can control oxidation of wood and the low heat drives off gases and coal tar but doesn't burn up the carbon.

"Charcoaling is an old art. The Egyptians used coal tar from the process for embalming their dead," notes Hansen. He added, "Around Drakesville many years ago a lot of charcoal was made by putting smoldering wood in a cone shape, placing straw all over that, throwing dirt on the straw, then making air holes around the bottom."

Hansen, who came here from Atlantic, thinks, as others have before him, that trees might someday become a permanent crop base to feed the world population. He noted that now, in certain places, people eat mostly dried mulberries. The starchy inside of the seed pod of the prolific Honey Locust has been ground and used as flour in bread and hogs in certain places are fattened on the oak's acorns.

"Trees also appeal to all of man's senses, smell, taste,

etc." says Hansen, who has taught forestry several years to Davis County 4-H'ers.

He spends much time working with the State Horticultural Society's big, long-term project of planting their Arboretum and Botanical Gardens. Already the Hort group, Iowa's oldest agricultural organization since 1886, has bought 40 acres along the Des Moines river that joins the entrance to the 4-H state camp at Madrid. Eventually, the Hort people plan a minimum of 1000 planted acres.

"We wanted to do something that would interest everyone and bring them all together," says Hansen about the Arboretum which is being done entirely with private donations. He thinks they might make commemorative plantings for faster progress.

The Arboretum was officially opened on the state Arbor Day centennial with an installed sign and several small group plantings. Gradually, it'll be a place for exposition of many kinds of trees, shrubs, vines, grasses, flowers, and other plants. Such plants will be native, introduced or developed through breeding—like the nut trees Hansen just grafted and pollenized right here in Davis County.



Pollenizing nutlets

Norman Hansen of Drakesville uses a small paint brush to pollenize nutlets on his tree farm seven miles

northwest of Drakesville. Besides nut trees, Hansen also raises pine trees.