

# California Clingstone Peaches

economic status, 1948

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**Bearing acreage** of California Clingstone peaches has been increasing gradually since 1942.

Present indications are that after 1948, bearing acreage will either level out or start decreasing due to the expected heavy removals of the large number of old trees and the decrease in acreage which will come into bearing.

The average yield per acre of California Clingstones has been increasing steadily since 1936, and is likely to continue increasing for several years.

Shifts in the location of acreage and changes in varieties grown have aided this increase. The present large number of young trees will help to insure increasing yields for some years.

Production of Clingstone peaches has been increasing since 1935, with a record high being established in 1946 of 554,000 tons. Though bearing acreage after 1948 is expected to level off or decrease, the expected increase in yields could hold production at its present high level for several years, if weather and cultural conditions remain favorable.

The higher yield per acre during 1942-1946 has been made in spite of the unfavorable age distribution of the trees since 1942.

Beginning with that year, removals of older trees were decreased to about one third what they had been during the preceding five-year period. This resulted in an increasing percentage of older, lower-yielding trees. By 1947, 30% of the bearing acreage was 18 years old or older as compared with only 11% in 1937. Also, the number of trees at the peak of their bearing life—eight to 17 years—was considerably less, 40% in 1947 as against 80% in 1937.

The combination of the other factors—favorable weather, better cultural practices, and changes in acreage location and varieties—more than counterbalanced the decreasing yield effect of the unfavorable age distribution, and the result was an increase in the yield per acre.

## Trends

The present age distribution of the trees is favorable for increasing yields. There are about 8,000 acres of 23 years old or older, which is considered the end of profitable life, and therefore, this acreage may be pulled in the next few years.

Offsetting this old age group, however,

is the group of more than 9,000 acres classed as nonbearing. This group will have a continually increasing production in the future.

The largest age group is from four to 12 years old. The oldest trees in this group should maintain their average production for the next few years while the youngest can be expected to increase in production.

Shipment of Clingstone peaches in fresh form is a relatively minor outlet, taking less than 2% of harvested production in 1947. Of the peaches shipped fresh, the majority go to markets within the state.

The drying of Clingstones has been resorted to when production was heavy and returns from canning low. It has never been an important outlet, and at best, returns are about one-half those from canning.

Canning outlets have, on the average, taken about 90% of harvested production over the years. A record high of 96.9% was used in 1946, and figures for 1947 indicate about the same proportion again went into canning channels.

Of the tonnage going into canning outlets, an increasing quantity is being used in mixed packs of which peaches are a component. About 23% of the 1947 canning crop went into these products, most of it into fruit cocktail.

California packs almost 90% of United States canned peaches, and between 90% and 95% of California's pack is Clingstones. The Clingstone pack has shown a slight upward trend since 1932, reaching a record pack of 17.6 million cases in 1946, and then declining to 15.3 million cases in 1947. With production expected to continue at its present high levels, future packs should at least equal that of 1947, providing demand conditions remain favorable.

Consumption of canned peaches is related to the level and distribution of consumer income, the retail price, and the prices of competing canned fruits.

Domestic shipments and per-capita consumption have slowly increased over the last 15 years. If consumers' income remains at its present high level, consumption should also remain high. More competition, however, can be expected from other canned fruits and from fruit cocktail.

Commercial exports of canned peaches constituted about 15% of total shipments prior to the war, with about 90% of these

exports going to the United Kingdom. Some recovery of this export market was made in 1946-47, but exports are likely to be low during the next several years unless export prospects are improved by aid plans for Western Europe.

## Prices

Prices received by growers for canning Clingstone peaches increased substantially during the war, but dropped off some in 1947. Costs of producing peaches, however, have continued their wartime increase. The f.o.b. prices received by canners for canned Clingstones also increased during the war years, but not as much as did growers' prices.

The United States retail price of canned Clingstone peaches fluctuates less than either growers' or canners' prices, and did not show as great a wartime increase, largely due to price ceilings. There has been some reduction in retail prices since the war, and the farm price for canning peaches has declined substantially.

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