

BUMPER-FRUIT CROP AIDED BY ORGANIZED SELLING METHODS HAS PLACED EAST END OF UMATILLA COUNTY BEYOND NEED OF WORRYING OVER BUSINESS DEPRESSION

Apple Crop Alone This Year Will Amount to 800 Carloads, Valued at \$1 Per Box to the Grower; Prune Crop is Also of Extreme Value.

BY BRUCE SHANGLE.

A prominent Umatilla county citizen who makes his home down toward Pendleton but who was for a number of years a prominent social and political leader of the East End, asserted a few days ago that not ten per cent of the land owners of this county could pay their debts and have a dollar left.

No such ratio exists in the Milton-Freewater country for according to the cashier of one of our largest banks, there are not ten per cent of the men here who would be seriously pinched if forced to liquidate.

The year 1921 is generally spoken of by persons of all shades of political faith as being as bad if not worse than the Cleveland times of the early '90s, and unbiased economic and financial experts hold out little hope for some months to come. According to the secretary of labor who spoke to there are six million unemployed in the United States today and little prospect for lessening this number in the near future. But if hard times are in evidence elsewhere this locality feels the depression but little.

There is a reason for the optimism which prevails here and it is not hard to find. A visit to the bulging warehouses where the recent bumper wheat crop has been stored or a trip through the orchards of the valley heavily laden and hanging to the ground with their bounteous yield, or a tour of inspection through any of the several packing houses of the Twin Cities will convince the most skeptical that this is a thriving and prosperous community.

Time was when the sheriff's coming with an overdue mortgage to foreclose was a nightmare which troubled the numbers of the small fruit grower through this valley, but generally speaking that day is past, and the fruit grower is the only producer who can realize fat returns on his investment calculated at war time cost. A few years ago the fruit grower was the hardest customer the banks had to deal with, not because of any native dishonesty or poor business judgment but because there was no other class of individuals who produced and sold on such an uncertain market.

Organized Selling Counts. This was due largely to lack of organized effort in the distribution and

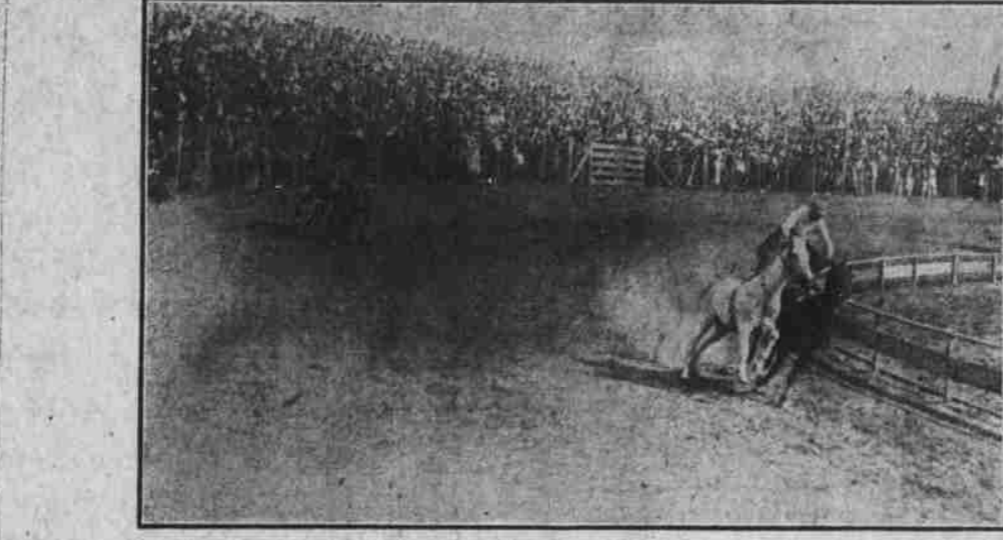
sale of their products. Also the growers themselves did not take the time and effort to grow top notch quality of fruit that they do now. They did not realize that it paid so well. Today, however, the grower who does not properly care for his orchard, prune, spray and thin when and where necessary, is the only man who does not get results and handsome results at that.

Compared in number of boxes with the apple crop of other Northwestern apple districts the Milton-Freewater country does not stand out conspicuously, for the Hood River and Rogue River districts in Oregon and the Wenatchee and Yakima valleys of Washington each produce more cars of apples than are grown here. But the acreage is much larger. Acre for acre the Walla Walla valley produces as much as any of them. In the end, however, it is not quantity that counts so much as quality, and the quality can be denied by no one who has had the opportunity to test it.

Fifteen years or more ago when all the other apple districts mentioned above were famed for their fruit, it was a doubtful proposition if the apple could be grown successfully in a commercial way in this valley, due to orchard pests. When Hood River, Yakima and Wenatchee were famed for the hundreds of carloads of apples shipped to the east and to Europe at prices that made good dividends on valuations of \$1000 and more per acre, the apple industry in this valley was practically nothing.

Even after state and nationally known horticulturists had dined into the ears of the people of this district at countless mass meetings and horticultural conventions, in an effort to convince them that this was an apple country, there were long haired and loud mouthed pessimists who could figure the grower out of any profit even if they could kill the worms.

There were those who could figure well, who estimated that even the acreage then in orchard, when it came into bearing, would produce so many million boxes and so many car and train loads of freight that the railroads could not secure sufficient equipment to haul the stuff to say nothing of where the people were to



The Standing Race.

come from who would eat it. But the calamity howler had his day, and while those he was not able to convince then, are now opulent growers, he and his kind are still working for wages and predicting evil times ahead.

The apple crop of the Walla Walla valley this side of the state line will amount to 800 cars for the present year. Valued at \$1.00 per box net to the grower the apple crop of this district will total \$500,000 in dollars and cents. Aside from what the grower receives employment is furnished to hundreds of men, women and children in caring for this vast output at wages that do not indicate pinched times.

The history of the apple in this district is but a counterpart of the growth of the Italian prune industry. Not so many years ago there were acres and acres of full grown Italian prune orchards dug up around the Twin Cities and it was not infrequent for the grower to "die up" to the railroad company for excess freight on a car of prunes shipped East.

About 1908 or 1909 the prune growers got as high as \$15.00 per ton for

their product and they began to think maybe they had been too hasty in digging out the trees. In 1910 the Italian prune was in such demand that altogether this valley produced close to a half million dollars gross for its prunes, apples, peaches and other fruit products.

In 1919 the prune grower received \$100 and better per ton. That was a war time return but in the hard times of 1921 the average is going to be about fifty dollars per ton.

A few years ago a man by the name of Hurst had been offered a 40-acre Italian prune orchard for a few hundred dollars and bought it. The Hurst orchard has for the past eight or ten years been a wizard, making money for its owner.

The present season will yield, when final returns are in, close to 400 carloads of prunes from this district at prices ranging from \$35 to \$55 per ton to the grower or between \$400,000 and \$500,000. In addition to these figures may be added the vast volume of money spent in packing, grading and loading these prunes for shipment. In the packing houses alone during

the past six weeks there have been employed for a good deal of the time 500 to 700 men, women and children, caring for the prunes as they are brought in from the orchards.

In a single day alone 65 carloads of prunes were sent out from here consigned for eastern markets.

A close estimate of the total yield of apples, prunes, cherries and all other fruits shipped from the Milton-Freewater districts during the year 1921 amounts to more than one and a half million dollars.

It is not a primrose path, however, this business of getting big returns from the fruit business. Hard work, constant and persistent attention to the details of the business and 16 hours a day during the growing and marketing season is the only way it can be done. But hour for hour the fruit business will pay bigger returns for the owner of the land than any other line of productive occupation known in the Northwest.

One of the most enthusiastic exponents of the fruit industry in the Milton-Freewater district is that pioneer fruit and nurseryman, S. A. Miller.

Along about 1889 Mr. Miller with his father, now hale and hearty at better than 90 years, started a little nursery business near Milton. Today with more than 200 acres devoted to the industry Mr. Miller has demonstrated to his own satisfaction that the fruit business taken year for year and followed up persistently is a "profitable and pleasant line of industry."

Twenty years or more ago when lands were not so much in demand as now Mr. Miller paid \$300 for four and one-half acres of land adjoining his home in Milton. His friends told him it was too much money. A few days ago he received a check for his prune crop which netted him, close to \$700 per acre for the one year's crop. Here are the figures: On the four and one-half acres are 575 trees, nine and 11 years old. From these trees were gathered this year 66 1-2 tons of prunes for which their owner received \$52 per ton net to him, or \$3458. Expenses in caring for the orchard, picking and hauling to market amounted to approximately \$500, leaving a net income from this land of about \$3,000. Not so bad for four and one-half acres.

The reader may say, this was one case in a thousand. It is not. It is unusual but there are others like it and there are hundreds of acres doing half that well. A \$350 an acre net return is a pretty handsome dividend on an acre of ground in a single year. The septical will say this is not done every year, for a heavy fruit crop one season is almost invariably followed by a light crop. Not so with prunes. There are of course some years when the yield is not so large as this season but the price is good, but the price is as sure and safe a crop as wheat on the best land in Umatilla county.

C. F. Collins, a well known fruit grower, who resides near the hard surface road a mile north of Freewater, has two prune trees 37 years old from which he gathered 1460 pounds of Italian prunes this year, selling the same for \$52 per ton. To the individual who likes to compute figures it may be interesting to know that an average acre of prune orchard contains 125 trees. At 750 pounds to the tree a whole acre has the two trees above mentioned would yield \$1,250

ounds or a trifle better than 45 tons which if sold at the price Mr. Collins received this year would bring the owner \$2340 or ten per cent on a valuation of \$23,400 per acre.

The above is of course a most unusual case and there are no other such aggregate returns. But this is a land of intensified cultivation and the more intense it is cultivated the bigger the returns. Poor farming never pays in any district and this is no exception.

While the big red apple and the Italian prune occupy the two most important places in the fruit industry of this valley, the cherry is by no means a small producer itself. Because of the longer time it takes for a cherry to grow to maturity it is not so popular with the grower as the more thrifty and quick growing prune or apple.

W. W. Bridgewater, who has a small acreage just outside the city limits of Milton, has a cherry orchard which yields him good returns. From this orchard of about 60 trees of Bing cherries Mr. Bridgewater last year sold \$1900 worth of fruit, about \$30 to the tree, which is by no means an exceptional yield for the Bing cherry tree 12 to 20 years old.

Growers of the Royal Ann cherry have of late years been reaping handsome returns for their product due to a big demand from California buyers.

A good bearing cherry orchard is safe for from \$500 to \$1000 per acre each year in this district.

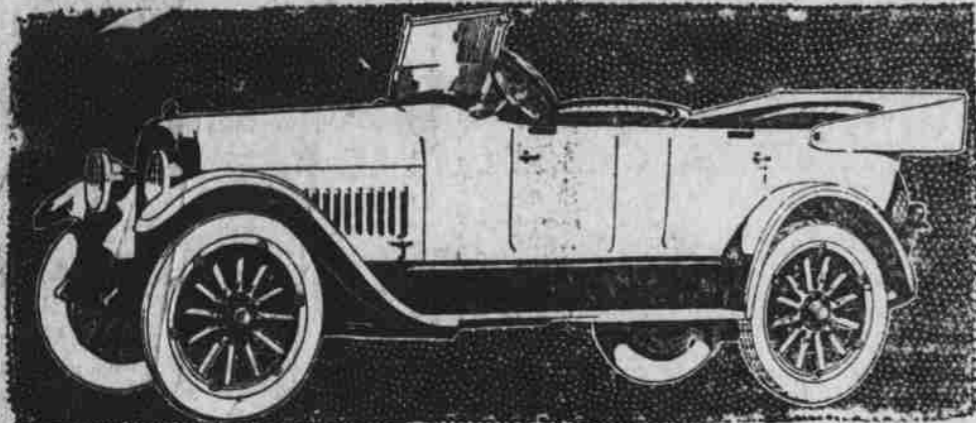
While growing a new orchard, its owner does not content himself with no profit from the ground as is the case in some localities. The first four or five years of a young orchard's life its owner grows watermelons, tomatoes, potatoes and other "truck" between the rows, and the returns from this venture often proves highly gratifying.

The tomato business this year particularly has been of a profitable nature and many acres have been planted and harvested, the total carload yield amounting to 20 cars for the district.

Fred McElrath, who started out a few years ago in the orchard game, now owns 10 acres of bearing and young orchard and grows tons of

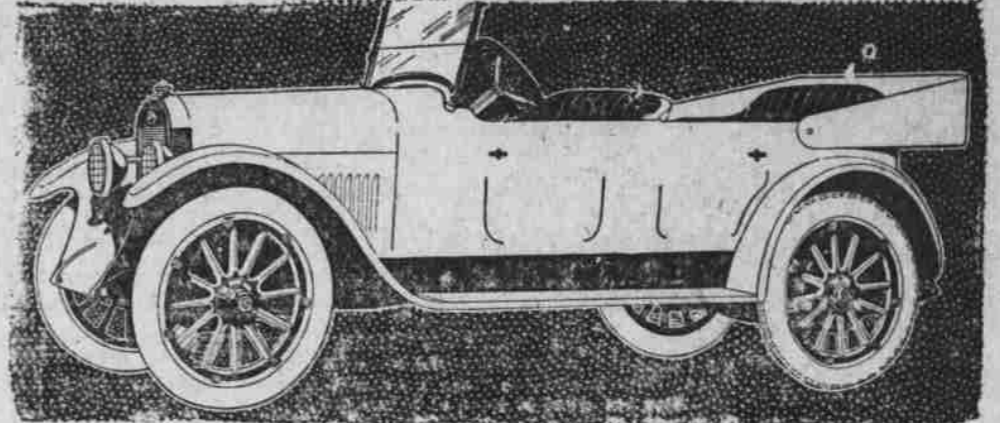
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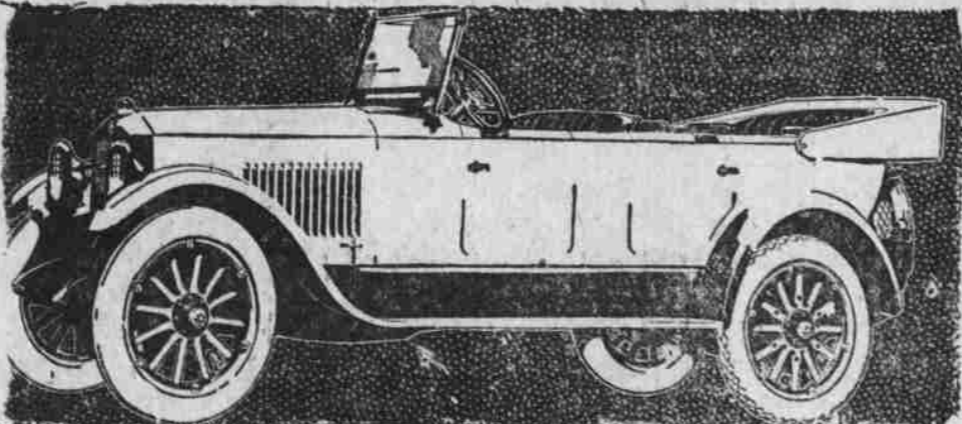
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