

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

MARKETS FOR BOISE VALLEY CROPS

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Potatoes and Onions

The markets for the potato and onion crops of the Boise Irrigation Project of Boise Valley developed early. In 1924, for example, 1,318 rail cars of potatoes were shipped to market from the Nampa-Caldwell area. Destinations in that year included 25 states. Major shipments were to Texas (772 carloads); and California (89 carloads). Direct markets were established as far away as Alabama, Arkansas, and Tennessee. Potato production saw 1,344 carloads shipped in 1920, 1,992 in 1921, 1,808 in 1922, and 2,136 carloads in 1923. In 1924, however, there was a reduction in valley potato shipments.

Crop production played a major role in volume of shipment, of course, but other factors influenced shipment. Refrigerator cars were just being developed and were scarce. Iced cars were used, but unseasonably hot weather caused greater expense for these cars. Ventilated cars could be used in cooler weather. However, if an unusually warm week fell within shipment time, considerable decay resulted. As with all locally-grown agricultural commodities, rail transportation rates influenced market destinations. Refrigerator cars and reduced shipping rates were major factors in market expansion.

During and following World War II, processed potato production developed. Markets for processed potatoes were wide-ranged from the beginning. Aside from being marketed as a convenience food, reduction of moisture and trimming of wastage reduced bulk and made shipment more economical. Present markets include all of the states of the union and several foreign countries.

Dairy

Geographical market areas for the dairy industry have been essentially the same in the last 50 years with a few exceptions.

Prior to 1925 the production of cheese ranked Idaho in the top six or seven producing states in the nation. Most cheese factories were gone by 1930 and until quite recently have not existed. For the project area, dairy industry as a whole, market areas have traditionally been in Washington, Oregon, and California. There has never been a mid-west market. In more

recent years, the California dairy industry has greatly increased and few valley dairy products are shipped to California at this time. Rather than exporting processed dairy products, today's market exports consist primarily of fluid milk. Major market areas are now Denver, Colorado; Phoenix, Arizona; Washington; and Oregon, with a lesser amount shipped to Utah.

Sugar

The earliest sugar refining in the region was at LaGrande, Oregon, in 1898. Within the project area, Western Idaho Sugar established a plant at Nampa in 1906 for the production of processed sugar. Due to an infestation of the White Fly in the following years, production waned and the plant closed in 1916. Market for processed sugar in this early endeavor was primarily local with a small amount being exported to surrounding intermountain states.

Present day processing began with the Amalgamated Sugar Company construction in Nampa in 1942. Little interest was shown in sugar beet production in the 1920's and 1930's because of intermittent problems with White Fly and leaf hopper. Markets for the last 30 years have generally been the same. Processed sugar is primarily distributed in the Northwest intermountain area and in the midwestern states of Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Indiana, Kansas, and Missouri. By-products consisting of pulp and molasses were used locally, but in recent years have been shipped to other points in Idaho, Oregon, Utah, and California, and to a small extent, some foreign export.

Fruit

Although there were early orchard ventures in the project area, the more significant beginnings were in the years following World War I and steadily increasing throughout the 1920's. In those early years the markets were primarily local. In the 1930's, markets for apples were established at several points, primarily Chicago and points in California. Chicago shipments were sent by rail and those destined for California were shipped by truck utilizing the newly constructed I-O-N (Idaho, Oregon, Nevada) highway route. As with other fresh commodities, cold shipment problems hindered transportation of "soft" fruit such as peaches and cherries. Therefore, prior to World War II, orchard production and subsequent shipment was primarily apples. Soft fruits were marketed locally or at the end of a short haul.

Washington state has been, and still is, the traditional competition for markets of locally-grown fruit. Idaho's local product did not compete well for many years. In recent years, quality, packaging, and promotion have improved to a point where the competition is keen.

Apple production was greater in the project area in the

1930's than it is today. With the development of better shipping facilities this trend is being reversed. Fewer apples, but greater production of other fruits has resulted in expansion; the greatest market expansion has been since 1960. Several factors are involved in the expansion, however. The development and construction of "controlled atmosphere storage" (CAS) sheds is of major significance. CAS allows for preservation of products and the opportunity to more fully enter into market competition. Of the 10 CAS sheds in Idaho, six are in the project area.

In the past 10 years, the markets have steadily increased. Products are shipped to most major U.S. cities and in 1973, approximately 20 carloads of apples were exported to Venezuela, Argentina, and Southeast Asia. The New York City market was established with 37 carloads of apples being sent there in 1970.

West Coast markets, long dominated by Washington state, are being increasingly entered into by local producers. As an example, 336 truckloads of apples were shipped to Los Angeles in 1970 and 710 truckloads in 1971. Also, 1,153 truckloads of peaches and 17 of cherries were shipped to Los Angeles in 1970; in 1971, these increased to 1,320 truckloads of peaches and 26 truckloads of cherries.

Seed

Prior to 1914, the seed raised in the Boise Irrigation Project area consisted of alfalfa and red clover. Following World War I and the closure of the vegetable-seed market of Europe, garden seeds began to also be grown in the Boise Valley.

Onion, sweet corn, and other vegetable seeds are marketed throughout the United States. The market for these crops following the war were primarily the garden states of New England. Later, as reclamation projects continued to develop in the west, the market for locally-grown seeds followed in those areas.