

The Mailbox:

Pilot: The Croft lily after seven years of phenomenal growth, finds itself in the most critical period of its introduction as a major industry in the Pacific north-

west. Prices, prolific reproduction heralded overproduction — history has once more repeated itself; the creation of a market from what was at one time a sellers' market. The industry finds itself with a surplus crop, produced by too many growers, and a limited market which can only be enlarged by intelligent and honest effort. This same crisis has been experienced by daffodil growers in the past and this same scene will be repeated by the Croft lily growers in this area.

In addition to this confusion, a new element has had its influence, in helping to stabilize the industry.

During the past three years the industry has been plagued by the stigma of "get rich quick." This gentry, with their various schemes to acquire planting stock for future land ventures, to organize promotional sales agencies, etc., have all had a part in the growth in the industry. At this most critical time the saviors are filling the magazines and local papers with articles, pertaining to the culture, growing areas, and the facts quoted in articles are injurious, misleading and are without any basis as to truth or merit. A unsuspecting reader, these can only lead to misapprehension, discouragement and

distrust.

Also, taking advantage of the present situation, unscrupulous brokers and alleged jobbers are having their heyday. Discouraged growers, who are dumping their crops, are victims of this type of buyer, who will use their give away price as a factor to beat down a legitimate price.

Another source of disturbance in the industry is that some of the sales representatives of the growers, who are selling direct to the green house trade. Their offers of guaranteed bloom and bud count, consignment and other cut prices, all help to throw the whole industry out of gear.

Also to be considered, are a few of the growers who have visions of becoming powerful enough to control the production of Crofts, and have, by successful manipulation, controlled a large percentage of the market in the past.

What then is the answer? Will the Croft industry survive? The answer is yes, for the following reasons:

First, the Croft lily has no equal as a bulb for Easter forcing. With an intelligent and vigorous campaign to publicize the merits of the Croft for outdoor garden use, and improving methods of production, etc., increased sales and larger distribution can be foreseen.

Second, the Growers. As has been stated, there are too many growers for the industry to support. As cruel as it may sound, the day of the backyard grower, the merchant, the doctor, and many others who have grown bulbs as a side-line, has passed. Also the "hit and miss" grower, who has paid little attention to culture or the improvement of

his strain of bulbs, and who today has nothing but a sick and weedy field to show for his efforts, is also on the way out.

With the elimination of these growers, the industry will support the growers who have had the foresight to plan ahead and who intend to grow lilies as a business. The industry cannot, under any circumstances, be controlled by a few large growers. The always-present dread of disease, and untold damage caused by climatic forces, prohibits the control of production by a few growers, in any one particular area. Therefore, with quality stock, reasonable prices, and more diversified marketing, the industry offers a good future to the small grower of Croft lilies.

Third, Culture. Demand for superior quality is increasing every year. Therefore, the grower who plans to continue raising Crofts, will make every effort to improve his strain of bulbs. Mother blocks are a "must" and are essential for the production of quality stock. Strict adherence to the proven theories as to fertilization, moisture control, disease and cultivation are also essential. The grower should be conversant with the problems confronting the forcer and jobber, as to culture, packing, shipping and storage. The small grower will utilize the reports from state and federal experiment stations.

Also, for the following and more specific reasons, the future of the bulb industry is assured. State marketing laws will be enforced, thereby eliminating the "fly-by-night" brokers and promoters. State inspection and cultural advice will do much to improve the crop. Growers organizations in their respective areas will accomplish much good, and establish efficient methods in the growing and marketing of the crop. Legitimate trade channels for marketing will do much to stabilize the market.

Yes, the Croft lily has its place in the floral market of America.

Another factor which has bedeviled the industry, is the sale of the yearly crop. In the past, growers have been pitted against growers, to the satisfaction of many buyers. Also growers have betrayed their own neighbors, in order to gain confidence of buyers, and sell their own individual crop.

Officials have stood up before their own groups with hands to "high heaven" pleading for the holding of specific prices. Then they offered their own at any price. All of these practices have led to confusion at harvest time.

This year, we find the same state of confusion at this particular time. Innuendos, rumors, etc., are being cast to spread the gospel of confusion.

Last year, the Co-op set a price for the industry, which was lots higher than the prices submitted by a representative group of lily growers. The co-op held to this price, while the bulk of the crop was being sold at a lower price. The co-op was reduced to meet this competition, but it was too late, as most of the sales had been consummated.

This year, the co-op, with the past year's experience in mind, refused to go on record with an

overall price. Instead, a schedule of prices was offered solely to the buyers with whom sales contact had been made. The basis of this price offered, was the competitive low price which had already been offered to the trade.

Past experiences also had to be taken into consideration, to wit: had a higher price been offered, it would have served as a target for the sharpshooters.

At a recent growers meeting, reference was made to this Co-op price and the statement was made, had not this price been in effect last spring, the current prices would have been higher. This as an absolute false statement, as anyone being honest and conversant with the market during the past months, would acknowledge.

Considering the very short crop of Creoles and Florida lilies on the market this year, the Croft lily should be in heavier demand. Adverse weather conditions during the past three or more months have made the predictions of a large surplus crop, a myth. Weedy and poorly cared for fields will also cut down the production. Late rains and early sprouting will also have their effect upon the final count.

What the final analysis will be by the first of September should be taken into consideration by every grower. The possibility of a premium being paid for quality

stock is not improbable. Certain brokers are not angling for a 5c price for sevens to eights, and feelers are out for this same price from some of the jobbers.

The growers who become panicky and sell at these lower prices, are cutting their own income. Forcers, legitimate jobbers and substantial growers certainly do not want to see the 1947 crop of Croft lilies go at bankrupt prices. —E. G. Farmer, manager, West Coast Bulb Growers, Crescent City, Calif.

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