



Bonnie Knittle, Greulach's daughter, soaks up some sunshine on her father's green gravel lawn.

IT'S ALL GRAVEL AND PAINTED GREEN

This Lawn Never Needs Mowing

By Cathie Shaffer

Ralph Greulach, of Van Wert, Ohio, only works in his front yard when it absolutely needs it — every five years or so.

That's because there's not a bit of grass there.

It's all gravel . . . painted green with a huge sloping initial "G" in the center.

"When we built the house in 1971, I decided not to have a front lawn," says Ralph, who owns a propane gas supply company near his home.

"I'm always busy spraying anhydrous in the spring, so I just don't have time to take care of a lawn. I don't have time for anything but work."

Ralph's sure his neighbors were a bit apprehensive about the kind of people moving in next door when he hauled in 70 tons of gravel.

And they had to be even more skeptical when he started painting all those little pieces of gravel green.

"The emblem in the middle is stone," he explains. "But the rest is all gravel. I think if I were to do it over, I'd use stone for all of it, though,

gravel just doesn't hold well on a slope. We paint the gravel every five years with a garden sprayer and water-based paint, but it doesn't hold the paint too well. "It's a little porous and the paint flakes off. Stones would hold paint a lot better."

Ralph lives on the south edge of Van Wert, right on U.S. 127. Since he lives on such a major thoroughfare, he hears lots of comments about his unique yard.

"I don't have a CB, but my friends tell me what they hear," he says. "Lots of truckers talk about it, since it's something different."

Although Ralph can justify his gravel yard as very practical, he admits there's still another reason he chose not to use sod when he built the house.

"I hate to mow lawn," he confesses. "I was raised on a farm and we had a big lawn . . . that I had to mow with a push mower.

"I hated it then, so I don't want to do any more of it than I have to!"

(Reprinted with permission from Farmland News.)

FFA's Bring Tractors To School On Ag Day

FFA students at Bowling Green High School in Ohio make their mark on Ag Day by lining up more than one million dollars of equipment outside their high school.

The line-up this year included 22 tractors ranging in size from a Deere 4650 to an Allis Chalmers "B", and 11 pickups. Mike Shertzer, co-advisor to the group, told FARM SHOW that "the event demonstrates to the school and community the importance and sophistication of modern agriculture."

Besides the equipment line-up, the

FFA's also put together a report, announced over the school's P.A. system, explaining the equipment investment and how it relates to the local community.

Bowling Green FFA students have been conducting the farm equipment display off and on for the past six years. As an incentive to get students to drive their tractors and trucks to school, awards are given to both the oldest and cleanest tractors and trucks. The oldest tractor this year was a 1946 Oliver 66.

FFA'ERS DOING BOOMING BUSINESS WITH UNUSUAL "LIVESTOCK"

This Feedlot's Full Of Alligators

When Shane Brooks goes out to feed his livestock, he makes sure to watch his step. Shane and his brother Wayne daily feed over 4,000 tail-swinging, jaw-snapping alligators and crocodiles on a family-operated farm near Christmas, Florida.

Shane's father, Hermon Brooks, started the Gator Jungle farm almost 20 years ago. Today it serves a dual purpose as a tourist attraction where visitors can see the reptiles in their natural setting; and as a producing farm which grows alligators for meat and hides.

Both Shane, 19, and Wayne, 18, have used their work experience on the farm as FFA Supervised Occupational Experience programs.

According to Shane, alligators grow better in warm, sunny weather. Under normal Florida conditions, a gator will grow to market size (six to seven ft.) in three to four years. "We plan to convert some pens into hot houses," says Shane, "which will speed their growth quite a bit. We'll keep the water temperature in the middle 80s and they'll eat all the time — and grow twice as fast."

All alligators are fed ground or whole chickens, plus a variety of fish with vitamins every other day. In all, the gators eat over 4,000 lbs. of feed each day. As long as the gators are fed, they remain even-tempered, says Shane. In warm weather, the gators show a 2 to 3% growth rate per day. The "display" animals (those used in the Gator Jungle park) grow as long as 14 ft.

Once the alligators for production reach the right size, the Brooks skin each animal themselves in their own processing plant. Skinning valuable alligator hide requires a skillful touch. "If you accidentally cut a hole in the hide pattern, they knock 25% off the price," says Shane. Gator hide is sold by the belly inch, bringing about \$150 to \$200 per hide. Every inch of the hide is used to make purses, belts, watchbands or briefcases.

The Brooks get another \$8 to \$10 per pound for meat, generating \$150 to \$200 per carcass. Popularity of alligator meat is rapidly growing, especially in Florida. "They're just now starting to sell it in restaurants around here," says Shane. "Our family eats it regularly."

Both boys have also worked with the Florida fish and game commission to collect eggs from wild gator nests. These eggs will be sold to farmers who want to start raising gators. These trips have provided the boys with some interesting adventures. "Collecting eggs from a nest that is protected by an eight-foot female alligator is not easy," understates Shane. "They'll come after you. Sometimes we have to throw a rope



The Brooks "feedlot" is filled with 4,000 alligators and crocodiles.

around their neck and tie 'em to a tree."

Gators have other unusual qualities. They can spend up to eight hours completely underwater, their jaw pressure is enough to break a shell around a turtle; and a sudden swing of the tail will knock you senseless. Shane was bitten in the foot once, but he says it's just one of the risks of the business. "There's a mean one in every tank," he explains.

The gators that wander free on the waters and beaches of Gator Jungle seem more sedate. The 20-acre park was completely landscaped by the Brooks family, and is surrounded by a six-foot chain link fence. It also features raccoons, otters, deer and panthers.

The Brooks spend little in advertising, yet attract 20,000-25,000 tourists to the park each year. Both brothers enjoy showing off the gators as much as tourists like seeing them. "Most people say they've never seen so many alligators in all their lives," says Wayne.

A good reputation for quality breeding stock has helped the Brooks expand into the alligator breeding business. They've had several offers to sell brood stock and have worked with university officials towards developing artificial insemination techniques. That, and an expanding market for alligator meat, leads Shane to believe the future looks good.

"People want us to produce more and more," he says. "It's getting better every day."

That's great, Shane. Just watch your step.

(Reprinted with permission from National Future Farmer magazine.)