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FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SALES AT CITY MUNICIPAL MARKETS.

February, 1947.

FRUIT.

Prices for Apples Remain High.

Supplies of dessert apples during February were insufficient to meet the requirements of the retail trade and values remained at the high levels recorded during the previous month. Large-sized fruit represented a fairly substantial proportion of available stocks and met a good demand on most selling days at prices varying between 24s. and 30s. per bushel case according to the quantity forward from time to time. Varieties most prevalent were Delicious and Jonathan, though McIntosh Red were fairly plentiful early in the period. Most of the cooking apples offered were of the Granny Smith variety, for which quotations ranged from 10s. to 16s. with selected sizes 18s. to 22s. A few Cleopatra cooking lines were available and realised mainly from 10s. to 15s. Queensland consignments were heavier, amounting to nearly 15,700 cases, but they met a good demand at prices approximately equal to those quoted above.

Peaches Less Plentiful.

Marketing of peaches from coastal districts ceased early in the month but the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and other inland districts, mainly in the Central Tablelands region, continued to forward moderate quantities. Early, some improvement in the quality of consignments from the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area was noticed and as high as 16s. and occasionally 17s. was obtained for best packs. Subsequently, however, a high percentage of wastage due to "break-down" was in evidence and values were mainly below 10s. Other inland peaches also showed a decline in quality towards the end of the month and, although 18s. to 20s. was obtained fairly freely for best lines early, rates at closing seldom exceeded 16s. per half-bushel case. Moderate quantities of Victorian peaches were forward, but these were mainly of medium to poor standard and only exceptional packs exceeded 24s. per bushel case.

Heavy Supplies of Pears Result in Lower Prices

Williams pears from Victorian centres arrived in increasing quantities during the month to supplement receivals from New South Wales areas. By February, stocks had reached glut proportions and, as a large percentage of offerings had reached the ripe and forward ripe stage, agents were obliged to reduce prices sharply in an endeavour to expedite clearances. Large quantities of pears in this condition were sold from 2s. to 5s. per bushel case. Choice large wrapped lines in semi-green condition at all times met a good demand and, apart from a temporary decline during the period of over-supply, prices ranged mainly from 12s.

to 14s. and occasionally to 16s. per bushel case for this class of fruit. Other sizes in firm condition realised mainly from 6s. to 10s. Small quantities of local Howells pears commenced to arrive towards closing and were taken into cool store.

Choice Oranges Relatively Scarce.

As a result of the main crop Valencia orange season drawing to a close, an over-all decline in the quality of consignments was apparent. Most lines showed a tendency to break down and, in order to dispose of these, agents were obliged to reduce prices well below those ruling for good packs in order to allow for wastage. Oranges with good keeping qualities were much in demand and prices, which ranged from 24s. to 28s. for best lines early in the month, had firmed to 30s. at closing. Moderate quantities were forwarded from the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. Most packs were lacking in juice content but, where quality was satisfactory, values were comparable with those for coastal lots. Small sizes and plain-grade fruit were offered at as low as 12s. and occasionally less.

Inferior Plums and Nectarines Over-supplied.

The percentage of good-quality plums and nectarines included in the large supplies available early in February was small. Sales were fairly brisk for best lines, which brought up to 18s. and occasionally 20s. per half-bushel case on many selling days. The large quantities of small, immature and inferior fruit on offer, however, had a depressing effect on the market generally and clearances were difficult to effect. Saleable lines of poor to medium standard realised mainly from 4s. to 14s. per half case according to quality. At closing a falling off in the size of daily consignments was apparent.

Grapes More Plentiful and Values Ease.

New season's grapes became available in increasing quantities during the period under review and prices were reduced in order to effect clearances. Black Muscats were quoted mainly from 8s. to 18s. per half case, though specially-packed brands realised to 22s. White Muscats were fairly scarce for the first three weeks of the month and best packs brought from 25s. to 34s. At closing, however, values had depreciated and were approximately equal to those quoted for Black Muscat. Other Black and other White varieties showed wide variation in quality and only specials realised more than 12s. to 14s. per half case. Moderate consignments from Queensland totalling nearly 4,000 cases were also forwarded. After the first week Black Muscat grapes included in these supplies showed a steady decline in quality and prices depreciated steadily from 16s. early to 10s. per half case at closing for best lines. Black Gros Colemans arrived mainly in good condition and because of their attractive appearance met a keen demand at 8s. to 14s.

Pineapples Heavily Supplied.

Greatly-increased quantities of Queensland pineapples were available each week during the current month, total receivals being 15,680 tropical cases. In order to expedite clearances, agents were obliged to reduce prices substantially and although special lines were quoted from 20s. to as high as the fixed maximum price of 26s. 3d. per tropical case on occasions, a large proportion of each consignment was sold at prices varying from 10s. to 18s. In addition, consignments from nearly all growing areas showed a fairly high percentage of wastage due to water blister, although those from Glasshouse Mountain and Beerwah, which in previous years have suffered heavy damage, have been comparatively free to date. "Break-down," due to this condition, was heavy in many lines and a considerable percentage of stocks had to be re-packed with resultant losses. Despite the heavier supplies and the "break-down," clearances each week were fairly well maintained.

Bananas Lightly Supplied.

Small quantities of bananas from Queensland were forward to supplement offerings from New South Wales districts. Stocks were at all times insufficient to meet the demand by the retail trade and all good-quality large fruit realised the maximum wholesale rate of 6¼d. per lb. Some over-ripe and very small fruit were cheaper.

Lemons More Plentiful and Cheaper.

Lemons were more plentifully supplied during February, particularly at closing, when values, which had previously been fairly well maintained at from 20s. to 25s. on various selling days, seldom exceeded 16s. per bushel case.

Cantaloupes Well Supplied.

Increased stocks of cantaloupes from the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area were available during the period and demand throughout was fairly keen. Values opened at 18s. to 24s. per crate for best packs and were maintained at that level except for the third week of the month when a temporary increase in supplies reduced top prices to approximately 8s. Local rock melons also cleared well, but Queensland honey dews were not in demand and were slow of sale.

Rates for Passionfruit Maintained.

Passionfruit were fairly plentiful throughout the month but arrived in regular consignments and prices were fairly well maintained, best packs bringing from 18s. to 20s. per half case and occasionally higher. Most offerings, however, were of medium quality and were quoted at 8s. to 14s.

Watermelons Neglected by Retail Trade.

Consistent wet weather in the Metropolitan area throughout the greater part of the month adversely affected the demand for watermelons and both agents and grower-sellers experienced extreme difficulty in disposing of stocks even at bedrock prices. On most selling days sales took place in small lots, usually not exceeding one or two dozen, and prices varied according to size from 4s. to 12s. per dozen. Despite warmer weather conditions towards closing, no improvement in demand was in evidence.

Quinces Become Available.

A small quantity of quinces from Victorian and New South Wales districts, mainly the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, became available towards the end of the month. Large sizes met a good inquiry at 12s. to 16s. per bushel case but small fruit was difficult to clear at prices ranging from 8s.

VEGETABLES.**Supplies of Peas Lighter.**

Smaller quantities of peas were available during February and daily receipts seldom exceeded 1,600 bags. Although prices rose sharply on 13th and 14th February because of a temporary shortage and best lines were quoted at 30s. to 34s. per bushel, rates in general were fairly steady and varied between 24s. and 30s. on most selling days. A large percentage of water-damaged lines, some of which showed breakdown in transit, was included and realisations for these were much lower than those obtained for medium and good green peas. Lowest recorded prices for saleable lines ranged from 6s. to 8s.

Choice Beans Relatively Scarce and Prices High.

Receipts of beans were lighter. Although a slight improvement in the general standard was noticeable, the quality of lines offered on each selling day covered a wide range. Rates for choice lots were highest during the third week of the month when up to 30s. and occasionally higher was obtained. Throughout the remainder of the period choice descriptions sold mainly at 16s. to 20s. per bushel, whilst inferior lines were available at times from as low as 4s. Values for medium grades varied mainly from 8s. to 14s. Consignments from Victoria became appreciable towards the end of the month amounting to over 2,000 bags in the last week. These beans were generally of medium standard only, due to late picking and slight deterioration resulting from the long journey from the growing areas. Realisations ranged from 6s. to 14s. per bushel.

Values for Tomatoes More Stable.

At the commencement of the month the very low prices recorded in last report continued to rule as a result of heavy receipts of fully coloured and ripe lines. After 5th February, however, an upward trend in values became apparent. For the remainder of the period, rates were fairly well maintained at reasonable levels, top realisations varying between 12s. and 20s. per half case

according to the quantity forwarded on each selling day. Considerable consignments of Queensland green tomatoes arrived at intervals. A high percentage of these was in "watery" condition, due to heavy rain in the growing areas immediately prior to picking. At times these stocks were practically unsaleable but towards closing an improvement in quality was in evidence, and rates ranged mainly from 4s. to 8s. per half case.

Improved Demand for Cabbages.

Because of the high prices ruling for peas and beans and the relative scarcity of good-quality lines of these vegetables, demand for cabbages showed a progressive improvement early in the month and as much as 20s. per dozen and occasionally higher was obtained on 14th February. Values on most selling days thereafter ranged mainly from 10s. to 14s. and occasionally 16s. per dozen for choice large heads, although small and inferior were available at all times at much lower rates.

Cauliflowers More Plentiful.

Greatly-increased quantities of cauliflowers were available but choice large heads in firm and attractive condition comprised only a small percentage of each days' offerings. Prices for these varied mainly from 18s. to 24s. per dozen, though occasionally as high as 30s. was asked for outstanding lines. Medium and inferior grades which comprised the bulk of consignments moved out satisfactorily but realisations showed wide variation, ranging from 4s. to 16s.

Lettuce Well Supplied—Prices Firm at Lower Levels.

Moderate offerings of lettuce were on hand in the growers' market daily and, although prices did not reach the high levels recorded during January, they remained fairly firm throughout the month, most realisations for choice large heads varying between 10s. and 15s. per case. Medium and inferior packs comprised a fairly large proportion of daily stocks and rates for these were sometimes as low as 3s.

Dull Demand for Cucumbers.

Receivals of apple cucumbers continued to be heavy and agents experienced considerable difficulty in maintaining clearances. Prices for the apple variety ranged mainly from 1s. to 4s. per half case but occasional special lines brought as much as 7s. Green cucumbers were not as heavily supplied as the other variety but were slow of sale on most days, very few realisations exceeding 4s. per half case.

Bagged Carrots More Plentiful.

Increasing quantities of bagged carrots were available during the month from inland districts of New South Wales, mainly from the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area. Most quotations ranged from 8s. to 20s. per cwt. according to quality, but on occasions as high as 32s. was obtained, due to temporary shortages on some selling days.

T. McKEON.