

Eastern Shore — The Truck Garden Of America

By GEORGE H. DACY

A NECK of land owned conjunctively by Delaware, Maryland and Virginia and known generally as Eastern Shore, or the Del-Mar-Va peninsula juts into the Atlantic ocean some distance south of Wilmington, Delaware forms the eastern boundary of Chesapeake Bay and constitutes one of the most successful trucking areas in these United States. Within a 500-mile radius of Eastern Shore live 50 million consumers or about 42 per cent of the United States' population.

Nature gifted Eastern Shore, a key location for "spud," strawberry, melon, vegetable production and other forms of farming, with proximity to tempering waters which mellow the cold winds and facilitate a longer growing season than that of the neighboring "mainland." Ready accessibility to some of the country's best markets decades ago led to crop specialization and the promotion of cash-crop growing. Today, the Shore is one of the most intensively cultivated areas of its kind on this side of the Atlantic.

Spuds Dominate Markets

Del-Mar-Va contributes millions of tons of foods yearly to the market flow of "early stuff" which begins with the strawberries from Plant City, Florida just before Christmas and continues northward with the trek of the sun and growing weather. From about mid-June until late August, shipments of Virginia Shore "spuds" dominate the northeastern terminal markets and are an important supply for the chief Midwest markets.

The Virginia sector specializes in early Irish Cobbler potatoes, yellow Jersey stemmed sweet potatoes, strawberries, melons and a variety of vegetables. The Maryland area, from north of Po-

comoke City to Chesapeake City, grows sweet potatoes, tomatoes, sweet corn, cannery truck, cabbage, watermelons, muskmelons and strawberries. The Delaware sector from Selbyville to Newcastle produces vast stocks of sweet spuds, tomatoes, strawberries, melons.

Orchards Dot Landscape

Commercial and intensive dairying and some sheep husbandry are practiced profitably in various parts of the peninsula such as around Easton, Maryland. Apple and peach orchards dot the landscape in the vicinity of Hurlock, Berlin and Salisbury, Maryland. Berlin boasts one of the largest nurseries in the United States.

Otis Cochran and his two brothers own and operate a chain of farms near Hurlock and produce canteloupes and asparagus on a stupendous scale. Cochran Brothers invariably sell all their melons at top prices because they grade scrupulously and refuse to ship any second-quality truck or fruit. In addition to being one of the "kings" of strawberry culture on the eastern Shore, W.F. Allen of Salisbury grows and markets millions of strawberry plants. He is the main distributor of new varieties of strawberries developed and introduced by the U. S. Department of Agriculture in the Shore Belt. Many farmers, including the Suttons of Kent County and Richard Fitzgerald of Somerset County, produce tomato plants on community scale in special beds. These growers distribute this planting stock among their neighbors at profitable prices.

Strawberry production centers in Accomac and Northampton Counties, Virginia; Somerset and Wicomico Counties, Maryland and Sussex County, Delaware. These berry farms range from 40 to 75 acres in size, with usually one-half



Packing strawberries for market shipment. The yield the first season ranges about 3,000 quarts per acre in some sections of the Del-Mar-Va. Peninsula.

to two-thirds of the area cropped to truck, including from four to 12 acres of strawberries. Several Virginia growers produce from 40 to 45 acres of strawberries each annually. Most of the farms produce from 2,000 to 4,000 quarts of strawberries per acre. It costs from \$45 to \$50 an acre the first year to prepare the land, plant and fertilize the crop; the cost of management the second year varies from \$6 to \$10 an acre dependent on location. Many producers grow their strawberry plants. The berry crop of the three states sells for from five to 15 cents a quart dependent on season.

Plantings Increase

The Eastern Shore and Norfolk districts of Virginia annually produce one-fourth of the early potato crop of the United States. During the decade prior to 1930, the Virginia Eastern Shore spud plantings jumped from 42,500 to 67,000 acres.

Planting in Northampton County begins about mid-February and continues up the peninsula, being completed by April in Accomac County. The land is fertilized commercially, then cultivated; seed potatoes are treated for scab before planting unless certified seed is used. Spuds are planted with machinery, the crop is cultivated from six to eight times, and sprayed two to three times with calcium arsenate to control the Colorado potato beetle. The Irish potato crop is generally dug during July. During the last 16 years, the average yield has been 150 bushels per acre. Yields as high as 300 bushels per acre have been harvested on the best projects. During 1920, the price soared to \$2.75 a bushel; generally, around \$1.10 is a reasonable and profitable price. A large part of Maryland's annual \$10,000,000 potato crop also is produced on Eastern Shore farms.

Dairying Dovetails

In Kent County, Maryland, the Sutton family of truckers operates a 425-acre farm and has dovetailed dairying and trucking in a practical way. They maintain a grade Guernsey herd of some 35 animals, raise alfalfa and soy beans and clover for hay. The boys rank among the most reliable Johnson County White seed corn producers in the state, selling seed corn widely at \$3 to \$3.50 a bushel.

One boy for many years has supervised the community tomato plant bed. He grew 1,000,000 vigorous tomato plants on an acre of former alfalfa ground one year, selling one-half of the

plants to some 40 neighbors at \$1.50 a thousand. Mr. Sutton cleared \$225 from that plant bed. The early tomatoes are sold as fresh "fruit" for the table markets; the late tomatoes are used for canning. More than 50 such community tomato plant beds are grown annually in Kent County. Some of the finest tomatoes are shipped by boatloads to Baltimore from Cambridge and Chestertown to Baltimore and Philadelphia.

Apples a Sideline

Not so far away at the Rash farm, some 50 gallons of milk ride to market daily from the herd of grade and purebred Holsteins and Guernseys. This farmer many years ago set out a 28-acre orchard of popular commercial varieties. Skilled in dairying, but a tyro in orcharding, he neglected to spray his trees because he could not locate any signs of disease infestation. The apple scab gained a strangling grip on the apple trees. Then the owner began a spraying campaign, conducted so painstakingly he eventually cleaned up his orchard and has since produced some of the best apples ever shipped from Eastern Shore. Rash markets around 6,000 to 8,000 bushels of fruit annually and nets anywhere from \$2,000 to \$2,700 from his sideline.

During the late Fall, this Shoreman runs an apple truck, which makes a house-to-house canvas of neighboring towns and sells \$20 to \$25 worth of fruit daily. Sufficient apples for that home county trade are stored on the farm. The great bulk of the crop is transported to Baltimore where it is placed in cold storage until January and February when the demand and prices for such tree fruit are at a peak.

Melons Are Improved

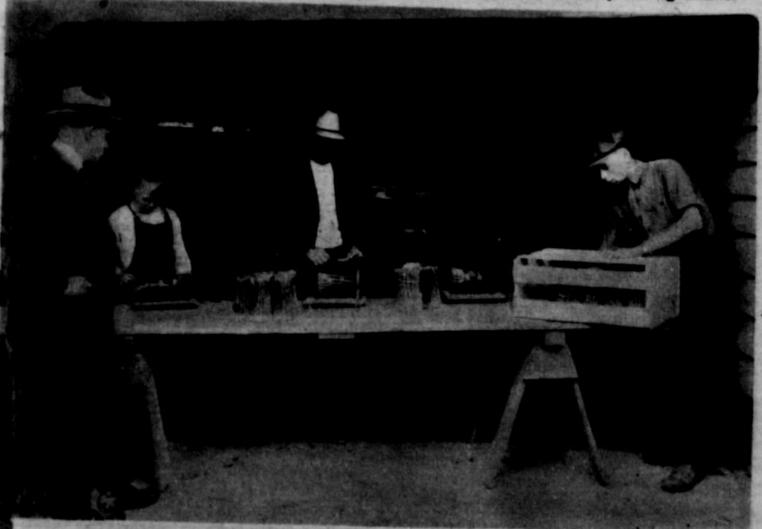
Maryland's canteloupe maturity law has improved the melon business materially by eliminating unsuitable food products from the fresh fruit market. This legislation prohibits the sale and shipment of obviously immature canteloupe.

Canteloupes follow cucumbers in ripening and marketing sequence, the Early Pink Meats and Hearts of Gold varieties being popular types and command the high prices and frequently top the market.

Watermelons are grown only once in seven or eight years on the same piece of land because of disease dangers. Melons, sweet potatoes and strawberries do equally well either on an acid or alkaline soil.



Judge Nelson, Somerset County, Md., looks over his field of early string beans.



Asparagus bunching and packing on the Sutton farm, Kent County, Md.



Young Sutton produced 1,000,000 tomato plants on one acre, selling half of them to 40 neighbors at a net profit of \$225.