

ming — good life but poor livelihood'

rd owner now trimming luxury homes

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N — Bob Hobson has
onflict.
r of Mountain Or-
bison has found an addi-
for his farm — for 15
me to his apple and
y crops.
poor weather causing a
of not too healthy years"
crops, Hobson looked for-
ing to "pick up the slack."
opportunity jumped out at
n and his partners Bruce
and Phillip Lyall while they
n installing trims for luxurious
s in Manotick.
bison felt the quality was not
o par and those paying the big
ts seemed to agree. "When
eone is paying you \$300,000 to
ld a house, they can be damn
ky," Hobson said.
Hobson said the threesome felt
ey could do a better job making
ims that will help a house stand
ut from the pack. And just six
months into their new business ven-
ture, Hobson said the trio have
"proven we can."
"We don't put out cheap stuff.
We put out quality trim."
Hobson said the trims he is mak-
ing leaves a house "looking one
hell of a lot more attractive." He
said it also increases the value of
the house.
The trims run along the windows
and interior and exterior borders of

a house. Much of the work so far
for Hobson has been making trims
for heritage buildings.

People are also going back to old
style houses, Hobson said.

Most of the past half year for
Hobson has been spent setting up
shop in his barn. A molding
machine was bought second-hand
for considerably less than the
\$150,000 tag a new one would
fetch.

He said business is off to a pro-
mising start. "It is a lot larger now
than we envisioned six months ago.
Initially we did not set big goals but
demands have greatly exceeded
expectations.

"I don't want it to get too big,
but I don't want to restrict its
growth either."

Hobson refrains from giving out
numbers when talking about just
how well things are going.
"Business is amazingly good. I
don't want to give figures because
they're misleading."

Supply problems slowed the ear-
ly production but with equipment
now purchased from Toronto and
a lumber yard in Pembroke supply-
ing the wood, the trims are rolling
through the molding machine more
steadily.

But it will not be all smooth sail-
ing from here on, Hobson admit-
ted. There are predictable clashes
between the crop and trim
businesses at Mountain Orchards.

Already Hobson is putting in
nine hour days, seven days a week.

"And we haven't even got busy
yet. That's the scary part."

Strawberry season is only about
two weeks away, Hobson
predicted. However, Hobson said
he has been "coping long enough
to know what critical things to take
care of."

There is another type of conflict
also confronting Hobson — his love
of farming and of working
outdoors.

He said such common farm
duties as pruning are "missed on-
ly when you are not doing it. Far-
ming is a fairly good life but not
a great livelihood."

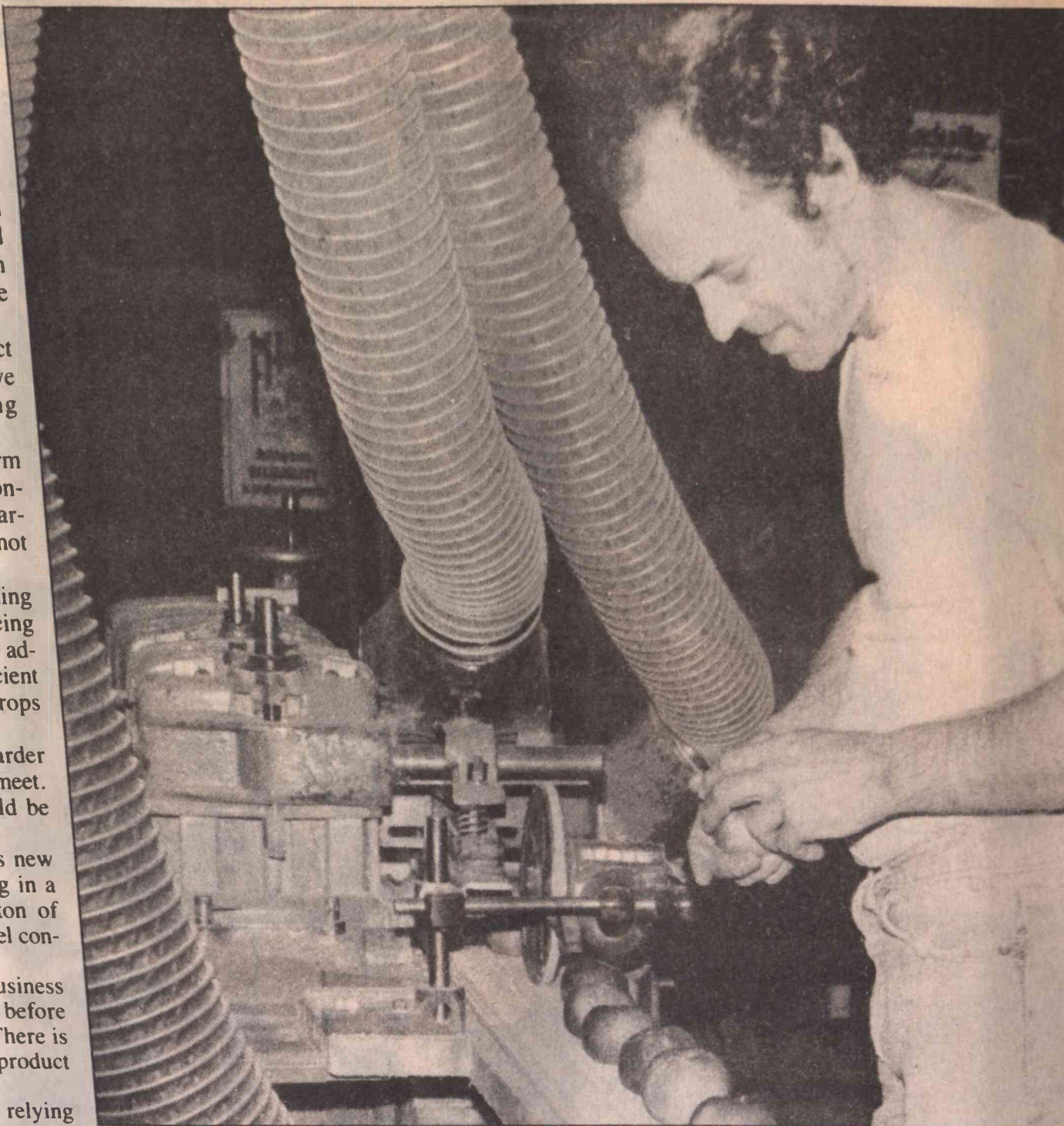
Hobson said he is "not getting
tired" of farming even after being
in the field for 15 years. But, he ad-
mitted there simply is not sufficient
money to be made from his crops
these days.

"Agriculture is getting harder
and harder just to make ends meet.
A nice reliable income would be
nice."

And Hobson is hoping his new
trimming business will bring in a
stable income. "I have a ton of
money invested so I better feel con-
fident."

He said he realizes the business
still has a "fair way to go" before
he can sit back and relax. There is
the job still of getting the product
into the public eye.

Hobson so far has been relying
on word of mouth to bring his trim-
ming business to the attention of
potential customers.

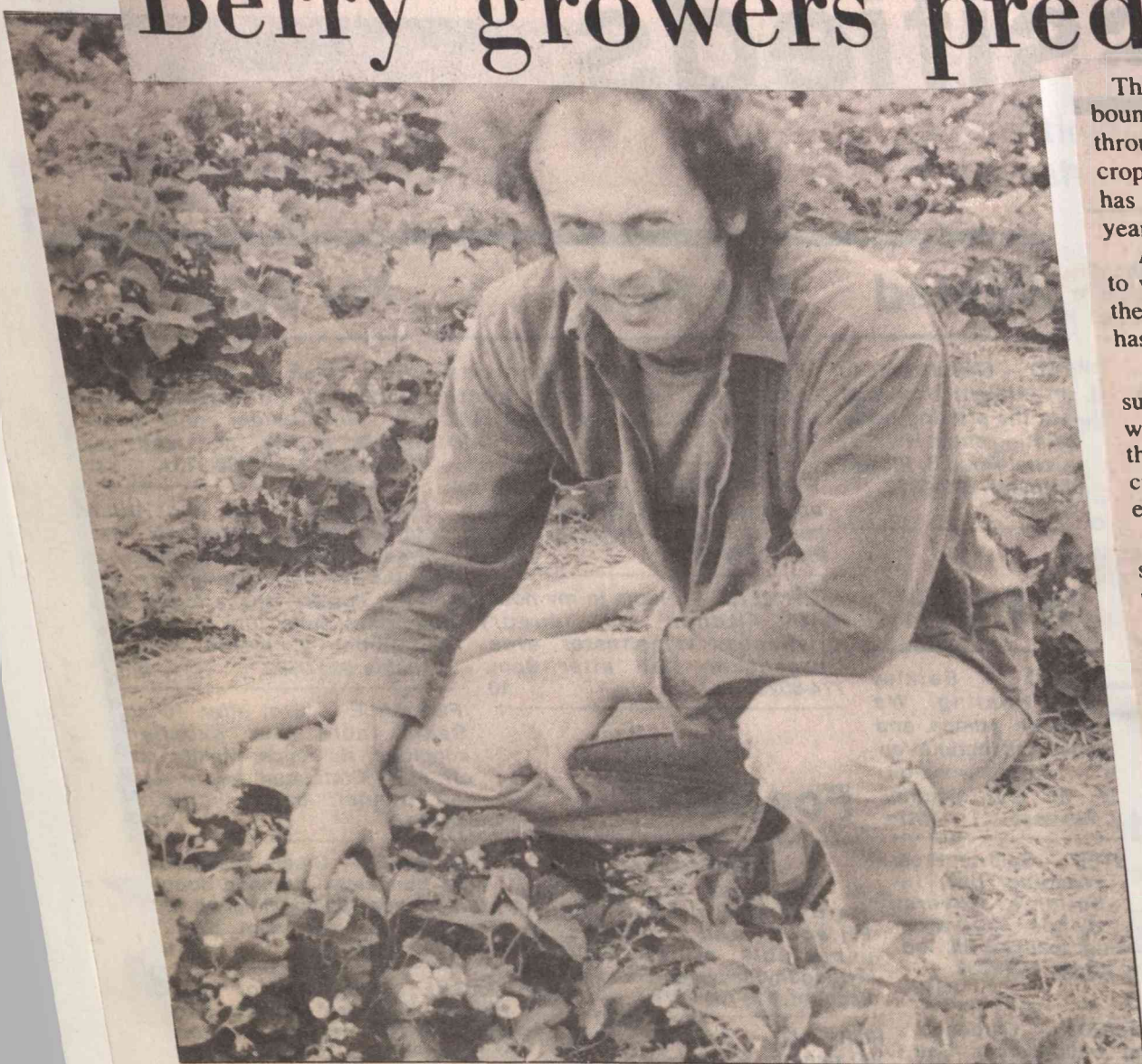


Bob Hobson has run into a problem finding
storage space for his crops now that his

Mountain Orchards' barn houses a new
business.

The Winchester Press Wed., June 1, 1988

Berry growers predict bountiful season



Bob Hobson of Mountain Orchards expects to have a good crop of strawberries
this year, thanks to irrigation last summer and no frost this spring.

MOUNTAIN — As the days get warmer
and the taste buds get a yearning for
delicious fresh picked strawberries, area
residents can head up to the Mountain
Orchards' farm to pick their own supply.
Mountain Orchards has been owned and
operated by Bob Hobson and Phil Lyall for
the past 15 years, although according to
Hobson "with the eight-day weeks it seems
longer than that."

Hobson, Lyall and their families each
share the large house on the farm and Lyall
and Hobson have their sons help out on the
farm. Hobson says that Lyall is hoping his
13-year-old daughter Jessica will also be
helping out this year.

Mountain Orchards is an 80-acre farm
with six-and-a-half acres of strawberries,
seven acres of raspberries and more than 45
acres of apples.

Hobson said more strawberries could be
grown but it would not be possible to sell
them all, and he doesn't want to be like
some strawberry producers who let their
berries rot in the fields.

As Hobson inspected his strawberry patch,
he predicted an excellent crop this year with
the berries ready near June 20.

"Last year it was embarrassing. It was the
most depressing year for strawberries we
had ever seen," said Hobson, as he recalled
winter kill virtually destroying last year's
strawberry crop.

This year the two farmers are expecting a
bountiful crop because they irrigated all
through the dry summer, and protected the
crops with hay during the winter, as there
has not been enough snow the past few
years to protect the crops properly.

As well, strawberry growers usually have
to worry about frost in the spring killing
their plants or berries, but this spring there
has been no frost.

Although the strawberries were not
successfully last year, Hobson and Lyall
were able to offset some of their losses with
their raspberry crop. "We had a bumper
crop of raspberries last year which made for
easy picking," explained Hobson.

Hobson estimates that half their sales in
strawberries and raspberries are through
pick-your-own customers while the rest of
the berries are sold at the house or to local
stores.

"We don't really advertise too much,"
said Hobson, who explained signs are put up
and regular clientele from around Mountain
and Winchester is counted on to pick the
fields clean during the three weeks of
strawberry season.

Hobson said there are many berry farmers
closer to the city so he does not rely on
pulling in customers from the Ottawa area.
"When we started with strawberries, there
were only about 40 strawberry farmers in
Eastern Ontario, now there are close to
700," said the fruit farmer.

"After all," said Hobson, "Eastern

Ontario residents eat more strawberries per
capita than other Ontario residents." Hobson
feels this is because they have a good crop
and an excellent Strawberry Grower's
Association to promote their product.

Although only a small number of
customers from Ottawa come to Mountain
Orchards for their strawberries, the opposite
is the case with their pick-your-own apples,
as numerous families converge from the city
on the farm in September.

"On busy Saturday and Sunday afternoons
we have more than 5,000 customers a day
and turn over 250 cars an hour," said
Hobson.

Picking apples is a family thing as parents
and children come out and make a day of it,
said Hobson. He added that a second
generation of pickers who came to Mountain
Orchard for apples as youngsters, now bring
their own children.

As one of the top five orchards in Eastern
Ontario, Hobson said Mountain Orchards
sells about 20 per cent of its apples as pick-
your-own and the rest of the apples, and
their apple cider goes to major stores in
Ottawa. "Why, we even supply the Boy
Scouts in Ottawa," said Hobson.

Although apple sales have been good,
Hobson said his business suffered last year
with the alar scare. Hobson felt the media
blew the effect of alar on humans way out
of proportion and he said he believes that
peanut butter is more carcinogenic than alar,
and that beer is 100 times more carcinogenic
than alar.

Although the federal government has not
declared alar to be harmful, until further
studies are done to show it is safe,
Mountain Orchards has stopped using the
chemical.

"I have a family of my own and I
understand the customers' concerns," said
Hobson, who said he hopes to gain back the
confidence of the market now that Mountain
Orchards, along with the majority of apple
orchards, stopped spraying alar last year.

As well, last Friday the Canadian
producer of alar, Uniroyal Chemicals
Limited announced that it was withdrawing
alar from sales in the Canadian market, and
that it had already done so in the U.S. on
June 2. The company said it would review
its decision in 1990 when the American
Environmental Protection Association had
finished its tests on alar.

Hobson did not think the fact that they no
longer use alar would hurt his crops that
much, but would rather condense the harvest
and picking into two weeks rather than
three.

Hobson said the ban on alar may cause
some farmers to grow a fewer number of
McIntosh apples, which would be
unfortunate since Eastern Ontario is known
world wide as the best producers of
McIntosh.

"Macs need hot days and cool nights and
we have the perfect climate for that," said
Hobson, who added that other apple
varieties, such as red delicious, do not fare
so well at such a northerly location.

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