

Pacific Coast Pears

production trends, utilization, export needs and price prospects

S. W. Shear and Sidney Hoos

GREAT INCREASES IN PEAR YIELDS per acre on the Pacific Coast have more than offset substantial decreases in acreage so that 1945-1947 production averaged 680,000 tons or over 40% greater than during 1934-1938. High yields have been the result of favorable weather, more and better orchard care and, above all, a big increase in the bearing capacity of younger maturing trees.

Whether yields per acre and production will be maintained near the recent high level, depends largely on the extent to which the small potential increase in yields, when present orchards are full-bearing, is offset by poorer cultural care. Total production could decrease if pear prices decline enough to make growers neglect their orchards much.

Utilization

Canning of Pacific Coast Bartletts increased about six times in the past twenty-five years or about twice as fast as total Bartlett production. The record tonnage canned in 1947 of about 300,000 tons used close to 60% of the Bartlett crops of both California and the Northwest.

A major factor in the very rapid rise in pear canning has been the great expansion in the market for California canned fruit cocktail. In less than 15 years the mixed pack of canned fruits increased from almost nothing to a record 1947 pack of over 10 million cases, which used about 165,000 tons of pears, or over 80% of the tonnage of California pears canned. The large domestic consumption of canned pears in all forms since the war appears to have more than offset the loss of most of our prewar exports, which took almost one third of our 1934-1938 packs.

Fresh markets will probably have to absorb more Bartletts than before the war and nearly all the increased production of later varieties except Hardys. California made all the Pacific Coast dried pear pack during 1934-1938, using about 30,000 tons of Bartletts a year for that purpose. For some time dried pear production and exports will probably be less than in prewar years.

California fresh Bartlett shipments to both in-state and out-of-state markets rose even more rapidly than production until they totaled 137,000 tons in 1930. From 1930 until 1943, out-of-state shipments,

and consequently total Bartlett shipments, did not keep pace with, nor follow the upward trend in production. In contrast, fresh Bartlett consumption within California since 1930 rose even faster than state production. State population and per-capita consumption both increased. The depression greatly reduced interstate and hence total shipments. Then wartime loss of exports held them down.

An upward swing in shipments, out of the state as well as to state markets, finally occurred which lifted 1943-1947 California Bartlett shipments to nearly 110,000 tons a year or about 40% of the three largest California Bartlett crops ever harvested. Total 1945 shipments again reached the 1930 peak of 137,000 tons, even though exports had recovered very little. About 30,000 tons of the 1930 Bartlett shipments were eaten in the state and 107,000 tons shipped out.

Exports Needed

The need for European outlets for our pears is still great but even if we operate a Marshall Plan, foreign demand for such luxury food products probably will be much less than before the war. For several years to come our chief prewar pear export markets will have to use their foreign exchange largely to rebuild their industries and to buy food necessities.

Before the war Europe and Canada took nearly all Pacific Coast pear exports. Since the war, exports of canned and dried pears through commercial channels have been small.

Fresh exports to England and Sweden picked up a little in 1945 and approached prewar volume for winter pears in 1946 after our loan to England in November. Shipments to Canada were above prewar in both 1945 and 1946. Exports from our bumper 1947 crop were heavier than in 1946 during July through October, but since then both exports and prices have fallen greatly, largely because of embargos by Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Canada, made necessary by a lack of dollars with which to buy our fruit.

Price Prospects

Pacific Coast pear production increased much faster than United States population during the past 10 years. Domestic civi-

lian demand for fruit already appears to have fallen off. Our government has stopped its lend-lease shipments of processed pears and most of those to our armed forces overseas. Moreover prospects for exports of them under the Marshall Plan are poor.

Our government is assisting in marketing the record 1947 Pacific Coast pack of about six million boxes of winter pears. To March 1 it had purchased 119,000 boxes for school lunches. It has also agreed to pay 45 cents a box to divert not more than 300,000 boxes of Anjou, Comice, and Winter Nelis pears to certain states, mostly in the South and Midwest, where such pears are not normally marketed.

All facts considered, pear prices during the next few years are likely to fall considerably below the highly profitable level of recent years. On the supply side, production of pears and of competing fruits is expected to continue to average near the recent high level. Even if the United States maintains a high level of consumer income, total demand for our pears will be less than in recent years but possibly better than during prewar years; at least for Bartletts, which are less dependent on export markets than late shipping pears. Although the domestic market may be better than in prewar years, foreign markets are expected to be poorer.

Growers' net returns may be expected to fall even more and faster than pear prices, because inflated costs of production, marketing, and transportation will fall more slowly than retail prices.

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