

This Week's Slogan:

Our Prune Industry Is Coming Back to Be and Stay Big

The Prune Industry of the Salem Section Is Decidedly On Way to Brighter Times

There Is Perhaps a 70 Million Pound Dried Crop All But Safe, Requiring Only Fair Weather Conditions in Douglas County

The prune industry of the Salem district is decidedly on its way to recovery, after a prolonged sick spell. If heavy fall rains hold off over the Douglas county prune districts for two to three weeks yet, the harvest this year will show a total dried tonnage of 60 to 70 million pounds. The crop of Salem district, counting this as the whole Willamette valley, will be 90 per cent safe in the bins by the time this article is printed, Sunday, the 13th and a few additional days will see the whole crop saved. The rains so far have done more good than harm; they have shown that have visited the orchards the past week or so.

But something unusual has happened this year—the Douglas county crop is much later than that of the Willamette valley; two to three weeks later. In ordinary years it is earlier ripening. What caused this? Perhaps for one thing, the heavier fall of smoke from forest fires in the early part of the ripening season. The rest of it is unexplained—unless that is all of it. Then Douglas county is not as well supplied with drying facilities as the valley counties, in proportion to the tonnage of green fruit to be taken care of.

They have been claiming for Douglas county 18 to 20 million pounds of dried prunes from the present crop, if all of it could be saved. A well qualified Salem authority thinks that is an over estimate. He adds that the Willamette valley crop will over run rather than fall short of the estimates. And he further adds that the best yields in quantity and quality have predominated in the Dallas, Sheridan and Newberg sections, and that the medium high land on the east and west flanks of the valley have made the best showings.

Decidedly More Cheerful
The average price realized by the growers for their dried prunes of this year's crop will run to 7 cents a pound or better. The average is raised by the greater proportion of large sizes than was expected—the larger sizes of course commanding the higher prices.

As the reader will observe, this means between four and a quarter to over five million dollars of new money coming to the growers this year for their prunes. For a large tonnage was canned, and these are not counted with the dried product in the above estimate.

The bulk of this five millions of new money, (if the tonnage runs to 70 millions), comes to the growers of the Willamette valley; a little of it to the growers of Clark county, Wash., and the rest of it to those of Douglas county. The Salem district will get the lion's share. It makes a big and wide distribution of new money, to the pickers, dryers, haulers, handlers, dealers and growers, etc., etc.

Time Now to Begin Dotted Willamette Valley With Flax Plants, Says Bartram

With Proper Organization, Federal Money Is Available to Build and Equip These, to Prepare the Fiber for Home Markets

Col. W. B. Bartram, superintendent of the state flax plant and managing director of the Oregon Lined Mills, Inc., Tuesday last addressed the Oregon City chamber of commerce. He there made the most important talk he so far has made on the development of Oregon industries. He declared that it would require 30,000 acres of fiber flax to take care of our country's imports in rough flax fiber from abroad. And he asserted that the Willamette valley is ready now for action; that we may get the necessary money from the federal government for dotting the Willamette valley with flax plants. The following is the full text of Colonel Bartram's address:

"It is very gratifying to the management of the state flax in Oregon and her people, that marked progress has been made in the development of the flax industry. The progress made may be appreciated when I tell you that the entire operations of seeding, pulling and processing are now done by machinery. Only a few years ago these operations were all carried on by hand labor. Today we have in Oregon the largest and most modern flax plant in the world. This has been made possible by certain factors that were necessary to such a development.

In western Oregon we have the required climate and soils to successfully raise fiber flax. From 14 years experience we have established the fact that we do raise and process the best flax fiber in the world.

It has found favor in all as in home markets, and our present ability to

replace other crops are now overdone and adds inducement to proper rotation of crops in general.

These factors have been established after years of patient hard work, believing that the greatest flax development on this continent was to be worked out here in the Willamette valley and confidence in the ultimate success of the industry.

This all means that the industry will persist. The acreage will be larger next year than this. New orchards will come into bearing, and fuller bearing with the growth of the young trees. Some old orchards and parts of others will go out. But most old orchards will have better attention next year than they have had lately, in the times of low prices and short crops that have prevailed for several seasons.

And the great majority of the trees, at least for some time, will be of the Italian or Oregon variety. There are not many petite or French prune trees in the Willamette valley. In Douglas county the proportion of these is higher.

There are some new sweet prune varieties, such as the date prunes, the Noble French, and others. But it will take a long time to bring on a great acreage of these. With several of the new varieties, experiments have not gone far enough to justify great promise.

What Caused It?
What caused the price comeback for our dried prunes? The late prices have been running to 10 cents a pound to the growers, for 20-30's, that is dried prunes 20 to 30 of which will weigh a pound.

There was a world shortage of the prune crops this year. California had 440 million pounds last year, and less than 200 million pounds this year. And there was no carry over this year, as there was last year.

Then central European countries had a short crop this year, and the French crop has been slipping for several years. It will take these countries years to bring back their orchards, if they ever are brought back. The world will always need and buy dried prunes.

The distribution this year is wider than ever. They are going from Oregon to Germany and central Europe, to the British Isles, and to all the southern European countries, to the Mediterranean ports, and to most other countries, to say nothing of an increased distribution in the United States.

For Better Methods
H. S. Gile of H. S. Gile & Co., who buy all over this section and have packing plants at Newberg and Roseburg, and who with W. T. Jenks manages the Willamette Valley Prune association with its packing plant at the Fruit Union building in Salem, said Friday that of course the prune in our prune industry should and will persist. It should and the orchards should and will have better attention than they have been having.

There should and will be new acreage, and the revamping of old orchards. There should and will be a better average, higher average tonnage and a better average quality.

authorized to make a loan from the revolving fund. It provides that this loan shall be used in effective merchandising, in educational work, in securing through construction, purchase, or lease, facilities for preparing, handling, storing, processing, or merchandising agricultural products. Through this provision a cooperative association may secure a loan up to 80 per cent of its valuation. These loans are repaid on an amortization plan over a period not in excess of 25 years.

Can Go Ahead Now
We feel that with this financial assistance available, the fiber flax cooperative associations could be organized at once in a number of the fiber flax districts, and then proceed with a plan as outlined in the "agricultural marketing act" which provides:

1. That cooperative associations be organized in accordance with the plan defined in an act approved by congress February 18, 1922, calling "an act to authorize associations for agricultural products." These cooperative associations should, of course, be known as fiber flax cooperative associations.

2. Appoint an advisory committee consisting of seven members of whom at least two should be experienced handlers or processors of the commodity. The advisory committee acts as representatives of the cooperative associations on all matters referred to the federal farm board and also in carrying out the educational programs. Members of the advisory committee do not receive a salary, but are paid on a per diem basis for services authorized by the federal farm board.

3. Organize a stabilization corporation in which all stock shall be owned by the cooperative association. The stabilization corporation act is to minimize speculation, prevent inefficiency and wasteful methods of distribution and aid in preventing and controlling surplus, to prevent excessive fluctuation or depression in price. The stabilization corporation acts as a marketing agency, and upon request of the advisory committee the federal farm board is authorized to make loans for working capital.

The "agricultural marketing act" provides for a clearing house association, but in my judgment this would be unnecessary at this time, as the functioning of a stabilization corporation would cover the present need of the fiber flax cooperative associations. There are also other miscellaneous provisions which I will not go into at this time.

Time Is Opportune
Gentlemen, it would appear there never was a more opportune time than now for expanding the fiber flax industry, and I have

Prune Industry is Coming Back

OUR prune industry is coming back. Our growers of what is called the Salem district, including Douglas and Clark county and upper valley sections, will receive for their dried prunes and those sold to the canneries perhaps as much as or more than five millions of dollars of new money—the bulk of the sum coming to the Salem trade territory.

Moreover, the world wide outlook appears favorable for our prune industry. The French orchards are slipping. So are those of central Europe. The prune trees of the Willamette valley in full or near full bearing are perhaps as many as they have ever been; they may be larger in number.

Good attention to the orchards, which will likely be generally had hereafter, owing to the better outlook for remunerative prices, will soon stabilize that part of the industry. This is an encouraging sign for Salem. This city is the center of a great prune section; prunes are a major crop here—have been for a long time, and will likely persist in being.

There is a report in this department of an address by Col. W. B. Bartram on Tuesday last, delivered before the Oregon City chamber of commerce—

And it is the most important talk the chief figure of our flax industry has ever made in favor of state development.

He says the time has come when a movement may be safely launched for dotting the Willamette valley with flax plants. He says this may be done by securing federal loans to build the plants. The money is available. It has been set aside for just such a purpose, or such purposes.

Every valley city should sit up and take notice, and get busy. There is a chance to push the flax industry forward and put it on its way to bringing hither many millions of dollars annually of new money. Good money. Money that will help enormously in our prosperity and solid growth.

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Prunes May be Graded on Quality as Well as Their Size in Markets Hereafter

The Oregon Agricultural College Experiment Station Staff Members Are Patenting the Process for the Protection of All Growers and the Public

(The following, furnished for this issue of The Statesman by John C. Burtner, associate director of the college news service, would seem to be information of prime importance to the people of this section who are engaged in the various forms of the prune industry.)

As the popular song writer said: "The baby prune looks like his dad, but not wrinkled quite as bad." And so far the public has been able to choose only between "baby" or "daddy" prunes for breakfast.

But like many another, this resemblance in the prune family has been found only skin deep, and a baby prune, fully mature, is often much sweeter, firmer, and of better flavor than a large prune picked when not fully ripe.

A new process, by which the prune crop of Oregon and the northwest may be graded uniformly, not only as to size but also as to maturity, sugar content, and texture, before drying, has just been perfected and patented by the horticultural products department of the Oregon experiment station.

The public service patent, granted to E. H. Wiegand, head of the department, and D. E. Bullis, assistant chemist, protects the public against payment of royalties in case the new method comes into general use. A similar patent has also been applied for on

a machine developed at the college to apply the prune grading process in a commercial way.

How It Is Done
Although it has long been known that maturity was a greater factor in quality of prunes than size, up to the present they have been graded only as to size, for lack of any known mechanical means of separating the mature from the immature fruit.

The process patented by the experiment station men is based on the fact that mature fruit, being of greater sugar content, is heavier, and therefore sinks in a denser solution than immature fruit. By providing a series of two or three vats of varying density of salt solutions and moving the fruit through these mechanically, the different grades are floated out and separated accurately.

The heavier prunes are also the best when dried, from the standpoint of appearance and by the most exacting physical and chemical tests. Investigation of those prunes floated out of a 40 degree solution were porous, acid, and of low sugar content, while those floated out of a 60 degree solution were of finer texture, greater firmness, more pleasing flavor and were a desirable jet black color.

Because of the variation in moisture content of fruit in different stages of maturity, it is

also better, in the interests of speed and economy in drying, that the tunns should contain only fruit of the same degree of maturity. This also makes for a more uniform dried product, as when fruits in various stages of maturity are placed on the same tray or car, the mature fruits, relatively low in moisture, are over-dried in the effort to obtain the proper degree of dryness for the under-mature fruit.

Experiments Satisfactory
During the 1928 season, findings made at the college on a small scale were tested commercially by the installation in an Oregon cooperative packing plant of a machine designed to handle prune grading by the flotation principle. More than 10 tons of fresh fruit were graded over this machine. Its operation was highly satisfactory, and the findings made by the experiment station when men in the horticultural products laboratory were entirely borne out.

These machines could be installed in commercial plants without any great increase in the costs of production, believes Professor Wiegand, as the grader would take the place of the dipper now used. The machines work rapidly, and could easily be accommodated to any size output. The solutions for floating out the prunes are made with coarse salt, which is both cheap and harmless.

Other factors brought out by Professor Wiegand and Mr. Bullis during the investigations are as follows:

"The prunes handled throughout these experiments contained much infected fruit. Unfortunately for the industry, that situation prevails generally. The infection was due principally to scab and brown rot. The separation of scabby fruit can not be accomplished by any method of gravity separation. It was thought that by the decomposition occurring in prunes affected by brown rot their

composition would be sufficiently changed to influence their specific gravity. It was found, however, that fresh fruit infected with brown rot had to be in an advanced state of decomposition to make possible its separation from non-infected fruit by the flotation process. Only when the brown rot had advanced so far that the fruit had become partly mummified could it readily be separated out in the lighter gravity solutions. It would seem, therefore, that separation of this type of infected fruit from perfect fruit must be accomplished mostly by hand sorting over belts before running any lot through a gravity separator.

These are some quotations from the report: Separation into quality grades by the flotation process seems most feasible when applied to fruit in the fresh state. The results are sure, the cost is low, and many advantages are gained by this method from a drying standpoint. But notwithstanding the advantages gained by gravity separations, it must be remembered that good fruit can be ruined by careless operations in the drying process and thereby all the effort spent on separations go for naught.

In recognition of this fact, some attempt has been made to ascertain whether fruit affected with various forms of spoilage might not be successfully separated out from the good by some change in the usual method of processing. A simple experiment shows that it can be.

"The dried fruit affected with these various forms of spoilage was processed in boiling water instead of live steam, which is one of the common commercial methods. Fruit with large gas pockets and that which was badly burned or poorly dried, floated to the surface of the boiling water, where it was readily skimmed off. The firm-textured product remained beneath the surface.

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