Georgia Commercial Peach Survey, 1957

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Vast changes have taken place in the Georgia peach industry in the past few years. Varieties which were unknown ten years ago now dominate current plantings. Nearly two million trees were planted by commercial growers in Georgia during the period 1954–57. Two-thirds of these trees were set in the South Georgia Peach Section mainly around Fort Valley. A survey was conducted during the spring of 1957 which included a complete enumeration of peach trees by ages and by varieties in orchards of ten or more acres. This type information is invaluable to growers in planning future planting and appraising market prospects.

The data here presented are based on a complete count of all known commercial growers in the State. Names of growers were obtained from county extension agents and other growers. A questionnaire was designed to obtain information on tree numbers by varieties and by ages. Enumerators contacted each grower and obtained the data needed to complete the questionnaire. Most of the contacts were made during March and April, 1957, with a few in May and June to complete coverage of the entire state.

Commercial orchards of Georgia are located in three main sections with the greatest concentration in what is known to the trade as the South Georgia Peach Section. This section consists of Peach County, in which Fort Valley is located, and the four adjoining counties—Crawford, Macon, Houston, and Taylor. Peach County is number one and the other four counties rank second, third, fourth, and seventh, respectively among the counties of the state in number of trees.

Middle Georgia is the second most important producing section; however, production is not as concentrated here as in the South Georgia Peach Section. Meriwether County ranks fifth and Upson sixth among the counties of the state in peach tree population. Fairly large plantings are located in Spalding, Henry, Jasper, Morgan, and Coweta counties.

Although production has been on the wane in recent years, a small area around Commerce-Cornelia—known as the North Georgia Peach Section—in the northeastern part of the state has a fairly large number of trees in commercial orchards. Jackson County is the major peach county in this section.

Of the 4,314,000 trees in commercial orchards in Georgia, 1,863,000 are under three years of age, 1,288,000 are from three to six years of age, 645,000 are seven to nine years of age, 390,000 are from 10 to 14 years of age, and 12,000 are 15 years or older.

Apprehension has been expressed in some quarters about the increase in numbers of new plantings. While there may be a basis for this fear, some consideration should be given to the high mortality rate among peach trees in the South Georgia Peach Section. The average life of the trees is around eight years in that section. Very few trees are in the 10 to 14 year age group, and there are not any 15 years and older. To have a given number of trees at the age of peak production, between two and three times this num-

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ber should be in the under-three-year age group because of the short average life of the trees in that section.

Actually, the problem in future production could stem from the fact that most of the new plantings have been of a relatively small number of varieties. For example, more than one-third of the trees in commercial orchards under three years of age are of two varieties—Coronet and Keystone. These two varieties have different ripening dates. However, there seems to be a tendency to shorten the peach season by planting only the early maturing varieties in the South Georgia Peach Section. Aside from the fact that growers want early maturing peaches, most of the late varieties have a high chilling hour requirement which limits their use in South Georgia.

Elberta continues to be the leading variety for the state as a whole, with respect to number of trees. This variety accounted for 12.3 percent of all trees. However, there may be some question as to whether it has been planted in sufficient numbers for replacement of older trees. Of the 532,000 Elberta trees in the state, 138,000 are under three years of age. Since most of the plantings of this variety are in middle and north Georgia, where the life expectancy of peach trees is longer than in south Georgia, fewer plantings each year are needed to maintain a given level of production of Elberta peaches.

Leading varieties in the three to six year age group are Hiland, Redcap, Dixired, Duke of Georgia, and Cardinal. These varieties account for approximately one-half the 1,288,000 trees in this age group. These trees are nearing the age at which peak production is expected.

Elberta, Dixigem, Sullivan Elberta, and Pearson Hiley are the leading varieties among the older trees. These four account for more than one-half the seven to nine year old trees. The first three varieties make up 75 percent of the 10 to 14 year old trees and nearly all of those 15 years and older.

Nine varieties make up 87 percent of the 1,863,000 trees in the state under three years of age. Some 52 percent of these plantings will ripen between May 25 and June 15 as indicated by the distribution of the trees among varieties which is as follows:

	No. of trees	*Percent of total*
Coronet	361,000	19.4
Keystone	316,000	17.0
Redcap	165,000	8.9
Hiland	157,000	8.4
Dixired	142,000	7.6
Elberta	138,000	7.4
Cardinal	136,000	7.3
Sullivan Elberta	119,000	6.4
Southland	85,000	4.6

Short chilling requirements and early ripening dates are the factors responsible for the large number of trees of Coronet, Keystone, Redcap, Hiland, and Southland planted during the past three years. These varieties have chilling requirements of 750 to 800 hours. The Dixired variety is a relatively early ripening peach; however, this variety is one with long chilling requirements (1,050 hours). The three other varieties—Elberta, Sullivan Elberta, and Cardinal—also have long chilling requirements (900–950 hours) and later ripening dates. These late ripening varieties extend the Georgia season providing high quality peaches to compete with the early varieties in other states.

Distribution of varieties under three years in age among the different sections within the state is important. Two-thirds of the trees under three years of age in the South Georgia Peach Section are of four varieties which meet the two essential requirements for peach production in this section, short chilling requirements to

break dormancy and early maturity. Of the 1,271,000 trees under three years in South Georgia, Coronet and Keystone are of equal importance. Each of the two varieties had 269,000 trees or 21.2 percent of the total trees in this age group. Redcap was third with 163,000 trees or 12.8 percent of the total, and Hiland was just behind with 153,000 or 12.0 percent of the total.

Turning to the Middle Georgia Peach Section, Dixired had led in plantings in recent years. Of the 507,000 trees under three years of age, 105,000 trees or 20.7 percent of the total were of the Dixired variety. Sullivan Elberta was second with 85,000 trees or 16.6 percent of the total, followed closely by Coronet with 80,000 trees or 15.8 percent of the total and Elberta with 78,000 trees or 15.4 percent of the total. The Dixired, Sullivan Elberta, and Elberta varieties have long chilling hour requirements to break dormancy. Usually, there is sufficient number of hours of cold for these varieties in this section. Dixired ripens six weeks ahead of Elberta; Coronet, five weeks ahead of Elberta; and Sullivan Elberta, one week ahead of Elberta. With varieties to fill the gap between Coronet and Sullivan Elberta, this area could have a peach deal spread over some eight to ten weeks.

Annual Meeting of American Pomological Society

The seventy-third annual meeting of the American Pomological Society was held as scheduled at Columbia, Missouri, January 5–7, 1959. This was a joint meeting with the Missouri State Horticultural Society which was celebrating its centennial year. The meeting was concluded very successfully, and the American Pomological Society members who attended are very grateful to the Missouri group, especially to W. R. Martin, Jr. of the University of Missouri, for being such fine hosts.

Stanley Johnston and President A. Leon Havis were on hand at the centennial banquet to present the Wilder Medals to each of the following:

To **Dr. M. B. Davis,** retired Chief of the Horticulture Division, Canada Department of Agriculture, for his leadership in American Horticulture as a noted pomologist, scientist in the field of plant nutrition, administrator, and as a president of the American Society for Horticultural Science.

To **Thomas J. Talbert,** retired head of the Department of Horticulture of the University of Missouri, for services to the American fruit industry as a pomologist, teacher, author, administrator, and as a former president of the American Pomological Society. He was the first horticulturist to recognize the great and far reaching importance of the spray residue problem, and took the leadership in inducing the U. S. Public Health Service to initiate research in the late nineteen-thirties that resulted in reasonable tolerances which greatly benefited the fruit industry.

To **Dr. Harold P. Olmo** for outstanding service to viticulture. Dr. Olmo is professor of viticulture at the University of California and is well known as a scientist, fruit breeder and author. His studies in viticulture have taken him to many parts of the world. His research studies and grape breeding have produced results of great value to the grape industry.