

# A Growing Business: Exotic Herbs, Vegeta

By STAN HOUGH

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**BERRYVILLE** — When's the last time you ate chicken garnished with an edible violet?

For Charlie Coiner—owner of the Rock Garden Herb Farm on U.S. 340 in the northern Clarke County community of Gaylord—that time has arrived.

With a sister farm in Costa Rica and the 25 acres he cultivates at the Rock Garden, Coiner has begun to carve a niche in the food business with his unique style of organically growing and marketing 104 unusual and special herbs, vegetables, and edible flowers.

"We have customers in New York, Philadelphia, Chicago, Detroit, Miami, New Orleans—even in Los Angeles," Coiner said. He also has one special customer that he delivers to on a weekly basis—the White House.

Because of cholesterol-conscious consumers and their inclination toward healthier diets in recent years, Coiner

feels the market is ripe for the type and quality of produce he grows.

"Organic food is not such a far-fetched idea any more. A lot of people have tried organic farming and failed because it was too early. I'm banking on the probability that John Q. Public is ready."

Coiner began organic farming 12 years ago on the Shenandoah River bottom in Jefferson County, W.Va.

He said he would still be there if the events of Nov. 4, 1985, hadn't occurred.

On that day, his entire operation was wiped out when the river flooded in the wake of Hurricane Juan.

"I lost everything—equipment, greenhouses, irrigation systems, not to mention my plants," Coiner said. And he had no insurance to cover his losses.

After securing the necessary loans to begin again at the Rock Garden three years ago, Coiner

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Star Photos by Wendy Gavin Gregg

The greenhouse includes unusual herbs such as the bonsai rosemary plant in the foreground.



Charlie Coiner: "Somewhere in that blind idealistic youth, I decided to grow food."