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POST-WAR ORGANISATION OF THE VEGETABLE-GROWING INDUSTRY.

BY

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The Need for Collective Effort.

Even before the end of World War II, vegetable growers in New South Wales were becoming somewhat apprehensive as to the future of the industry. During the war years, a larger measure of stability was enjoyed and a greater demand was forthcoming owing to the presence of large numbers of United States and British servicemen in Australia. Furthermore, the growing of many types of vegetables under contract to the Commonwealth Government for the armed forces meant assured prices for a substantial proportion of the vegetables grown and the diminution of supplies available for civilian consumption meant that a high level of prices mostly ruled on the open market.

However, the withdrawal of allied servicemen from Australia spelt a diminished demand while the prospect of increased numbers of Australian ex-servicemen taking up vegetable growing, and the abandonment of growing by contract, were considered likely to create grave problems. As previously indicated, prices for vegetables during the war years were considerably higher than in pre-war times, and as there is practically no export market for fresh vegetables, it was anticipated the industry would be one of the first to be adversely affected by the change-over from war to peacetime conditions.



Potato Digging Machine at Work—Guyra District.

The New South Wales Vegetable Growers' Council.

These considerations led to various organisations of growers in this State approaching the Department of Agriculture requesting that a conference be convened to discuss the advisability of forming a State-wide organisation that would be fully representative of the vegetable-growing industry. In response to this request, the Minister took the necessary steps to call together representatives of the various growers' bodies throughout the State and these representatives met in Sydney on 9th August, 1945.

At this conference it was decided to form a State-wide organisation to be known as the New South Wales Vegetable Growers' Council. A Provisional Council was thereupon appointed, comprising one delegate from each of the organisations represented at conference, to explore the possibilities of setting up the proposed organisation.

The Provisional Council met on the following day (10th August, 1945) and arrived at certain recommendations to be referred back to their constituent bodies for consideration. These recommendations may be summarised as follows:—

- (1) That legislation should be introduced by the State Parliament to provide for the compulsory registration of all vegetable growers on lines similar to the Potato Growers' Licensing Act.
- (2) That the maximum registration fee should not exceed £1 per annum and that for the first year it should not be in excess of 10s.
- (3) That all growers who have a total area equivalent to not less than half an acre be required to register. (This is the requirement in a similar Act passed by the New Zealand Government for the registration of commercial vegetable gardens).

Using the constitution of the Potato Growers' Association as a basis, the Provisional Council divided the State into eight zones, from which it was suggested fourteen members should be elected to constitute the Council if legislation for registration were enacted.

The Zones of the State.

The following zones and the number of representatives for each were agreed upon at the Provisional Council meeting:—

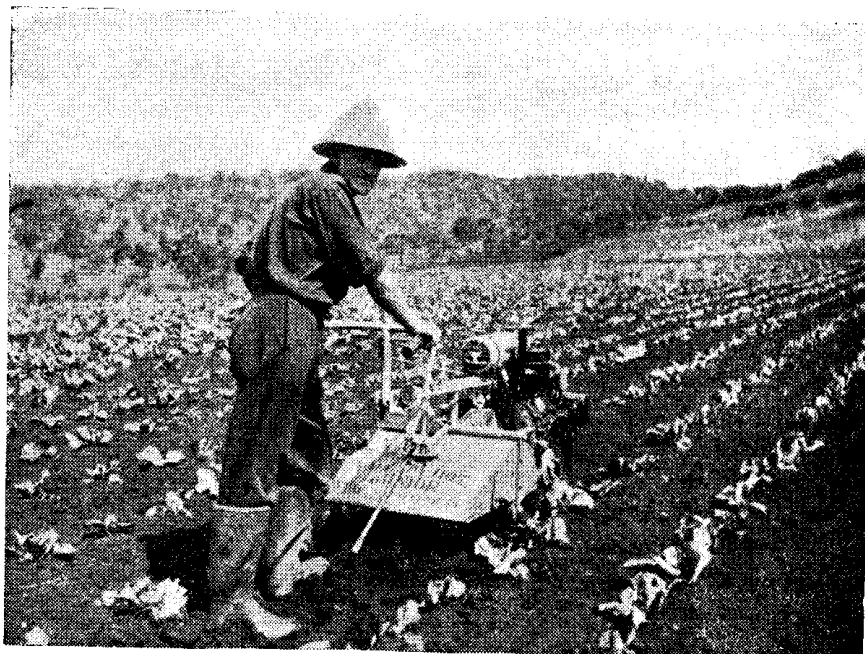
- No. 1 Zone—The North Coast Statistical Division and south to the Manning River—4 representatives.
- No. 2 Zone—The Northern Tablelands Statistical Division south to and including the Gostwyck Shire—west to Moree and east to the borders of No. 1 Zone—1 representative.
- No. 3 Zone—Southern border Newcastle, north to Gostwyck Shire boundaries, including Tamworth and Quirindi—2 representatives.
- No. 4 Zone—From southern border of No. 3 Zone to and including Metropolitan area—2 representatives.

- No. 5 Zone—South Coast Statistical Division—1 representative.
- No. 6 Zone—Central Tablelands and Central Western Slopes Statistical Divisions—2 representatives.
- No. 7 Zone—Riverina and Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area Statistical Divisions, excluding those areas served by Victorian Railways—1 representative.
- No. 8 Zone—Southern Tablelands and South-western Slopes Statistical Division—1 representative.

It was considered that a Council comprising fourteen representatives in eight zones should be satisfactory. It was realised, however, that some variations of the boundaries of the suggested zones might be desirable and that there were parts of the State which had not been taken into consideration; these latter parts, however, comprised areas where very little commercial vegetable growing was practised. Subsequently, it was decided that the State Council, when established, should consist of one member from each zone or district to be elected on a basis of one zone or district for approximately every 1,000 registered vegetable growers.

Further Action in New South Wales.

At a further conference of representatives of vegetable-growing organisations, held in Sydney on 2nd October, the need for registration of growers was again stressed and a sub-committee was formed for taking the necessary steps to sponsor the introduction of proposed legislation and to frame a constitution for the projected New South Wales Vegetable Growers' Council, pending such time as a decision might be given by the New South Wales Government as to whether the proposed legislation should be



Cultivating the Vegetable Crop—A Rotary Hoe in Action.

passed. There appeared to be a general feeling among delegates that the only satisfactory means of bringing about State-wide organisation on a unified basis would be by the passage of legislation providing for registration of growers.

Action in The Federal Sphere.

Side by side with the movement in this State, action was proceeding at the Federal level to examine the position in relation to the vegetable-growing industry on a Commonwealth-wide basis.

At a conference convened by the Federal Government and held in Melbourne on 22nd October, 1945, representatives of vegetable-growers' organisations and officers of the various Commonwealth and State Government Departments passed the following resolutions:—

1. That this Conference is of opinion that the licensing of vegetable growers for the purpose of controlling production is impracticable and unnecessary.
2. That there be a recommendation to the various State Departments of Agriculture that they take the necessary steps for the registration of vegetable growers.
3. That an overall announcement quoting relevant statistics be issued by the Commonwealth regarding the recession of demands for vegetables and the necessity for reduction closer to pre-war levels, and warning against further expansion of the industry.
4. That the States advise the Commonwealth from time to time of crop prospects and conditions similarly to the procedure adopted during the war period, and that the Commonwealth relate such reports to the overall Australian position and make the resultant information available to the States for general dissemination among vegetable growers.
5. That this Conference affirms the necessity for organised marketing of vegetables and requests each State to give consideration to the introduction of marketing legislation giving statutory powers to growers' organisations for this purpose.
6. That this Conference request each State to meet the representatives of Vegetable Producers' Organisations to discuss details of the type of marketing organisation that is so required.
7. That when the States have drawn up plans for marketing organisations for the vegetable industry, further consultations take place with the Commonwealth.
8. That this Conference requests the State and Commonwealth Governments in their respective spheres to explore the possibilities of action in respect of—
 - (a) Improved transport facilities from producing areas to markets.
 - (b) Distribution generally, including the resumption of door-to-door deliveries.
 - (c) Storage.
 - (d) Grading.
 - (e) Processing.
 - (f) Overseas export.
 - (g) Obtaining increased consumption of vegetables.
9. That where necessary copies of the Queensland Marketing Act and Regulations, constituting the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing, and of the report of the Queensland Royal Commission on the Marketing of Fruit and Vegetables, be obtained by State Departments of Agriculture for distribution to interested organisations within such States.

10. That this Conference requests the abolition of vegetable price control.
11. That the Vegetable Seeds Committee continue, but be reconstituted to include representatives of the growers and the State Departments of Agriculture.
12. That this meeting, as representative of vegetable growers of the Commonwealth, views with appreciation the outstanding work done by the Director-General of Agriculture during the war years.

The Melbourne Resolutions Examined.

A further conference of the representatives of New South Wales vegetable growers' organisations was held in Sydney on 22nd January to discuss further the resolutions passed at the Melbourne Conference in October.

With regard to Resolution (1) the New South Wales producers adhered firmly to the opinion that licensing of vegetable growers for the purpose of controlling production is impracticable and unnecessary.

So far as Resolution (2) is concerned, the vegetable growers of the State favoured the registration of growers and have recommended that registration should apply to all persons engaged in the production of one-half an acre or more of vegetables, one-quarter acre or more of tomatoes, or in the glass-house culture of any vegetables. It was contended that in view of the income that can be derived from vegetable culture on very small areas, registration should not be confined to those utilising one acre or more.

Resolutions (3) (4) (5) (6) and (7) were endorsed, while a sub-committee was appointed to deal with the matters contained in Resolutions (5) and (8).

Action had already been taken along the lines suggested in Resolution (9).

With reference to Resolution (10), an approach had already been made to the Commonwealth Government urging the removal of prices control of fruits and vegetables and it is of interest to note that wholesale "ceilings" were removed from a number of kinds of vegetables as from 11th February, 1946.

Resolution (11) was endorsed.

The Provisional Council Meets Again.

As was mentioned earlier, the Provisional Council of the projected New South Wales Vegetable Growers' Council was entrusted with the task of preparing a constitution for the new organisation. At a meeting held on 23rd January, 1946, a constitution, largely based on that of the Vegetable Growers' Association of New South Wales, was closely examined. This draft constitution was finally adopted with minor alterations and modifications and has been referred to the various vegetable growers' organisations throughout New South Wales for consideration.

A Selling Organisation.

In addition to the steps which have been taken towards establishing a closely-knit State-wide organisation of growers, the need for a grower-controlled selling organisation was under discussion at the general Conference held in Sydney on 22nd January. It

was decided to appoint a sub-committee to examine the general powers and functions of the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing established under the Queensland Fruit Marketing Organisation Act and the question of the suitability of a similar Act to provide for the setting up of such an organisation in this State. The sub-committee has had preliminary discussions on the subject but the stage has not been reached where any definite expression of opinion can be made in that connection.

What of the Future?

The foregoing gives only a brief general outline of vegetable growers' organisational activities in New South Wales but enough has been said to demonstrate that producers as a whole are alive to the difficulties that confront them and are taking all possible steps to minimise, at least, many of their troubles.

WORLD FOOD NEEDS.

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The shortage of food, which was severe in many countries during the war, has since the cessation of hostilities become even more acute. The countries most affected are those in which fighting has actually taken place or which warfare closely touched, such as the United Kingdom, Continental Europe, Japan, China and the Philippines.

Factors Inhibiting Production.

The reasons why supply cannot meet demand are many. Where fighting occurred, agriculture has been disorganised considerably. Farms have been abandoned, farmlands rendered unfit for cultivation, and machinery and working animals destroyed, resulting in a substantial reduction in crop acreage. Excessive slaughtering of livestock due to the lack of other food, the commandeering of herds by the occupation forces, and the lack of feedstuffs caused a reduction in livestock numbers. This resulted in decreased production of meat and dairy products. Moreover, transport services have been disrupted in many areas, limiting the distribution of rural products and causing severe local shortages. Where production was not directly interrupted, shortage of labour, fertilisers and machinery limited the output of primary produce.

The re-establishment of agriculture in southern Europe and North Africa has been hampered by the drought conditions which were experienced during 1945. Moreover, production in countries of the Southern Hemisphere which are normally exporters of food also was seriously affected by droughts. Since most of the food-deficient countries are normally importers of food, they will be even more dependent on the production of the exporting countries, until such time as they can re-establish their own agriculture.