TELLS THE WORLD ABOUT FINE APPLES

James M. Irvine, managing editor of the Western Fruit-Grower of St. Joseph, Mo., visited the fruit growing sections of the Northwest this summer, and has published the following description of the industry in Hood River valley in the September number of his very excellent paper:

Nestled among the mountains along the Columbia river lies the Hood River valley one of the best known fruit sections of all the northwest country. It should be said in the beginning that the term "valley" is somewhat misleading. The fruit trees are planted in what is really a valley as contrasted with the near-by mountains but as related to the Columbia river the Hood River valley is really a comparatively level plateau several hundred feet higher than the river. We present an illustration, giving a bird's eye view of the valley with its small farms.

Hood River is noted for its apples and its strawberries. Not many of the apples grown at Hood River find their way into the ordinary markets, for the price is usually too high to permit of any but the most select trade to handle the fruit. But last year at St. Louis a wonderfully fine exhibit of apples was made, and the eyes of the middle west were opened. Hood River strawberries have long been known on the markets, on account of their firmness and careful handling.

When The Fruit-Grower representative arrived at Hood River, it was after a very hot, dusty ride; the day had been very disagreeable. It meant much therefore, to reach a place provided with clear, cold water, from springs up in the mountains, and the first impression of Hood River was most favorable.

One of the first men we met was Mr. E. H. Shepard, manager of the Berry Growers' Association, also manager of the Apple Shippers' Union. An appointment was made to drive out in the country the following day. After supper The Friut-Grower representative met Hon. E. L. Smith on the street and recognized him from his published likeness. Mr. Smith is president of the Oreogn State Board of Horticulture president of the Northwest Fruit-Growers' Association and is one of the pioneer orchardists of Hood River. It may also be stated that while in Portland we learned that Mr. Smith will likely be the Republican nominee for governor of Oregon next year. If he is we will vote for him.

We made ourselves known to Mr. Smith, who replied:

"Well, I am certainly glad to see a representative of The Fruit-Grower, for I want to say to you, as I have said to a great many other persons, that The Fruit-Grower is the best fruit paper published in this or any other country. I have made this statement all over the northwest, and have myself sent a number of subscriptions."

Mr. Smith took us up to his house, to meet his wife, who explained that she, too had admired The Fruit-Grower very much. Mr. Smith is one of the first settlers of Hood River, and when he had opportunity to choose a site for his home selected a block of ground with a magnificent view up and down the Columbia river and across to the mountains on the Washington side. He has a beautiful home in a beautiful location. We are indebted to Mr. Smith not only for a most cordial welcome, but for much valuable information concerning fruit growing in the northwest. He has grown three orchards, which have been sold, and now has another beautiful orchard just coming on. One of our illustrations shows Mr. Smith holding a branch of apples. He has been in the northwest fo' 44 years, but is a well-preserved man and we hope he will be with us long enough to raise several more orchards.

Mr. Smith informed us that the fruit lands of what is called the Hood River valley will amount to perhaps 50,000 acres; about 3,000 acres only are now producing fruit for market. We asked Mr. Smith what is the best money crop that is grown, and he promptly replied:

"Newtown and Spitzenburg apples."

He added that the strawberries are an important crop, and will serve to bring an income until an orchard is in bearing, but when an orchard begins to bear he believes that nothing will beat it for profit. He added, in this connection, that he believed the varieties named are the ones to plant. Other apples do well at Hood River, but they succeed in other localities also, whereas the two varieties named reach a high state of perfection there, such as they reach at very few other places in the country.

Not everyone who plants an apple orchard will succeed, at Hood River, any more than at other places. The successful man must spray his trees and cultivate the soil thoroughly. The annual rainfall at Hood River si not heavy—not heavy enough to raise strawberries without irrigation—but the young orchards are all grown without irriagtion, unless strawberries are planted among the trees, in which case they will have to be watered, and of course the trees will receive a share of the water. However, the best opinions are that apple trees should be grown without irrigation, at lest while they are young; when trees get old and are bearing a heavy load of fruit, it may be necessary to apply water late in the season. But orchards twelve to fourteen years old, full of fruit, are enabled to ripen their fruit without irrigation—simply cultivate the soil thoroughly and often.

The Hood River growers are experts on spraying, too. Notice the small tree shown in our illustration. The photograph from which this cut was made plainly showed the spray mixture sticking to the fruit, although this is not so clear in the reduced illustration. This spraying is so thoroughly done that some of the trees seem as if they were whitewashed. We asked Mr. Smith if any of the growers contend that spraying is ineffective, and he replied that they do not—they know better.

"I can spray one row of apple trees and allow the adjoining row to go unsprayed. From the first I will get nearly perfect fruit, while from the unsprayed row there will be few perfect apples. Codlin moth can be controled, and I have little sympathy for the one who says he cannot hold the insect in check. Some persons say that the presence of an unsprayed orchard in the vicinity will infest the whole neighborhood, but this will not be so if the other orchards are sprayed as they ought to be. Tell your people in Missouri and elsewhere to spray their trees thoroughly, and this insect can be controled."

As an evidence of the thorough spraying given the Hood River orchards, it may be said that when the apples are packed in the fall they are wiped with a cloth to remove the marks of the spray mixture—not the "russet" marks, of too strong a mixture, but the actual spray mixture itself.

Many of the trees are sprayed with lime, sulphur and salt—indeed, in many of the places visited on the trip we found where apple trees are sprayed while dormant with this mixture, simply for the effect upon the vigor of the trees. The bark is kept smooth and vigorous, and even though there is no danger from San Jose scale, many orchardists use this mixture every winter.

We asked Mr. Smith how one was to handle a large orchard where this thorough spraying is done. That is the thing which troubles many of the orchardists in the middle west, the getting over a large orchard.

"That is easy," replied Mr. Smith. "The solution of the problem is to have no large orchards. We have none here. Twenty acres is enough for most men—forty acres is enough for even men who are capable of handling a large enterprise. Twenty acres well cared for is enough work for any one man to look after, and many of our growers are growing wealthy on ten acres. Don't have a large orchard to be neglected—have a small one and care for it."

Mr. Smith said the best orchard land near Hood River is that on which pine and oak timber originally grew. This land is hard to clear for planting, and is worth $200 to $400 per acre in the raw state. We asked Mr. Smith to say frankly if he thought one would be justified in paying $200 an acre for this land, then clear it and plant it to aplpes.

"When a single crop will net the owner more than the land cost, I don't believe the first cost of the land should be considered. Yes sir, I think you can pay even more than that for this land, and still make good money from apples."

Later Mr. Shepard submitted some figures which seemed to prove the correctness of Mr. Smith's position. The writer saw a small orchard of 200 trees from which the fruit sold last year for $2,400, and there were many other similar cases.

Next day Mr. Shepard took The Fruit-Grower representative for a trip through the surrounding country. We wish every member of The Fruit-Grower family might take this trip, to see the care which these orchards receive. Not being able to do this, we present some illustrations made from photographs.

As stated before, strawberries are irrigated, and apple orchards are not. The former are planted close together in rows, and no runners are allowed to form. A runner cutter is used similar to the old-fashioned posthole digger. One of the best we saw was formed of an old saw blade, which is bent in the form of a circle. The lower edge is sharpened, a handle is attached to the top, and the cutter is placed over a hill of strawberries, and the runners cut on every side. These cutters operate just as a biscuit cutter does, and they vary in sizes. For newly set plants, one eight or ten inches in diameter is large enough to cover a hill of strawberries, but for older plants a larger one must be used.

After fruiting season the plantations are allowed to rest a while; then the tops of the plants are cut off with a sharp hoe, a man goes along with this cutter shaped like a biscuit cutter, and then the water is turned on and cultivation begins. Some of the strawberry patches are kept for five or six years, and no runners are ever allowed. It is held by some growers that to cut off the tops and apply the water immediately after the fruiting season will induce the plants to blossom in the fall. Early in the spring the plants are cultivated again. This plan will not work, of course, in localities where the rains would splash the soil on the ripening berries, but they do not count on having rains at Hood River when the fruit is ripening.

Asked as to the varieties grown at Hood River, Mr. Shepard said that only one sort is grown—Clark's Seedling, which originated near Portland.

"We have found that this berry is of good size, good color, and is firm, and it has driven out all other varieties," said Mr. Shepard. "We formerly grew the Magoon, but it is not so firm as Clark's Seedling, although it is more prolific. Occasionally we had a grower who had some Magoon berries, which he tried to ship with Clark's Seedling, but the former berry invariably arrived in bad condition, and is not grown here now."

Berry-growers generally can learn a lesson from these Hood River growers, who have put away a prolific berry and have planted instead a very shy bearer, simply because it will carry well to market, and will not injure the reputation for Hood River fruit. Clark's Seedling is a very shy bearer, but it has firmness, and that is why it is profitable.

Mr. Shepard said the berries are not packed promiscuously in boxes in the field; instead, they are delivered by the picker to the packing shed, and the berries are then placed in boxes in rows and layers, just as Hood River apples are packed later in the season. This requires considerable handling, of course—but the top prices are secured, and that is what counts. Small, poorly shaped berries are not marketed at all, for with this system of grading and packing they cannot be placed in the boxes.

Most of the berries are handled by the association, and much credit is due Mr. Shepard for the splendid returns of the past season. With a large acreage and heavier crop than ever before, the net returns to the growers will be about $1.60 cents per crate of 24 boxes. This means lots of money to be placed in circulation among the strawberry men.

Mr. Shepard is also manager of the apple association, and was in position to give us many facts concerning this business. Last year the apple crop was unusually heavy, and the fruit was of very fine quality. The Newtown Pippins were sold at $1.75 a box, and the Spitzenburgs at $2.10, f. o. b. cars at Hood River, payment being made in cash. This was four-tier apples. This year the crop is not so large, and high prices are expected. While The Fruit-Grower representative was at Hood River two buyers from Europe were on the ground, looking over the field, with a view of buying the fruit for export. Most of the Hood River apples are exported, anyway, and these buyers were seeking to get the fruit at first hands.

All the apples are handled by the association, and we asked Mr. Shepard how the organization could guarantee the pack of its members.

"The association packs all of its fruit," was the reply, "so that we know just the character of the fruit. The growers pick their fruit from the trees and deliver to the packing tables at their orchards, and our expert packers are there to do the packing. For this service the orchardist is charged a considertion, but as they own the stock of the association it is the same in the end. After the fruit is packed the orchardist delivers it at the warehouse in town, and it is sold with that of other growers. And under our system we have a uniform pack, and the association guarantees every box of the fruit."

We were told that the cost of the box, labor of picking, packing, hauling to town, etc., is estimated at about 50 cents a box.

Perhaps many of the persons have been of the opionion that, because the Hood River apples they have seen have been uniform in size; that apples there do not vary in size as do ours in the middle west. But they do. Apples of all sizes are grown and many styles of pack are made, such as four-tier, five-tier, etc., the boxes containing from 72 to 212 apples each. The fruit in a given box, however, will be all of the same size, and this careful grading and packing has made a reputation for Hood River fruit. The grading is done by the eye of the grader, who can tell at a glance whether an apple belongs in a four-tier or a five-tier box. This requires careful handling of the fruit, and this is where the expert help is required.

All fruit must be hauled to town in wagons with springs, so that it is loaded on the cars in the best possible condition. This all goes to help bring the price up to $2.00 per box, you see.

Mr. Shepard agreed with Mr. Smith that Newtown Pippin and Spitzenburg are the two varieties to grow.

"Frequently one of our members will bring in an apple and ask how I like it," said Mr Shepard, "it may be a good apple, and the man will tell me he will plant a lot of trees. Then I reason with him like this:

"'Yes, this apple is a good one, but is it better than a Newtown?'

"'No, it is not better than a Newtown.'

"'Well, is it better than a Spitzenburg?'

"'Oh, no; nothing is better than a Spitzenburg.'

"'Then why not stick to these two varieties? If this new apple has no points of superiority, or if in growing it we will have to compete in the markets with the same sort as grown elsewhere, why not stay with the Newtown and the Spitzenburg, when we have almost a mononopoly of the markets for these sorts?'

"All of our growers are coming to see that we must make our money with these varieties, which reach such a high state of perfection here."

The illustrations show some of the typical scenes in the Hood River fruit country. Apples and strawberries are the great crops, although sweet cherries do remarkably well. This year Bing cherries were shipped by express to the city of Mexico and arrived in good condition. Planting of cherry trees is being increased, and in a few years this fruit will be added to apples and strawberries, to call attention to Hood River. We visited the farm of Mr. Chris Dethman, one of the members of The Fruit-Grower Family, and found one of the prettiest orchards in the valley. One of the orchards which were grown by Mr. Smith is now owned by another member of The Fruit-Grower Family, Mr. Vanderbilt, who showed us Newtown trees from which he had picked eight boxes of apples, in the process of thinning the fruit. This fruit was picked while quite small and was thrown away.

That takes nerve, but the Hood River growers have lots of this quality. It takes nerve to pay as high as $200 per acre for land, clear it of stumps, then plant apple trees 30 feet apart, and give the trees the whole occupancy of the land, with no crops planted between; then to add the expense of cultivating this soil once a week during the summer—all this takes nerve, but it has demonstrated that the expenditure of money and labor pays.

Hood River is well located for shipping its apples. Before the locks were built in the river, which allowed boats to come up that far, freight charges were ten cents a box on apples from Hood River to Portland. Steamers now stop at Hood River daily, and the rate to Portland, where competitive freight rates can be secured, is only 5 cents a box.

Across the Columbia from Hood River is another fruit section, which is being developed rapidly. This is the White Salmon country, in Washington. White Salmon berries have the advantage of an earlier location, and the berries from that point are on the market a week or ten days ahead of Hood River fruit. Fine apples are also grown over there, and orcharding is on the increase.

The Fruit-Grower is under many obligations to Mr. Smith and to Mr. Shepard and to Mr. W. F. Laraway. Mr. Shepard has one of the finest locations in all the valley, his farm consisting of 40 acres. Eight acres of strawberries last spring were very profitable, and he is now growing a fine young orchard. We regret we could not use all the photographs secured in the Hood River valley, but we present a number, which will give one an idea of the conditions which exist there. We believe that nowhere else in this country are orchards uniformly better cared for, nor is the fruit crop more carefully graded and packed. This has something to do with the high prices obtained for the fruit.