

## COMMERCIAL POSSIBILITIES

### Seen For Blueberries in CURRY COUNTY By George D. Asdel

This is the third and last of a series of articles on blueberries, the first of which was published three weeks ago and discussed the commercial possibilities of blueberries in Curry county, the present plantings, market possibilities, soils, irrigation and the varieties.

Cultivation by the most successful growers in the northwest is carried out as follows: disc three inches deep as early in the spring as the soil can be worked to work in the cover crop and weeds; cultivate with a spring tooth as required to keep down the weeds and to provide a loose surface on the soil; hand hoe (very shallow) close to the berry plants once or twice to hold down the weeds (mature plants usually shade the ground enough to prevent weed growth and this is not necessary); plant a cover crop as soon as the berries are off. A mulch of sawdust around each plant will help control the weeds, making the hand hoeing unnecessary and will also help to conserve the moisture.

Fertilizers of the commercial kinds are usually liberally applied. Some growers use 700 lbs. per acre on mature bushes. The Washington experiment station at Puyallup has found that 5-10-10 applied at the rate of two ounces per plant for each year of the plant's growth—to a maximum of 800 lbs. per acre has given good results. When a sawdust mulch is used an additional 30 lbs of nitrogen per acre is required to replace that used in the decomposition of the sawdust. Animal fertilizers should not be used as various tests by growers as well as the experiment stations show that they often cause damage.

Pruning is very important as it affects both the size of the berries and the total yield. The amount to prune varies not only with the varieties but also local conditions such as moisture and plant food available, etc. Generally speaking a light to moderate pruning that removes the older, less vigorous wood and a portion of the fruit buds gives best results. Pruning may be done any time while the plants

are dormant or while in bloom. Many of the local plantings would do much better with care in this respect.

Yields of five tons to the acre can be expected from well-cared for plantings under suitable conditions. One large Washington grower is reported to have averaged eight tons per acre for the last three years. In Michigan the rate of bearing from the second year through the sixth was recorded as follows:

50, 200, 2050, 4000 and 6000 pints per acre. This should be bettered considerably in the northwest as the normal field here is considerably better than that obtained in Michigan and the plants propagated here are larger and make a faster start. Properly cared for plants normally yield for many years. Some plants found in the wild are believed to be over 100 years old and many of the first commercial plantings set out around 1900 are still in good condition.

Marketing has been handled by each grower until this year when the Pacific Northwest Blueberry Growers Association, at Puyallup, Wash., started a cooperative marketing program which looks very promising. Most of the berries are sold on the fresh markets of the principal western cities but there is a strong demand for processing them also. A price of \$3.50 per flat of twelve 14-oz (1 pint) boxes packed for the fresh market was agreed upon by the blueberry growers prior to this year's season. This price held without fluctuation throughout the entire season.

A large produce company, doing a wholesale business in this area, has purchased the berries produced by one local grower for several years and will probably be able to absorb all local production for some time. Selling direct to the local tourist retail trade is another promising outlet for these people on Hwy 101.

Produce trucks bringing supplies to Northern California and returning empty to San Francisco are considered a likely way of transportation to that market.

The Del Norte Ice and Cold Storage plant at Crescent City is interested in obtaining blueberries for freezing and would be a good outlet for producers in the southern part of the county.

The Coquille Cranberry cannery has shown considerable interest and is a possible outlet

for growers in the northern part of the county. When the tonnage produced locally warrants such action a local marketing association could be set up to operate independently or possibly with the Pacific Northwest Blueberry Growers Association. From all indications the potential markets are expected to develop faster than production for a good long time.

Diseases and pests have not bothered northwestern growers to any noticeable extent thus far. As far as can be determined no spray or other control measure has been used on blueberries of Oregon or Washington. Birds and deer have caused some damage to small plantings but this damage is not noticed by the larger growers because of the small percentage of fruit affected.

Home plantings include those used for landscaping purposes as well as for fruit, as the plants are very attractive, giving lots of color when in bloom, when heavy with fruit and when going dormant in the fall. They are also set out in closely spaced rows or plots when not used for landscaping. Most any soil can be doctored up to give good results for a few plants. Three-year-old plants are recommended for home use. Mature plants reach a height of four to six feet. With a little care a few blueberry plants will supply a family with a delicious fruit that may be eaten fresh, used in cooking, preserved by freezing or canning, made into jams and jellies and in all the other ways other fresh berries are used.

The cost of planting per acre varies with the manner used in starting the acreage. In the following comparisons 908 plants per acre in the following proportions are assumed: 308 Jersey, 300 Stanley, 100 Dixi, 100 Atlantic, 100 Pemberton. The cost would be changed with more or fewer plants per acre or a different selection of varieties. Prices are quoted by the Oregon Coast Berry Co., in their 1948-49 price list.

1. Where low investment is of prime importance No. 2 rooted cuttings may be purchased and nursery grown for one or two years prior to setting out in the field. Plants would cost \$287 per acre. This method is recommended for those who do not have their field ready for planting but do have a small area (15x50 ft. for 908 plants) near a water supply. In this way the plants are gaining in size and strength as the field is being prepared.

2. When earlier bearing is desired No. 1 rooted cuttings may be purchased and either nursery grown or set out in their permanent field location. Plants

would cost \$480 per acre. This method is especially recommended for those who have their fields ready to plant as these plants are large enough to be set out in their final location thereby saving the shock of a later transplanting.

3. When the earliest possible commercial crop is desired and cost for plants is secondary the grower may purchase two-year-old plants at \$850 per acre or three-year-old plants at \$1275 per acre. Plants may be set out from November through April.

It is strongly recommended that those planning to purchase blueberry plants use extreme caution and thoroughly investigate the various sources of supply and the plants they offer. No standards have been established and the quality of the plants offered by various propagators differ a great deal. Most sources do not grade their plants but mix the small-sized ones with the larger ones and charge full price for all. Others grade and sell the smaller size plants as No. 2's at a reduced price. Eastern plants should be avoided because of the danger of bringing in diseases with them and because they are much smaller than western-propagated plants.

The Oregon Coast Berry Co. of Port Orford has the most modern equipment developed for the

blueberry propagation and will welcome visitors at any time, whether they are interested or not in growing blueberries.

Additional information is now available at the following places:

Western Washington Experiment Station, Puyallup, Wash., South Haven Experiment Station, South Haven, Mich., New Jersey Experiment Station, New Brunswick, N. J., Massachusetts Experiment Station, Amhurst, Mass., U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.



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