

Weather damage to crops widespread in '72

By SHIRLEYAN ENGLISH

1972 will probably be known as the year Mother Nature would not co-operate.

Last January severe fluctuations in temperature killed peach buds in orchards in the Leamington area which provide 20 per cent of the province's crop. This, coupled with increased demand from the United States, shoved up the price of peaches from the Niagara region.

Then, a cool wet summer hurt our cherries and strawberries and nearly ruined the tomato crop. Luckily, frost held off until second plantings could be harvested.

This same wet weather reduced harvests of feed crops for cattle in the east, increasing the farmer's costs. Overall, the crop was down about three per cent across Canada. Herb Heimbecker, a feed broker in Toronto, said: "By the end of July, we will have cleaned up all available supplies of barley from out west and corn here in the east . . . so we HAVE to have a good crop this summer." (The feed crop comes in at the end of July).

But Mother Nature was not finished. A severe frost in California in December has done extensive damage to the orange crop and already prices are rising. Newton Webster of Webster Fruit told me the price has risen from 50 cents to \$1.50 per case lot, depending on the size of orange. Already he has found oranges with frost damage in supplies he received recently.

He has heard nothing from California on the extent of the damage and has been able to obtain supplies, although he had difficulty getting the larger sizes for Christmas.

A broker at Sunkist Growers in Toronto said the total frost damage is still not known. Although Central California was hit by the five-night freeze in mid-December, Southern California was not hit until last week. They are now having problems with heavy winds in that area.

According to The Packer, a weekly newspaper for the fruit and vegetable industry in United States, freezing began the morning of Dec. 9 and continued every night through Dec. 13 with temperatures dipping into the low 20s in the San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys.

"Some of those nights saw the temperature stay below the critical 26 degree level for as much as 12 hours. Daytime temperatures stayed in the 30 and low 40-degree range, denying fruit enough warmth to stave off the next night's freeze.

The navel crop in the San Joaquin Valley was being harvested when the freeze hit with about 15 to 20 per cent of picking completed. Some shippers were rating the damage at 50 to 60 per cent of the navel crop. The San Joaquin Valley produces about 50 per cent of the total California-Arizona orange crop with about 70 per cent of that crop in navel oranges.

In the Sacramento area where temperatures dropped even lower, reports indicate that damage could run as high as 100 per cent.

Protective measures taken by growers proved ineffective as the freeze was accompanied by a high or non-existent ceiling that allowed warmth from heaters to dissipate in the atmosphere above the orchards and wind machines were turned off to avoid further chilling the fruit.

Protective measures worked for lemon producers and the crop now being harvested was not damaged although small "button fruit" slated for market later in the year was hurt.

Grapefruit, tangerines and other citrus fruit seem to have come through without damage but cauliflower and artichokes were hit.

Mr. Webster said cauliflower prices have been high and last week supplies were impossible to obtain, although he received some this week from Toronto.

Back in Canada, Agriculture Canada, in their Food Forecast for '73 predict the supply of apples in the first half of the year will be smaller, resulting in higher prices. They report that stocks in storage are five per cent smaller than a year ago, particularly in the Maritimes, Quebec and Ontario. The reason for this could be the increase in exports which rose 49 per cent over last year from 31.5 million pounds to 46.9 million pounds.

The reduced crops we experienced last summer in fresh fruits will also mean higher prices than last year for processed fruits and vegetables.

There's more bad news yet. Although the movement of potatoes from storage to market is running 39 per cent higher than last year, the supply of potatoes is substantially down this year and prices will be much higher than last year. Mr. Webster confirmed this.

The Canadian crop is estimated to be 17 per cent below the 1971 level, and 19 per cent below the 1965-69 average. Production was predicted in October to be 40.5 million hundred-weight compared with 48.8 million in 1971.

The crop is also considerably lower in United States so we will not be able to get supplies from there.

Onions, carrots, cabbage and rutabagas are also in reduced supply and prices will be "firm" which means higher.

Rumors which have been circulating that beef producers were going to reduce their herds due to increased cost of feed are not true. Charles Gracey, president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association, said the increase is a painful reality due to the reduced supply of corn and soybeans. Feed is more expensive than in previous years.

However, he pointed out that it is difficult to reduce herds because producers have already bought them and have to feed them. There are two types of beef farmers — those who have a commercial cow herd — that is they breed cows to produce calves — and those who have feed lots, that is they buy calves after they are weaned then feed them for market.

Farmers may market cattle at a lighter weight than in

past years he said, because costs increase as cattle become heavier. But he expects the total tonnage marketed in 1973 to be six per cent higher than in 1972.

One-third more beef is now being raised than in 1969, Mr. Gracey said, and the results of this will be seen in 1974 and 1975. The decision to reduce herds rests with the farmer who has a cow herd — the breeder — but that has not happened yet.

"There are enough calves now to raise the per capita consumption of beef 10 more pounds, to 100 pounds in 1975".

In fact 10-12 per cent more calves were born last spring than the year before, Mr. Gracey said.

"Those who say beef is in short supply have missed the mark".

He added beef prices are at a satisfactory level as far as producers are concerned and consumers are buying in record quantities. Prices should remain unchanged.

The department of agriculture reports pork supplies are expected to be lower during the first half of 1973 so prices may rise but should drop in the last half of the year. Poultry prices are expected to remain stable and supplies should be ample.

W.I. Met in Stratford

The Lakeside Women's Institute held their November meeting in Stratford on Wednesday. Two places of interest were visited. At the Stratford Ceramics Centre, Mrs. Racz explained the making and finishing of ceramic ornaments and other crafts. The tour through Stratford Textiles with the knitting machines and many operators at work proved to be very interesting.

Lunch was enjoyed at the Drama Restaurant where a short meeting was held. The committee in charge was Mrs. Ross McCorquodale, Mrs. Jared Vining and Mrs. Robert Holden.

This Stratford tour was very much enjoyed.

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