

MARKETING THE PEANUT CROP

Shall Growers Sit Still and Allow the Crop to Be Sacrificed This Year?—This Is What Will Happen Unless Action Be Taken Immediately

By T. E. Browne, West Raleigh, N. C.

NOTWITHSTANDING the fact that the marketing of peanuts has been discussed in the columns of *The Progressive Farmer*, a repetition will be risked because of the seriousness of the outlook. There is a prevailing opinion that the acreage devoted to peanuts is much greater in 1915 than ever before. There is general complaint of a poor stand among growers of the large varieties, but this does not necessarily mean a small crop. With the price of cotton still below 10 cents—with a prospect of its being much lower this fall—why do the peanut farmers sit still when there is every reason for the peanut trust's taking the 1915 crop at an average of not more than two cents per pound? With the bulk of marketable peanuts grown in a dozen counties in Eastern Carolina and Virginia, practically giving the growers in those counties control of the highest priced nuts, why should they wait for dire necessity to force them to form some kind of marketing organization to handle their own product; a product which furnishes one of the best opportunities for coöperative marketing of any in these states? Shall we wait for "the organization to be born of poverty and disappointment" of the peanut growers? Why not profit from the experience of other farmers whose product was controlled by monopolistic methods and make some arrangement while still "above water"?

Time to Get Busy

SOME months ago there was a meeting in Suffolk, Va., of representatives from the peanut-growing counties of Virginia and North Carolina, and it was unanimously decided to organize and make plans for handling the crop. The organization was perfected, committees appointed, but the 1915 season is approaching with no farmers' cleaning plants in sight. The trouble was the 1914 crop sold for what was considered a fair price under the circumstances, and the growers forgot their Suffolk resolutions. It does seem that nothing short of the sacrificing of a few peanut crops will force us to action.

The manufacturing or cleaning of peanuts depends almost entirely upon the varieties grown. Out in Texas the Spanish is grown almost exclusively, and there the crop is handled through shelling plants, which cost from \$4,000 to \$20,000 for building and equipment. These plants shell and grade the nuts, most of the work being done by machinery. They also have attachments for making peanut butter, a most palatable and nutritious food—more nutritious pound for pound than ham. They also have attachments for extracting the oil and making peanut cake, a stock food which ranks with the richest concentrates.

Farmers Should Own the Cleaning Plants

THE farmers of the Spanish peanut sections should own and operate these plants themselves. The best farmers who only produce a crop, and leave it to somebody else to prepare the crop for the consumer, are only "half-way" business men at their best. Why should the producer be satisfied to allow some corporation in which he has no interest to make as much on his crop by preparing it for the consumer as he has made during the entire season? In the case of the larger va-

riety of peanuts, the step from the producer to the consumer is almost entirely one of cleaning and grading,—of course a small per cent always going into shelling stock for candy, etc. The cleaning establishments may be constructed and equipped at a cost of from \$5,000 up. There is no secret formula for cleaning, most of the work being done by ignorant Negro labor. It is my opinion that the best plan is to have small cleaning establishments scattered over the peanut territory at accessible points, with probably larger establishments at such points as Petersburg and Suffolk, Va. The smaller plants should be under the same general management as the central plants, which should act as distributing points. Stock in these corporations should be put down as low as \$5 per share, in order that small farmers may be stockholders, and the sale of stock should not be confined to farmers alone. The "one man one vote" plan of control should be adopted, and the organization managed by a board of directors elected by the stockholders from the various counties.

Such organizations are not new. There are numbers of successful coöperative marketing organizations described in Dr. Clarence Poe's new book, "How Farmers Coöperate and Double Profits," in which he gives in detail their plans of organization and the results. Prominent among those mentioned is "The Eastern Shore of Virginia Produce Exchange," an organization of phenomenal success almost in the midst of the peanut growers. A peanut-cleaning organization would have considerable advantage over this, in that the peanut is not as perishable a crop as the truck they handle. Some other marketing associations described by Dr. Poe and worthy of the close study of every one interested in coöperative marketing are The Wisconsin Berry Growers' Association, and The Catawba Creamery. The latter has given Catawba County a national reputation, and has set the coöperative spirit to going till Catawba County is almost competing with Denmark in coöperative enterprises. There is the United Fruit Growers' Association of Western North Carolina, for instance, with a charter so broad as to allow it to do anything, from making apple butter to writing insurance.

We Can Do as Well

THESE fruit growers' associations have for their purpose the grading and packing of the farmers' products, and then the intelligent distribution of the same so as to avoid the glutting of markets. This is practically what peanut cleaning establishments would have to do, while dealing with a product that may be stored and held 12 months or more till the market will take it.

There is every reason why the peanut growers should get together now, and not wait till they have to give away a few crops and thus have no money with which to capitalize an organization. By placing shares of stock at \$5 or \$10, and putting a live man in the field to solicit stock right away, it is possible to get ready to do business this fall. Of course, as suggested in a former article, it may require sacrifices, but sooner or later we are going to have to make sacrifices with no ultimate good to be accomplished by the sacrifice.

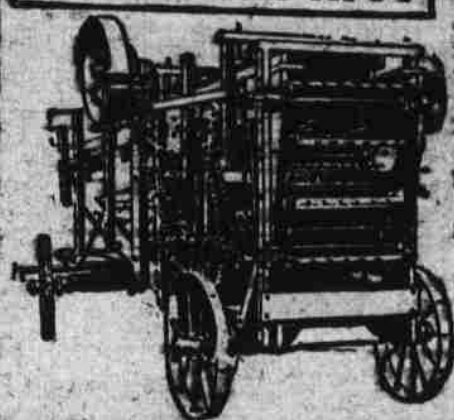
The point has been raised that the retailers would not buy from new concerns, but would stick to the old established houses. A little investigation on the part of the writer among vendors of peanuts revealed the fact that they were very much handicapped by the monopolistic

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methods of the peanut trust and would be only too glad to buy from independent concerns could they get a reliable product.

By having a coöperative marketing organization with careful and well trained inspectors and graders, special brands could soon be established and with the distribution of customers' dividends, after the paying of stockholders' dividends, it would be only a few years before the organization could control the crop. This company could then do educational work in the establishing of the best varieties, and the placing of a premium on fancy stock.

With the ease with which peanuts can be grown, the large acreage of soil adapted to their production, their logical adaptation to sane rotation systems in the cotton belt, their wonderful food value for both man and beast, there is every reason to expect a rapid increase in the number of acres devoted to "the goober," and it is right that it should be so. The fact that growers will not take a sane, sensible step for their own protection should not be used to hinder the development of a great crop. The world wants peanuts, and the South can produce peanuts. If they become so plentiful that the price paid by the consumer is such as not to allow the grower profit enough on the one operation of growing them, then they will do the wise thing and add to this small growers' profit the cleaners' profit and keep on growing peanuts.

Why should we fear overproduction? See what some other farmers have done. Quoting from "How Farmers Coöperate and Double Profits," "20 years ago overproduction of oranges was feared in California with only 5,000 carloads of oranges to market annually. The California Fruit Growers' Exchange was organized, the largest business organization of growers in the United States; now they experience no difficulty in distributing 45,000 carloads of oranges annually." With all these examples of coöperative marketing

to guide us, should the peanut growers of Virginia and North Carolina stand still and let the peanut trust take the crop at from one and a half to two cents per pound?

Every State Should Have a Marketing Bureau

EACH state should have a commissioner of markets and marketing, and he in turn should be in constant touch with the National Bureau. It is absolutely necessary that the farmers in every state should be kept in close touch with market conditions. Many crops are wasted each year, not because there is a surplus, but because no adequate market conditions exist and no intelligent system of distribution has yet been devised. To illustrate, fine peaches in some counties of Pennsylvania sold this year at 40 cents per bushel at the orchard, while in other counties the consumer was paying \$2.50 per bushel. Again we are not fully protected by law in our efforts to do coöperative buying and selling. There are too many wholesale jobbers and business houses that refuse to sell any organization that conducts a coöperative business. This is clearly an attempt to restrain trade and ought not to be tolerated in "a government of the people, for the people and by the people."—E. B. Dorsett, Mansfield, Pa.

In a letter just received, Hon. G. W. Koiner, Commissioner of Agriculture of Virginia, says: "Please state that we are very much interested in the subject of marketing and are anxious to do everything in our power to help the farmer in this most important matter connected with his work, and it is a fact that farmers are learning better how to grow crops, than to market them."

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