

CHERRY INDUSTRY COMMENTED UPON BY EXTENSIVE GROWER

Cove, Ore., Sept. 8.—(To the Observer)—In the La Grande Evening Observer for August 21 appears a lengthy and interesting article on the cherry crop and cherry growing proposition, of more than usual interest as the writer Mr. John A. Hadaller evinces a great deal of information and thought on the subject and deserves attention by the community so vitally interested in this industry. There are, however, certain statements that seem misleading and faults are found and placed where they do not exactly belong, and in order to help place the matter more correctly and fuller before the interested grower and buyer, I wish to add a few facts and reflections.

The district of Cove having produced

ed nearly 1,300,000 pounds or about 650 tons of marketed cherries the last season, of which the Oregon Packing company received about 360 tons, purchased and picked for canning and maraschino purposes, and besides shipped out in the fresh state to eastern markets the equal of 36 minimum cars, is therefore more vitally interested in the future of the cherry than most any single locality in the whole Pacific Northwest, also for the reason that not half of the present cherry trees are in bearing, and that, even without any special boom or excitement in planting, the increase annually amounts to 15 to 25 per cent of the former acreage.

In the consideration of the cherry as a safe fruit to grow in large quantities, for any and all purposes Mr. Hadaller has shown a number of possibilities that must be reconed with, particularly as to its keeping and shipping quality, it is certain that, unless it will stand up long enough to reach a profitable market, it would be folly to raise it, and the main question hinges on whether we can do so or not. There are many factors that enter into the keeping quality of any fruit, in the first place the soil must have sufficient soluble potash, and the season of growth must be fairly dry, the grower controls all these factors except the weather, and this is somewhat within the control of the prospective grower if he chooses a locality with a known, suitable climate, barring exceptional seasons. But, as the past season proved that we had a little too wet growing weather, and on top of this the growers were permitted, by the buyers, to butcher the fruit, a large per cent of the cherries delivered to the Oregon Packing company were so roughly picked and handled that they would not stand up 24 hours, and the other growers who had sold to shippers found it difficult to get satisfactory picking and some of them even got careless, by bad example, and hauled their cherries on "dead axle wagons," often unfit for a local cannery to handle, and here is where most of the trouble lies, it was the fault of the O. P. company rather than the grower, as the former had a right to refuse, as unmerchantable all fruit not properly and carefully picked and handled, and the laxity on their part and other receivers were taken advantage of by many growers, who, in the end may have to pay the heaviest for the losses they now occasioned others.

The writer has handled and shipped cherries all over the United States from this place, for the past 20 years and the last season handled 30 carloads, mostly express cars, and found the carrying condition the last season considerable below the average, but mostly to be accounted for by the rough picking and handling of the fruit, and only partly to the more than usual wet growing season.

Milton, Walla Walla, Lewiston and also The Dalles districts were much more effected by the season than we were in this valley, as on the whole we had a very successful season, as there are some remedies open both to the Oregon Packing company and the growers. In the first place, one solution of getting our cherries into the barrels and cans in good condition would be to exact from the grower careful picking and handling and to have the processing plant near the supply, so also the cannery, with 650 tons of cherries at Cove, the place to barrel and can them should be here, at least, this would insure good condition and no loss from shipments. And while the canning company who operated here the past season is desirable, the grower might sell his white cherries direct to the large eastern firms dealing in maraschino products, as these people are open to deal with any responsible parties who can contract the goods they want, and, as there is only a small per cent produced in the United States of the white cherries used for this purpose, by far, the larger part being imported from Portugal, Spain and Italy, there is no cause for alarm about over-production, although values may go down somewhat, in seasons of large general crops.

The facts are, that if the cherry growers of this district would effect an up to date co-operative marketing organization, they might reasonably figure on placing a much larger crop than the 1913 to better advantage, as the maraschino manufacturers are paying several unnecessary items, some backhauls, etc., and these might be partly saved and the profits to the

"middleman" retained by the grower's organization.

The canning proposition fluctuates even more than the fresh fruit market, and the Oregon Packing company or any other canning concern must see profits in the fruit in order to buy it, and it is always up to the intelligent grower to give value for his money or lose his market.

The person who now contemplates going into the cherry growing on a large scale should realize that there are almost unlimited markets for our cherries, in the fresh state, and while these are more speculative and fluctuating than selling to canneries and processors, etc., are nevertheless better on an average, as, by pooling the crop and each grower taking the average net, on a large line of co-operative shipments, intelligently handled, the result is bound to be satisfactory—in face of all our past experience, and a hundred cars of cherries will average better than one-fourth that amount, as with the larger quantity we can keep up regular and full interest on most of the large markets.

In view of the above we deduce that, while it is up to the grower to use artificial fertilizers, particularly potash, if needed, and to cultivate and grow his fruit to the highest quality possible, and to get it picked carefully, with the stems on, and without bruising, to handle it in very shallow boxes, not the large 50 to 60 pound kind that were furnished by some of the buyers here the past season, but shallow containers, where the weight of the fruit and the bulk will not do any damage and prevent sufficient air, and to haul on easy spring wagons and deliver the fruit within a few hours after picked, it is absolutely certain that there is sufficient assurance of profitable returns to warrant most any one to go into the cherry growing on a large scale.

With the scab and the blight so prevalent in some districts, may well contemplate the cherry industry, as these are not enough reasons for refraining to do so, that are of material importance, if the grower will do his part, as there is surely splendid inducements for growing the cherry in a country where they have been netting the growers from \$150 to \$300 per acre for a period of six years or more, average annual net per acre.

The average yield per acre, in Cove, for all trees over 10 years old, has been something near four tons for the last five years, which includes two very light crops, and the best orchards have averaged over five tons per acre, and the average selling price has been over \$70 per ton, showing an average net, above harvesting expenses of about \$200 per acre, which should satisfy a common mortal, when he can buy the best kind of cherry land in the best cherry district on record for \$200 per acre.

The caution of a possible different future from the past should be well considered; But there is no reason to believe that we can't market all our cherries in the future to as good an advantage as in the past, as with more experience and more prestige and attention, we have good reasons to anticipate better returns providing all the time, that we all do the best we know how.

The prune is well worth some considering as a profitable fruit and one that is easy to grow and suited to more people than either apples, cherries or pears, as they grow themselves, and may be largely marketed through hogs, and easily sold at home to dryers and shippers.

But as Cove received good returns for its last cherry crop and this was on a low price level, we can't help believe that the cherry is the best fruit for this locality, without fear for over-production.

KARL J. STACKLAND.

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