

Tomatoes plentiful, prices 'rotten'

By DIETER KRIEG

THE BUCK - Tomato growers have an above average crop of tomatoes on their hands and are faced with "rotten" prices, according to B.S. Warfel and of B.S. Warfel and Sons, Inc., who heads a tomato brokerage firm here in southern Lancaster County. A broker with 44 years of experience in the business, Warfel flatly said "I never saw the market so depressed in my life."

We can buy more than what we want for 60 to 65 cents per 5/8 bushel basket (20 quarts) but can only place a limited amount at the canneries. Farmers with a contract have a limited home for their product but there's little demand for open market surpluses," the veteran tomato handler added.

Warfel, who at one time had seven tomato stations along the East Coast, claimed that affluence and welfare policies have much to do with the present squashed state of tomato prices and demand. Supply and demand determine prices.

"People are so affluent, they eat steak instead of tomato soup," Warfel quipped. Then he unabashedly opined that welfare programs which distribute the working man's money to those who don't work are partially responsible for the development.

The weak demand for tomatoes has developed in spite of the thousands of tons of fruits and vegetables which spoiled in California fields last month due to a strike. Farmers in the Golden State grow 87 per cent of the nation's tomato crop and canneries there last year hauled in three million more tons of the crop than they had originally counted on. The result has been that canning houses are working with surpluses and growers are faced with depressed prices. This strike and low price situation has prompted one California grower to open a 160-acre field of his tomatoes to the public free of charge, a California newspaper reported. Approximately 300 people showed up for the free harvest.

Warfel said he could only handle his own customers this year, due to the bigger than average crop and slow demand. His clients are scattered throughout several Pennsylvania and Maryland counties - as far as 75 miles away. Two Schuylkill County growers, among others, were delivering their tomatoes here while this reporter was visiting.

With the tomato season now in its peak, Warfel and Sons are shipping about 12 truck loads per day - or roughly 10,000 baskets. While that may sound like a lot, it is not, compared to the days when there was still a strong demand for tomatoes. "Years ago," Warfel recollected, "we hauled 40 to 60 truck loads per day during the peak of the season. Prices have changed too. Says Warfel: "You'd pay five cents per basket to pick'em and sold'em for 35 cents and up, per basket,



Approximately 10,000 baskets of tomatoes are loaded daily at the B.S. Warfel and Sons tomato loading station, south of The Buck on Route 272.

delivered." He also noted that at that time (1932) there were 14 canning houses in Baltimore, compared to not a single one today.

Warfel ships his tomatoes in whatever way the various firms dictate: bulk, boxes, or basket. Trucks pick up the crop as far as 75 miles away and will deliver 500 to 600 miles away. Coreless tomatoes is what the canning houses are demanding nowadays, Warfel explained, pointing out that the Red Rock variety is one of the more popular.

The tomato picking season began during the first days of August and will continue throughout the Summer and Fall until frost arrives. So far there have been no



On August 28, 1776, at Birmingham, England, refugee Samuel Curwen met a local quaker and "found him a sensible man and a warm American, as most of the middling classes are through the



kingdom, as far as my experience reaches." Later in the day he talked to a merchant who had visited America and "is her steady and ardent advocate."

significant problems. As much as 20 per cent of the fields may have been affected by blight, Warfel estimated, but that was more of a problem where spraying was neglected. Jim Ressler, who was in Warfel's office at the time, noted that the 40 acres of tomatoes he and his brother, Charles, work with at their farm near Rawlinsville, were sprayed five to six times - which works out to just about once every two weeks. The spraying program payed off, however, as Ressler

acknowledged "very good" yields - "darn near twice that of last year." Blight problems were avoided by the Ressler's.

Ressler believed that if it hadn't been for storm damage earlier in the year, his tomato crop would have been even better than the "very good" crop he's picking anyway.

Warfel described this year's tomato growing conditions as being too wet, a condition which some of the fruit to be damaged right on the vine.



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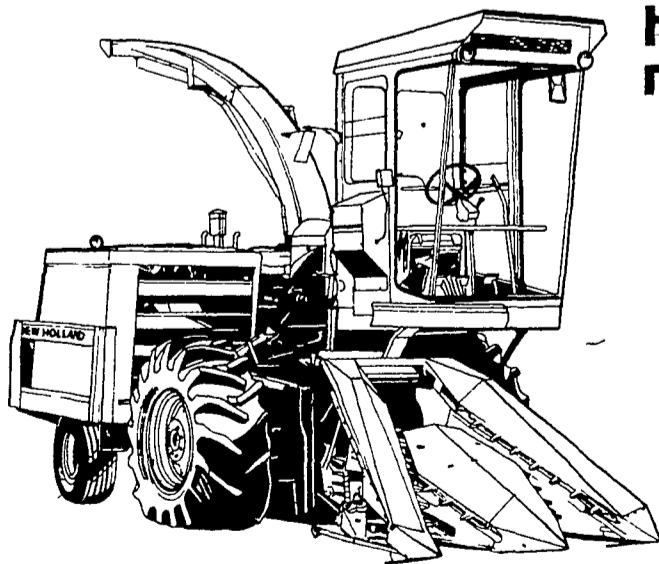
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