

STRAWBERRY SEASON

GUY A. CARDWELL

The Bureau of Agricultural Economics outlook report for strawberries reports: "Conditions appear to be favorable for strawberry production and prices in 1937. Prices paid to growers dropped to a low point in 1933, but since that year the trend has been upward. If the quality of the 1937 crop is average or above average, it is probable that prices received by growers will be equal to or slightly higher than were received in 1936."

It is also reported that a small decrease in acreage is in prospect for the second-early group of strawberry growing states. The Carolinas are embraced in this group.

The Carolina growers improved their chances for profit last season when they experimented in packing a part of the crop in lighter crates, 24 quart crates. The 24 quart crate was so favorably received that it now appears that the bulk of the 1937 crop will move in these lighter crates, and that the old formerly popular 32 quart crate will soon be a thing of the past; something as outmoded on the markets as is a horse and buggy on the city streets today.

I am showing below some of the practices to be carefully observed in order that growers, shippers, and the section generally may derive maximum results from the strawberry industry.

1. The best of marketing facilities cannot overcome the handicap of inefficient picking, grading and packing methods. The unsatisfactory condition and grade of strawberries often found on the markets indicate a need for more attention to standardization and for better handling methods.

2. The first step in the preparation of strawberries for market is to engage an adequate supply of competent, dependable labor before the picking season begins.

3. It is necessary to provide competent supervision for the pickers before they are sent into the berry field.

4. The proper stage of ripeness for harvesting strawberries as determined by color depends upon the variety and the distance they are to be shipped, but it varies from about three-fourths colored to a full red color. Growers and shippers who trace occasional shipments to market can determine whether the fruit is being delivered to dealers in the best possible condition as to ripeness.

5. The best picking is done by using the thumb and forefinger to pinch off each berry with a stem

about three-eighths to one-half inch long. Berries should not be snatched off and tossed into the boxes. Many pickers need instructions as to the proper method of picking.

6. Trays for carrying the berry boxes in the field should be light in weight but substantial, medium in size, and so built that the boxes fit into them snugly.

7. Exposure to the sun, rain, or dust in the field, at the packing shed or while they are being hauled to the loading station will injure the picked strawberries.

8. Under most conditions the removal of undesirable berries from field-run stock will be as much hand grading as will be found practicable. It is advisable to avoid unnecessary handling. Whether or not the berries have been graded, the filled boxes should be classified as to quality before they are placed in crates. Depending upon conditions, strawberries may be graded in the field by the pickers or in the packing shed by special labor. Grading by pickers reduces the handling.

9. Fixed, uniform strawberry grades are very desirable as a guide and basis for the use of growers in preparing their crop for market, of buyers in the purchase of fruit, and of inspectors at the point of shipment or destination. The important factors considered in standardized strawberry grades are size and quality.

10. Boxes should contain a uni-

form grade of berries and should be so filled that they are not slack nor yet full enough for the berries to be crushed. It is advisable to place the fruit under refrigeration as soon as possible after it is packed.

11. Careful supervision at the packing shed is of vital importance; so also is the location and plan of the packing shed.

12. Growers and shipping associations wishing to build up a reputation for well-standardized grades of berries sometimes use brand labels on the ends of crates. The Federal Food and Drugs Act requires that all crates of berries be marked with a statement of the quantity of the contents. If the grade, and the grower's name and address are also neatly marked on the crate, the prospective buyer will have confidence in the product.

13. A rigid system of inspection at the loading stations is a prerequisite to the permanent success of shipping associations.

14. Most of the strawberry-shipping sections would be benefited greatly by adequate sheds for car loading and inspection.

15. For safe carrying, crates must be loaded in the car compactly, with ample provision for the circulation of cold air, and they must be braced firmly to a-

void shifting and damage in transit.

2. Thomas county reports 100 eggs from his flock at 50¢ each. Leghorns for the past month says this is a profit of \$100.00 above feed cost.

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