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PREPARATION OF VEGETABLES FOR MARKET

By J. P. FALLON, B.Sc. (Agric.), Adviser, Vegetables

PROFITS in commercial vegetable growing depend as much on proper harvesting, handling and marketing as on good production practices. Many gardeners who are experts as producers are perhaps not so expert in presenting their produce in a manner which will command the most favourable return.

Harvesting and packing are the initial steps in distribution to the consumer. They present the first opportunity to impair or preserve the natural goodness of well grown vegetables. The arrival at the market and at consumers tables of vegetables showing minimum deterioration of appearance and of quality can be assured in large part by correct methods and management, before the produce leaves the grower's property.

Growers should keep in mind that fresh vegetables are living organisms. They undergo normal life processes. They lose water through transpiration, they respire and they undergo chemical changes. These processes contribute to gradual deterioration and are influenced by temperature, atmospheric humidity and other factors. All handling procedures should aim to retard these life processes without stopping them altogether.

The stages of development of vegetables when harvested is of utmost importance when managing perishable crops. For example, a single day's delay in hot weather may result in serious deterioration of peas or lettuce. Frequent harvesting of tomatoes, melons, and beans or other vegetables which mature progressively is required to avoid losses through over maturity of some of the fruit.

Particularly important is care in the handling of perishable vegetables. Needless bruising or crushing in the course of harvesting and packing results in extensive damage and in addition is a principal contributory cause of decay.

Vegetables should be sorted. Uniformity in size, shape, colour and ripeness is of great importance in disposing of any product and this cannot be obtained without careful sorting and grading. In carrying out this grading work the grower should be guided to some extent by the view point of the housewife, who thinks in terms of individual specimens and their condition. To her, if she happens to obtain an unsatisfactory cabbage or cauliflower, it is of little consolation that 90 per cent. of the specimens in the particular pack marketed were desirable. If she is unfortunate enough to receive on a number of occasions overmature or undesirable vegetables, she may conclude that good quality vegetables of that type are unavailable. The family would be inclined to refuse second helpings and there would be no request for the same vegetable for the next meal or the next day. A number of experiences of this type can rapidly reduce subsequent purchases. Poor quality which results in slow sales and low prices is frequently associated with the development of glutted markets.

In packing vegetables for sale, the grower should aim to make each package as attractive as possible. This is achieved not only by cleaning and sorting and using proper containers, but by skilful arrangement. Appearance may sometimes be improved by the use of special lining papers for the containers. The use of attractive papers for packing has not received a great deal of attention by growers in this State, but is well worthy of consideration.
Honest packing is essential if satisfactory sales outlets are to be retained. This means uniformity of grade throughout a pack.

Fortunately, most vegetable growers in this State have only short distances to transport their produce to market. However, although the distance is short, care should still be exercised in giving proper protection to vegetables so that they do not deteriorate before reaching market. Many growers will be familiar with the browning of cauliflowers which can occur by exposure of the curd to sunlight and wind even for short periods. Other vegetables are subject to similar forms of deterioration.

To sum up the prevention of marketing losses depends on vegetables being harvested at the right stage of maturity, properly graded, carefully packed in suitable containers and carefully handled at all times. If these points are kept in mind, many growers will effect a marked improvement in their product and their profits.
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<th>Bore diameter</th>
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<td>1/-</td>
<td>1/5</td>
<td>1/11</td>
<td>2/7</td>
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<td>Maximum Working Pressure P.S.I.</td>
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<td>Weight per 100 ft.</td>
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