

Market Conditions

By S. J. FEE.

Conditions for the marketing of 1915 fruit crop were particularly favorable, a short crop across the line, a partial failure in Ontario, great crops in the prairie provinces, meaning good buying power, helped by the splendid and effective advertising campaign carried on by the B. C. Government, Horticultural Branch. Most of the crop was sold at prices sufficiently good to give the growers quite satisfactory returns. There were, however, exceptions and disappointments, but on the whole the net returns to the growers must have been fairly satisfactory. That the season was not a satisfactory one to the jobbers is a regrettable fact. Very little sympathy is given the jobber. He is a middleman, scorned and abused, sometimes unjustly. He, however, is a necessity until such a time as a better system of marketing is established, and his welfare is of vital interest to the growers. He will endeavor to make up in 1916 his losses of 1915, by more careful buying, more careful handling and avoidance of any risk. In 1915 everything was favorable for high prices, and jobbers felt they were safe in paying good prices and sure of selling at a fair advance. They, however, were up to the Court of Last Resort, the consumer, and the consumer absolutely refused to pay high prices. So much would he pay and no more. Winter apples were forced down nearly 30 per cent lower than they should have been sold at. Then country collections have not been what was expected. They have been delayed and renewed, costing the jobber interest and exchange as well as general inconvenience. It can hardly be said that any special progress was made in marketing, except by the Mission and Hatzic growers, who loaded cars with raspberries and in this way successfully reached markets too distant for open express shipments, and the Creston-Wyndell district which loaded cars with strawberries and extended their markets. This is a very brief summing up for 1915.

The Effect on 1916.

The unsatisfactory season of 1915 to the jobbers will have its effects. They must buy more carefully in order to break even. Careful buying is a tory season of 1915 to the jobbers will have its effect. They must buy more carefully in order to break even. Careful buying is a factor in leading to a heavy or glut market, snappy buying keeps a market cleaned up. It has been for the past few years the great endeavor to sell F.O.B. shipping points, and prices being right, this of course is the most satisfactory from a grower's or shipping association's point of view and it is a fact that jobbers almost to a man prefer to buy, if they are assured of a fair margin, to handling on commission. But this safety in buying is becoming a difficulty. A jobber may buy a car of standard varieties, pack and grades for a certain point, only to find on the arrival of the car, that a car of similar fruit shipped by another association or grower is on sale there, probably by a retailer at prices sometimes lower than his cost. Then in the larger centres we have agents for B. C. associations and growers operating for a short time selling their own goods and making prices lower than the jobber could buy and lay them down at. It is not my intention to make any complaint of associations or growers selling

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their own goods, that is their right and they have certainly had excuse for trying to do so, but to show the difficulties the jobber must contend with in buying F.O.B. shipping points, that he really cannot do so unless he has some protection from this competition. For instance, last season there was a car of raspberries on sale in Edmonton at a price of \$1.00 a case higher than what the very same berries from the same shipping point sent direct to a retailer were being retailed at. This was certainly discouraging to the jobbers buying and handling that car.

Then the direct shipping by the growers and associations to the farmers' associations is another serious competition, laudable as it is to cut out all middlemen to the mutual benefit of the producer and consumer. The farmers' associations getting direct and distributing at a trifling cost to their members, the retailer must make the same price in order to sell, buying lower from the jobber in order to do so. These problems are becoming more serious and difficult of solution. The jobber finds the cost of business greatly increased, sales are smaller, entailing greater expense, with keener competition for those sales.

Co-operation is recognized as the great solution, but the method of this co-operation is the difficulty. There are schemes without number, ingenious, complicated schemes, that only the schemers themselves can operate. We study carefully what they do in the south, the east, in Denmark, forgetting that our conditions are entirely different.

Consigning without supervision is ruinous, permitting two cars to be placed in a town that can handle but one, permitting one jobber to fight another with your goods, leaving it to one small dealer in a community to make the prices for the great total. That is what consigning or even selling without supervision will permit, resulting in very serious losses to the growers. A district combining and placing a broker in

the main centres, is a step in the right direction, so concentrating the business that it can be handled on a small margin.

After twenty-six years in the wholesale and commission business, I am still convinced that the place to market, is in the markets, and getting a little better net returns is the way to build up a business. I believe that it is feasible to ship mainly through one channel. That is, whatever goods are not sold F.O.B. shipping points. This one channel to be brokers at the main distributing centres, brokers under one responsible head, handling only B. C. goods. These brokers in turn, selling or giving for sale to whatever jobbers give the best results, the goods on sale under their direct supervision at all times.

The Calgary Board of Trade is advocating that all dealers in Calgary receiving consignments of fruit and produce for sale, shall be licensed and bonded. This would be of great advantage to the shippers.

Supply and demand will always control prices. No scheme, no matter how plausible, will advance prices beyond what consumers can afford to pay. That the present marketing is very costly and wasteful, there can be no denying. Concentration and supervision are practical and inexpensive of operation and will prove of immense benefit to the growers and gradually lead to a marketing system of the least possible cost and waste.

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