

Canadian Growers Face Real Problem

Uncertain Market Conditions Are Cause for World Concern

Decrease of Fifty Percent Reported In Canadian Crop

Toronto Paper Tells of New Crop in Canadian Farm Program

It is hard to believe what a few months' time can do in the way of bringing about changes over a wide front, especially as those changes affect economic conditions in general and tobacco culture in particular. Hardly before they got started into the business of tobacco culture, Canadian farmers are now facing a serious problem. Only last year Mr. Groves of a Canadian firm was in this county looking for young men to teach and train farmers in the northern country how to cultivate and cure tobacco. Before that crop was marketed, war broke out in the Mother Country, and, according to reports reaching here the Canadian farmer has a large portion or all of his crop in his own barn. When the British went off the American market, the action was felt in Canada, too.

This year Canadian farmers are said to have reduced their acreage more than 50 per cent, and it is possible that many of those entering the tobacco business for the first time will return to their old agricultural habits.

Up until the war broke out, Canada was making extensive preparations for increasing tobacco production, and a story appearing in the Toronto Star Weekly of August, last year, tells about it in the following story:

"There's a new kind of farmer in Ontario these days," the story begins.

He lives in a big house in town, wears \$80 suits, goes to the office every morning and has never milked a cow or plowed a furrow in his life.

He hires, not farm hands, but resident managers and crop experts. And he makes money. Not the money needed to meet the instalment on the mortgage and buy his wife a new dress and make a down payment on a second-hand combine. He makes big chunks of "folding money", like vice presidents and salesmanagers.

He is a tobacco farmer. His product is "brown gold".

Now there are big men in dairying and fruit-growing and in mixed farming, and there are small farmers—many of them—who grow tobacco. But never, probably in all the history of Ontario farming, have hard-headed business men, looking for an investment, put so much money into the soil as have these sponsors of the province's newest big-time crop—tobacco.

Not that all tobacco men go around with broad smiles on their faces. They grumble, too, like any good farmer, and have troubles of their own. They worry about the prices and too little rain and not enough sun and too much wind and any hail at all and the possibility of frost.

But it is the kind of worrying that big business men do, not the kind that afflicts the farmer who wonders if he is going to break even on the year.

CAN'T BE DONE

Spending several seasons teaching Canadian farmers the art of harvesting and curing tobacco, a Martin County young man learned a few things himself. Possibly the same lesson could have been learned right here at home, but as it was the young man went thousands of miles to the north to find out that certain things just can't be done.

Several years ago the young man spent three seasons in Canada on a tobacco farm. The owner planted about 60 acres of tobacco, leaving no room for food and feed crops. He raised good tobacco each season and sold it for an average of forty cents a pound. But by the time he bought all his feed for his stock and food for his family, the farmer had nothing left.

Possibly that policy, while not practiced to such an extreme by our own farmers, is partly responsible for the bad plight we find ourselves in today.

77,000 Acres This Year

This year's high acreage of 77,000 may be greatly increased in the near future, if suitable, sandy soil can be found suitable for tobacco.

Anyway, Ontario's 4,000 tobacco growers, large, medium and small, expect to reap no less than \$20,000,000 off their 77,000 acres in the crop that is now being harvested. Away back in the early days of tobacco-growing in Ontario—in 1919, for example—the growers received as high as 58 cents a pound for their crop. But in recent years the price has been between 22 and 30 cents a pound. It costs around 15 cents a pound to produce tobacco.

Essex County is the center of Ontario's tobacco industry, but the acreage has increased almost every year for the past 20 years. New areas not even considered for this crop a few years ago are now planted to tobacco, and the belt now extends through Kent, Norfolk, Lambton, Elgin, Middlesex, Oxford, and most recently, Brant County.

Takes Money

You catch on to his feeling as soon as you look over the great fields of broad-leaves tobacco. There's something impersonal about tobacco, row after row after row, unbroken. There's nothing of the "good earth" feeling about it, like growing potatoes or corn, that makes so many men content to wrestle with the dirt year after year for a bare living.

And those kilns, gaunt and bare and business-like, not friendly like a barn.

There's no smell about a tobacco farm, either. You'd think the whole place would reek of the stuff. But even when you crush a leaf and snuff it, there's only a green smell. It takes curing to make it the "fragrant weed".

But there's no doubt about it—there's money in tobacco. Plenty of money to be taken out after plenty of money has been put in.

Take the case of Cecil Elliott, who has 100 acres of tobacco in the Brockville area, one of the newest districts of the ever-ex-

panding tobacco country.

A \$20,000 Profit

"We have put," said Elliott, \$30,000 into this 100 acres. And we haven't taken a cent out of it yet. But this is the first year we have grown tobacco. This will be our first crop. And if the rain and the sun and the hail and the frost give us a break, we may gross \$50,000 on our crop."

A \$50,000 return on a \$30,000 investment in one year—and in preference in the English market makes it possible for this country to "steal" a portion of the huge United States export to Britain—140,000,000 pounds a year. Canada's "bright Virginia" tobacco is almost identical with the United States product, and already England buys several million pounds a year here proving that Canadian tobacco is acceptable to English smokers.

"But," reminded Elliott, "if things go wrong, we may be out a sizeable portion of that \$30,000." So there's an element of chance, of speculation, about tobacco, too.

"We are not, as a matter of fact, interested in breaking even," one tobacco man told me. "It costs a lot of money to grow tobacco and we must make money on it—or we wouldn't be in it."

Curing Described

If you could listen in to the whole of the tobacco area these nights, you would hear a great symphony of tinkling alarm clocks as curers, cat-napping beside the kilns, are awakening to check their temperatures.

No father of a new-born babe is more alert to catch the faintest cry of his pride and joy in the still of the night than are these curers to the music of their alarm clocks, warning that their kiln-full of tobacco needs attention. Even heat is the important thing here. Too much or too little may ruin a fine batch of tobacco.

Tobacco has lent an international flavor to southwestern Ontario. In earlier days thousands of skilled pickers and curers from the southern states used to come north for the crop, and although Canadians now are able to do most of this work, a number of southern-

ers, confident that tobacco had a bright future in this "land of ice and snow" have settled in Ontario, become growers themselves. Some have married Canadian girls, others have brought their wives north and their children are Canadian-born.

Hundreds of Belgian families, too, moved into Ontario as tobacco workers. Many started growing crops in shares, and eventually became independent farmers. The little town of Delhi, for example, in the heart of the tobacco country, becomes much like a Belgian village on market days and holidays. Recently an elaborate bicycle track, said to be one of the best in Canada, was constructed at Delhi. Cycle races are the favorite sport of the Belgians.

The farmers cure their own tobacco in wooden kilns. Some 15 kilns are needed for 100 acres of tobacco and they cost \$550 each, consume four tons of coal and four cords of wood, at a total cost of \$48, during the time of curing.

Hundreds of men are suffering sleepless nights in the tobacco belt this time of the year. They are the expert curers, many of them southerners, who tend the kilns by day and by night. On their care and skill rests the fate of the crop. In the three or four days of curing, the best leaf may be spoiled, and turn out to be worth only half the market price.

BUSINESS MAN



Among the newly-created business establishments in Williamston is the Martin Supply Company with Mr. Eddie Trahey, above, as its general manager. The firm is made up of well-known Martin citizens and is housed in the Perry Building on Washington Street.

Tells How It Is Grown

Tobacco is grown from seed which has the consistency of dust. There are no fewer than 350,000 seeds in a single ounce and an ounce and a half will grow seedlings enough to fill a greenhouse 100 feet long by 22 feet wide. The seeds are planted in wood ashes in perforated cans. The greenhouses, incidentally, are not artificially heated, but the temperature is maintained by the heat of the sun.

Many more seedlings than are needed are grown. Only the sturdier plants are selected for the fields.

At the age of six weeks the seedlings are transplanted. By the middle of August the leaves are turning yellow, and are ready for picking. Usually the pickers work in gangs of six under a "boss picker".

The leaves ripen "from the ground up." The first picking will take those nearest the ground, about three leaves from each plant. A field will have to be picked as often as four or five times, until the topmost "layer" has been taken off. Only skilled pickers are employed, since much of the value of the tobacco is lost if the leaves are damaged.

As the pickers pass along the rows which are 41 inches apart, they place the leaves in a horse-drawn "boat," a narrow canvas container on runners. As each boat is filled, it goes at once to the kilns, since it is important that the curing process begin as soon as possible after picking.

Nimble-fingered girls then take over. Two assistants pass leaves, three or four at a time, to the tiers, who, with a quick flick of the fingers, fasten them on alternate sides of a four-foot lath. When the "stick" of some 112 leaves is completed, it is passed up to a worker in the kiln, who places it on a rack. Each kiln holds 1,250 to 1,450 "sticks", reaching nearly to the roof.

Fast Work

These skilled girl "stringers" provide the one bit of fast action in the harvesting of tobacco, which otherwise is quiet and unobtrusive. For months the leaves have grown and matured. After they have been cured, there need be no hurry in handling them. But in those minutes between the

Cotton—An Old Arkansas Custom

Little Rock, Ark.—In Arkansas it's an offense carrying with it a fine for a member of the 77 County Home Demonstration Councils to attend a meeting wearing other than a cotton dress.

Since 1933 the home demonstration club women of Arkansas have adhered rigidly to the policy of wearing cotton costumes exclusively to their annual meetings and camps. Miss Connie J. Bonslager, state home demonstration agent, has advised the National Cotton Council.

The Arkansas State Camp, held for six years, drew from 1,000 to 1,260 women each year, and none but cotton dresses were worn on these occasions. The 77 county councils in the state hold from two to four meetings a year, with attendance running from 50 to 300 women, with many of the groups assessing fines on any woman who appears wearing a dress made of other fibers than cotton.

Flour made from cottonseed is now blended with wheat flour to produce a delicious new type of bread rich in vitamins B and G, the National Cotton Council announces. Vitamin G is a preventive for pellagra.

picking of the leaves and the beginning of their heat treatment, every minute counts. The leaves are as perishable as fish after they are hauled from the water.

A good stringer can loop her hands of leaves as fast as two helpers can hand them from the "boat". She stands beside a wooden "horse," across which is placed a four-foot lath. The helpers hold the hands of three or four leaves high on the stalk, and with one swift movement the stringer grasps them, loops a length of string around the stalk, and lets it fall to one side and the other, alternately, of the lath. The leaves fairly dance into position under the fingers of a fast stringer. Then up the "sticks" go, into the kiln to become tobacco as we know it.

Flue-cured Creates "Boom"

Flue-cured tobacco is by far Ontario's largest crop of the "weed," and it is this tobacco that is responsible for the western Ontario boom. Burley, grown for half a century, covers fewer than 10,000 acres, compared with over 60,000 acres for flue-cured. But burley growers are prosperous too and stick faithfully to their choice. Burley is darker, is used largely for chewing tobacco and some pipe blends, and does not require the same elaborate curing as the Virginia bright. Some 2,700 acres are grown to "dark tobacco," used for blending.

The leaves are dried at 80 degrees, then the furnace is stepped up to 110 degrees for the coloring process, and the curing is finished off at 180 degrees. This takes three or four days, during which the leaves lose 75 per cent of their weight. A cured stick of leaves weighs about a pound and three-quarters.

No Auction Sales

The colorful tobacco auctions of the south, with the queer babbling jargon of the auctioneer, are not held in Ontario. Instead, tobacco buyers visit the farms and make an offer for the cured crop.

After that, it goes to help make the seven billion cigarettes (yes 7,000,000,000) that Canadians smoke each year.