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A Fruit Conference at Winnipeg

Ontario Growers and Western Dealers Confer—The Needs of the Trade Discussed—Rascality said to Characterise the Ontario Packer

The bad condition in which a great deal of the Ontario fruit arrives in Winnipeg has been a serious grievance with western fruit dealers for years back. On the other hand Ontario shippers have complained of unfair treatment on the part of the western buyer of fruit, who appeared to him to be ready to take nearly everything and allow the shipper little or nothing for his trouble and expenditure. And thus matters have gone on for years, with very little harmony between the Ontario fruit shipper and the Winnipeg dealer, though it is only fair to say that things are improving and trade conditions are much better than they were five years ago. Conditions, however, are far from satisfactory, and with the hope of remedying matters a conference was held at Winnipeg on August 4th, at which were present representatives of the western fruit trade and of several members of the Fruit Division, Ottawa. Among those present were: A. McNeill, Chief of the Fruit Division, Inspectors F. J. Carey, Belleville, J. J. Philp, Winnipeg, Maxwell Smith, British Columbia, J. S. Scarf, Woodstock, Ont., Director Ontario Fruit Growers' Association, W. A. McKinnon, late Chief of the Fruit Division, R. M. Palmer, British Columbia, and Messrs. Rubalee, Taylor, Bright, Scott and several others representing the Winnipeg fruit trade.

Mr. Scarf was asked to preside. In discussing the transportation side, Mr. Rubalee, of Foley, Lock & Larson, stated that the time made on shipments of fruit from Ontario was bad. Five days was good time between Niagara and Winnipeg, but frequently it took twice that time. The refrigerator cars used, though an improvement on those in use a few years ago, were not at all suitable for this trade. They should be modelled after the California fruit cars, in which fruit carries in better condition owing to their having ice overhead. The west wants both Ontario and British Columbia fruits, and better transportation facilities should be provided. Nearly 90 per cent. of the small fruits arriving in Winnipeg come from the United States. This does not apply to apples.

Following up this subject, Inspector Philp stated that there was not quick enough despatch. He advised shipping early apples in boxes only and ship in refrigerator cars and have them iced on the way.

Mr. Taylor, a large importer of fruit, stated that the icing enroute to Winnipeg from Ontario was very bad. He had had the best results by shipping two or three cars at once in charge of a messenger, whose special business it was to see that the icing was properly done in transit. The ice bunkers should be kept full, and he preferred to pay for a messenger rather than lose a car of perishable fruit. He stated that conditions on the Northern Pacific, over which a large share of the California fruit reaches the west, were perfect, and the Canadian roads could have them as if they wished.

Mr. A. Bright in discussing the condition of fruit on its arrival, said that Ontario growers and shippers were afraid to spend a dollar in putting their fruit in shape. It arrives in bad condition because of being badly packed. The two evils were: bad packing and bad stock. The fact in every case should represent the barrel. A reference here to the work of inspectors in stamping out fraud brought on a pretty warm discussion, in which the inspectors came in for some adverse criticism. Mr. McNeill stated that the Fruit Marks Act was designed to protect from fraud. If a buyer bought fruit that turned out to be fraudulently packed or misrepresented he could go before any justice of the peace and have the seller or shipper prosecuted without calling in the inspector. It was never intended that the inspector should do this work. It could be done without the inspector just as well.

Dealing with the subject of small fruits, Mr. R. R. Scott stated that they arrived in bad condition. He claimed that no amount of packing or improved transportation can bring plums and peaches from Ontario to Winnipeg in good condition. They don't go into consumption soon enough and are liable to spoil before the dealer disposes of them. Grapes, if packed in 10 lb. baskets and

handled carefully, arrive in good condition, especially late in the season. He recommended growers to use a good strong basket (climax) with wooden covers. A basket with a canvas over the top was not so good. When a strong basket is used tomatoes arrive usually in fair condition. All small fruits arrived in better condition in double decked cars. Peas, especially the Bartlett and Flemish Beauty, arrive in good condition. Twenty-five cents on a barrel. Mr. Scott here waxed warm in discussing the "rascality," as he called it, of many Ontario shippers. The west wanted good fruit only and the dealer never lost money in handling it. "We don't want second-class fruit," was the way he put it. Twenty-five cents on a barrel of apples does not count so long as the quality is right. Referring to the non-carrying qualities of Ontario plums and peaches, he stated that they were too juicy to admit of shipment any long distance. The soft fruits of the Okanagan and Victoria districts of British Columbia will ship well. Mr. Taylor stated that he had shipped the Smuck peach and the Grand Duke plum from Ontario to Winnipeg with good success.

Being asked to speak, R. M. Palmer, Chief Fruit Inspector for British Columbia, stated that the fruit growers have adopted the California package and method of shipping. It frequently took from 11 to 13 days for freight shipment between Victoria and Winnipeg, which was too long. Peas carried badly, but prunes and plums carried well though long on the road. Over 3,000 acres had been added to the fruit area of British Columbia during the past year. They wanted to extend their strawberry shipments to Winnipeg, but must have a better ventilated service. The smaller independent shipper did not do so well as the large one or the co-operative organization.

Inspector Carey followed. He was present to obtain information for Ontario shippers. In his opinion the packer was often times more to blame than the shipper. The latter often spread out too much and could not properly control the packing of his fruit.

Chief McNeill advised the Ontario grower and the western dealer to get together and to do business on a higher plane.

Mr. McKinnon thought that the principle of doing business was at fault. Dealers and shippers in Ontario have expanded too much and consequently there is a lack of supervision of the packing, etc. He looked to the co-operative movement to remedy matters.

Maxwell Smith, Dominion Inspector in British Columbia, speaking of the fruit trade on the Coast, said that he had found many Ontario apples in British Columbia and the Territories put up in accordance with the Fruit Marks Act. He estimated that of all the Ontario apples he examined only about one-quarter were good. Many packers mark the best they have as XXX when they were only XX. The British Columbia people want Ontario growers to adopt a uniform apple box. The barrel was out of date. The apple should be handled as carefully as an egg. It takes an expert to pack a box quickly so that it will pay. The farmer is too slow. By co-operation experts can be employed. In British Columbia Chinamen and girls do the work best. The packing should be the same all the way through. A size of an apple can be packed in a box 20x11x10 inches, inside measurement, the standard for British Columbia.

Some of the Winnipeg dealers stated that while they preferred to have early apples packed in boxes, the late varieties sell better in barrels. Some of their customers seemed to like the barrel better than the box. J. W. W.