Fruit Crop Report

If the October 1 prospects are realized, the citrus crop for 1974-75 will be slightly above the previous record set in 1972-73. Production of noncitrus fruit is expected to total about the same as last year's utilized crop.

October's index of prices received by growers for fresh and processed fruit, at 160 (1967=100), increased 5 percent from September - and was 3 percent above a year earlier. The index is expected to decline seasonally during the fourth quarter this year to levels near a year ago, reflecting the large prospective citrus supplies. Although most retail fresh fruit prices will also decline seasonally during this period, they will probably remain materially above last year's level.

In view of recent advances in wholesale prices for many processed noncitrus fruit items, retail prices should increase to levels substantially higher than last season. However, advances in retail prices for processed citrus items are expected to be moderate. Higher retail prices for fresh and processed fruit are attributed both to generally higher grower returns for processing fruit and to continued sharp increases in marketing and processing costs.

Dominating the citrus scene is a record orange crop in prospect. The first forecast for the 1974-75 season points to 234.4 million boxes, up 8 percent from last season and 4 percent above the previous record set in 1972-73.

Prospects are up in all producing areas except Texas. Orange production in Florida, at 174 million boxes, is up 5 percent from last season and 3 percent above the 1972-73 record. Total orange prospects in California are set at 50 million boxes - the largest since 1946-47 and 23 percent above 1973-74. Prospects are up 25 percent from last season in Arizona, but are down 8 percent in Texas. Current moderately below year-earlier levels.

A smaller grapefruit crop is being forecast. Prospects point to a crop of 58 million boxes (excluding California's late areas), down 8 percent from last season. Florida's crop is expected to total 45 million boxes, down 6 percent from last year's record crop. With substantially larger shipments so far this season, f.o.b. prices have been below a year ago. However, in view of the smaller remaining supplies, grower prices are likely to advance by winter to levels above last year.

The larger citrus crop prospects for 1974-75, combined with large carryover stocks of most processed items (mainly frozen concentrated orange juice), indicate ample supplies of processed citrus for the coming season.

Production of apples, grapes, and pears was estimated at almost the same as last year's utilized production. Shipping point f.o.b. prices for apples and grapes are generally lower this season while pear prices have been substantially higher. These prices have been declining seasonally and will likely continue to do so through fall and early winter.

Despite a smaller carryover, the combined 1974-75 supply of processed noncitrus is likely to be above that of a year ago. Frozen canned and frozen fruit packs are likely, but dried fruit output will be below last season.

Total production of the four major edible tree nuts (almonds, walnuts, pecans and filberts) is estimated at 404,800 tons, 12 percent below last year. A record almond crop is more than offset by material declines for walnuts, filberts, and pecans. However, the total supply of domestic tree nuts for the 1974-75 marketing season is slightly above last year's level since current holdings of shelled and unshelled nuts are generally larger.

Eastern Lauds USDA Action

Eastern Milk Producers Cooperative Association, Inc. has applauded two recent recommendations by the United States Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Marketing Service. The first recommendation was in regard to extending the Middle Atlantic Federal Marketing Order No. 4, to include the following Pennsylvania counties: Adams, Chester, Cumberland, Dauphin, Franklin, Fulton, Juniata, Lancaster, Lebanon, Perry and York. Unregulated parts of Bucks and Montgomery counties were added under this recommendation along with Washington County, Md. The order currently covers the principal metropolitan areas of Washington, D.C., Baltimore, Md., Philadelphia, Pa., and Wilmington, Del.

The other recommendation made by the USDA states that a reserve milk processing plant operated by a cooperative would be eligible to have its milk pooled and priced under the order only if the cooperative sells at least half of its milk to regulated distributing plants serving the fluid needs of the markets.

Dairy farmers who become producers under the Mid-Atlantic order as a result of the marketing area expansion would be issued bases so that they could be paid under the order's base-excess producer payment plan. This is a plan under which a producer's deliveries to the market in certain earlier base-forming months are averaged out to establish his monthly base. During following base-paying months the producer is paid the order's uniform base price for milk delivered up to his base amount, but a lower price per hundredweight for any excess milk.

At a hearing held in Allentown, Pa., early this year, Eastern Milk Producers entered strong testimony on behalf of the cooperative's 8500 members.

At that same hearing, Eastern also supported, among other important matters, a recommendation to extend the New York-New Jersey Federal Milk Marketing Order No. 2, to include 20 northeastern Pennsylvania counties. The USDA has denied that proposal. Eastern officials said the Cooperative will, however, continue efforts to attain that denied proposal, since they feel a favorable decision would enhance the income of Order No. 2 producers.