THE SMALL FARMER OF THE EVERGLADES

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Farming started in the Glades about forty years ago, of course it started in a very small way, a few cows, hogs and a vegetable patch.

In those days there were not any diseases to bother the animals or plants not even any insects to speak of.

There were only a half-dozen, or so, people in the Glades at that time and the nearest town was Ft. Myers.

Really the only means of making a living was fishing in Lake Okeechobee, but as more settlers arrived and dredging crews came in to dig the canals to drain the Everglades there were more and more demands for vegetables and meat. The soils were rich and no fertilizer was needed.

As better transportation developed, vegetables were consigned to northern markets and usually brought good price.

Then buyers came and bought the produce F.O.B. and the farmers sold even if they could get a little more by shipping and waiting for their money. Because of this policy of selling F.O.B. the buyers soon found they could pay about what they pleased and only demand or competition gave the farmer a decent price.

The plan used was for the farmer to take his produce to the express loading platform and if he could persuade the buyer to stop gambling long enough he would sell his produce for the day; because of this practice the farmer gradually began to get in the habit of letting some man act as his broker and this broker was usually a representative of a commission house so if he didn’t sell the produce he would ship it to his commission house and the farmer got whatever they saw fit to give him.

By this time almost everything was shipped by carload and express was so much higher it was out of the question for the small farmer to ship his own produce.

The small farmer had made several attempts to organize but each attempt failed after a short time for one reason or another. Usually because the one doing the organizing was not a farmer, but one trying to make some money for himself.

In the fall of 1943 in the Canal Point-Pahokee area a Marketing Cooperative was formed by a group of farmers without any outside influence. They hired a sales-manager, bookkeeper and packing house foreman. It was the plan of the organization to grade, pack and sell their own produce. The name of their organization is L.O.F.C. Co-op, and no farmer with over three hundred acres was allowed to join the group. There are now around 30 members in their Co-op and several more Co-ops have been started in Belle Glade and South Bay.

I guess this should be the end of this story because those Co-ops were life savers for the small farmers and looked the solution to their troubles but such was not to be.

About the time the first Co-op was formed until now it has been the general practice to sell by auction to the highest bidder.

As we all know there were always one or two people in any group that are smarter than the rest and also they are not too ethical in their method.

In this case these men persuaded the other buyers that they could buy much cheaper if they would let Mr. X and Y do all the buying and divide the spoils among all the buyers each day. The other buyers made a pretense of bidding but that was all, as each day the same man received all the produce and split the lots up between the other buyers.

For an example of how this works: When a new buyer arrives at the auction sale they let him buy part of what they think he wants at what the buyers have decided to pay that day. Then when he tries to get enough to finish his truck load or carload they run the price up so high he can’t make a profit or even break even, but he has part of his load so he has to protect the money he has already spent.

The next step is for the broker to approach this new buyer and tell him that for ten cents a bushel he will buy his load for him and save him fifty cents or maybe as much as a dollar a bushel. Of course it is the farmer who is the loser every time.

What the answer to this problem is, I do not know but the L.O.F.C. plans to abandon the auction method of selling and acquire new connections with northern markets.
There may be a question in your mind what is a small farmer. I would say a small farmer is one that does not have enough produce to pack and sell his own produce economically.

We used to think of a small farmer as one that farmed five or ten acres and had a horse or old tractor. This picture has changed and today because of the high cost of labor even the small farmer has to have tractors to prepare the land, plant, cultivate and spray.

The cost of this equipment necessitates a larger acreage than in times past and most small farmers run from 25 to 75 acres depending a lot on what crops are grown, as ten acres of beans take less labor than one acre of peppers.

ADAPTABILITY OF VEGETABLE VARIETIES TO SOUTHEAST FLORIDA

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The total acreage of principal Florida truck crops has increased steadily during the past several years. According to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture, the 1949-50 acreage for Florida was 245,130 acres, or approximately three times as large as that of the 1925-26 acreage, just 25 seasons before. In 1949-50 Palm Beach county led all other counties by a wide margin in the total acreage of vegetables, followed in order by Dade, Broward and Hillsboro.

The breeding of vegetables for resistance to plant diseases and/or insects is one of the chief aims of plant breeders today. Resistant varieties are becoming increasingly more important as the numbers and strains of diseases and insects increase and their distribution becomes more widespread, thus, in many cases, resistance either to diseases or insects or both, appears to be the only answer to the problem. The suggestion or recommendation of newer varieties is based on evaluation of these varieties by experiment station workers or other available information. New varieties should undergo careful field trial and observation under the growers' usual cultural conditions before any major change is made from the standard variety or strain being used. Therefore a gradual change from old varieties to new varieties, in most instances, is recommended.

A brief discussion of some of the more important vegetable crops and varieties of vegetables adapted to southeastern Florida follows:

Beans, bush snap: Older bush varieties, such as, Tendergreen, Black Valentine, Bountiful, Plentiful, and Florida Belle still constitute a major portion of the bean acreage planted; however, several newer varieties are superior to the older ones in many respects.

Tendergreen, a round podded type, is probably the most widely planted variety because of its adaptability to the canning, freezing and fresh markets. It is very susceptible to common bean mosaic and several other diseases. Black Valentine, an oval podded type, continues to be one of the more popular shipping varieties. It is also very susceptible to mosaic and a number of other bean diseases and fails to set pods under adverse environmental conditions. Bountiful, Plentiful, and Florida Belle are all flat podded types and form fiber rapidly after the No. 3 sieve stage. The latter three varieties are grown primarily for the fresh market.

Logan, Topcrop, and Rival, all mosaic resistant, round podded types, recently released by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, have not been widely accepted. Logan is a high yielder but produces light colored pods that do not hold up well in marketing. Topcrop and Rival are high yielders but produce rough pods under certain growing conditions.

Contender was introduced jointly in 1950 by the Regional Vegetable Breeding Laboratory of the U. S. Department of Agriculture at Charleston, S. C., and the Florida, Mississippi and Alabama Agricultural Experiment Stations. It is a very high producer, develops marketable pods in approximately 50 days, and is adapted to a wide variety of soils and climatic conditions. It is resistant to common