

The Fruit and Vegetable Canning Industry

THE NORTHWEST CANNERS ASSOCIATION



INTERIOR VIEW OF MODERN FRUIT CANNERY

SIX SHORT YEARS ago, during the summer of 1916, a scant half dozen canners met at luncheon in Portland, Or., having in mind the possibility of forming some kind of an association which could act for the canners of Oregon in an attempt at, least, to aid in the solution of its problems of a general nature which continually develop in any great business and which can be handled only as a general matter. This body formed themselves into an association known as the Northwest Canners Association, which association for several years was more or less of a precarious matter. However, in the last few years, realizing that much could be accomplished by united effort, the association has grown rapidly, until in the year 1920 it was enlarged in scope to take in the State of Washington as well as Oregon, so that the association now has a membership of 46 firms operating a total of 63 fruit and vegetable canning plants in the two states—more than two-thirds of the total number of canneries and approximately 80 per cent of the total output.

The association, during the year 1922, found that its task had grown to such an extent that it was found necessary to establish permanent offices in the City of Portland, and, due to the united cooperation of its members, the association has been able to greatly better conditions having to do with the canning industry, particularly in matters pertaining to traffic problems, publicity, legislative and problems of general interest in the matter of canning specifications, general betterment of working conditions, the improvement of sanitation, and, indeed, all matters of this character.

Not alone have the member plants been benefited, but, as a natural consequence, every canner, whether or not a member, has received untold benefits through the efforts of the association.

On the question of standardization of pack, the association is putting forth every effort toward this end. Strict specifications are issued and every canner is expected to pack strictly in accordance with these specifications. It is the object of the association to so educate the canners in the Northwest that the pack of every plant will be as near a standard as is humanly possible, so that each can of fruit packed in the Northwest will be on a par.

These specifications are given herewith with the idea that the consumer may know what he should expect to find in the can, and a careful study of them is to be recommended:

The established grades are, in the order of their comparative values, Fancy, Choice, Standard, Sub-Standard (or Seconds), Water and Pie.

Fancy grade or superlative quality consists of fruit of very fine color, ripe yet retaining its form, not mushy, free from blemishes, with the pieces uniform in size and very symmetrical, and packed in the highest percentage of sugar in syrup.

Choice grade or fine quality consists of fruit of fine color, ripe yet retaining its form, not mushy, free from blemishes, with the pieces uniform in size and symmetrical, and packed in approximately 10 per cent lower percentage of sugar in syrup than Fancy.

Standard grade or good quality consists of fruit of reasonably good color, ripe yet not mushy, reasonably free from blemishes, with the pieces reasonably uniform in size and reasonably symmetrical, and packed in approximately 10 per cent lower percentage of sugar in syrup than Choice.

Sub-Standard grade (or Seconds) quality consists of fruit tolerably free from blemishes, pieces tolerably uniform in size, color and ripeness, and packed in approximately 10 per cent lower percentage of sugar in syrup than Standard.

Water and Pie grades consist of wholesome fruit unsuited for the above grades.

The Fancy, Choice and Standard grades are the grades of fruit principally used by the housewife. The lower grades are those used by restaurants and bakeries for cooking purposes.

In order that there may be no misunderstanding as to the proper grading of fruits, annually this association conducts an investigation in the City of Portland, at which time samples are taken from every plant in the two states and are examined carefully by most competent judges, and the findings of the examination are reported in detail to all members of the association. This gives the canners an opportunity to check up on the packs of their competitors and has much to do with the wonderful increase noted in the standardization of Northwest packs. The task of inspecting the hundreds of cans is huge and the investigation lasts over a period of days.

While progress has been made in the canning industry and a steady increase in production noted, with the single exception of the year 1920, which, being a year of reconstruction, and owing to the fact that thousands upon thousands of cases of canned goods were thrown into consumption from army stores, which necessarily slackened up the pack for that year, nevertheless the industry is handicapped principally for the want of capital to properly function. This does not mean that a great deal of assistance has not been given to the industry by the financial powers, but rather that the importance of the industry to the Northwest has not been fully appreciated by the financial interests and by the Chambers of Commerce.

In order to properly understand the needs of the canner, one should keep firmly in mind the fact that the canning business is one that requires the keenest foresight, and also bear in mind the fact that very few carloads of straight varieties of one kind of fruit are purchased by the jobbing interests. In fact, by far the greater part of the canned goods shipments consist of mixed cars, and in these cars are every variety of canned fruits and vegetables packed in the Northwest, so that the canner finds it necessary in the spring, before the season is under way, to endeavor to secure some future orders that will give him at least an insight of the probable requirements of the consuming public for the ensuing year. Of course, it is impossible for the canner to book ahead sufficient business to take care of his entire operations; but, using his future orders as a figuring basis, he must so arrange his affairs that he will have the necessary diversified pack in order to take care of his buyers. Therefore, starting in with the gooseberry pack at the first of the year, he must proceed through the whole year packing consecutively

strawberries, raspberries, loganberries, cherries, pears, prunes, plums, and finishing up with apples in October.

Were it possible for the canner to ship his pack as it is produced in the plant, his troubles would not be great, but he must be in a position to hold his early pack clear through the packing season and into the Fall before he is able to clean up on his mixed carloads, which means that in some cases a period of six months elapses before he can realize on his pack. Now, the canner must pay cash for everything, for the reason that he is on a cash basis. It is, of course, well known that sugar, one of the chief essentials of the canning business, is a cash sale; his cans are also cash; his labor, of course, is cash; his transportation charges, which are heavy, are a cash proposition; and most important of all—his supply of fruit is handled strictly on a cash basis, for the farmer or producer must be taken care of; for he, in turn, has his problems of paying cash to his pickers and other help; so that the canner must have a tremendous line of credit in order to accommodate all of these people, and himself must be able to wait until the Fall, when he can realize on his shipments.

This means that for six months in the year everything is being paid out, but his returns come very quickly when the packing season is over.

There is not a cannery in this district that could not have increased its output, had it been possible to arrange to take care of the entire quantity of fruit offered. It is true that some crops here were short, owing to the weather conditions during the year 1922, but aside from this it is seldom possible to take care of the entire production of berries and fruits. Indeed, a great quantity of berries are annually shipped, frozen in barrels, to Eastern jam and preserve manufacturers, owing to the fact that it is not possible for the canners to handle all the fruit.

If financial arrangements could be made, the canner could pack every bit of fruit grown in the district, and then, being secured through proper financial arrangements, it would not be necessary for him to figure so closely on his possible sales, but he would be in a position to pack all the fruit offered and warehouse same. Thus the producer could bring his entire output to the canning plant, and the canner, being properly financed

and thus able to carry the load, could put up a much larger pack, and the entire situation thus relieved.

In the past there have been times when it has been inadvisable for growers to pick fruit, owing to the fact that the canner had no market and was not in a position to pack the goods and await his market later. Thus, taking these points into consideration, it would mean that the canner would pack, not according to future orders, but all the fruit delivered to his plant, and no raw products would be shipped out of the district to be manufactured elsewhere, and this district would receive the benefit of manufacturing costs.

The Northwest Canners Association is putting forth every effort to aid in a more liberal financing of canners, having in mind these facts; and, while it is true, as stated before, that the canning industry has grown and will continue to grow, it is nevertheless even more true that no extraordinary growth in this industry will be noted until such a time as the combined interests of the Northwest unite in a more liberal financing of this great and important industry.

We talk of more settlers for the Northwest. We are behind the rest of the country in this particular, but before we can honestly and consistently appeal to the settler to locate in our locality we should provide him with a market for his products, for we are assuming that the most satisfactory settler is one who develops the land, and we must bear in mind that no district is stronger than its agricultural development. Therefore, the development of the Northwest, agriculturally, is tied "hand and foot" with the development of the canning industry of the Northwest, and with the development of the canning industry will be found similar development along horticultural lines. The settler locating on a small tract of land can more quickly make a living by setting out a small tract of berries and small fruits than in any other manner.

The canner is doing his best to aid the small farmer, but thus far has had to fight his battles practically alone. While, of course, it is true that the canner needs the grower, and the grower the canner, nevertheless it is also true that the business interests of the Northwest need both the grower and the canner if the entire district is to grow as it should.

The Canning Industry— Source of Revenue to the Northwest

THE TOTAL VALUE of the production of canned goods in Oregon and Washington during the year 1922 amounted to more than \$12,000,000. The products packed in this state were distributed all over the United States and a great proportion was exported, principally to Great Britain, France, Canada, and some of the Orient. Thus, the distribution, it will be observed, is practically universal. This means that millions of dollars of outside money is brought into the States annually by this industry.

This is not a destructive industry, and each year adds to its upbuilding.

The chief industry of the Northwest has always been lumber, and the lumber industry is, of course, deserving of all support and great praise; but when the trees are cut down the land is rendered valueless until such a time as it is put under cultivation, and the canning industry offers a solution toward the development of land thus laid destitute.

The market afforded by the industry makes it possible for the small farmer to clear off a few acres of land, plant this land thus cleared in small fruits, berries, and with even such a small tract as 10 acres, placed under cultivation and planted in this manner, in a very short space of time the grower is enabled to earn a good living for himself and family, and each year, as he succeeds in adding an acre or so to his tract, he is able to increase his output gradually and thus pay his expenses of clearing as he goes along.

The canning industry is also one of the few industries that can exist in a small community. It is a tremendous factor in its locality, not alone because it furnishes a market for that locality, but also because the canner pays cash for his product, thus affording the grower immediate returns for his efforts.

In addition to this a great deal of inexperienced help is used at the plants every summer, and in this work many women and students find a wonderful opportunity of providing a little "nest egg" which goes far toward helping them along. Added to the help employed in the canneries, the growers, of course, employ a similar class of help in the fields as pickers.

Another way in which the canner helps materially in the upbuilding of the community is the fact that the cannery is one of the few industries that aid every other business. It is hard to name any class of trade that does not benefit by the patronage of this industry. The industry is susceptible of great development and the canners are putting forth every effort toward the proper education of the growers so that the right kind of fruit may be planted and proper care taken of the growing vines and trees.

A staff of experts is employed by most of the canneries and these men spend their entire time and energy in assisting the growers in securing maximum returns from their labor. The canner is ready, at all times, to arrange for the analyzing of the soil so that it may be determined which crop the land is best adapted to. Fertilization and harvesting methods receive similar attention. Seeds and plants can be obtained through canners by the growers at actual cost.

The Oregon Agricultural college has rendered invaluable aid in every line of horticulture and is conducting classes for the instruction of the cannery employes so that the canners may not be confronted by the problem of inexperienced help in that part of their work, which requires careful attention and close application.

Very little assistance has been received by either of the two Northwest states from governmental sources in the upbuilding of this industry. In this matter we are behind the great fruit growing states. California has appropriated hundreds of thousands of dollars and is financing training courses in its state university, and conducting investigational work at all times in the matter of the elimination of fruit and vegetable pests, and has thus very materially aided in increasing and bettering the output.

Michigan, Minnesota, Illinois, Ohio and New York state legislatures have aided very materially in similar work. In Illinois alone the legislature has authorized the construction of a complete plant which will cost in the neighborhood of \$250,000, which plant will be devoted entirely to horticultural interests.

The problems of the canner in the proper preparing and preserving of fruits are taken up by these bureaus.

The time has come when the Northwest state legislatures should take similar action in order to keep pace with the growth of the rest of the country. The canner and grower, working together, have endeavored to solve many of these problems, but the investigational work is expensive and extremely far reaching, and there are problems beyond the "ken" of either of these parties which can only be solved by experts, thoroughly equipped with the technical knowledge necessary and being able to conduct their experiments by having at their command thoroughly up-to-date laboratories.

The Oregon Agricultural college, under the splendid leadership of Professor Wiegand, has done much to help both the horticulturist and the canner in these problems, but of necessity it cannot do much on account of the lack of equipment. It is hoped, however, that the very near future will see provisions made in a manner which will enable better progress to be made in this class of work.

The problems of the canner and the grower should not be considered as theirs alone. The development of the entire country depends on the settler; the success of the settler depends on his ability to produce and market satisfactory crops; the success of the canner depends on his ability to secure the proper kind of fruit and have this properly prepared so that it will meet all competition—and thus it is seen that the development of the entire district depends, to a great extent, on the development of the one industry that the grower can look to as an outlet for his crops.

The Northwest is in a position to produce the finest fruits obtainable in any part of the world, but we are woefully deficient in that equipment which adds so much to the improvement of crops and in manufacturing.

The future of the Northwest lies in such industries as this—that cannot do otherwise than aid in the upbuilding of the entire district.

Facts Concerning the Canned Goods Industry in Oregon and Washington

Total Number of Cases of Canned Fruit Packed

	1919	1920	1921	*1922
Washington	1,211,177	1,003,936	1,307,548	1,569,057
Oregon	1,228,629	1,019,391	1,304,457	1,565,348
Total Northwest dist.	2,439,806	2,023,327	2,612,005	3,134,405

*Estimated.

Approximate value of 1921 Washington pack \$ 4,481,485.25
Approximate value of 1921 Oregon pack 4,903,699.25

Total \$ 9,385,184.50

Estimated value of 1922 pack, Northwest \$11,262,221.40
Total number of individual plants 90
Total number of operating firms 75
Estimated number of employes at peak of pack 8000

Comparison With California Pack, 1921

	Northwest	California
Fruits	2,612,005	8,511,851
Vegetables	157,401	2,615,947

Regarding canned vegetables, very little has been attempted in this line in the Northwest, but a gradual improvement is noticed in the canning of vegetables.

No estimate of the value of the Northwest canned vegetables pack is contained in the figures above noted.

Acreage in Oregon

Total acres of land in farms in 1921 8,419,955
Total acres in agricultural and horticultural products 3,081,339
Total number of farms in Oregon 33,917

Statistics regarding acreage are not yet available on Washington.