

UA Plant Scientists Helping WILLCOX LETTUCE DEAL

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The rush to Cochise County in 1957 and 1958 was not to search for metallic gold, but to grow a green gold called lettuce. The first year about 800 acres of lettuce were tried commercially in fields near Willcox. That was the start of a new lettuce producing area in Arizona.

Results from the 1957 planting were good enough to encourage growers and shippers to plant 12,000 acres in 1958. The lettuce fields were located in the Stewart area and around Kansas Settlement. Much of the land used was newly developed soil.

New Area, New Problems

Since lettuce was new to the area, much information regarding production of this crop was lacking. This was especially true for varieties and strains. During the first years of this expanding industry, much confusion existed as to varieties to plant and their appropriate planting dates for the climate of the area. Lettuce planted too late in the spring would develop tip burn, and lettuce planted too early in the fall would "go to seed."

Because of the great interest, and because little was known in regard to varieties and planting dates, research and extension personnel from the University of Arizona decided to set out experiments and demonstrations on farms in the area to help growers learn the best varieties and planting dates for commercial production.

Working with Extension Horticulturist Harvey Tate and County Agent Carmy Page, Dr. Robert Foster, U of A plant breeder, arranged for seed from leading seed companies. In the spring of 1958, some 26 lettuce varieties were tried experimentally at four different planting dates. In the fall three planting dates were tried with

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these same varieties. Each year since that time similar tests have been made.

Put in Commercial Fields

Tests were placed within commercial fields, and received the same treatment as the lettuce grown for shipment. The cooperating grower-shippers furnished the land and all cultural operations up to harvest time.

Observations as to plant characteristics, yields and quality were observed and recorded by the U of A research-extension team. After harvest the lettuce was studied in storage and simulated transit tests by Dr. Paul Bessey, post-harvest physiologist.

Field meetings for growers were held at the plots to show them how the varieties performed. Information from the field and storage tests was relayed to the growers by circular letters, news stories and personal contacts; also, many growers personally kept an eye on the varieties as the plants developed.

As a result of these demonstration trials, the growers obtained accurate information about variety performances at different planting dates. Growers utilized this information by adopting the varieties which did best. Some varieties showed more resistance to the problems of the area than others,



COUNTY AGENT CARMY Page examines test plants in a commercial field.



NOTE SIZE OF this commercial lettuce field at Kansas Settlement. When the lettuce producers went in to Cochise County they went in in a big way.

and some performed much better at certain planting dates than others.

U A Work Beneficial

Information from these tests and studies has helped this area develop into one of the well established lettuce areas of the United States, and one with a reputation of producing high quality lettuce during the late spring and early fall months.

The Willcox lettuce deal has had its ups and downs. The acreage has leveled off now to about 5,000 acres annually. The annual value of the crop produced is usually over \$4 million.

The University of Arizona is continuing to test and demonstrate lettuce varieties in Cochise County. This spring 16 new and recently introduced varieties were evaluated, with the hope that the problems of the Willcox area will be further solved.

Soviets Vote To Stress Agriculture

MOSCOW — (AP) — The Soviet Communist Party Central Committee voted today for increased emphasis on agricultural production as "a big step forward in building the material and technical foundation of communism."

Approved unanimously were recommendations of the party leaders to spend about 42 billion rubles — considered here the equivalent of about \$46.6 billion—over the next seven years in an effort to make Russian farms produce like those in the United States.

These decisions wound up another...