Vegetable and Truck Crops in Florida

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Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen: Commissioner McLin's Report for 1909-10 makes me feel that I must take off my hat to the truckers of Florida. A substantial increase in value of 70 per cent. over the previous year, leads us to congratulate ourselves on being permitted to interest ourselves in the State's welfare to this extent. Florida alone as a State can boast of such a per cent. of increase in values of vegetable products. The truck and vegetable crop for 1909-10 is reported as valued at $6,825,972.

The acreage for vegetables in 1907-1908 was 42,357, and for 1909-10, 54,047, an increase of a little over 11,000 acres growing truck crops, and an increased return in value of approximately 70 per cent. in favor of the 1909-10 crop.

We are not fond of figures and will not dwell longer with them, but in this case they have served a splendid purpose. This 70 per cent. increase in values in truck crops has come with less than 20 per cent. increase in acreage. There are reasons:

1. Better and more intensive methods of cultivation have been advocated and practiced.
2. Truckers have learned that all fertilizers are not alike and no two varieties of plants need exactly the same fertilizer, and that fertilizers are really plant food in which the plant lives and subsists.
3. They have learned how to control the moisture problems and the value of irrigation.
4. They realize that trucking is a business of itself and must be skillfully managed.
5. Experience has shown them that inferior products cannot be loaded on cars and transported long distances, profitably to the producer.
6. Discriminating markets refuse inferior products and injure the future sales with good products.
7. Truckers realize as never before the value of good seed and proper planting.

Many of our vegetables grown at a season when forcing is necessary are extremely perishable. Careful crating and packing is therefore an important part of this industry.

Improved quality and greater quantity with a correspondingly small increase in acreage has elevated the vegetable industry above citrus and other fruits, and approaches the general field crop values for last year.

It is a striking fact that several of our most important commercial crops
were until recently considered unsatisfactory for Florida conditions but now we have reason to believe that a still greater variety is possible.

With the increased supply and values naturally arises the question of over-production. Each year we are confronted with an over-supply of one or more important vegetable crops. Coming in direct competition with those growers closer to Northern markets and where freight rates are considerably reduced, the crop remains untouched or dumped when it reaches its destination. While these conditions are more or less discouraging, it does not mean that more of these products are being grown than can be marketed and consumed. It merely emphasizes the need of a greater distribution of the products and not necessarily greater distance in transportation.

The facts are that hundreds of small towns that could use a large amount of these products never get an opportunity, the need therefore of organization and co-operation, which slowly but surely comes about with such an important industry. We have become so accustomed to shipping to New York, Baltimore, Philadelphia and Washington, etc., that we hesitate to consign our cars elsewhere. Others would like to have those products, but so far have been unable to get them.

The population of our Northern towns is on the increase. A large percentage of this populace in the ranks of mechanics and in the various professions and industries must buy their vegetables, and are becoming rapidly educated to a vegetable diet in preference to such an extensive meat diet.

Considering these facts we cannot compare our trucking industry with some other industry that produces luxuries instead of necessities that have a duration only for a period and finally pass into history. The trucking industry has to do with a product by which the people are fed.

The South is the home of truck crops, and there is no section of it that will produce any better or larger crops than our own State. For the most part, truck crops like a rich sandy loam soil and plenty of warm sunshine. Moisture is an essential element in all crop growth, and while our rainfall during the trucking season is inadequate in many sections for several crops, we always have at hand an abundant supply of water for irrigating purposes.

In preparing the soil, no matter for which crop, it is vastly important that a thorough cultivation shall precede planting. Irrigation, high-grade fertilizers, good seed and plants, etc., are always to be emphasized, but unless the land has been thoroughly cultivated before planting, much of your efforts will result in failure.

The land should be plowed as deep as possible without turning up too much raw subsoil. Thorough working at this time gives the soil a good supply of oxygen and greater power to absorb and hold the needed moisture. Shallow plowing followed by insufficient surface cultivation results in an impoverished moisture content.

An experiment at the Florida Experiment Station conducted at the termi-
nus of a long drought shows a moisture content in cultivated soil equal to 1 1/2 inches of rainfall, or 175 tons of water per acre. More than that found in the soil not cultivated during the same period in a depth of soil through which the roots feed and secure their water supply. Continuous surface cultivation is important while the plant is growing, otherwise a tremendous waste of water or moisture will occur at the expense of the crop.

OUR WASTED PRODUCTS.

It is hardly necessary to call attention to the enormous waste sustained each year by truckers and fruit growers from our lack of canneries, to use up surplus production. Take the trouble, if you will, to examine the packages that reach us through our grocery stores put up by New York and other Northern canneries, and often filled with our own products. After these second-grade products reach these Northern markets a greater profit is realized by putting them up in quart cans and then distributing it throughout the United States and even into European countries.

There is not a trucking or fruit-growing section of Florida but that wastes tons of valuable products that would reach the high-class markets if they were put into air-tight cans in the proper condition, properly labeled and distributed.

We have expensive packing citrus houses conducted on a larger scale and could not get along without them. Perhaps we are contented with our present profits, but we are not seizing our possibilities so long as we permit the thousands of tons of vegetables to go to waste as we do at present and for want of canneries in these sections.

I cannot better illustrate this tremendous waste than refer to a corresponding waste once permitted in our meat packing industries, and which now, under more economical management, make up the bulk of profits in the business.

We are just dawning the horizon of our possibilities for vegetable growing in Florida. As Florida fills with people and all her land cultivated, the demand for all her products will increase, but with more and stronger competition we cannot continue to make the business profitable unless most economical methods replace our present wasteful ones.