# Vegetable Section

## IMPACT OF SUGAR CANE EXPANSION ON VEGETABLE PRODUCTION IN THE EVERGLADES

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Palm Beach County has been recognized as the leading vegetable county in the State for many years and led the Nation for ten or more years as the largest vegetable producing county. According to the Florida Vegetable Crops Annual Statistical Summary, vegetable production in Palm Beach County has steadily increased in acreage harvested over the period of the past twenty years, from over 77,000 acres in the 1944-45 crop year to more than 124,000 acres in the crop year of 1962-63.

Vegetable production in Palm Beach County is in two distinctly different areas, the sand lands of the Coast—a seven-mile wide strip from West Palm Beach to Boca Raton, and the muck soils of the Everglades—about 500,000 acres on the south and east sides of Lake Okeechobee.

Since sugar cane production in the County has been mostly on the muck soils, I will confine my remarks about the Impact of Sugar Cane Expansion on Vegetable Production to the muck soils and those crops produced in that area.

Sugar cane has been produced commercially in the County for more than thirty-five years with varying degrees of economic stability. Government controls have been put on during these years to help stabilize production and to insure a domestic supply. Controls were removed in 1958 and vegetable growers began to consider the possibility of planting sugar cane. The political situation in Cuba,—with Castro taking over the government and termination of trade with the United States caused growers to talk in terms of sugar mills, acreage planting and Government quotas.

In the 1960-61 crop season, two years after Government controls were lifted and no restriction imposed, only 50,725 acres of sugar cane was harvested by eleven growers and processed by three sugar mills; United States Sugar Corporation in Clewiston, Okeelanta Sugar Refinery, Inc., South Bay, and Fellsmere. Approximately 80% of this acreage was in Palm Beach County. Acreage jumped to 60,797 acres harvested in the crop year 1961-62 with two new mills in operation for a total of five sugar mills. In the 1962-63 crop year the acreage planted again jumped to 137,935 acres and the number of sugar mills in operation to ten. This more than doubled the acreage during a one year period. During the 1963-64 crop, the acreage planted continued to increase but at a much reduced pace to 149,829 acres; 8,866 acres of this production was harvested for seed to plant another large increase of acreage for harvest during the 1964-65 season when an expected 225,000 acres of sugar cane will be harvested. Since sugar cane requires at least one year to mature in order to produce a satisfactory yield this acreage was in direct competition with vegetable crops for acreage during the 1963-64 season.

Now, how has this rapid expansion of the sugar cane industry in the Glades area affected the vegetable industry that has been the life blood of the economy of the Glades for so many years? To best explain this I will again refer to the figures of vegetable acreages harvested as reported in the Annual Statistical Summary of Florida Vegetable Crops.

For the 1958-59 crop season, the acreage of vegetables in Western Palm Beach County was 82,810 acres, the 1959-60 season 76,820 acres, the 1960-61 season 62,850 acres, the 1961-62 season 62,215 acres and for the 1962-63 crop season, the most recent figures released at the time of this writing 64,440 acres. Since this report does not cover many miscellaneous crops including rad-

ishes, *broccoli,* black eye peas and turnips, it is safe to add another 15,000 acres each year to these figures. This brings the total acreage harvested to more than 77,000 acres for each of the past five years.

To give you some idea as to what has happened during the 1963-64 crop season when again we experienced extremely heavy sugar cane planting to be harvested this fall, I must refer to the carlot loadings of the vegetables from the Glades area, since acreage figures are not available. In order to tie these figures to acreages, the 1962-63 carlot loading was 27,817 carloads from 64,440 acres, plus 15,000 acres for radishes and miscellaneous crops. The 1963-64 carlot shipments were 26,315 carloads, only 1,500 carloads below the 1962-63 crop year. This decrease could have easily been caused by the cold weather in late February of 1964 which killed more than 3,000 acres of sweet corn alone.

The main impact this writer sees that the sugar cane expansion has had on the vegetable industry, is the moving of crop acreages from the warmer lands close to the lake to new, colder, locations farther from the lake: This shift has had a tendency to change the production of certain crops during the colder winter months. Acreages of hardier crops have been increased in winter with the more tender crops planted during the fall and spring months. Some acreage of sweet corn has moved to the sand lands of the East Coast.

Many residents of the area feel that the sugar cane plantings have crowded out the green bean acreage which has decreased in the Glades. This writer does not believe that the sugar cane industry can be blamed for this loss. Scarcity of labor, competition from other areas, and the desire of the consumer for the built-in-maid service obtained in frozen and canned products, are the main reasons for this decrease. To prove a point in this regard, green bean shipments from the Glades area last year increased to canners who have contract acreages for mechanical harvesting.

In summary, the vegetable acreage of Palm Beach County has not suffered as a result of the expansion of the sugar cane industry but it is noted that growers have decreased acreages of tender crops and have increased acreages of more hardy crops on the colder land. The sugar cane industry has helped the vegetable farmers in the area to stabilize their economic position and remove part of the gamble in their farming operations.

# A COMPARISON OF "STRING TRELLISING" VERSUS THE CONVENTIONAL TYING METHODS OF SUPPORTING STAKED TOMATO

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Until a few years ago all tomatoes grown with stake supports were tied to the stake with short lengths of two or three-ply hemp twine or string. This method is slow and expensive due to the labor involved. Satisfactory results required a certain amount of skill and judgement on the part of the workman to avoid breaking plants or tying fruit clusters against the stake which would cause bruising and scarring of the fruit.

Recently a new method of tying, to be discussed herein, has been adopted by many growers in the Manatee-Ruskin area. This method, which for want of a better name has been dubbed "string trellising," has proven so successful that it seems worthwhile to pass the information along so that other growers of staked-tomatoes can apply it to their operation. Thus, the benefits of decreased cost and increased efficiency can be derived without the need for trial and error application. Simply stated the trellis is composed of several double strands of twine placed horizontally from stake to stake. Plants are supported on and by this series of strings placed opposite one another at different heights on the stakes. (Fig. 1).

Field observations and a comparison of the

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