

Pioneer Memories of the Santa Ana Valley

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THE FRANCIS GRISET STORY

by

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Cover Photo

THE J.J. GRISET FAMILY

Maria Louise (Vola) and Jean Jacques Griset
and their sons, left to right:
William, Eugene, Stephen and Charles

THE FRANCIS GRISET STORY

PREFACE

This editor has known Francis Griset all her life. Her father, C. M. McClintock, was a good friend of Stephen Griset, the father of Francis. Both men were farmers and machinists and lived south of Santa Ana, McClintock at Fairview and Griset at Greenville.

In the McClintock Family Photo Book are several pictures of the deep plow which I remember. My father built his version of it. Francis remembers it as a four-foot version.

When Francis Griset spoke to "Our Heritage" Section on February 9, 1984, he promised to give us some of his family and farming history. After a lot of prodding, here it is!

My family was French on both sides. On my Mother's side the Raymonds came to this country in the fifteen hundreds. On the Griset side, we came from the Waldensian Protestant faith started by Peter Waldo in the twelfth century near Lyon, France. In the 1600's after the Edict of Nantes was revoked, the Protestants were ordered to go back to the Catholic faith or leave their possessions and country. Our folks left and went to the Italian Alps where there were other Protestants southwest of Turin, Italy.

The Grisets left Italy in 1879 for the United States with three sons, Charles, Eugene and David. David died after they arrived in Monett, Missouri. In Monett the last two children, William and Stephen, were born. My father, Stephen, was born July 26, 1885.

There were other Waldensians who had gone to Buenos Aires, Argentina and Valdese, Uruguay. At present in these two countries there are about 30,000 Waldensians. Two of the South American families had moved to Monett. They were the Plavans and the Planchons. All of these families came to Orange County about the same time and became very close friends. They were also members of the First Prebyterian Church of Santa Ana.

When the Grisets arrived in Orange County, they first settled in Westminister, where they started farming. They also worked on farms in Talbert area known as Gospel Swamp. Gospel Swamp received its name from the many religious groups which lived on this swampy area which was due to many flowing artesian springs, wells and peat bogs.

My father was thirteen and in Westminister grammar school. Later he attended Bolsa high school. He also went to Woodbury Business School in Los Angeles for a few months. During high school, he worked in celery fields planting and other types of land tillage. After business college, he worked as secretary at the celery packing shed at Schmeltzer. Before the blight wiped out the celery crop, Smeltzer was the largest shipping point in the United States. This warehouse then changed to the Smeltzer Lima Bean Warehouse Association. I was on the board of directors for many years and was secretary of the board when we closed it. I signed all the final papers in the same warehouse where my Dad had been secretary when he was young.

About 1898 or '99 Gospel Swamp had two South Methodist churches -- one, the Old Newport, now Greenville, the other, Bolsa, southwest of Santa Ana. Our family had gone to the

Presbyterian Church at Westminster when they first arrived in California. My Uncle Eugene was going over to Westminster one Sunday, west on Talbert Road, up on the Huntington Beach mesa. At the first house, Charley Ward was in the front yard working. Eugene yelled at him and said, "We should build a church in Talbert." He said, "You are talking to the wrong person. You should be talking to my wife." So Eugene went to see her. She said, "That's a good idea and Charley will lead the singing." By 1900 the church was built and Talbert was added to make three Southern Methodist Churches in the area. The preacher was R.R. Raymond in 1900 and '01 serving the three churches.

That is how my father met Mary Raymond. She was the preacher's oldest daughter. In 1907, on the 24th of October, she was married to Stephen Grisct by Rev. C. Raymond Gray, my grandfather's cousin, witnessed by The Rev. R.R. Raymond and Eugene Grisct.

On September 8, 1908 Mary L. Grisct was born; on March 20, 1910 R. Raymond Grisct was born; and on July 14, 1911 Francis Eugene Grisct was born. I never knew my mother as she died when I was nine months old as a result of surgery.

After the funeral our Dad moved all three of us in with his mother and Eugene. Eugene was not married. The house was on the corner of Bristol and Talbert Road, south of Santa Ana. This is the only place I knew as home until I was married in 1935.

The house did not have electricity. Kerosene lamps were used until power lines came past the house. We had outside toilets -- one two-holer we called the "Ladies" and another farther out by the barn, more crude, was for the "Men." There was a small well about one hundred feet west of the house. This artesian well was piped to the kitchen. When you turned on the faucet the well supplied the pressure.

By the time I was in school our Dad bought a used 1911 Model-T Ford touring car. So we would go to church in Santa Ana where our church is today. My brother and I would work the yard and in the fields. We would never let the men get ahead of us while working in the fields.

In 1924 our Dad married Belle McDermott who was my sixth teacher.

When I was in high school our Dad with Bill Armstrong and Ray McClintock bought a Harris Pickup Thresher. That was much easier than the old stationary system. I began running that about 1929 or '30. We finally bought their

interest in the thresher as we were raising more lima beans. We used it for the next eight years as we got a lease on the Santa Margarita Ranch and there was lots of threshing to do.

We found farming easier in the early 30's as we improved the modern changes. It was then we went to the Bastenchury Ranch sale. They had gone broke early in the depression and we bought their shop equipment. This included a trip hammer, forge with many tongs to handle hot steel, bolt racks with all the bolts in them, steel racks with lots of steel in them, a big grindstone and anvil and a Webber Trailer. On the Santa Margarita Ranch lease there was an old abandoned western gas engine. I cleaned this up to run the shop power equipment. What a shop!!

To get away from farmwork a little, in January, 1934, my best friend, Lambert McPaddin and his girlfriend, Beryl Willits, introduced me to Betty Drysdale. I had known Beryl's brother, Neil Willits and Betty's brother, Bob Drysdale, in school. This was a blind date and we went down to our private beach at Las Flores on our ranch. That beach was so private that if we were working down there in the summer, we would take off our sweaty clothes and skinny dip before going back to the cookhouse for dinner. The cookhouse we operated for ourselves and the men. On our date we didn't skinny dip, but got acquainted and had a good time. We kept on dating after that until June 20, 1935 when we were married in the First Congregational Church of Santa Ana by Rev. Perry Schrock. This started a landslide in our family because in August my sister got married and at Christmas my brother was also married.

We remodeled the five-room bunkhouse for a honeymoon cottage. This included lining the inside walls with tar paper and wall board, wiring for electricity, removing two partitions, building a septic tank and installing an inside bathroom and butane water heater. It had to be furnished with a \$5 Gaffler and Sattler kitchen stove from the Southern California Gas Co. and a butane heater for heating the house. We bought a used round dining table with eight chairs, a buffet and a serving table, all used from Bekins Van and Storage for \$28. A twin bed set with dressing table and a chest of drawers was bought, used, from Barker Bros. bargain basement in Los Angeles for \$25. The bathroom toilet, basin and tub came from Whiting Mead Lumber Co.'s used department for about \$35 for all. Then came our luxury kitchen. I was in Whitson Lumber yard getting some supplies. On the way out I stopped to look at the beautiful kitchen cabinet on display by the door. The clerk called and said "I'll make you a good price on that, we want to put in a paint display in its place." That turned out to be a big one - \$100 for 16 lineal feet of top and bottom cabinet storage.

Everything was included -- flour and sugar bins, a white enamel work area, etched glass windows on the upper cupboard doors. This was in 2 and 4 foot widths so they could be arranged well. In the living room we put an 8'x4' plate glass window from Whiting Mead's used lumber yard for an excellent view of the ocean and the farm valley. All in all it cost \$850 to convert an old bunkhouse into a most comfortable wedding home.

Well, back to farming. The same year we got married we were given a chance of a lifetime. The Holly Sugar Co., who we were growing sugar beets for, gave us first chance to buy some of their land. We could have bought the piece next to Heil's Dairy (now just east of the Performing Arts Center) for \$250 an acre, but this was very poor land and we finally bought the piece between Flower St. ditch and our Dad's ranch on the west -- 125 acres from the Pacific Electric Railroad (now S.P.) on the north and almost to Sunflower on the south for \$500 an acre.

As time goes on, we were farming more land and raising more beets and beans and some other crops such as peas, spinach, tomatoes and alfalfa to pay for the land.

On August 7, 1937 our first child, a son, George Stephen, was born. This was a great occasion for us. He was a fine little boy and we were overjoyed with his arrival. At this time, since we needed more car room, we bought our first new car -- a 1937 Ford sedan.

In 1938 we had only a used Mack Truck that pulled the Webber Trailer and a 1934 1 1/2 ton Ford Truck. So we added one Ford and one Dodge and 2 old trucks from a wrecking yard. We paid \$30 each for the used trucks and made Semis out of them for the two new trucks.

This gave us a 12 ton capacity per truck. None of these old trucks had fancy brakes. You watched the road a long way ahead with big loads, for safety. All through the years we did not have one truck wreck on the road even with poor brakes and three drivers.

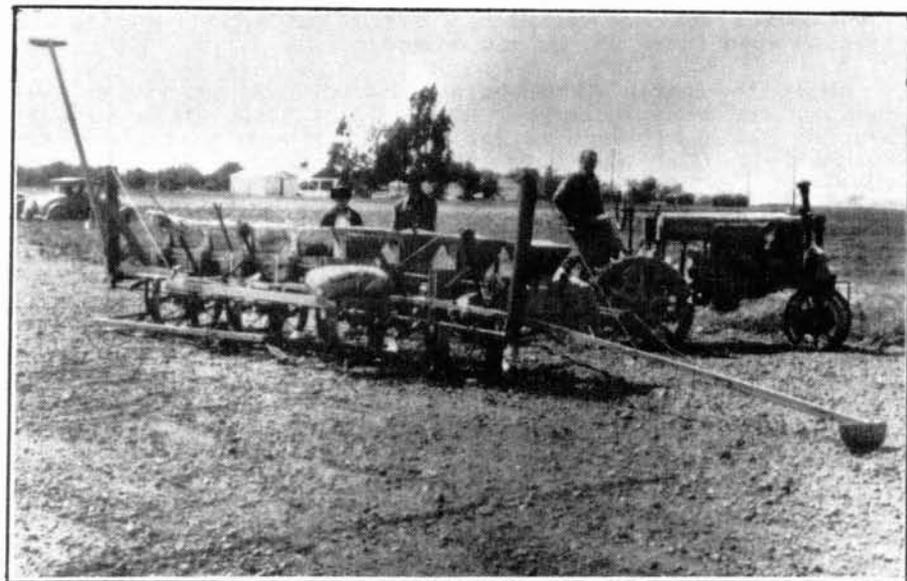
The United States Department of Agriculture was doing test plots on bean varieties and they put a small thresher on the back of a Ford Model-T chassis. This turned out to be the idea for a self-propelled bean thresher.

In 1938 I took on the project of building the first self-propelled thresher. When completed it took about 7 men to do the job of 30 men and 36 head of horses.

In January 1938 we went to Ventura County and found that the Pettit Ranch had an old stationary separator that we



GRISSET FAMILY GROUP
Maria Louise "DeeDee" Grisette with sons, grandsons and great grandson: Lorin; his father, Eugene; Stephen; his son, Ray with his son, John; Charles; Francis, son of Stephen, with his son, George Grisette.



THE FIRST FARMALL TRACTOR TO COME TO ORANGE COUNTY
Notice the steel wheels, (rubber later); and the double set of lima bean planters (the tractor replaced four horses).

bought. It was very cheap as it had been idle for many years. We hauled it to the ranch at Las Flores and then began the job of self-propelling it and building a pickup system. We used a Mack Truck frame and axles and modified all parts for the job. We had a Harris Pickup Thresher for many years so I spent all spring designing and building all the original self-propelled, mechanical innovations needed for the task ahead. We found a Stewart Truck and Trailer. The truck had an International motor which was ideal for the belt-drive power for the separator. For the self-drive power we used a Ford V-8 motor. In six months it was ready for its first year harvest and did the work of 40 men with about 7 men. Later we made a 30 foot semi-trailer out of the Stewart Truck frame for the Mack Truck with a capacity of 22-plus ton of beets or beans.

The very next year came Mary Frances, our 2nd child. born December 23, 1939. That all went well except, maybe, a little less sleep. Mary was supposed to arrive on New Year's Day, but decided to come early after a a country road ride Betty and I took, looking for turkeys. So Christmas was spent in Oceanside Hospital.

In the meantime bugs and insects were a problem so in the mid-30's I built a duster on a Model-A Ford chassis. This was a new method for us to control insects. We used sulfur and a few new insecticides that had been developed. The duster would cover about 100 to 150 acres in the early morning when there was no air movement.

About the early 40's the war effort was on and we were looking for men to harvest the spinach, but there were no men. My Dad and I went as far as Loss Alamitos on a man-hunt but didn't find any. On the way back home we went by implement dealers looking for a trail power mower. I finally found one I liked -- a Canadian built power takeoff hay mower, with cast iron finned wheels that would keep it on the rows of spinach under side pressure. In less than a week we were cutting spinach with 10 men. It had taken about 60 men to do the same job. The next year we had time, so I simplified the system with much easier output.

This accomplishment came, just as the Marines took over one half of the Santa Marguerita Ranch, because of the war, to make Camp Pendelton, This ended our farming there. We had already acquired a 1/2 section from the Bixby Land Co. that Spring so we started farming in the Long Beach area, west of Los Alamitos. The Irvine Company bought a piece of land from the Bixby land Co. also and wanted us to farm it so we added 225 acres. At that time the Susan Bixby Bryant land was just below ours and also across the San Gabriel River from us. Her son, Ernest, was running it and was losing



FIRST SPINACH CUTTER ON JUNE 1, 1942
A T.A.- 40 International Tractor (butane fuel) and Francis
Notice the Griset homestead and barns in background



IMPROVED SPINACH CUTTER, 1943
Revised with a cross shute, a V Center Cutter and Assembly
Line System. Francis Griset with the pitchfork

a tenant on 900 acres, from the river to Los Alamitos Blvd. So we were able to lease that piece. This gave us a nice block of land in one area.

The Irvine piece had 80 acres of waste land caused by floods earlier, so Irvine rented Post Brothers 6-foot plow and furnished two of their D-8 Catapillars and we added two more tractors, making four tractors to pull the plow. This made good land out of the 80 acres. We also plowed many acres on our side of the river. We also plowed more of the land with 3-foot and 4-foot plows we owned. The 3-foot plow was the original one-way 3-foot plow built by Atlas Machine with some of Harry Plushy's patents.

Since we had to leave the Santa Margarita Ranch and one couldn't build during the war we fixed up an old two-story house on our Dad's dairy ranch at Santa Ana Gardens on Fairview Road (now Greenville St. where Valley High School is located).

In December, 1944, we decided to dissolve Stephen Griset and Sons. My brother and I and our wives started "Griset Brothers," an unwritten partnership. Ray and I had always worked well together. He built a home in Long Beach and I settled in Santa Ana. He supervised the tractors, cultivators and most of the field work. I would do the buying, repairing and building new equipment as needed. I also handled the banking and accounting as the bank was near my home.

James Robert Griset, our third child, was born October 9, 1945 while we were living at the dairy ranch. At the time of Jim's arrival, George was eight and Mary was five. George and Mary attended Diamond School. We lived in that house until 1946.

During that time we raised a lot of alfalfa so we built a self-propelled mower using a Ford Truck chassis. I put light springs on it so it would float over bumps in the field with a mower head mounted under it and the sickle bar to the right. We could cut hay at about 10 miles an hour.

We kept increasing our acreage of spinach and lima beans for freezing which opened up a new challenge for efficiency. In the spring of 1946, after the war, the Vanell Co. hauled in 6 shiploads of military surplus from Guam. Three of the ships dumped their loads on the Long Beach Harbor; the other three went to Seattle, Washington. We began buying parts for repairs, including a big International Diesel TD 18, like new for half-price. We decided to build a new type of viner system and make it another self-propelled system of four machines. The 4 viners and the new dry bean thresher

all used many of the same kind of parts from Guam.

I took on a big task the spring of 1946. With the task of building five machines I started with the green Lima bean viner first because they came first in the harvest season. With the new self-propelled system we eliminated all the vine hauling and hand labor feeding the viners. We didn't have to haul the straw back to the field. The cost of operations was lowered by 80% and changed the heavy man labor to a driver and one man watching the machine for quality of output.

In the August 9, 1948 edition of the Los Angeles Times there appeared this headline, "Machines Perfected by Farmers to Harvest Green Lima Bean Crop," (for freezing). It showed a photo of two portable (self-propelled) Lima bean viners. The photo caption read, "Robot Pickers Roll Through Fields of Green Gold." In the article it mentioned, "Objective of the process is the delivery of the tender shelled beans in neat packages to stores throughout country for sale to housewives."

The new dry bean thresher had a big change in the self-propelled part of the design. I had learned a lot since 1938. The materials from war surplus were a great advantage both in cost and motors and gearing. The big change had to be so we bought a carryall from surplus very cheap. It had 4 big tires. I used the tires, wheels and bearings for the thresher to adequately carry the extra 8 1/2 tons of beans on top of the thresher. We had two 4-foot sprockets made for the drive wheels and instead of using the International axles with wheels on them, I put a 12-inch sprocket in place of wheels and tires. This gave it a 4 to 1 ratio, 1 1/2 inch-pitch chain-drive to the wheels for an excellent long-life system. For power we used two International 361 motors, one for the self-drive and the other for the belt-driven thresher power. There were many more innovations.

The final trip for the bean thresher was to Gustine on Highway I-5 from Rancho Santa Fe after finishing the last crop before we sold the ranch in the fall of 1982. It is now at home on a ranch we own in Gustine where our son, George, farms; also living there are his son, Steve, and our two great grandsons.

While all this work was going on Betty and I were talking about a new home. After she saw a plan for a one bedroom, rear living and dining room house in Sunset Magazine, we thought we would like that type. We started a 4 bedroom plan using that idea. Also we were looking for a place to build our home. A realtor found two pieces, a 20 acre piece

on the Santiago Creek, northside and west of Flower for \$29,00. The other piece was 7 lots between Santiago St. and Oakmont, north of Santa Clara for \$7,200. We decided we didn't want to live on the creek so we bought the 7 lots.

Now with the lots we'll get our Sunset Magazine house plan together. I took a sheet of paper and a yardstick and made a sample of rooms for a three bedroom and a den, living room, dining room, kitchen, breakfast room, 2 1/2 bathrooms and a back porch with a breezeway and garage on the other side and a laundry room at the back of the garage. This was an "all under one roof" plan. After three plan revisions, we had it scaled for the city plan needed for construction use. We planned the inside details as needed.

Before going further with the house plan, I should mention that we decided to use two lots on Oakmont and took 25 feet off the Santiago Street lots and added this to the back of our lots; this gave us 100 feet by 175 feet. This gave us a big inside yard for our patio and lawn and shrubs. Behind was our other yard with fruit trees, swings, acting bars, a tether ball and basketball court for the children.

The house was completed in 1946 except for the kitchen, because we couldn't get a good dishwasher and some otherbuilt-in items until after the war. The one innovation in the kitchen was the rotary corner cupboard I made from a Model-T Fordfront wheel-hub bolted to the floor. We finally finished the self-designed house with every modern convenience and are very happy with it to this day.

The farming mechanical innovations we built are being made now by the industry. Agriculture is being forced out of Orange and Los Angeles Counties by the population explosion. Our Long Beach ranch which was condemned in 1952 allowed us to reinvest into 1,000 acres at Rancho Santa Fe and also in Imperial Valley. My brother, Ray, established a home at Rancho Santa Fe.

We made a modern, efficient ranch out of the farmland at Rancho Santa Fe farming about 600 acres, the balance was coastal hills. We farmed this land to lima beans for the next thirty years. In 1982 we exchanged the balance of Rancho Santa Fe into property at Gustine.

In the 60's we started exchanging portions of the Rancho Santa Fe for land in Imperial Valley Grace Ranch. We finally owned 2 1/2 sections on this Ranch. Today we farm 1 1/2 sections since the remaining section was condemned by the Imperial Irrigation District in 1987.



ORIGINAL SELF-PROPELLED BEAN THRESHER, 1938
at the Francis Grisct Home-Ranch in Rancho Santa Margarita
Betty and son, George and daughter, Mary Grisct



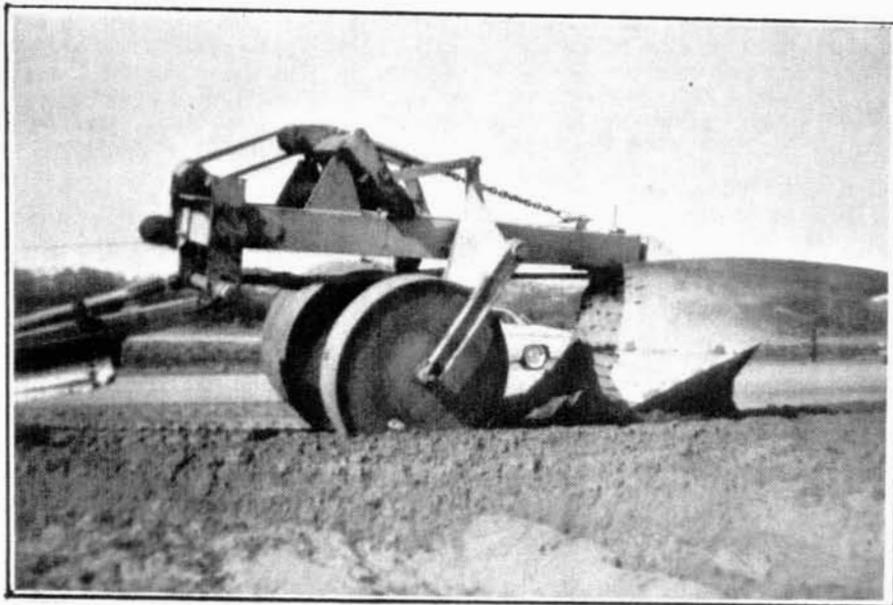
GRISCT BEAN THRESHER
Betty Grisct in the beanfield the last day of threshing in
1982 at Rancho Santa Fe

THE FRANCIS GRISET FAMILY

Francis Griset married Elizabeth, daughter of George and Stella (Goodhead) Drysdale, June 20, 1935. Elizabeth had a brother, Robert Drysdale.

Francis and Elizabeth "Betty" Griset have three children: George, Mary and James. George married Barbara McIntosh. Their son, Stephen, married Pauline Cerutti in 1986; their sons are Zachary Francis and Benjamin George Griset. George and Barbara's daughter, Victoria, married Kevin Hanson in 1989. George and Barbara divorced and he married Donna Luster in 1991.

Mary Frances Griset married James C. Holland in 1968. Her brother, James Griset, married Sue Boydston in 1971. They are divorced.



THE DEEP PLOW
THE SIX-FOOTER

Deep plowing was a new innovation in the thirties. Prior to this period, all plowing was 6" to 12" deep.

I had grown up on the corner of Bristol and Talbert Road. West of our house about 1/4 mile and across the P.E. Railroad tracks was the back of the Frank Plavan ranch. His son, Paul, was farming on his Dad's ranch and made a four-gang plow about twice the size of the standard manufactured plows. Paul had Santa Ana Iron Works cast large beams so they could plow about two-feet deep instead of twelve inches. This gave him the idea of a one-gang, three-foot plow to plow the river flooded land they farmed. That started deep plowing demands. Paul didn't want to build plows commercially so Post Bros. decided to go into the manufacturing business as they were doing farmwork with Caterpillar tractors. They built two-foot, three-foot and four-foot plows to reclaim flooded river land. One six-foot plow was built in the late thirties.

In the thirties, we started farming on leased land of the Santa Marguerita Ranch. We bought an inexpensive, used three-foot plow from Ed Farnsworth. This land required deep plowing to break up the flooded strata.

Later, we bought land from the Bixby Land Company in Long Beach which also required the deep plowing to make the soil useable.

The six-foot plow created much interest and notoriety. The San Diego Sun published an article and pictures as did several other newspapers and agricultural publications. Life Magazine ran a two-page spread on April 25, 1955 entitled, "Wow of a Plow." A picture and subtitle explained, "Standing Neckdeep in Furrow, Farmer Francis Griset Demonstrates the 6-Footer Cut His Plow Makes."

The "Life" article said, "Winter floods often deposit yard deep layers of useless sand atop the fertile coastal field of Southern California. To bury this useless cover and turn up the rich buried soil of their 1,000-acre farm at Rancho Santa Fe, south of Los Angeles, bean growers Francis and Ray Griset commissioned the world's biggest plow. With steel wheels six feet high, the plow weighs ten tons and has a mold-board and point almost seven feet long. It cuts nearly six feet deep. Pulling the plow takes four tractors which burn 350 gallons of fuel (butane) each day. This year the Grisets will deep-plow 230 acres and bear the expense gladly. They find that turns over their land increase the yield of lima beans by as much as 300%"