

Tomatoes - Gains in the West, Losses in East

Never underestimate the power of a tomato.

Not only has it been the best-selling of all processed fruits and vegetables over the years, but it's becoming more so, riding on the crest of demand for quick foods that make abundant use of such items as catsup, tomato sauce, or paste.

Since the late 1940's, growers have had to more than double production to meet the demand for processing tomatoes. Imports of processed tomatoes are way up, particularly from Italy, Spain, and Portugal. And a switch to more concentrated tomato products has played a big role in California's taking over as the Nation's No. 1 producer and processor of canned tomato products.

The average American now consumes about 20 pounds of processed tomatoes a year in such forms as juice, canned tomatoes, paste, puree, and sauce. He eats, by contrast, 12 pounds of fresh tomatoes.

Close to four-fifths of the processed crop comes from California. Of the other two major processing centers, the Midwest accounts for 14 percent

of the processed crop, and the East, 6 percent.

Just about all of California's rapid growth in the past 20 years has come at the expense of the East. From 1948-50 to 1970-72, the East had a 42-percent drop in harvested tonnage. California's production went up four times to more than 4 million tons. Midwest tonnage climbed 50 percent.

Climate control. California owes much of its success to a climate that's paved the way for mechanical harvesting. Because of the dryness in producing areas, crops are irrigated and soil conditions can usually be controlled to just about optimal levels for harvesting. As a result, high-yielding varieties that respond to once-over mechanical harvesting have been developed that take full advantage of these conditions.

California thus has substantially higher yields and lower production costs than other parts of the country. And with lower raw product costs for tomato canners, the processing industry has flourished.

Today, just about all of California's tomatoes grown for processing are under irrigation

and mechanically harvested. The Midwest and the East, on the other hand, are more dependent on hand harvesting due to wet field conditions. Last year, about 30 percent of the Midwest's crop was machine harvested, and the relatively few mechanical harvesters in the East were frequently slowed or delayed by wet fields.

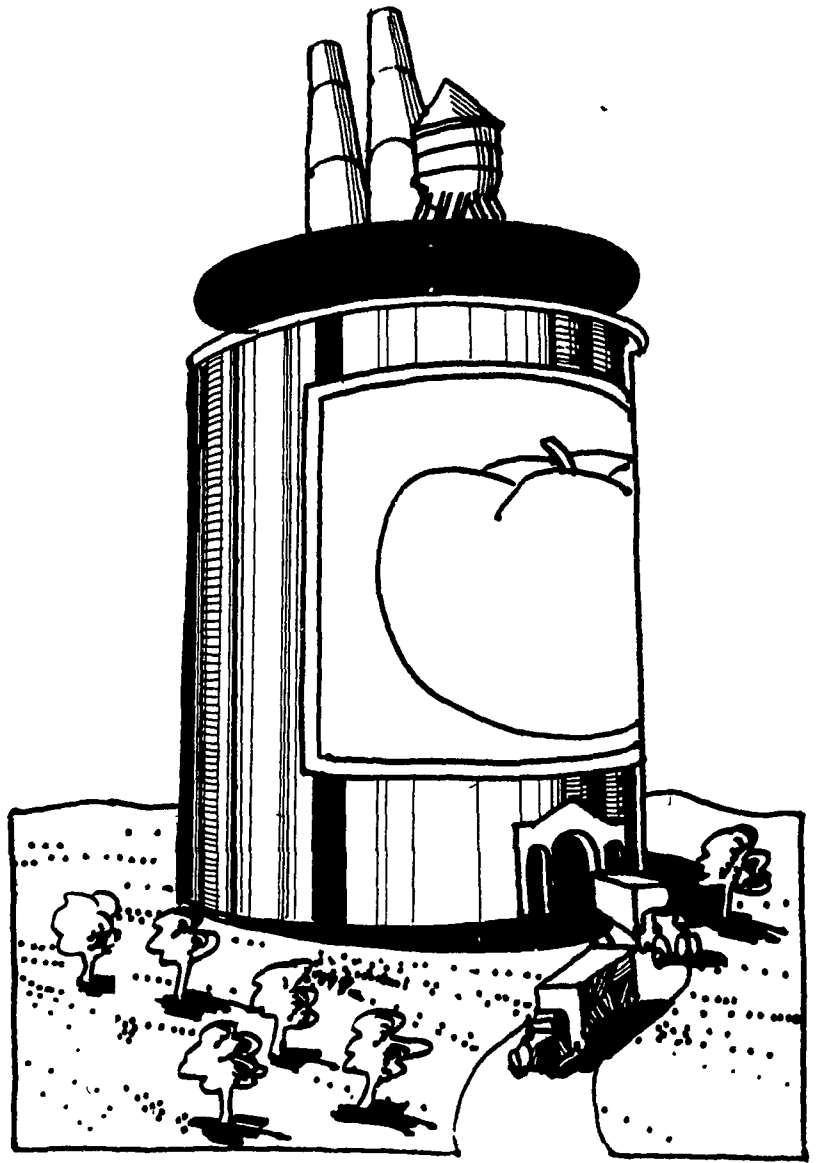
To each his own. Each of these three major processing regions has its specialties.

California is in a better position to produce high-concentrated tomato products because of its advantage in lower raw product costs. Nearly 60 percent of its processing crop goes into such products as sauce, puree, and paste, which take up to 5½ pounds of farm weight to make a pound of finished product.

Well over 90 percent of the Nation's tomato paste and tomato sauce comes from California.

Concentrate on low-concentrates. The East and Midwest put close to half their production in low-concentrated tomato juice and canned tomatoes. These products take about 1.5 pounds of farm weight tomatoes to make a pound of finished product. High-concentrated products account for less than 10 percent of their production.

In the East, most of the plants (Continued On Page 15)



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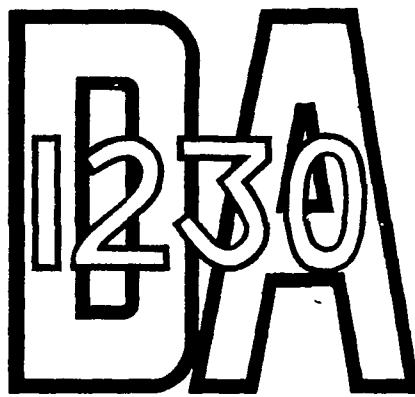
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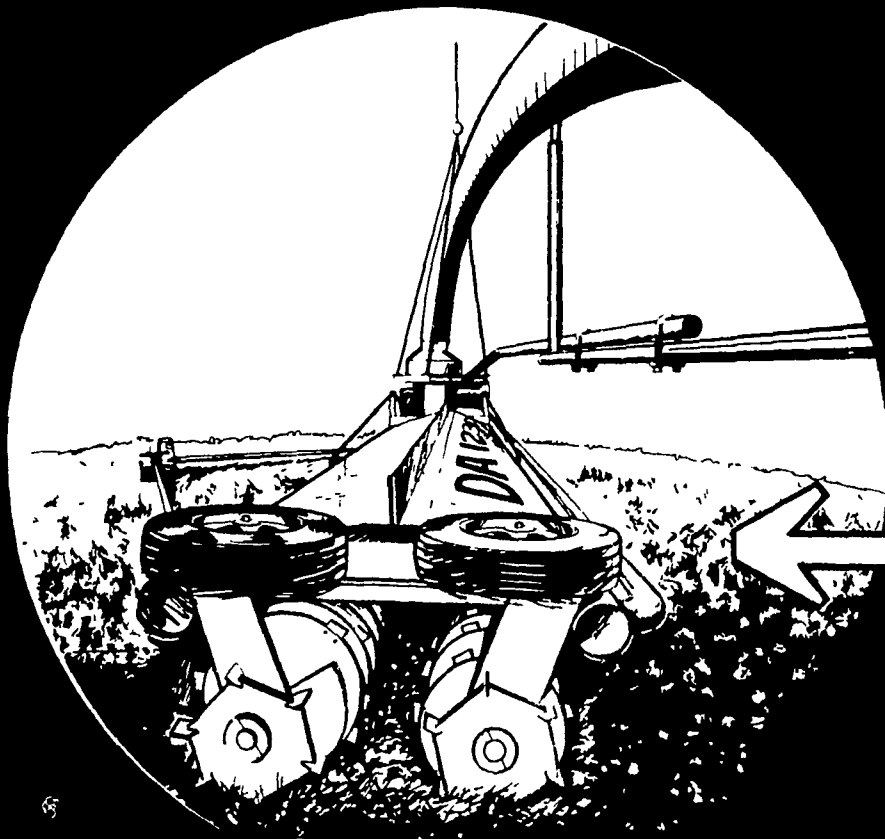
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