Dania — A Rich Agricultural Country

EVERY RESIDENT OF THE TOWN IS A FARMER. ALL OF THEM GROW TOMATOES, MANY RAISE OTHER KINDS OF VEGETABLES AND FRUITS.

MADE AN INTIMATE ACQUAINTANCE WITH THE GODDESS OF SUCCESS, AND FORTUNE SMILES ON ALL

by Myrtle English


“Is there a man in Dania who does not own, lease, or at least have an interest, however small it may be, in some piece of farm or grove land in the vicinity?”

This was the question asked after a few conversations with well informed people of that town about conditions in general and what was doing.

And the answer was “no.”

Now, this reply may not have been literally true. There may be a man, or stretching the point a whole lot, two or perhaps three men in Dania, who have nothing to do with raising tomatoes, or other vegetables, or citrus fruit, but they aren’t telling it, if they exist, for if there is one thing every man, woman and child in Dania is interested in, it is farming, and tomato farming in particular.

Just as soon as the boys are big enough, they go to work in the fields, perhaps lease a tiny bit for themselves; the girls go into the packing houses, where they make four, five or six dollars a day; hundreds of “croppers” flock in from the north with the first tinge of fall, and as for the professional man or “the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker,” tomatoes are his standby. A citizen of Dania may state his business as that of a banker, a doctor, a druggist, or grocer, and that may be true, but just the same, out on the front prairie or back west of the city there is bound to be a piece of land, ranging from five to fifty acres in extent, which he calls his, or has leased for raising a crop. No indeed, they do not conceal the fact, or slide over it in any way, for most of the substantial fortunes possessed in that prosperous community come from the rich, red, juicy vegetable.

Three Thousand Acres

The Dania district is unique in that only a very few of the farmers live out in the country. All come into the town at the close of the day’s work, and early in the morning, during the season, make their way into the fields. It seems to be a most satisfactory arrangement, for the tomato land in particular is usually somewhat low, and entirely too valuable to be used for the surroundings of a home. The townsite is high and dry, swept by cooling breezes from the ocean, well laid out and apparently altogether satisfactory to the people who are united in declaring that Dania is absolutely the only town on earth, with that almost fierce loyalty which is characteristic of the pioneers in a new section such as this. There may be little difference between the citizens as to proper methods of procedure under certain circumstances, but the front which is presented to the outside world is a loyal and steadfast one.

In the district which stretches some five or six miles to the west, a little over a mile east, and a comparatively short distance north and south, are probably 3,000 acres of land devoted to the growth of tomatoes. On hammocks scattered here and there are a few groves, with more planned, while in occasional patches of sandy soil are pineapples and small quantities of other produce. These are not taken into consideration to a great extent.

From these 3,000 acres some wonderful crops have been harvested; men have made fortunes, and, to be truthful, occasionally lost them too, as is the case everywhere; and millions of crates of produce have been picked and shipped out.

Good Average Yields

Ups and downs have been plentiful in the history of the tomato district at Dania, but considering a normal crop in a normal year, 500 crates to the acre is considered a low average yield and the cost of growing and getting the produce ready for the market is estimated at from $100 to $115 per acre. Now, of course, with the yield varying from this figure up to 1,000 crates to the acre, and the market fluctuating as markets always do, it is a hard task to estimate an average profit in a normal year. Martin Frost kept close count of his crop for three years, previous to the last season, and found that his average profit per acre was $183, on an average yield of about 500 crates. This, it is believed, may be taken as a fair sample of what a man may expect under ordinary conditions. One year Mr. Frost, who is a pioneer of the district, realized $2,036 from seven acres of land, which
is much above his average as given.

N. C. Pike, whose place is a mile west of town, and is sand and muck, produced $2,100 worth of tomatoes on four acres. They were early, planted in November and off the ground before the others began to come in.

Who's Who in Dania

To give a list of the growers in Dania and what each is doing would be to publish a directory of the town, considering the conditions which have been described above, but some of the concerns are working on a large scale which attracts and holds attention. It is said, however, that the matter of growing tomatoes is becoming less and less of a gamble each year. The present tendency is to discourage the man who comes in, borrows money for running expenses, mortgages his prospective crop for the seed, risks nothing and has all to gain. He is not catered to as he was a few years ago, and the consequences is that the conservative man is coming to the top. Those who plunge in deeply, keep out a weather eye for the life line, and go pretty cautiously.

Hardee and McFarland are among the larger growers, and they not only control a large slice of land in Dania, but operate in other sections of the Matecumbe country, and run a big packing house besides. M. C. Hardee is president of the Bank of Dania, owner of a beautiful town home which he just bought the other day for about $8,000, and interested in everything which will develop the town. W. W. McFarland has not been here so long but he has just finished building a beautiful home and will make Dania his permanent place of abode. This concern branches out into the fruit business in Arkansas and Texas, too.

Tubbs and Johnston control 125 acres of tomato land and also operate their own packing house. They raised some early varieties on the west prairie this year and made money on them. Mr. Johnston's brother-in-law, D. S. Weaver of Memphis, Tenn., was down here this winter looking things over. He is a cotton broker but decided that this was a mighty good place to invest some money, so he bought 120 acres. Two years ago he bought 145 acres nearby, and nothing could induce him to sell either piece.

From Poverty to Affluence

It was about ten years ago when A. C. Marshall arrived in Dania. He knew little about the tomato business, and being a sensible man, started out to learn in the most practical way, by hiring out at $1.25 per day. Now his business of packing and shipping has extended until it covers the entire state, and in addition to controlling a large acreage in the Dania section, he is interested on the west coast and in other sections.

W. J. Reed was a large grower this year. He had about eighty acres in all. Harry S. Jones has the reputation for growing some of the choicest tomatoes in the county and more than 100 acres was farmed this season under his supervision. Mr. Jones has just finished building one of the prettiest homes in Dania and says the place is plenty good enough for him. He owns 320 acres altogether, and has a big packing house in addition.

J. M. Holden [should be Holding] is a member of the county school board and perhaps one of the best known men in Dade county. His crop, from 40 acres on sand and muck soil, was sold for $10,000 this year.

J. W. Mulliken is one of the old timers there. He is from "ol' Kaintuck" and possesses the sterling integrity, fixity of purpose and perseverance, characteristics of the people from that famous state. He is a member of the city council, and has a neat home on Main street, as well as 150 acres of farm land and a packing house, in addition to a fine grove.

Some of the Smaller Growers

A profit of between $6,000 and $7,000 from twenty acres of land is usually considered pretty good wages, and that is the estimate made of the result of the year's work of Charles Swanson.

There were many others who farmed ten, fifteen, or twenty acres. George Bloom was a twenty-acre man; Edgar Peters had a like amount and got $3,700 for his crop; Ed. Grothen also had twenty acres as did also Thompson & Peters and H. J. Singleton. Some of those who cared for fifteen acres were G. A. Potts, Bert Riel, J. P. Nix and I. T. Parker, cashier of the bank.

Ten acres seems to be the favorite amount of land to take up and look after. Judge Sands, the first mayor of Dania [Dania's Charter of Incorporation, November 30, 1904, lists John W. Mulliken as the first mayor], has a nice farm of that size. J. H. Clark, E. L. Smith, J. Bencer, F. H. Webber, Tippett & Yates, Oliver Swortz and the pioneer W. G. Moore were mentioned as some of those who have made a success on that amount of land. Dr. C. E. Stewart runs the drug store and attends to a flourishing practice most conscientiously, but just the same there is a ten-acre tract back there, the products from which bring him a nice profit.

Women Farm, Too

Some of the women own pieces of ground which are profitable investments. Of these, Mrs. H. J. Singleton has been one of the most successful. She put in five acres this season.

W. M. Bellamy controls a nice slice of land and has found it a good thing on the whole. Peter Hansen grew about seven acres of tomatoes this season. J. R. Brown had in a like amount and Carl Larsen put in six acres.

J. C. Green should have been classed among the larger growers, for his holdings this season were between twenty-five and thirty acres. A. H. McFarland is another of the successful ones.

When a man will put $10,000 in land, for cropping purposes only, he must have some faith in the country. Gus Nyberg has just done this thing. In all, he has acquired within the last few weeks 240 acres of marl, muck and sand land, scattered around through four sections, and he is getting it ready to plant next year. Mr. Nyberg has about forty acres in tomatoes this season, and lately has been devoting his time to cucumbers. They have been growing well and he has given the pickers a merry chase to keep up with them.

Mr. Nyberg owns one of the eight packing houses which are scattered along the track at Dania.

Several years ago F. G. Taylor and his brother arrived in Dania. They have stuck it out through thick and thin, and this season farmed between twenty-five and thirty acres.

A. C. Frost was also one of the first arrivals on the scene at Dania, and now with his son, Martin, owns or controls over 300 acres, land in the Dania district and about Lake View, a settlement just twenty miles from Dania, they have branched into the real estate business however and do not depend alone on farming. When the elder Mr. Frost arrived in Dania in 1901, there were three bachelors and one white woman in the place. He was an agent for the F.E.C. and at once began to develop the place, with the result that he is now affectionately called the "father" of Dania.

Even the mayor of Dania has a crop. He is E. F. Nieblack who has been quite successful in the way of coaxing the tomato plants to grow and yield abundantly.

Citrus Fruits

Do not, gentle reader, get the idea that there is nothing but tomatoes in this fertile district surrounding Dania. One of the show groves of the county is just a little way from the town. It is that of J. M. Bryan three and one half miles west of Dania on the rock road to Davie. There are twelve acres in trees now fourteen years old, and the crop this
year was sold on the trees for $10,000. This was only a normal year, too. Both grapefruit and oranges are grown in the grove which is valued at $40,000. Last year, it is said, Mr. Bryan refused $10,500 for his grove and the previous year he realized $7,000 from it. Seven years ago, when the grove was a young one, he sold 1,000 boxes of grapefruit from it, for $2.50 a box, and 1,500 boxes of oranges for $1.75 a box. Mr. Bryan came down the east coast in the early days, long before the days of the drainage canals, and taking a canoe, traveled over the 'Glades until he picked out a hammock which suited him. Here he started his grove. Now the land is high and dry, but the grove is one of the best in the county.

About a mile away is the grove formerly owned by J. M. Bryan’s father [J. M. Bryan, Sr.]. It comprises some eight or ten acres, and is a fine piece of property, but is now the source of litigation which has arisen over the affairs of the Sterling-Worth sanitarium which purchased the property some time ago.

J. W. Mulliken’s grove is about nine years old and is beginning to bear prolifically. He is fond of oranges and these predominate among his trees. Mr. Mulliken has fifteen acres set out and bearing.

Many New Groves

Judge George L. Glaser, formerly a member of the legislature of New York, and prominent in politics in that state for years, came to Dania broken down in health, not long ago. Out in the country he has established his home, and his residence is one of the finest in the district, set in the midst of forty acres of fine land devoted to grapefruit and avocados. He proposes to develop this property into a first class grove and is giving it the intelligent care which spells success.

Through the influence of Judge Glaser, his friend, Dr. F. Wickham, formerly recorder of Queen’s county, New York, came to Dania. The result of this visit was that he bought a good sized tract of land, built a $4,000 home, and is now putting out twenty acres in trees, mostly avocados.

Fifteen years ago James Paulson was a poor man, struggling along as many other men do. But he knew a good thing when he saw it and so secured eight acres of Dania land. This he planted in grapefruit and avocados with a few limes for luck. The grove is coming five years old, and this year he took $3,000 worth of fruit from it. Before the trees began to bear Mr. Paulson trucked between them and kept up the expense of the grove in that manner.

He irrigated two and one-half acres of his land and found that it was a good paying proposition.

Reed A. Bryan has one of the older groves, ten acres in size, but now, in partnership with F. A. Barrett, has planted twenty acres in new trees. They are using the hammock soil for this purpose.

Groves are a rather new proposition for that section of the county, but the acreage in trees is rapidly extending, and it is predicted that within the next three years it will be more than doubled.

Pineapples, Too

As one whirls around the corner leading to the main street of Dania, just before you get to that "speed limit" sign you know, one passes a big pineapple tract, the fragrance from which comes in refreshing whiffs to ones’ nostrils. This naturally leads one to suppose that pineapples may perhaps be one of the staple crops of the section, and rightly, too, for they seem to do well there, although not grown to a great extent. Probably thirty cars a year are shipped on the average.

S. M. Alsobrook is known as Dania’s pineapple king. He has between thirty and forty acres planted to the crop. Ten years ago, so the story runs, he appeared in Dania with something like $1,700. Today his estimated wealth is $100,000. A few days ago he sold his home property in town to M. C. Hardee for $8,000.

Three thousand dollars were the receipts from A. H. McFarland’s fourteen acre field of “piques” last year. He is usually pretty successful. Pineapples will not be so good this year, however, for the early bloom was damaged by the unusually cool weather. They are coming out pretty well, however, and will not be a total loss.

C. M. Nelson usually grows ten or fifteen acres of pineapples, and there are a few other small fields scattered about in the sandy soil.

Spuds Make Good

One hundred acres of Irish potatoes, or “spuds” as they call them out west, produce an average of 150 hampers to the acre, for which the grower gets from $1.75 to $2.00 per hamper.

That, in brief, is the story of the potato industry in the versatile Dania country. That strange combination of sand and muck found in spots sometimes widely separated does it. Potatoes will not grow well in marl, the farmers say, but they do take to that sand and muck. A. C. Marshall & Co. grew thirty acres of potatoes this year, F. J. O’Connell twenty acres, J. D. Doan fifteen acres, N. C. Bryan twenty acres, and others small patches of two, three or five acres to make up the total. They are planted in November and in March are harvested as an early vegetable, packed in hampers and sent north where they are welcomed as one of the first harbingers of the coming spring.

Owing to the comparatively small amount of suitable soil, it is not believed that the potato industry will develop extensively about Dania, but those who have the proper land are enthusiastic over its possibilities.

Many Other Crops

Tucked away in various corners of the farms may be found small areas devoted to a great variety of vegetables, including peppers, squash, eggplants, cucumbers, beans, peas, cauliflower or cabbage. All of these do well but as yet have not been grown to any great extent. No effort is made to market any of them into a staple product.

“Have the farmers of Dania taken up the diversified crop idea to any extent?” was asked of a well informed man of the town.

“No,” he replied. “They seem to be willing to stick to the tomatoes, but I believe that the time is coming when diversified or rotated crops will be necessary.”

Dania farmers are intelligent, and those watching the trend of affairs predict that there will be no danger of their making many mistakes in the matter of over production of one crop. Over production, they point out, was the cry ten years ago, when not one hundredth of the present crop was shipped out in a year. Increased transportation facilities, organization in the matter of marketing, and the ever increasing demand for fresh vegetables at all seasons of the year, will strike a balance with the crops, it is believed.

Summer farming is a new departure, however, and this year it is said there will be more of it than ever before. Sweet potatoes are a favorite crop. Mr. Nix and J. W. Johnston are especially interested in this and have planted several acres to them. Corn, forage crops, and other experiments will be tried by many of the men.

Why Is Dania?

All of this great matter of production centers right in the town of Dania, and a glance at the municipality is an interesting one. In the first place, when the railroad was first pushed down this far, the station was called Modello, just why deponent sayeth not — the name is now consigned to a station in the Redland district. Later a colony of Danes came down from Chicago expecting to
get rich at once. They knew little about farming under subtropical conditions, and in a short time most of them gave up and departed, but the name stuck and Dania is the title applied by the Danish emigrants to the place. A few of these original settlers stuck to it and are still living there, prosperous, and glad that they stayed.

As was stated, A. C. Frost was the father of the town proper. It grew rapidly, and just as soon as it was large enough, was incorporated, some ten years ago, the second town in the present Dade county to take such a step. Miami was the first. Judge W. S. Sands was the first mayor.

Now the town has a winter population of about 1,500 and is growing like the proverbial weed. It has seven stores, three hotels, a bank, fine school, eight packing houses, three churches, a water system, electric lights, and other improvements. Within the last eighteen months $40,000 worth of improvements in the way of new buildings have been completed and the amount contemplated for this summer is said to be at least $15,000. There is talk of putting in sidewalks along the length of Main Street and the proposed automobile road to the beach promises to be a reality soon.

The Town's Merchants

Dr. C. E. Stewart is the owner of the drug store, and others engaged in the mercantile business (all farmers, too, remember) are F. L. Neville, R. L. Jones, Charles Wilers, W. M. Bellamy, Freeze and Mr Price.

P. H. Roper runs the Dania hotel; the Dixon house is another popular place; and the traveling public flocks to the New Webb, owned by Mrs. Anna Webb, whose chicken dinners are famous the county over.

Two years ago the Bank of Dania was incorporated with a capital stock of $15,000. It now has a building worth $5,000 and its stock has advanced to a valuation of $150 ($150,000?]. M. C. Hardee is the president and I. T. Parker the cashier. Two years ago, also, the new schoolhouse was erected at a cost of $7,000. It will be necessary soon to have additional room. C. F. Mayer was the principal this year and his assistants were H. P. Ames, Miss Alice Strickland, Miss Louise Fullerton, and Miss Nellie Odom. An agricultural department will be introduced next year.

E. F. Nieblack, the mayor, is aided in conducting the affairs of the town by the board of councilmen who are M. C. Frost, J. W. Mulliken, Gus Nyberg, F. L. Neville and H. T. Tubbs.

Splendid water, from wells sixty-three feet deep, is supplied by a system which cost $12,000 to complete. On June 6, an election to vote $3,500 in bonds in order to complete the purchase of necessary pipe will be held, and following the successful carriage of the measure, many new customers will be served.

Women's Organization

One year ago, the women of Dania decided that the time had come for concerted action to improve the looks of the town. To decide was to act, and a cleanup day was the result. They did not stop, however, and are continuing the missionary work by example and constant effort. Just at present a block which constitutes the city park is occupying their attention, and the women are waiting for bids on the job of laying pipes to irrigate the tract. When this system is installed trees will be laid out, grass will be planted, a pavilion will be built and, in fact, a little beauty spot will grace the town. Mrs. McLaughlin is president of the organization which is known as the Civic Improvement League, and Mrs. C. E. Stewart is vice-president.

The men have Masonic and Woodmen lodges. An effort is being made to revive interest in the Commercial club, which flourished about a year ago, and it is hoped that this move will be met with success.

Lake View District

It is practically impossible to separate the Lake View District from that of Dania, so closely are the two allied. A. C. Frost laid out the town site at Lake View and this year some forty families from North Carolina cropped in the district. There is a store run by H. Gibson, and the big Shull and Dillard packing house. W. T. George and C. Knight, both from South Dakota, are probably the largest property holders.

There is great enthusiasm in Dania over the proposed extensive development of the beach. It is proposed to build a bridge over the canal and complete the road along the spoil bank, already built but not surfaced. The canal will be deepened, so that larger boats may come up to the town limits and thus provide transportation to the ocean by boat or road. It is proposed to sell ten lots on the beach for $250 each and use this money for the construction of the drawbridge.

With this improvement, it is predicted that Dania will have claims to becoming a winter resort as well as a farming community, for the beach has been pronounced an exceptionally fine one, and the citizens of the town believe that they will be in one of the most successful districts of the entire east coast.

"There are many difficulties, many discouragements, but we believe that the man who keeps a stiff upper lip and sticks it out, will surely win in the end if he stays in Dania," was the summary of the situation as put by one man.

The original Bank of Dania building on the east side of Federal Highway at Dania Beach Boulevard, was constructed in 1912 and destroyed by the 1926 hurricane.