

MARKETING OUR PRODUCTS.

Prices Largely Dependent on Good Packing and Neat Packages—Florida Growers far Behind Their Competitors in this Respect—Methods of Selling—Establish Your Brand—Largely Dependent on the Individual Shipper and Packer.

Paper prepared and read by J. A. Icenhour, Upsala, Fla., together with discussion following the reading of the paper.

[SEE MINUTES PAGES I TO 6, ITEM 75 AND 76.]

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen of the State Horticultural Society: Your Committee on Marketing submits the following report which, in its brevity, much resembles the late and prospective orange crops. The question of how to market, just at this time, does not trouble us so much as the lack of something to market.

Our remarks are made from some years' experience in handling citrus fruits, and what we say in regard to them we deem applicable to the handling of any Florida field or orchard product.

We make bold to say that in many hands, a crop receives more injury in the short distance from tree to car than from transportation lines, not forgetting the abuse our shipments often receive at their hands. This report covers no new ground. The straw has been well threshed by abler hands. If we can convince a few more growers that there is a crying need of more care in gathering, grading and in all handling devolving on the grower and packer; that packages must be better made, from better ma-

terial; that it will pay to pattern after the little niceties seen in the best brands of imported fruit, we think we have done the cause some service.

Very few of us can lay aside our work, go to some large city in the height of the shipping season, and there see the methods that prevail amongst the growers of our State. In a two days' visit in the fruit districts of New York City, we learned more than we had in a ten year residence in the State. We saw how buyers, from the old lady who presided over a street stand, to brokers carrying in their hands orders for a thousand boxes, discriminated against poor packages and poorly packed goods, while neat, attractive boxes were set aside without quibble, at outside figures.

So it goes without saying, that inferior fruit put up in the best possible style, will outsell superior fruit as we mostly see it handled. No one questions the superiority of the Florida orange. The wonder is why the Florida grower is so far behind in style of package, grading, etc., that marks the

work of our California competitors. Now, while our output is limited it is a good time to improve our methods, and put in practice the things our attention is called to.

Knowing that it will pay, we would urge our larger producers or associations to make use of attractive, lithographed labels. Protect and use them as trade marks. Make your standard high, and in no way deviate from it. In a short time your selling agent will inform you that he has inquiries for your brand, and can obtain 25 cents to 50 cents beyond quotations, and that the fruit is sold in advance of arrival.

We take no stock in printed wraps. Where one box is displayed in wraps, a thousand are stripped in ware rooms. Gaudy colored wraps we should also refuse. Nothing can look more clean, cool and inviting than a fine box of Floridas wrapped in white tissue.

In the matter of grading, we think the Society should at this meeting establish a standard and so urge its use that some of the following legends we have seen: Fancy, Fancy Bright, Fancy Russett, Bright, Bright No. 1, Choice Brights, Bronze, Russett, Golden Russett, etc., may be eliminated. Any selling agent will tell you that this mixed nomenclature is coning, and requires more sampling in effecting sales, than it would were lines more sharply drawn and fewer grades made.

Having our methods of packing right, we are confronted with the question of how to sell. The methods of exchange, auction, sell at home and regular commission sales have all been tried and been found more or less unsatisfactory. We began with the exchange, but when an account-sales brought charges for ice and the notation of "fruit frozen" we had to give it the cold shoulder. Auction methods brought fewer ducats, and

before we found ourselves in the hands of the sell-at-home plan had not been tried before we found ourselves in the hands of an old commission house, whose returns to this day have been satisfactory. We have heard of the dishonest practices of the commission men. We have also seen the sharp (?) practice of some of our producers.

If the grower would turn his back on the foxy solicitor, and consign only to those whose references have been looked into and found satisfactory, there would be little cause of complaint. Printed matter and "brasses" you know are cheap commodities. The average solicitor is often sleek, but neither ornamental nor useful. Those who have fallen victims to his oily and persuasive way of putting things have none but themselves to blame. They would not have sold him a horse without the cash or some security.

But being solicited for a trial shipment of a hundred boxes of oranges is a different thing. They feel flattered. He gets the fruit, and after many days we hear the wail and know another lamb has been shorn.

To know what a rabble has fattened on the Florida Orange grower previous to December, '94, one has only to look over his collection of stencils and make some inquiry for the parties issuing them. He will find they have folded their tents or less stable habitations, and the land that knew them, it is hoped, shall know them no more forever.

But if we do not throw away our credulity, and take on board incredulity in large masses, and hedge ourselves about with common sense business principles, believing a man is a rogue till he has proven to the contrary, there will spring up a new horde of these pestiferous traders, that in growth will keep pace with our crops.

If you consign to a commission house and have any doubts as to getting full market values, ask them to subscribe for you, for the best fruit trade journal published in their city, for the months covering your shipments. Compare account-sales with market report of even date. If there is a difference, ask the house for reasons. They will take the hint, knowing you are posted; to hold your business they will be compelled to work for top prices. To encourage them to do so, do not divide shipments. Having satisfied yourself as to the firm's responsibility, you best serve your interests by keeping your fruit out of the hands of their competitors. Having placed your lines in the hands of a good commission house with an established trade, we claim shippers of a few thousand or more boxes can in time, gain a recognition in a market, supply a part of its needs, and own and control the same as much as they do their own Florida realty. And their deed in fee simple is in having established a high standard and never deviating from it. Possessed of such a reputation your agent can demand and receive the two bits over ruling prices on a day of brisk trading or light supply, and on days of large supply and slower trade can promptly close out at the highest quotations. On the authority of many we say no market was ever glutted with good, well handled lines of Florida fruit. It has always been the trashy, ill packed lots that have broken the market. Not a few commission houses refuse such consignments. They cater to a trade that is willing to pay a good price for a good article. We would urge that your interests demand the service they are prepared to render.

In conclusion we would ask you to serve notice on your dealers, that in future you will buy no sides, hoops or heads that

should have found their way to the furnace. Such a protest will drive trashy stock out of the market. From good material, neat, handsome boxes are rapidly made. This is no place to practice economy. A penny saved here is a dime lost at the other end of the route. Look after the grove and packing house force closely. If the grower does not show a lively interest in securing a higher standard of excellence, hired help will surely not.

The "how to profitably sell the crop," like the "how to profitably produce it," we think depends mostly on the individual.

No neighborhood is without some one who is not reasonably sure in securing satisfactory returns. Very few would refuse advice to less fortunate neighbors. If you have failed in getting profitable returns from strangers, why not ask your more businesslike neighbor to consign your crop as his own, and be willing to pay him for the service? He would have an interest in it, would look after, and correct your faulty methods and very soon you would be able to take care of yourself.

Now is the time for the live grower to step out of the ranks, take advanced standing and obtain for his products a place that they will hold for a generation if

"He but to himself be true."

DISCUSSION.

Mr. Phelps: I would like to hear from E. W. Johnson, of East Palatka, who has looked after packing in California, Florida and Mexico.

Mr. Johnson: I have a model packing house on my grove at East Palatka; probably one of the most complete in the State. With the many improved appliances for handling the fruit the expense is reduced fifty per cent. which in itself is quite an

item. It is not a pleasant subject, as it is a reminder of the disastrous winter of 1894-95 and the fact that I have no oranges to ship from the grove. On the subject of marketing I believe that I occupy a unique position, as a Florida orange grower and as the representative of Porter Brothers Company, of Chicago. I can look on this subject from the standpoint of a grower, shipper and receiver, and agree fully with Mr. Icenhour in all his statements in the valuable paper just read. The major part of the trouble in getting satisfactory returns for consignments originates with the grower and packer. I speak from an extended experience in handling all kinds of fruits from the South, the West and Mexico. Personally a grower and shipper of oranges, and in a position to see the shipments on arriving at destination, acquainted with the receivers and consumers, I am fully informed as to the demands of the trade. I again endorse Mr. Icenhour's statements that the care given the grading, packing and packages by the shipper are main features in securing satisfactory returns. I have never had any fault to find with my personal returns for fruit sent to many markets.

There is no question but that there are many shady commission men, but there are plenty of good responsible men in the commission business who will send you good returns if you send the right kind of goods.

There are many first class shippers in Florida. I have seen their shipments in various markets in the North and West and know the care they take to have everything as it should be; know of their standing with the trade and know that they have no trouble in selling their consignments at satisfactory prices. These shippers are all right. But a great many shippers are all wrong. Their unsatisfactory returns are from poor grading and packing, wrong marking and inferior packages. Good fruit, properly put up can be sold at any time. It will sell when the market is overstocked, while inferior fruit, poorly put up, consumers will not buy at any price. Fruit is a luxury. Consumers are attracted by nice fruit, neatly put up, and will pay a good price for that which they fancy. Unattractive fruit they will not buy. Mr. Icenhour has so fully covered the question that I will add but a word in regard to those to whom you consign. It is easy enough to find reliable commission houses. Start your shipments properly, consign to a reliable concern and at the end of the season you will be satisfied with your returns. In regard to my experience in Mexico, the subject is too long to be treated in the short time before us; but I will say in the shipment of fruit, care of trees and all that pertains to the business, they are miles and years behind everything in Florida.