More Lemons In Arizona

Industry Grows in Citrus Sections of State At Rapid Rate During Last Few Years

By C. W. Van Horn
Department of Horticulture

The expanding lemon industry in Arizona is related to increased production of lemons and large acreages of new orchards planted in recent years. Since 1950, Arizona's lemon acreage has more than doubled.

In the warmer areas of the Salt River Valley there are new plantings, in addition to the top working of grapefruit orchards to lemons during recent years. On the Yuma Mesa, south and east of Yuma, new plantings are being made as rapidly as young trees become available from nurseries. There is no top working of grapefruit to lemons on the Yuma Mesa because grapefruit orchards are profitable in this area.

Varieties Tested

The University of Arizona has been testing different varieties of lemons at the Yuma Mesa Citrus Experimental orchard since 1922. The average yield per tree for a 14-year period from three lemon varieties now thirty-one years of age grown in this orchard are: Lisbon, 10.3 boxes; Eureka, 7.7 boxes; Villa Franca, 8.2 boxes. Due to the Lisbon's greater vigor and outstanding yield performance in the University orchard, it is the predominant variety now being planted on the Yuma Mesa.

Many of the older plantings of lemons in Arizona are on sour orange rootstocks, particularly in the Salt River Valley where cold tolerance and salt tolerance are essential. Experimental plantings by the University of Arizona on the Yuma Mesa show that the average yield of Eureka lemons on sour orange roots for the four seasons from 1949 to 1952 and from young bearing trees was 1.3 boxes per tree, while on rough lemon roots similar aged trees yielded 3.5 boxes per tree.

As a result of this outstanding performance, new plantings on the Yuma Mesa are on rough lemon rootstock. Furthermore, all seedlings in the current nurseries on the Yuma Mesa are rough lemon. Obviously, rough lemon stock is well adapted to the Yuma Mesa sandy soil.

The outstanding characteristic of Arizona lemon production in the warmer areas is high yields of fruit which can be harvested at one time and hence result in lower harvesting costs than coastal California where several harvests are made during the year. Arizona harvesting is completed in the fall ahead of winter freezing temperatures.

The additional popularity and increasing consumption of frozen lemon juice concentrate and lemonade concentrate, coupled with the continued strong demand for fresh fruit, have been large factors in the recent expansion of the lemon producing industry in Arizona. Processing plants in the state can be expected when the increased acreage results in sufficient production.

More Expected

Lemon production will continue to increase in Arizona. Salt River Valley plantings in warmer areas probably will continue to expand. On the Yuma Mesa, the ample water supply, increased activity by nurserymen, and purchase of considerable acreage by lemon-processing interests are all factors indicating new forthcoming lemon plantings.