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Sunshine saves growing season

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After a near-disastrous start, this year's field crops seem to be growing with the lush profusion typical of Cowichan Valley agricultural production.

In its June 12 edition, The News reported how several area farmers were facing difficulties as abnormally-wet weather caused seeds to rot in the fields and some soggy fields to lie unplanted or under water.

A fortunate break in the weather has turned the situation around. The recent spell of hot, dry weather has been ideal for hay producers, who have been mowing and bringing in the dried hay only slightly behind schedule.

For other farmers, the wet spring has meant lower yields of some crops, but no complete failures.

At Westholme's Russell Farms, Russell Stewart is busy in his produce fields, bringing in the last of a late strawberry crop. Although slightly late and not quite as abundant as in other years, this year's berries are succulent and ripe, while the raspberries seem bound for a bumper crop, he said.

Stewart said the rainy weather proved a setback but not too serious. "There was a two or three week setback," he said. "Some things did not come, some things will never recover."

His early potatoes had a much-reduced yield, but later varieties like White Rose are coming along nicely.

The promising crop picture continues at Cowichan Valley Produce, just south of Duncan.

"We're right smack in the middle of the raspberry season and things are look-

"We're washing and grading our potatoes here this year before we ship them to the marketing board, and its working out very well. The price we get is a little better and we've had

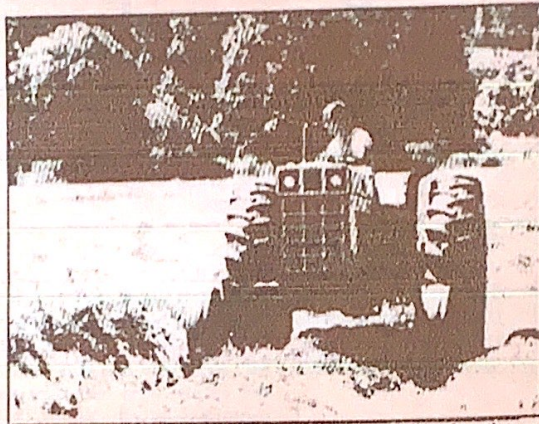
french-fried potatoes this year, and is doing well with the restaurant trade.

Other crops such as zucchini, pumpkins and carrots are all shaping up well, Langtry says.

Dave Scotthorne, manager of Duncan's Farm Labour Pool, says his office has been processing "quite a lot of casual work" in past weeks. He credits the farm community with doing more than its fair share to help create employment during a tough summer.

"We've had a very good supply of people using our office, both youngsters and older people," Scotthorne said. He has also made referrals for local people wanting to work in the Okanagan during fruit picking season and in the prairie provinces for grain farming.

Scotthorne predicts another small rush for workers at the end of July and in early August for the second cut of local hay.



MOWING HAY, David Quist works on his family's Westholme farm

ing very good. Prices are holding up well and we're shipping between 2,000 and 6,000 pounds every two days," Mike Langtry of the farm said Friday.

The farm has 20 acres in raspberries and is the biggest supplier for the fresh berry market on Vancouver Island. Langtry says there are as many as 200 pickers at work daily in the berry fields on the delta farm, located between the Cowichan and Koksilah Rivers.

Langtry terms their strawberry season "reasonably good."

Cowichan Valley Produce has had good success with its early popular crop, and the reds, whites and netted gems on the way are also promising.

up to 16 people working in that part of the operation this year," Langtry said.

Langtry says the farm is also producing its own cut