

FARMING

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FARMING

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TOPICS FOR THE WEEK

Getting Fruit to Market. II.

In our issue for October 5th we spoke somewhat strongly of the necessity of some sort of action being taken to secure a better means than what seems now available, for getting our choice fruits to market. From what we have since seen and heard we believe that we spoke not a whit too strongly. We are told upon good authority that so far from overstating the case, we understated it. Grapes are sold in Toronto this autumn at one cent a lb., basket free. Peaches were to be had in the St. Catharines district all season at 5 cents a basket, if one would but gather them. Plums have been left on the trees because they could not be picked and sold at a profit. Currants, lovely red currants, plump and large as cherries, have been left to dry on the bushes, because it would not pay the owner to gather them. And yet in hundreds of communities throughout all Canada, all these fruits have been scarce and dear. Last year it was the same with apples. Through lack of means for selling and distributing, in the midst of plenty the grower is impoverished and the consumer goes unfed.

If Canada were a thickly populated country things might perhaps be different. But our country is sparsely settled, our centres of population are far apart, our fruit areas the most part lie close to the national boundary line, and trade is restricted except in one or two directions, and difficult in any direction. The Niagara and St. Catharines fruit growers are practically dependent upon the Hamilton and Toronto markets, though some shipping is done, also, to Montreal. These markets are soon overstocked, and there seems to be no machinery by which sales can be easily extended to other districts. Middlemen and express agents have things all their own way when any rapid movement of a big crop is required, and the producer has to put up with what he can get.

Just now we are hearing a good deal about the Canadian fruit-grower not packing his fruit properly. If a consignment of fruit to England goes wrong for lack of proper transportation service, the whole blame is laid upon the grower and packer. If a carload of fruit for Winnipeg takes too long on the way and is spoiled for lack of ventilation and proper refrigeration, it is the packing again that is given the fault. Now there may be some truth in this criticism. The packing may not be what it ought to be. But the whole business of marketing fruit is unorganized and lacks direction.

The selling, the packing, the shipping, is all done individually and in a hurry. Where there should be co-operation there is competition. Where there should be orderly methods there is confusion. Where there should be a united front made against the demands of middlemen and transportation companies, every producer is trying to get ahead of every other. Where the most carefully planned and most effective action is necessary in order to get the fruit surplus well distributed into every part of the country, and not heaped up in big unwieldy stocks in one or two cities, everything is left to the middlemen, who have other interests to look after, and who in any case cannot expand their business suddenly to meet sudden expansions in the supply. As a result of all this a big crop is about as undesirable a thing as a fruit grower can well wish for.

Now what is the remedy for this evil? It is evident that the evil is a serious one, and that something ought to be done to meet it. But what shall be done?

We wish it to be understood that we are not decrying middlemen and transportation agents. These no doubt are acting honorably and efficiently. The fault that the fruit grower does not get better results does not lie with them. But it must be remembered that these men act always in their own interests, and that their interests and those of the fruit grower are not identical, in fact they are often opposed. But what we are decrying is a system which leaves the whole business of the sale and distribution of fruit in the hands of the middlemen and transportation agents to do as they please with it. *It matters little to them* how low priced the sales of the retailers are. They get their profit per pound, and their rate per pound, no matter what the net result to the producer may be.

The remedy for the evil lies in two directions. On the one hand there must be co-operation on the part of the growers, on the other, there must be supervision, instruction, and direction on the part of the government. In these directions, and in these alone, does the remedy lie.

The growers must co-operate to secure uniformity of grading, proper packing, the control of the output, the making of terms with the middlemen, the making of terms with the transportation agents, the advertising of their goods in cases of great surplus, the securing of sales at points in the country other than the large cities, the securing of better railway transport facilities, the opening up of markets in distant points like Winnipeg, Quebec, St. John, Halifax, etc., the obtaining of better ocean transport, the securing a hold on the British market, etc., etc. Just as the farmers of the country have co-operated to make cheese production a success, just as they are now co-operating to make butter making a success, so must the fruit-growers co-operate—not merely to produce fruit (they know how to do that now)—but to sell it, to pack it, to grade it, to ship it, to transport it, and to get good prices for it.

The part of the government in this matter, (we are speaking now of the Dominion Government) is (1) to be efficient and active in promoting this co-operation, (2) to undertake a system of supervision and direction, by which all necessary instruction as to picking, packing, shipping, etc., can be given, and by which the necessary help in opening up new markets, in securing better transportation facilities, in advertising the condition of the fruit crop to prospective buyers, etc., etc., can be efficiently rendered.

The work of the government should, of course, be largely educational and advisory. Every care should be taken not to interfere with private rights

or the natural course of trade. But if a government officer, say the secretary of the Fruit Growers' Association, appointed for the purpose, should for five or six months in the year employ his time wholly in studying the probabilities of the fruit supply and demand, in endeavoring to find out what the exact requirements are for transportation over long distances and in unfavorable weather, in instructing growers as to the best means of meeting these requirements, in exploring new markets with trial shipments, etc., in publishing to fruit growers the conditions under which trade could be done in these new markets, in publishing also where it will do most good, the condition of the fruit supply and demand when the crops are needing to be moved—if we say such an officer could spend his time for five or six months in the year, in such ways as these, and in other ways that would occur to him, or be suggested to him by the experience of growers, buyers, etc., would not a very great benefit accrue to all concerned? Undoubtedly so.

And all this effort could go usefully and efficiently on without encroaching on the rights of middlemen, transportation companies, etc., etc., in the slightest. But if it *should* be found that the middlemen's profits were excessive, or that the transportation facilities were deficient, or were not suitable to the preservation of the fruit transported, or were too high priced, then how easy would it be for such an official—having the backing of the whole fruit growing interest behind him, having also the moral support of the government behind him—to bring public opinion to bear on the matter, and have the evil redressed.

The question is an important one. None can be more so. The well being of a great industry of the country is in jeopardy for lack of some such action as the one here outlined. For years we have been encouraging people to go into fruit growing, and have at great cost been instructing them how to grow fruit productively and economically, what varieties to cultivate, what varieties to avoid, and so on. All that end of the work has been done and done well. The other end is now to be taken up—the selling end, the trade and commerce end. This is an affair of the Dominion Government. It lies within the scope of their action. We trust they will recognize their responsibility and act accordingly.

Intensive Farming.

The farming of the future will be *intensive* farming. It will mean the application of brains and science, of energy and skill, to farm work to a degree now scarcely dreamed of. As the population of the world grows bigger, the demand for food-stuffs will, of course, increase with equal pace. But for many years wheat and other bread grains, common beef and mutton, and the cheaper sorts of foods generally, will be cheaply raised in countries where labor and land are cheap, and the Canadian farmer, the American farmer, and the English farmer, whose labor and land are both relatively high priced, will not be able to meet their competition. Farmers, therefore, in English-speaking countries, must take to other branches of the business than the raising of wheat and low priced cattle and sheep. The farming of the future, so far as these countries are concerned, must be devoted to the raising of products in which foreign competition is small or impossible.

We have as yet but little intensive farming in Canada, or even on this continent. One reason for this has been that our country has been new and growing, and farmers for years were able to sell at good profits everything they raised. This