

BRUSSELS SPROUTS AS A CROP IN SAN MATEO COUNTY

1951-52

SAN MATEO

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San Mateo County and neighboring Santa Cruz County comprise the main area of Brussels sprout production for the entire United States. In recent years acreage in San Mateo County had varied from 1,000 to 2,000 acres. In 1951-52 the acreage was estimated at 1,858 acres having an average yield of 3.2 tons per acre or a total production of 5,945 tons worth \$832,384. This made it the second most important vegetable in the county being only slightly below artichokes in total value.

Adaptation - The Brussels sprout is well adapted to growing in the coastal zone along the ocean where it is cool enough for good growth in the summer and warm enough for a long productive season in late fall and winter.

Yield - Production per acre has been observed to vary considerably from 2 to 8 tons per acre but 4.5 tons should be obtainable with good cultural care.

Season of Crop - The plants are grown in the spring in small seed beds from February to May and are transplanted to the field in May and June. During the summer they are cultivated, irrigated, and dusted for pest control. Harvesting usually begins in August and may run through December to February. Fields are picked over from five to nine times.

Irrigation - Since much of the growth takes place from transplanting to late fall when there are no rains an adequate supply of soil moisture must be maintained by frequent irrigation. It begins in late spring when plants are set in the field and continues until the soil is adequately wet by fall or winter rains. About eight irrigations of  $2\frac{1}{2}$  acre-inches per acre each are usual for a total water use of 20 acre-inches in an average season. Since flows of irrigation water are small in this area, great care and considerable labor are involved in irrigation.

Pest Control - Brussels sprout plants are very attractive to aphids and other insects and it is necessary to dust them frequently from June to October. About eight to ten dustings at 40 to 50 pounds of insecticide, currently 2 per cent parathion, are needed making this operation one of the most expensive on the crop.

Harvesting - Pickers strip or pick the mature sprouts from the stem and place them in hampers and boxes for transporting to the farm shed where they are further cleaned and some are trimmed. They go from here to the freezers or to packing houses for shipment fresh. Some freezers take the sprouts direct from the field.

Marketing - Formerly most of the sprouts were shipped fresh under refrigeration to markets all over the country but in recent years most of them have gone to freezers who process, freeze and package them for marketing frozen and ready for the kettle. In the last three years around two-thirds of the crop have been frozen. They are usually grown for freezing only on contract.

Earnings depend on the difference between the price received and each growers costs. The potential grower would do well to estimate his costs in advance of production and consider it in light of contract price offered or expectation of probable market price.

Costs have been obtained from a number of growers and from this information a complete sample schedule of work done, materials used, and prices as of 1951-52 has been prepared and appears on the reverse side of this sheet. Use it as a guide in figuring or estimating your own costs.

