



FARM & RANCH NEWS

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The only local voice for rural living

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BIBLE QUOTE

“The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress. Therefore men, revere him, for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?”

— Job 37:23-24

GROWING PEAS

for seven generations in East Texas

By WAYNE STEWART
Farm & Ranch News

For the Elliott family in Houston County, most people would probably say raising peas is in their blood.

For seven generations now they have been growing peas — for themselves and for sale. “My husband’s family came here when Stephen F. Austin did,” said Joanne Elliott from her Grapeland home. “They started growing peas then, and seven generations later my son is growing peas.”

Her son, Nathan Elliott and her husband Sam Elliott grow about six acres of peas. Recently, they decided to go organic in their pea growing and according to Nathan, they are growing better than they ever have before as his mom notes, “we’ve got more peas than we know what to do with.”

Sam Elliott, is a ship captain in Houston, but he schedules much of his home time in the summer around the peas. When he isn’t home, the 19-year-old Nathan sees to the peas — and they have flourished under his guidance.

This year they are growing top-pick purple hull peas. For those who don’t know peas, the top pick variety grows its peas at the top of the plant for easier picking.

The top pick plants also make it easier for the Elliotts mechanical picker.

“We have to grow the top picks to use with the picker,” Nathan said. “It will cut the plant and separate the leaves and trash from the peas.”

With one man on the tractor, Nathan said it takes three people on the picker to keep the bins catching the peas rotated and stacked.

“We had to get that because nobody wanted to pick peas any more,” Joanne Elliott said. “People used to come out and pick their own, now they want you to do everything but put them in the freezer for them.”

The Elliotts sell as many peas as they can to local folks with the rest going up to the Dallas Farmers Market.

“They like organic products up there,” Nathan said. “So we went that way this year with the peas.”

A cover crop of English peas were planted in late winter, which according to Mrs. Elliott, helped.

“The bugs that like regular peas couldn’t stand English peas,” Mrs. Elliott said. “That helped keep them away.”

They also added nat-



WAYNE STEWART/Farm & Ranch News



ABOVE: Nathan Elliott checks the progress of his family’s pea crop recently at their home near Grapeland. Nathan and his parents, Sam and Joanne Elliott, grow about six acres of peas. **LEFT:** Nathan explains how the mechanical pea picker works. The Elliotts grow top pick plants to make mechanical harvesting easier.

a cover crop, which also will help with weed control.

Deer control has been an issue in the past, but Mrs. Elliott said she thinks they have that problem licked now.

“Just a couple of days before the peas are ready we spray Tabasco sauce around the fields,” Mrs. Elliott said. “So far that’s kept them away.”

Over the coming years Nathan said he would like to lease a little more land to grow some more peas.

“Our picker can pick 15 acres a season,” Nathan said. “So we can do a little bit more.”

Once the peas are

picked, they are taken over to the sheller and then they are bagged.

“Everything I can do on the tractor I enjoy,” Nathan joked. “When it comes to working in the pea shed I kind of run out of favor with that.”

Still, he and his parents put the work into it to get the job done.

This year the Elliotts’ peas are set to be ready on July 29.

“It’s a little later than most,” Mrs. Elliott said. “So maybe we can get that late market cornered.”

To set up a time to pickup some peas, call the Elliotts at (936)687-3982.

ural amendments to the soil after having a soil test done.

“We’ve never had a soil test done before,” Mrs. Elliott said. “That was the best \$14.99 we ever spent.”

Use of the cover crop along with the amendments helped to cut

down on the weed population, which made their method of mechanical cultivation easier.

“We just use old technology when it comes to cultivating,” Nathan said.

Next year, Nathan said they plan on putting down peas over