

# Freeways Fence in His Farms

Overhead is a network of power cables snapping with 220,000 volts of electricity. On the west is the Long Beach Freeway roaring with frantic internal combustion. The east boundary is formed by the broad, concrete-lined Los Angeles River.

Hardly the setting for a farm in the bucolic tradition.

Yet, on this strip of land only 300 feet wide and perhaps 500 yards long, is where farmer Louis F. DeMartini is making an heroic last stand against a space hungry city.

In fact, from this and two other thin strips of land scattered around the Compton and Long Beach area, totaling only about 122 acres, DeMartini is harvesting one crop or another 365 days out of the year.

He is able to do this by specializing in greens-collards, Texas mustard, turnip tops, and mustard—which are ready for market within 30 days of planting during the summer months. In winter it takes longer.

ALL MUST be hand-picked, washed, packaged and chilled before they are trucked to the downtown Los Angeles markets.

As DeMartini told the Council of California Growers:

"My customers depend upon me for garden fresh products, and by continuing to farm on the freeway, to speak, I can deliver greens to the stores within 30 minutes. If I had to move far out beyond the perimeter of the city I would lose this time advantage, plus the advantage of an ideal climate for growing greens. I guess I would just have to go out of business."

But it doesn't appear as if DeMartini will have to go out of business as long as the Southern California Edison Company maintains its power lines in their present location. For it is on the SCE's highline property that DeMartini and a couple of hundred other growers of vegetables, flowers and nursery stock have leases.

ZONING LAWS and power company regulations prohibit the use of this land for homes, stores, and shopping centers, so there is a good chance the land will continue to be used indefinitely by small farmers.

A power company spokesman said SCE is delighted with its farmer tenants.

"Their operations relieve us of the necessity of removing weeds or other combustibles," he said. "And then there is esthetic value of eye-pleasing green belts breaking up the monotony of concrete and brick."

He added a note of caution SCE has a waiting line of several hundred would-be farmers, so don't bother to apply for a lease.

DeMARTINI, prominent in Farm Bureau circles, started working on his father's vegetable farm near Vernon as a boy back in 1911. He delivered produce to the city's central markets in horse-drawn wagons.

"Those were the days," DeMartini says, "when our nearby farms not only supplied the city of Los Angeles but shipped many carloads to Midwest and Eastern markets as well."

Continuing a lifetime habit, quarters "farm" near Compton at 7 nearly every day of the week.

"Sometimes I take off Saturday, but not until I check to see that everything is going okay," he explains. "You see, when you're harvesting a crop every day of the year, you can't do much gallivanting."

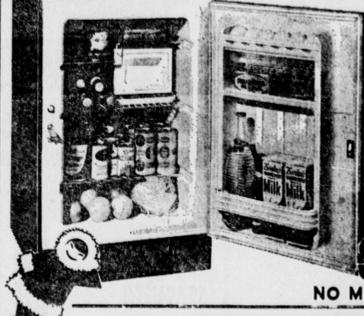
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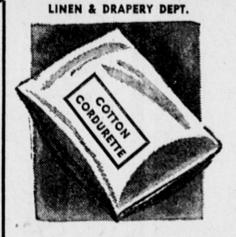


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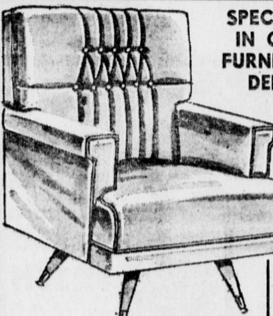
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