

# CLASHES BETWEEN organic, chemical methods on McLain farm

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The scene south of Eckelson Tuesday morning was anything but friendly when young Harley McLain and his father, the Rev. Bernard McLain, set out to prevent H.J. ("Junior") Didier from following his customary farming procedure on the land he rents from the McLain family.

Convinced that the chemical-based farming techniques used by most American farmers not only mine the soil but poison the foods thus produced, Rev. McLain had mailed Didier a letter, dated April 24, stating his "request that the McLain land be farmed in an organic method starting this spring (because) I have been awakened to the facts about the devastating effect on the environment that chemical farming techniques cause." McLain is pastor of Faith United Church of Winthrop, Minn.

So when Didier's tractors arrived around 7 a.m. Tuesday, Rev. McLain and his son intervened in an effort to enforce the request. For two hours, Harley prevented the machines from moving onto the farmland by standing directly in front of Didier's tractor. Finally, Didier, whom Harley described as "mad as a hornet" by that time, called the Barnes County Sheriff's Office.

This is all according to the McLains. When contacted by the Times-Record,

Didier acknowledged the occurrence of the incident Tuesday morning, but declined to make any comment for publication.

Barnes County Deputy Sheriff Ken Zander reported that when he arrived at the McLain farm, in response to Didier's call, he instructed Harley to "discontinue disrupting Didier's farming" and to seek legal assistance if he had any further complaints. Although Harley lives on a portion of the McLain farm, he is not legal owner. The estate is jointly owned by Rev. McLain; his brother, Harley L., of Hatton, who is the administrator; and his sister, Verla Ukestad, of Mayville. Rev. McLain noted that Didier has rented the acreage for about 10 years; for a number of years prior to that, Junior Didier's brother, Francis, had rented it—all by verbal agreement.

Zander said that Didier promised Tuesday morning not to apply anhydrous ammonia fertilizer to the McLain land, and said he would not apply chemical herbicides and pesticides unless "he had to use them."

For two years, young Harley has rented 20 of the 220 McLain acres for producing organically-grown vegetables. Early in April he entered into a written agreement with his father whereby Harley would become caretaker of the entire acreage for five years, during which time he would conduct a systematic program "to restore the soil to a healthy, natural fertile condition" without the aid of chemicals.

To begin naturally restoring nitrogen to the soil as a first step in the five-year program, Harley seeded clover about two weeks ago on the 200 acres that Didier ultimately re-cultivated Tuesday. But, since neither his uncle nor his aunt had joined his father in signing the caretaker contract, Harley admits he had "no legal ground to stand on...I was acting as the laws of nature dictate to man." Harley had also posted all the McLain land with "No Toxic Sprays" signs, which the Didiers removed when they began their spring

tilling following the confrontation.

The five-year farming program Harley seeks to implement calls for: the absence of all toxic sprays and fertilizers; a crop-rotation program; shallow tillage; and the application of manure, humus, trace elements and microorganisms. He claims that at present, there is "no life in the soil" on the McLain farm. There are, he said, no earthworms, which in nature's balance would act like "natural fertilizer factories," thus precluding the need for artificial applications. In addition, he claims, there is a "drastically low level of humus" and erosion is washing away the topsoil. The land, he asserts, "is sick and has been devastated by...ignorant farming techniques."

Harley's proposed five-year program would begin with two years of "grace" when clover would be seeded and shredded as a mulch to increase the humus level and thus control the erosion problem. After three years without chemical contamination, Harley said, the land will be eligible to produce certified organic grain.

Rev. McLain, who said he has visited with other farmers who have succeeded with the organic program, said in his letter to Didier: "Artificial fertilizers such as anhydrous ammonia actually destroy soil life, killing earthworms and microorganisms...and (making) the land dependent on an outside source of nitrogen instead of the natural processes. Also...nitrates pollute the water that we drink..."

Pastor McLain, describing the issue of organic-versus-chemical farming as a "moral crisis," said he has decided "to say 'no poisons or petro-chemical fertilizers, herbicides, fungicides or pesticides' because scientific studies show that cancer is caused by chemical build-ups or deposits in the body tissues. It is sad and tragic that indiscriminate and widespread use of these accepted farming practices is subtly poisoning our nation."

Didier "thinks we have to feed the world," Harley commented; "But why poison the world while feeding it?"



Rev. Bernard McLain and his son, Harley, "stand firm" by their sign forbidding the use of chemical sprays on the McLain estate south of Eckelson. Owned by Rev. McLain in conjunction with his brother and sister, the land is currently being rented by H.J. "Junior" Didier, whose

tractor can be seen in the background. Barnes County Sheriff's officials were called to the farm Tuesday morning when the McLains' plans for instituting organic-farming methods clashed with Didier's intentions to use more conventional techniques.

standing firm

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