

HORTICULTURE CONDITIONS IN WESTERN WASHINGTON

J. S. Thornber, '31

Small Fruits and Truck Produce Main Crops; Methods of Marketing Farm Produce

AGRICULTURALLY the State of Washington is divided into two districts by the Cascade Range. These are known geographically by the terms Western and Eastern Washington.

Eastern Washington in temperature and climate is very similar to our Salt River Valley with the exception of the continual heat of the south which causes so much of our tipburn. This area starts at the Canadian boundary in the Okanogan country and carries south to the Oregon boundary in a crescent shape, ending at Walla Walla. The territory thus comprised consists of the section in which the tree fruits are grown.

Traveling eastward a vast desert is encountered which ends near Spokane, and the narrow strip between there and the Idaho boundary stretching to Canada on the north comprises their grain and field crop region.

Western Washington is the region west of the Cascade Range lying between the Canadian border on the north and the Oregon border on the south. Here is a pear-shaped region, the larger part immediately surrounds Puget Sound and tapers to a narrow neck in the southern part of the state. This is the small fruit and truck gardening section of Washington. A knowledge of conditions under which the crops are grown is necessary for an agricultural study of this region.

In regard to temperature the climate is very equitable, the temperature being modified by the immense bodies of water nearby which tend to cool in summer and to prevent severe frosts in the winter. The rainfall is very nominal during the summer but very heavy in the winter.

The average size farm is from twelve to thirteen acres in area, the farms ranging from two to fifty acres. On account of the vast forests of the state, cleared land sells for from \$1500 to \$2000 per acre. The truck farming is done almost entirely by foreigners who use members of their families to cut production costs.

The horticultural crops which are



Crop of Lettuce in Western Washington

raised are the small fruits, and truck produce.

The small fruits raised are the blackberries, loganberries, raspberries and strawberries, gooseberries and currants.

The truck produce raised are the bunch vegetables, rhubarb, sweet corn, beans, squash, peas, cauliflower, cabbage, lettuce, cucumbers and asparagus.

The bulb-growing industry has in the past few years been placed in a very prominent position in this area. Due to the embargo which has been placed upon the Holland grown daffodil and narcissus bulbs, the bulb-growers are able to sell on the American market at a price which more nearly equalizes their production costs, than has heretofore been possible.

The conditions under which these crops are cultivated in the average year are ideal and due to the large production, a very serious marketing condition must be faced each season.

The crops on the average farm are very diversified, each farm in all probability would raise a small plot of each of the above mentioned crops. The yield per crop for a farm is often very small and this factor also affects the conditions under which it is marketed.

Due to the abundance of produce grown on these numerous small farms, it forces the price on the in-

dividual commodity down to the point where the margin of profit is very small indeed. Owing to this fact production costs must be kept at the lowest possible figure. It is very rare indeed to find hired men upon even the largest farms. The only labor hired are the pickers who work for a standard price per lug, which has been set by all of the packing houses. Labor other than picking is contracted for on the hourly basis until a certain job has been finished, at which time the man is laid off. Other than that the owner does all work himself.

In large scale agricultural production of the present day, hired labor often is the only labor applied, the owner merely adding his managerial ability to the enterprise. By questioning over a score of growers on this phase of hired labor, they had actual figures to present which showed that it is impossible to pay labor and still have a profit to show for the years activities.

After any agricultural product is produced, the next important item to consider is the turning of it into cash. In this direction there are several channels which may be considered. First among these are the co-operative associations for shipping either fresh or canned products to other localities. Second, the commission brokers and third, independent marketing.

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If you can picture an area of this size, of almost continuous farms which stretches across the width of an entire state, with climatic and soil conditions as favorable for large production as they are in western Washington, and with but three principal cities the total of whose population is less than three quarters of a million people and of which a great percent of the rural and urban population have home gardens, you will appreciate their marketing problem.

Let us consider their problem through the stages in which they have worked. First of all they marketed the products themselves. Keeping in mind the fact that the total yield is great and each individual person on the average has only a small amount of produce to dispose of, you can readily see how unsatisfactory this method of sales became in the face of a rapidly increasing number of farmers. The individual merchants bought the produce considerably under the daily market quotations, but the constant soliciting by growers became very tiresome.

To illustrate a step upward from this, in the city of Seattle there is a municipal market containing 150 individual stalls, but each farmer has the same produce at the same season, so the ultimate effect was to draw all the competitors into a relatively small area.

The commission merchants were able to handle only a limited amount of this entire output and combined with an exorbitant commission charged; there was then the uncertainty of any sale being made, owing to their high degree of perishability.

We have now come to the co-operative associations which so far have seemed to fill the gap which other methods created. There are in this region well over a hundred of these associations. They accept from members any quantity of produce from an area specified prior to the time of harvest. Each association deals in only one or two different commodities and a grower may belong to as many as six associations to be able to dispose of all his crops. Every grower receives a small advance for his product upon delivery, with the possibility of more when

the entire crop has been sold. In August of 1928 the last carload of blackberries for the season of 1926 had just been shipped.

Owing to the growing season being chiefly in the summer the crops of this section come into competition with those of different localities, many of which are much nearer to the large consuming centers than the

Puget Sound region.

In setting forth these facts of the conditions under which the horticultural crops of western Washington are produced it is intended to acquaint persons who may hear one side of the question presented with the other factors which have a direct bearing upon the success of the individual in that district.



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