



The Hirst's modern brick home sits on a wooded hillside.

## "BITTER HARVEST" SWEEPSTAKES

# Plan To Raffle Off Farm Is Pure Poetry

By Fred Mares

UNIONVILLE, Mo.—Hazel and Raymond Hirst, nicknamed Bud, call it the Bitter Harvest Great Farm Sweepstakes. And the prize they're offering is a 476-acre slice of rural American good life they couldn't sustain: their farm.

The rules are simple enough. If, the financially strapped Hirsts say, they can sell 50,000 copies of Bitter Harvest, a collection of 14 poems by Mrs. Hirst, one of the buyers could win the farm.

And to comply with "no-purchase necessary" lottery rules, even those who don't buy the illustrated booklet will be able to compete simply by sending the couple a stamped, self-addressed envelope.

The plan by the Hirsts, who say they're about \$200,000 in debt, has drawn national attention and skepticism. But Missouri Assistant Attorney General Bill Van Hook says it's "perfectly legal — and a nifty idea."

The raffle, says Tam Ormiston, Iowa assistant attorney general, is "a perfect mirror of American agriculture. It's high-risk and chancy — like the situation that exists right now down on the farm."

But if, the Hirsts add, they can't raise enough to pay off their debt, the sweepstakes will be canceled and the book-purchase money refunded. "We'll either sit and wait for foreclosure or bankruptcy," Mrs. Hirst says. "Maybe we'll think of something else — I don't know."

They started making their offer public in July. Right now, they're 48,000 book sales short.

Still, there's little question they're offering an abundant prize: a modern, one-story, three-bedroom home valued at \$100,000; a private lake stocked with bass and catfish, rolling hills near the Iowa border that are home to wild deer and turkeys.

Total value of the package: \$500,000 — the amount the Hirsts hope to raise at \$8 a book plus \$2 for postage and handling.

For 20 years, the Hirsts owned and

operated a motel and tavern in Decatur, Ill., at one point employing 14 persons.

"Then I just said, 'Hazel, why don't we publish your poems you keep writing?' We thought, 'Why don't we give the farm away and let somebody else fulfill a dream?' We weren't going to sit back and let somebody take our farm away."

"It was a good business, but we just got burned out," said the 53-year-old Mr. Hirst, whose father and uncles had farming experience. "We wanted to just move out into the hills somewhere and get away from it all."

The couple looked in southern Illinois and Indiana before a friend mentioned the property near Unionville, about 180 miles northeast of Kansas City.

In 1972, they packed their gold Cadillac and moved, intending to make their profit by raising cattle and hogs and by growing corn and soy-

*Maybe soon the world will see  
What great harm has been done,  
They'll know this nation can't survive  
Without the family farm.*

—From "Good-Bye Old Farm," by Hazel Hirst.

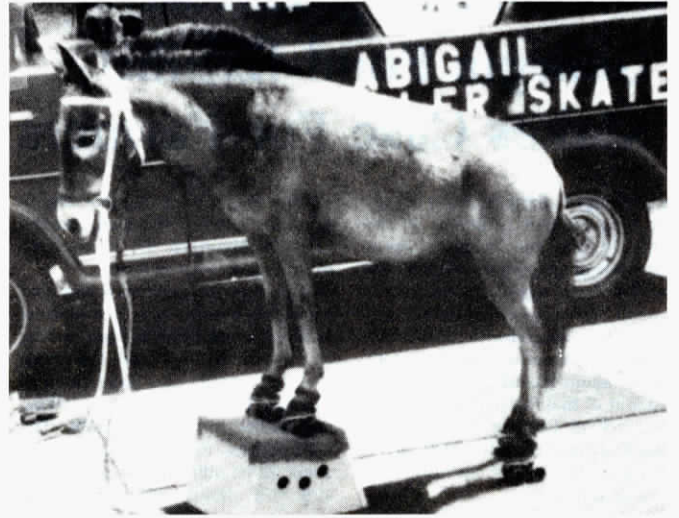
beans. They paid \$100 an acre for the land, cleared some timber and built their brick home.

"I used to think that I didn't have enough experience — that it's me," Mr. Hirst says. "But when I went to the sale barns and got the same price for corn as the rest, I knew I wasn't alone."

It just wasn't a lack of skill, he maintains. "You know it doesn't mean a damn thing if a sow lays out 10 pigs or two pigs — you lose money on every one of them."

By last January, the couple had a second mortgage from the Farmers Home Administration. To make ends meet, Mrs. Hirst says, they took "anything and everything" as second jobs.

She tried selling recipes to mail-order catalogs, sold food at area farm



All it took was patience, popcorn and candy to train Abigail to skate.

# The World's First Roller Skating Mule

It's tough enough teaching anyone to roller skate, but how'd you like to have Abigail, a 5-year-old mule, for a student?

"She caught on fast," says Jim Bails, Junction City, Oreg., who, so far as he knows, is the owner-trainer of the world's first roller skating mule.

"I've wanted to teach an animal to roller skate ever since I was 13 and heard about a colt someone had trained to skate," says Bails. "After I retired, I had some extra time so I decided to train a mule to skate."

"All it took was a little patience and some sugar lumps, candy, and

popcorn. I started training her in September and, 7 months later, she was skating pretty well. She's a real sharp mule. She can turn, stand on a stool and now I'm teaching her to bow. To stop, she skates on to a mat.

"The trick to teaching Abigail was getting her to learn how to work her feet so they wouldn't touch each other. She uses regular roller skates except that they're equipped with special straps so they're fast and easy to put on," he explains.

He takes Abigail "on tour" in his van and performs for area business and children's groups.

auctions and worked as a part-time store clerk. Mr. Hirst obtained a real estate license.

They even thought about building a dam, flooding the property and selling lake lots. But an engineering survey showed their lake would be so shallow that "to drown, you'd have to lie on your back," Mr. Hirst says.

He remembers hearing the wind whipping outside last January, sitting with his wife around a wood stove "about as depressed as anybody could get."

In one of her poems, titled "The Naked Truth," Mrs. Hirst writes: *The fault is yours, right here at home. You just stood idly by, I heard your laughter, saw your tears, But not your battle cry . . . I say good-bye to fields of grain, To hills of sweet red clover. You never made a stand, my friend, — The war is almost over.*

If all goes according to plan, the Hirsts will have their grand drawing July 4 in Unionville's town square. They sold books at this summer's Putnam County fair, traveled through Iowa, Missouri and Illinois to promote their idea, and are holding open houses on Sundays to explain their offer.

Some newspapers initially de-

clined to accept their advertisements, questioning the legality of the plan. "We have to personally visit with people to show them what we're doing," Mr. Hirst said.

They're receiving letters from across the country, including one from an Iowa woman who wrote: "Are you sure you want to do this thing?"

Tom Nee, Putnam County supervisor for the Farmers Home Administration, said he doubted that other farmers would follow the Hirsts' lead. "Most of the farmers in Putnam County are second- and third-generation farmers," he said. "The idea of raffling off the home place would be very hard to accept."

But, Mrs. Hirst asks, "What's wrong with wanting to help out yourself, your children and grandchildren?"

Then she recited her favorite verse: *My old dog came to meet me, And my troubles disappeared. I smell once more the fresh green earth,*

*Let's stay just one more year."*

Mr. Hirst put it another way, "If this whole thing is successful," he said, "I may just one day try to buy this whole thing back."

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