

Co-operation in California

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ARRIVING in Southern California about the middle of January, I was delighted to find myself in a climate much like our September, with a temperature from 75 to 80, the air full of the perfume of flowers and songs of birds, and the groves loaded with fruit. One could not but wonder at the energy of the people in transforming the sage brush districts into the great plantations, in the course of 12 or 15 years. In California water is king. By the application of water to the desert wastes, and by co-operative methods of marketing, the planters have been able to make themselves rich.

Irrigating is a study in itself, so that I will not enter into it now, but in passing, would say that I believe it can and will be used with great success in Ontario, especially in the production of small fruit. Almost every year we find the berry growers longing and looking for rain during the ripening period that so often does not come with the result that the crop does not turn out half what it would have produced had there

* The author of this article spent the past winter with fruit growers in California, Oregon and British Columbia, studying their systems of production and marketing. In subsequent issues of THE CANADIAN HORTICULTURIST we hope to publish other pointers gleaned from the lessons learned.

the coming season we expect to test it here with every hope of success.

The co-operative system of Southern California has had its ups and downs. During the first few years of its existence it had many staggering blows, but it has triumphed over them all and has resulted in making orange and lemon growing a most profitable industry, whereas, only a few years ago, it was one of the most unprofitable. The years 1892 and '93 were perhaps the most disastrous years on record when the small growers struggled individually, each competing one against the other. All shipping at random to the same markets, resulted in account sales in red ink being received in great numbers. In many cases growers not only furnished their entire crop for nothing but were often forced to pay freight charges which the gross sales of the fruit did not cover.

METHODS OF FRUIT EXCHANGE

Various systems of marketing were tried with more or less success until finally the California Fruit Growers' Exchange (head office, Los Angeles), was organized for the purpose of marketing the fruit through one agency. In plain words, this Exchange is a huge commission firm appointed and controlled by the fruit growers themselves

and handles no fruit but that grown or bought by its members.

The first steps of organization is the forming of local associations which own their own packing houses and grade and pack their own fruit under their own brand. The manager of the local association is in constant touch by telephone with the head office, which gives orders when and where to ship the fruit.

The exchange system cuts out all middle men, employ their own salesmen on salary and allot certain districts to each man. Over these salesmen are two general agents with headquarters at Chicago and Omaha where they keep a full bureau of information, through which each local agent receives each day detailed information as to sales of exchange fruit in other markets the previous day. If any local agent finds that he cannot maintain the prices that are being made in other cities he wires the head office in Los Angeles, which immediately diverts shipments from that market until the trade is restored to normal again.

All this seems to be a great expense, but, when we take into consideration the enormous amount of business done, we find that the cost is about half of that charged by an ordinary commission firm. With an even distribution of the fruit, the markets are maintained and each place receives its proper proportion of fruit. The local associations pool their returns every two weeks and pay according to grade.

CO-OPERATION MEANS MONEY

The results of the cooperative system in California is that fruit growing has been made a most profitable business. An orange orchard of 10 acres near Riverside was sold while I was there for \$30,000, or \$3,000 an acre. The crop this year would pay \$8,000 of that. A small grove of 1 1/4 acres netted \$2,920 last year, and another grove of 40 acres netted \$26,000. The secretary of an association near Los Angeles told me that last year the proprietor of a 12-acre strawberry patch received \$24,000 for his crop. This seems hard to believe, but, when we take into consideration their irrigating, fertilizing and marketing systems it is not surprising.

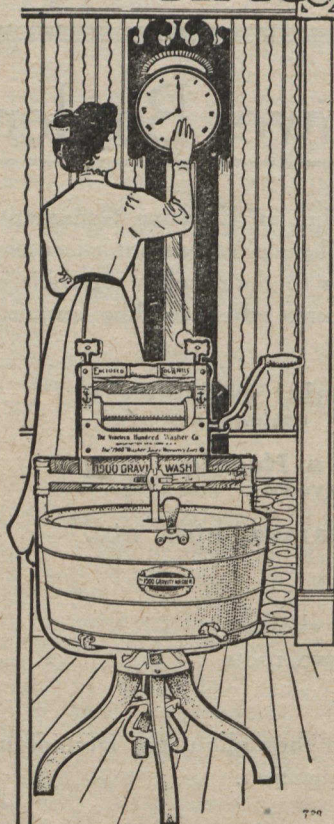
California, like Ontario, has found in its cooperative work much discouragement by growers shipping in and out of the associations, and playing between the exchanges and dealers in the hopes of making better returns for themselves, with the result that some of the local associations have given up, and dealers, taking advantage of this, pay the growers what they like.

If the California Fruit Growers' Exchange were to withdraw from the trade, the conditions which existed before its organization would prevail, and result in growers becoming discouraged, neglecting their groves, just as the majority of Ontario apple growers do now and declare that there is no money in fruit growing, which would be true if there was no marketing system.

At a meeting of the Toronto branch of the Ontario Vegetable Growers' Association held early in April, Dr. Jas. Fletcher, of Ottawa, gave a valuable talk on "Insect Pests on Vegetable Crops, and How to Combat Them."

An exceptionally well prepared booklet entitled, "The Potato Crop in Canada," has just been published by the Dominion Agricultural Offices of the Potash Syndicate, Temple Buildings, Toronto. To review all its good features would necessitate the publication of the entire article, it is so filled with valuable information. A copy may be had free by writing to the firm.

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