

Commercial Strawberries in Kentucky And Variety Trends

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Kentucky farmers have produced from 300 to 1300 carloads of strawberries (or total truck lots equivalent to cars) annually during the past 15 years. Eighty-five percent of this volume is pre-cooled and shipped under refrigeration to out-of-state markets. Approximately one-third of this volume goes directly to Canadian markets on solid strawberry cars by express.

Marketing and Acreage

Ninety-five percent of our commercial strawberries are sold through cooperative berry marketing associations. Our largest organization, the McCracken County Strawberry Cooperative Association with headquarters at Paducah, serves some 2500 to 4000 members in seven counties of southwestern Kentucky during normal times. The number of members and the acreage of strawberries which they grew was greatly reduced during the war period because of the labor shortage. The relatively high price of tobacco during the past four years has also been a contributing factor in the present decreased strawberry acreage in the state as a whole. I think I am safe in stating that our picking acreage for 1946 is less than 35 percent of the average of the last 15 years. However, we expect a reasonable comeback in our commercial production in the next few years because of the return of the G.I.'s together with the reduction of the tobacco acreage.

Inspection and Grading

Government inspection requirements were introduced a few years ago and

were well received by the producers, and in my travels over the state I find very little opposition. Our Kentucky associations have long realized that a good pack of berries over a period of years was not only desirable but necessary in order to maintain the industry. Since all of our berries are sold through cooperative associations, the requirements for federal inspection have not materially changed the methods that have been in use over a period of years.

On 80 per cent of our farms producing berries the grading is done in the field by the pickers. Many people have told me this method cannot be operated successfully, but as a matter of fact we do operate our grading according to this plan. I would say that less than 10 percent of our growers use the "pan method" of grading at the shed. Naturally, field supervision is very necessary where the pickers are expected to grade the berries. Most of our berries are picked in 6-quart carriers, commonly called a "handy". The picker simply puts the cull berries in one basket of the six he carries on the "handy" and is paid for picking the culls as well as the good berries. This is considered desirable by most growers, because when the cull berries are left in the patch they may be handled on two or three of the following pickings, thus consuming considerable time of the picker.

Varieties

Twenty years ago the Aroma variety represented over 90 percent of the total volume of strawberries in Kentucky. At present, however, Blakemore represents 75 percent of the volume, Aroma 15 percent and Premier 5 percent. The

Premier is a very unsatisfactory variety under refrigeration but still constitutes a large part of the shipments out of the Louisville area. In this section the Premier berries are loaded every day by noon, or soon after, and are shipped by fast moving trucks to a distance of about 200 miles. The fruit is then sold to the consumer on the same day it is picked or early the next morning.

Two new varieties which are under trial in the state and show considerable promise are the Tennessee Shipper and the Tennessee Beauty. These two varieties were developed by Dr. Brooks Drain and his associates at the University of Tennessee. In Kentucky they are the most promising selections out of several hundred varieties that have been developed through plant breeding. Both have excellent shipping qualities and productive ability. Some of the best growers of the state have trial plantings of these two varieties and by the end of this 1946 picking season we should have considerably more information concerning their good and bad qualities.

Qualities Needed in New Varieties

In looking for new varieties the following points should be given serious consideration: (1) Is it a heavy producer? (2) Will it carry to the market under refrigeration? (3) What will it do in a rainy harvest season? (4) Does the season of harvesting fit in with your market demands? (5) Does it make sufficient runners to develop a matted row? (6) Will it produce satisfactory second and third crops? (7) Are the plants vigorous? (8) Do they all bloom at one time? (9) Will it freeze successfully?

Freezing and Preserving

Berries for the frozen pack open up a new field of possibilities in the merchandising of strawberries. As I look at this side of the berry industry, it appears to me to be the greatest stabilizer of markets that this generation has seen. Here in Kentucky we feel that in the future the best of the early ripening berries, or about 75 percent of the Blakemore crop, may be sold as fresh fruit. The remaining 25 percent, including the small but good quality berries, will go to the frozen trade. This will give the grower an opportunity to increase his cash returns by about \$50 to \$100 per acre in selling the small berries that would otherwise be left in the field and rot.

In the early years of the war, Kentucky packed about 3,000, fifty gallon barrels of capped or stemmed berries which were treated with sulphur dioxide chemical and were then shipped to England. Six months later they were made into preserves, with color being added to make them again look like strawberries. This war measure convinced our berry growers that they could get the job of stemming or capping done at home and now for the 1946 market season, dozens of buyers are trying to buy a million pounds of capped berries out of this year's production.

Fertilization and Mulching

Fertilizer tests during recent years have indicated that the use of super-phosphate would increase the yield of strawberries in Kentucky. The section of the state where our berries are largely grown is naturally short of phosphate in the soil, and many of our berries are raised on

land that would not produce 20 bushels of corn per acre in an average year nor over 10 bushels of wheat. Land of this type responds profitably to the turning under of a green cover crop, preferably a legume, with the addition of at least 1,000 pounds of 20 percent super-phosphate per acre for the strawberry crop.

We have also found that the applica-

tion of mulch to strawberries should not be delayed until March or early April as has so frequently been done. When the winter temperature reaches 0°F. with no snow on the ground, the yield may be reduced from 25 to 75 percent. This reduction in yield can be avoided by applying 1½ tons per acre of straw mulch in December.



The American Pomological Society's Code For Naming Fruit and Nut Varieties

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The number of fruit varieties claiming the attention of fruit growers is being increased each year. The list published by the American Pomological Society in its forthcoming issue shows that 10 to 50 or more new peach varieties come to the fore annually. As time goes on, many of these of course will fall by the wayside, while others will take their place in the orchards on the basis of their individual merits. There is an opportunity, therefore, with new varieties being named each year, to duplicate names of varieties already in use.

The American Pomological Society is continuing its plan to keep variety names true and as far as possible eliminate duplication. One of the dominant trends of the present which is bound to lead to

confusion as time goes on, is the use of well-known variety names in so many combinations—often for types not too closely related to the parent form. Take for instance Elberta, some horticulturists think there are a number of strains of this old standby, which alone would lead to considerable confusion. On the other hand, there is a tendency to weaken the position of this variety through the use of such names as Early Elberta, Late Elberta, Redelberta, Hardy Berta, Halberta, to mention a few.

Recently I looked over an exhibit of apple varieties and picked up the following names of bud sports of Rome: Ruby Rome, Black Rome Beauty, Red Rome, Rich's Red Rome and Seando Red Rome. These types are all closely related but, when grown under different conditions, may vary considerably. As