



Business Trends

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HARVEST SEASON FOR GREENHOUSE CROPS

Many of the crops grown under glass in the Cleveland area are being harvested, or are rapidly approaching the harvest period, despite the lingering winter weather of the past few weeks. Well over one-tenth of the annual harvest of cut flowers moved to market in the past week to be skillfully fashioned into corsages and floral arrangements for the observance of Easter Sunday today. Easter lilies, as well as at least a third of the other flowering plants sold yearly, comprised the floral accompaniment to Easter services here and throughout the nation today.

Preparation for the current harvest of blooms and flowering plants began months ago when the plants were propagated, except in the case of orchids which require seven years from the time the seed germinates until the first bloom appears. Following propagation, heat, moisture and plant nutrients need to be administered in amounts appropriate to the quantity and intensity of the prevailing sunlight in order to permit the bloom of each type of plant to reach the desired stage of development by Easter Sunday.

The year-to-year variation in the date on which Easter is observed further tests the growers' skill in assuring flower development at the appropriate time. Although Easter marks one of the principal harvest periods, another

period of concentrated activity occurs in May when flowering plants like geranium, petunias, and ageratum are in great demand for home plantings and for such occasions as Mother's Day and Memorial Day.

Brisk Demand for Easter Flowers. The demand for flowers during the current Easter season is reported by local representatives of the industry to have been unusually strong. Sales in terms of unit and dollar volume have apparently approached record levels. The fact that Easter Sunday this year was observed after mid-April is considered an important factor responsible for the strong demand for floral products. Presumably the record level of personal income in recent months exerted some influence too.

The brisk demand for floral products experienced so far this year is, of course, encouraging to the operators of the 3.25 million square feet (about 75 acres) of greenhouse currently estimated to be devoted to the production of flowers and flowering plants in the Cleveland area. Nevertheless, they, like the other growers of greenhouse crops in the area, are experiencing increasing competition from producing areas in Florida and Texas where lilies, chrysanthemums, and pom poms may be grown under plastic or cloth houses, harvested and delivered to local markets within 72 hours

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by refrigerated trucks. Moreover, carnations, chrysanthemums, and roses similarly produced on the West Coast may be flown in by air cargo in 24 hours.

That competition from the shipping areas has been effective is attested to by the fact that the greenhouse acreage devoted to the production of flowers grown locally has registered comparatively little net growth in recent years.

Vegetable Growers Meet Competition Too. While the producers of flowering crops are striving to produce blooms that whet the consumer's desire for more flowers, the producers of greenhouse vegetables are striving to produce fruits that tempt the consumer's appetite. Tomatoes are by far the principal crop grown in the Cleveland area. The acreage formerly devoted to other salad crops, like cucumbers, leaf lettuce and radishes, has declined in importance in recent years as competing areas have tended to supply a higher percentage of the market supplies.

It is estimated that over 95% of the nearly 400 acres of vegetable greenhouse in the Cleveland area are being devoted to the production of tomatoes for harvest this spring. Some of the growers have already begun harvesting and most of the acreage will be approaching full production by mid-May. An average spring crop of tomatoes, reportedly, yields 12,000 eight-pound baskets of tomatoes per acre, whereas the fall crop averages 7,000 baskets per acre, chiefly because of the lack of adequate sunshine during the fall growing period. Total annual production of tomatoes in the area is usually about 35 million pounds. About three-fourths of this output is shipped to points outside of Cleveland--to the East as far as New York and Boston and to the West to Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Louis.

The production from approximately half of the acreage devoted to tomatoes is marketed through a cooperatively-owned greenhouse packing company which picks up the tomatoes at the greenhouse, grades, packs and then distributes the packaged product to any market where the demand exists. The remainder of the crop is sold through wholesale firms that have built up a reputation for proficiency in marketing greenhouse tomatoes.

The spring crop of tomatoes now being harvested was started from seed in November. The plants were transplanted to the greenhouse in December. Pollination of each flower with an electric vibrator began in February and will continue through May or later, if the grower plans to maintain production well into the summer as some growers are now doing. When production is maintained well into the summer, the grower may forego the fall crop inasmuch as it is frequently a high-cost crop because of the reduced yield resulting from insufficient sunlight during the autumn growing period. Growers who follow this practice may produce a short-season crop like Bibb lettuce after the plants from the spring crop have been removed, but most of the growers use the time to sterilize and recondition the soil for next year's crop.

While southern field-grown tomatoes have admittedly offered considerable competition to the northern greenhouse varieties during the early part of the harvest period, apparently the quality of the local greenhouse tomatoes has enabled the industry to remain sufficiently competitive to allow for a moderate rate of growth in the acreage utilized. Available data on the acreage devoted to tomatoes in the Cleveland area indicates a net annual increase of about 3%.