

**NEW MEXICO
FARM & RANCH
HERITAGE
MUSEUM**

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
INTERVIEW ABSTRACT**

CONSULTANT: John Clayshulte, Jr.

DATE OF BIRTH: July 4, 1951 SEX: Male

DATE(S) OF INTERVIEW: September 6, 2001

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Clayshulte farm, Mesilla

INTERVIEWER: Marcie Palmer

SOURCE OF INTERVIEW: NMF&RHM_X___ OTHER_____

TRANSCRIBED: Yes: September 19, 2001

NUMBER OF TAPES: One

ABTRACTOR: Sylvia Wheeler

DATE ABSTRATED: February 1, 2002

QUALITY OF RECORDING (SPECIFY): Good

SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE: Interview done for the exhibit on contemporary farming in the lower Rio Grande Valley, "The Inside Story of the Roadside View." This interview focuses on pecan farming.

DATE RANGE: 1951-2001

ABSTRACT (IMPORTANT TOPICS IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE):

TAPE ONE, SIDE A:

The Clayshultes own a farm near Mesilla and also own property near San Miguel. They have approximately 450 acres in pecan orchards.

The orchards are flood irrigated although they also utilize wells for irrigation. The land is laser leveled, making it easier to irrigate. Most of the soil is loam, though one farm has eleven different soil types which makes it difficult to properly water.

They apply a medium dose of fertilizer in early April, followed by another application in June. They then vary the amount of fertilizer depending on whether it's an on year or an off year, feeding the trees more on an "on" year. It is more efficient to give many small doses of fertilizer.

Unlike fruit and other nut trees, pecan trees don't have an absolute life cycle; they can start producing at three years old and continue for one hundred years. The pecan is a budded tree, planted with a nut, it buds in the second year and at end of the third year is dug out and sold. A tree is priced by the diameter, the bigger it is the more it costs. The first year a tree is transplanted into an orchard it merely "survives," within about four years the tree will start to produce. By the time the tree has been in the orchard five or six years it becomes economically feasible to harvest the nuts. By the eighth year there should be significant production and by ten years the tree is in full production.

In addition to family labor the Clayshultes employ five full time workers. After harvest, trees are pruned and some transplanting is done. It varies orchard to orchard, year to year. They'll disc the orchards for aeration, and start irrigating in late March. By the end of September, the trees are through making the crop for that year and during October and into November, the tree stores carbohydrates for the next year's crop. The trees are fertilized to keep them healthy.

They use pesticides, lately, to control the pecan nut case bearer a pest which came into the area about ten or twelve years ago. The first generation of nut case bearer appears around May 20th. They have about three days to spray for it at this phase (the ground must be dry for the spraying). At the end of June the orchards are monitored for the eggs of the nut case bearer and a determination is made as to whether they will need to spray. The third generation of the insect appears in August. Although the first appearance of the nut case bearer in May is predictable, the appearance of the later generations is dependent on the "heat units" in a particular year.

After the initial cultivation the orchard is maintained through a combination of mowing and spraying Roundup. Other pests include the black and yellow aphids. It is not considered feasible to spray for the yellow aphid; however, ladybugs and lacewings control the population of this pest. They try not to impact the beneficial population of insects.

During harvest the consultant hires an additional ten to twelve people for their field crew. In the processing plant managed by Clayshulte's brother, Nelson, they hire thirty or so employees. In addition to their own work, the Clayshultes do custom cleaning for other people.

Discusses drying and sorting the pecans. As a rule they don't dry their nuts but will if it's been a rainy year. Nuts are sorted from the field debris, hulled, and the light and empty nuts are blown out. The last step is to put the nuts on a sorting table and clean them by hand.

Clayshulte raises a concern about what the State Engineer's Office is going to do about water allotment. Some years they are unable to get enough irrigation water through the Elephant Butte Irrigation District and they have to use well water. Now there is the possibility that well water will be metered; the question is how much water they will allow to be pumped from wells. "If they try and give us such a limited amount of water . . . basically we're doomed," he says. He believes if the pecan farmers don't get enough water, they will form a group, hire lawyers, and fight for greater water allotments. There have been no new appropriations of water rights for twenty-one years.

Clayshulte feels the greatest impact on pecan farming during his lifetime has been loss of political power by the agricultural sector. Agriculture appears to have been in a depression for the last three years; "the future looks very bleak . . . I'm not particularly encouraging my kids, uh, to farm at all." The consultant owns some land that has appreciated in value and this land can be developed if farming is no longer "feasible." But they hope that this will not happen. The 1990s overall, have been good for the pecan industry, but "the other guys who don't have pecans in this valley are . . . in deep trouble."

TAPE ONE, SIDE B:

Clayshulte discusses thinning the orchard to allow sunlight to penetrate. He also describes transplanting trees from February through April to either replace trees they have removed or planting "new ground." There are some questions yet to be answered in regard to the best way to manage the growth of the pecan trees.