

Potato prices influence Island living standard



1963 SAW MORE THAN 4 1/2 MILLION BUSHELS OF POTATOES OFF ISLAND

Long regarded as the main cash crop of Island agriculture, potatoes have more influence on establishing the economic outlook each year in this province than any other phase of agriculture.

Returns can vary as widely, for example, in a good year like 1959 when the Dominion Bureau of Statistics estimated cash value on the farm of \$14,728,000 to an abnormally low year like 1961 when the cash value was placed at \$6,861,000. This latter valuation drew sharp criticism from agricultural spokesmen here through the DBS people stuck to their original estimate. The abnormally low price of 30 cents per 100 pounds, contributed to the low return.

The 1961 potato returns played the major part in a sharp drop in farm income which several political spokesmen latched around for a few days before the item was forgotten.

45,000 ACRES
The potato income comes from approximately 45,000 acres of potatoes with the acreage varying only slightly each year, and the greatest part of it planted to seed potatoes, although much of the spuds pass-

ed for seed are sold for table stock because the seed demand does not provide a market for all of them.

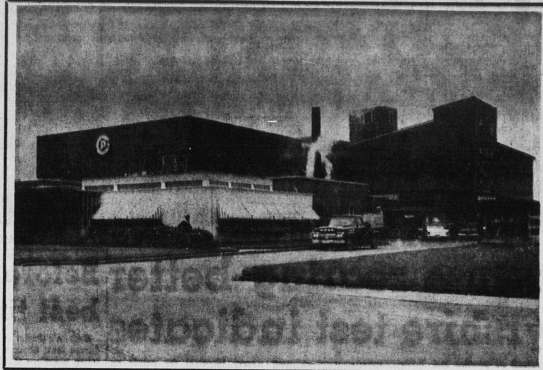
A summary of the returns for the past five years has been supplied by the Provincial Potato Marketing Board. It shows

that the 1957 crop year furnished the biggest shipments with 15,403 carloads of 450 hundred-weight bringing a total value on the farm of \$11,728,000. The production was down slightly in 1953 with 13,627 carloads bringing \$10,556,000 to the grow-

er. The 10,629 carloads shipped from the 1959 crop brought \$16,728,000 for the highest return in the five-year period. It was 11,267 carloads and \$10,556,000 in 1960, and the controversial figure of \$7,861,000 emerged as the estimated farm value for the 1961 crop, though that figure may be changed slightly.

A total of 6,394 carloads of 4,700,000 bushels had been shipped from the 1962 crop year up to the end of January. This is down slightly from the 6,322 carloads of 4,801,000 bushels shipped at the same date from the 1961 crop year.

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IMPROVED PLANTS MORE VIGOROUS

Growers asked to use improved 'berries

The importance of using improved strawberry plants where possible, is stressed to growers by William Sterns, provincial horticulturist. Mr. Sterns also has some interesting comments on new varieties which in many cases have replaced the Senator Dunlap, which once dominated the Island scene almost completely.

Mr. Sterns explains that virus-free strawberry plants are obtained by testing a number of strawberry plants in the greenhouse, and some of them will be found virus free.

From these more may be propagated, but unfortunately virus-free plants are not resistant to virus infection. Strawberry viruses are spread by strawberry aphids and leafhoppers which feed on infected plants. They move to healthy plants and carry the virus with them. To control the viruses then, the aphids must be controlled, but it is impossible to eliminate the aphids completely. It is then apparent that some of the virus-

free plants may become infected with virus even within one year.

MORE VIGOROUS
When strawberry plants are sold they are not or should not be advertised as virus-free strawberry plants but as improved plants.

Asked "Are these improved plants better than regular stock plants?" Mr. Sterns replied: "According to experimental work that has been carried out at various stations and also commercial field results, improved strawberry plants have been found to be more vigorous, and they will give more than double the yield of regular stock plants."

"It might pay a strawberry grower who are not satisfied with their present yield to try improved strawberry plants."

The provincial department of agriculture in co-operation with the Canada Department of Agriculture has a program whereby improved strawberry plants from commercial nurseries are made available to the general public.

The names of these nurseries will be published in the newspapers early in May. The



MR. STERNS

Supply of improved plants may be in short supply this year but it is hoped to have more available in future years, Mr. Sterns forecasts.

The trend toward newer varieties has developed in the last five years, said Mr. Sterns who said they include Sparkle, Cavalier, Red Coat, Guardsman and Catalina varieties that appear to be suitable for this climate.

SEARCH GOES ON
There are hundreds of other varieties and it is possible that within five years, for example, other berries may be developed that will be suitable for P.E.I. as the search for new and better varieties is being carried on all the time.

Sparkle, Red Coat and Cavalier are all good for the fresh market trade and are also satisfactory for processing, he said. The processing trend has shifted in the past decade or so from the preserved or jam to the frozen trade, though there is still some jam made, Mr. Sterns observed.

They have size, yield, better keeping qualities, will ship better and are considerably superior to Dunlap, though many of the Dunlaps are still grown here, he observed.

An estimated 500 to 600 acres of strawberries are grown in this province and the production last year was an estimated 1,200,000 quarts.

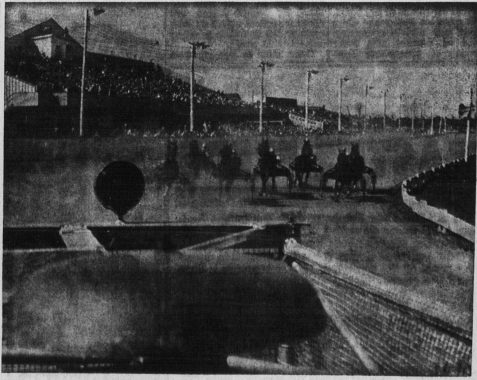
Average production would probably run 5,000 to 6,000 quarts per acre while top growers get much more. Nova Scotia growers claim yields of 10 to 12 thousand quarts per acre, but a few of the top Island growers also get that, Mr. Sterns observed.

Urging higher yield, the horticulturist suggested selection of the best available plants, better varieties, a good fertility program and good cultural practices.

Growers should fertilize feily heavily—some of them do—and manure or fertilizer can both be applied, or a combination of both, he observed.

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