

Re-use or refuse?

Hornby grower leads cabbage box controversy



PETER VANDER DUSSEN demonstrates the new cardboard boxes which cost more than wooden crates, break up easily in dampness, and can't be used more than once.

(Photo by J. Beaton)

by Joyce Beaton
Peter Vander Dussen is a new breed of farmer concerned with changing what is wrong with a law that doesn't work, and willing to pay the price personally to assure justice. He and his wife Joanne operate a market garden on the Eighth Line near Hornby.

On Friday he led a group of Ontario produce farmers in a demonstration in front of the Ontario Legislature. They were protesting the Ministry of Agriculture and Food regulation that requires them to employ new, unused containers for shipping cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce and celery, rather than the reusable wooden crates they have used in the past.

It costs a lot of money to fight Queen's Park and this year Peter stands to lose \$3,000 to \$4,000 as a result of the time he has taken to bring the issue to the attention of the public. "I won't get my winter cabbage in this year because of the work involved organizing this," he said.

On Jan. 1, 1973 the Ministry of Agriculture began enforcing the regulation first introduced by the Ontario Fruit and Vegetable Growers' Association. Passed by a vote of three to two by association delegates, the law was intended to standardize containers, up-grade the image of the product, bring a better return for these products and create a better profit for the grower.

Peter takes exception to the way the law was passed as well as the reasons given. He claims the small growers didn't even know about the proposal before the association and were not consulted before the vote was taken.

"If it was so wanted by the growers, why did they need a law to force us to use the cardboard crates?" he asks. The regulation has failed to provide standardization, according to Peter, as it added cardboard throw-away containers to the market but did nothing to eliminate the various containers previously used. It only states that the container must be new.

Harassed
Peter told of his experiences in trying to buy the new cardboard boxes. "The containers are frequently out of stock and when that happens you are just out of luck. At least with the wooden ones we can use them again and again," he said.

Peter says he has been harassed by three inspectors of the produce terminal in Toronto. When Peter, using wooden crates, would sell cabbages to customers their trucks would be tagged. The

"I can put cabbage in a pair of new panty-hose and they would not be detained by the Department of Agriculture", Joanne quips, "but if I use a melon crate I can't sell the cabbage."

This is not a new fight for the Vander Dussens. The problem was first brought to the attention of farmers in the August issue of "The Grower". Written by L. G. Howe, Supervising Inspector, Farm Products, it listed complaints received concerning the cardboard crates.

Three weeks ago Peter went to the Ontario Food Terminal with cabbage in used crates and was detained because he was using wooden containers. He had previously been in touch with government officials but no one would take the initiative to relax the law.

It was at this time he decided to make a public issue of the problem. Armed with letters from all produce farmer within two miles of Hornby, and accompanied by Joanne and 30 farmers from around Toronto, they drove their truckloads of cabbage to Queen's Park.

They demonstrated the superiority of the wooden crate over the easily split cardboard one. They were accompanied by representatives of large food stores. Jack Comella, president of Sunkist Fruit Markets, said the extra cost of new cartons can add a nickel to the price of each cabbage.

"We have to pass the cost on to the consumer. Nobody makes any profit on it except the container companies," he said.

Costs higher
"The wholesale prices received by the farmers for the products involved have not gone up to cover the cost of the new container," Peter says, "yet the retail price of the products has jumped considerably, due in part, to the inadequacy of and damage resulting from the new container."

The organization which recommended this regulation is benefiting financially because some of the con-

customer would then be forced to bring the product back to him to be put in cardboard containers.

The irony of the situation is that when the produce is taken to the store it must be put into wooden crates to be kept in cold storage as the cardboard crates fall apart with moisture.

During wet weather the cabbage must be put from the field into wooden crates, transferred to cardboard for shipping and then changed again to wooden for storage.

"The cardboard companies are obviously benefitting from all this," Peter says. He charges a conflict of interest with companies such as Skyway Produce of Burlington. Handlers of produce, they also sell the growers cartons and get commission on their sales.

"All they want is to make more sales," Peter says. Ecology
Pollution Probe, Toronto points out it is ironic that with the current paper and petroleum shortages, single-use wax-coated cardboard cartons are in short supply, yet Peter is being threatened with prosecution for still using wooden crates.

An encouraging remark was made by Agriculture Minister William Stewart. He said he could not see too much wrong with re-usable containers as long as they are kept clean. At first sight, he said, he would not be in favor of throwaways.

Mr. Stewart has promised to get together again with the association to pursue the matter further.



HEADING A PROTEST over the government's forced use of non-reusable cardboard containers for vegetables is Peter Vander Dussen, Eighth Line Hornby market gardener. (Photo by J. Beaton)

Obituary

Clarence Coulter

Clarence Irwin Coulter who died Nov. 5 at his home, was born in Weston Nov. 20, 1894, the son of Andy and Clara (Croxall) Coulter. Educated in Weston, he was a junior with the Bank of Hamilton from 1913 to 1923 and a further two years with the Bank of Commerce.

During this period he served overseas with the 204th Regiment, later absorbed with the 125th from 1916-19. He was married to Bessie Madill, the daughter of E. C. Madill, on Sept. 1, 1920. In 1925 he established C. I. Coulter and Co. brokerage house at 317 Bay St., Toronto, and purchased a seat on the Standard Stock and Mining Exchange, subsequently merged with the Toronto Stock Exchange during the following year.

During world war two Mr. Coulter managed Lou West's brokerage firm while the latter served with the Armed Forces from 1939-46. From

1946 until 1952 he retired to his farm at Coldwater, then he purchased an estate near Hornby, wintering at St. Petersburg, Florida, from this period on.

His wife Bessie predeceased him in 1961 and he married Ilse Wandschneider of Hamburg, Germany, in 1963. She also predeceased him in 1966.

"C. I." as he was affectionately known to his friends, was an avid baseball and hockey fan all his life, a member of numerous lodges, chapters, and societies, and a life member of both the Masonic Order and the Milton District Hospital.

He is survived by his three nieces, Lois Clarke, Belleville, Betty Dodds, Rexdale, Katharine Moffat, Milton; one nephew, Richard Coulter, Agincourt, and their mother Winifred Coulter of Willowdale. Funeral service and interment were held at Streetsville, Nov. 8.

Hydro plans hearing soon

A public hearing of the Solandt Commission on proposed hydro lines will be held in Milton, it was revealed this week.

Dr. O. Solandt has been holding public hearings in Toronto, but has been urged to hold a hearing in Milton because of the serious effects current proposals could have on the area.

Mayor-elect Anne MacArthur told Milton Council-elect she understood the hearing would deal only with the effect on Milton and the

route change from the 10th Line to the Ninth Line in North Oakville.

She noted Milton had presented a strong case regarding the effect of the proposals, which would see transmission lines on three sides of the present town.

Councillors Richard Day and Don Gordon had also made a strong case for the problem created in the area of the Ninth Line, the mayor-elect said.

These had resulted in Dr. Solandt's agreement to hold a public hearing in this area.

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