

COOPERATIVE MARKETING

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The Development and Aims of the Mesa Lettuce and Vegetable Growers; Methods of Selling; Factors Influencing Success

NO DOUBT all growers of lettuce, vegetables, and all perishable products have found marketing facilities and conditions very unsatisfactory at times. It seems that, in some instances in the past, the grower has received no consideration whatever. What his financial returns were at the end of the season depended entirely on a commission merchant who handled a large volume. A good share of the volume has meant an actual loss to the grower, but has still produced a profit for the handler because of the fact that part of it which sold at a low price, had to make up the deficiency of that which sold at a low price.

Aims of the Organization

This is one of the reasons for the birth of the Mesa Lettuce and Vegetable Growers. In starting this organization several things were in mind that could be accomplished. One of them was to sell the product at a fair price, and if the market did not afford a price that would at least pay operating expenses, to stop shipping. It is useless to ship a perishable product to a market that is fully supplied. This may be judged for oneself. What could be done if one had all of a perishable commodity that he could possibly consume and someone would keep on sending more?

Another aim of the organization was to obtain for the growers absolute control over the quality to be shipped, and to make every car as nearly uniform as it is possible to make it. One cannot have a car of any commodity fifty per cent of it good quality, and the other fifty per cent of it poor quality, and expect the good quality to sell the poor. It will do exactly the opposite. The entire car would very likely sell on the basis of the poor quality. The quality of the commodity should never be overrated or misrepresented to the buyer. Rather under-rate the quality than overrate it. In under-rating the quality the buyer will be agreeably surprised, and will know that he can depend on the grading. If it is overrated, however, he would be sorely disappointed and would hesitate to buy on your grading.

Methods of Selling

One of the biggest problems after the association was organized was to decide how to sell the produce. It

would cost money in any way that was chosen to handle it. The problem was studied from all angles and it was finally decided to sell through a firm which had a well established trade, a trade that demanded a quality product, and a trade that also was willing to pay a fair price for quality products and an assured supply. It was proven to our satisfaction that a wise selection had been made. Without giving the matter much consideration it would seem an easy matter to get a selling organization, but when it is gone into thoroughly, one will find that a good share of the organizations are depending on just a chance market. An average farm boy may make a wonderful success in selling of a commodity in the case of a shortage of it. But in case the market is well supplied, an old-established selling firm will always have the preference in supplying the trade, especially if they have dealt fairly with their buyers and have never overrated their products.

The organization might do its own selling, but in that event the buyer would be handicapped for the reason that the supply is only seasonable. He would always be confronted with the problem of getting his supply somewhere else when the season ended; also the seller may be handling only one or two commodities, whereas these buyers may handle everything in the line of fruits and all kinds of vegetables. It is the object of a selling organization such as was selected to keep its trade supplied with all these commodities throughout the year.

Factors Influencing Success

The above discussion has covered a portion of the marketing problems of the organization. No doubt it will be proper to say a few words in regard to the growing of the products and the personnel of the organization. In starting an organization of this kind it is well to consider who should be the members. The type of men needed are those who are willing not only to look for larger financial returns immediately, but men who are looking more to the future and are considering what can be accomplished by thorough co-operation. Men who are also willing to face certain problems and discuss them and try to work them out and really try to build a permanent organization.

There is one more thing that is vitally important in trying to grow quality products. One must have good fertile soil. No matter how sincere a man may be, with an impoverished soil he could not come up to the standards set by his association, and the heads of the organization should make it plain to all the members that, no matter how sincere or loyal they may be, they should not be allowed or encouraged to grow any of their products on soil that is not able to produce quality products.

Financing an organization of this kind will not be as hard a matter as it may seem if it is operated on a business-like basis and maintains a high standard at all times. This may be thought of as "co-operative selling," but it is not only that; it means co-operation of the buyer, the selling organization, the heads of the organization and every single grower. If they all co-operate, there is no reason why the organization will not be successful.

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