



**CITRUS SEASON OFF TO POOR START**

Further setbacks have now been encountered by Israel's citrus growers in addition to the losses suffered from frost that hit orange blossoms last spring. Prices for Shamuti oranges remain at last year's figure on world markets, and exporters have had to sign contracts for grapefruit at prices lower than those obtained last season.

Still more difficulties plagued the growers. As a result of weather conditions, early grapefruits ripened later than expected. Thus, instead of the planned shipment of one million cartons of fruit, only 918,000 had been exported by the end of October. These were supplemented in mid-November by an additional 300,000 cartons. Although these were snatched up by an almost empty market abroad, prices still remained 60 to 70 cents lower than last year, with the average carton bringing in \$4. f.o.b.

Navel oranges, shipments of which started in mid-November, also ripened erratically due to unusually warm weather, leaving the fruit spotty and without the desired uniform colour. Harvesting, which first began in the coastal lowlands, is now underway throughout the country. Lemons are also now being picked, and large quantities will be exported to Scandinavia and Eastern Europe.

Due to the frosts, there will be little variety in oranges and total shipments of citrus are expected to number only 48 million cartons, the same as last year. The harvest of Shamuti's, which will amount to 5-10% less than last year, will comprise 20 million cartons. However, grapefruit exports are expected to increase slightly to 14.5 million crates from 13 million, and lemons and navel oranges will remain at 1.5 and 1.8 million cartons respectively. Due to constantly fluctuating currency rates, particularly in England, France and Italy, no estimate of potential earnings

can yet be made. Losses from devaluations in these countries, however, are expected to be offset by heavy shipments to the German market. Several countries which do not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel are buying quantities of "anonymous oranges" packed in crates without source identity markings.

**WATER RESERVES IN THE NEGEV**

Desert agriculture, already highly developed in Israel, should receive an important boost soon. Large quantities of underground water reserves dating back many millenia have been found by the Mekorot Water Company in the heart of the Negev near Nahal Zin. When the taps were opened on experimental drillings at a depth of 820 metres, the water burst out over the dry, rocky desert at a rate of 440 cubic metres per hour, creating a wide stream.

Although high in salinity, the water can easily be treated for desalination. In its present state, however, it is already suitable for agricultural irrigation as well as industrial uses at nearby phosphate mines.

It is hard to estimate the enormous impact which these new sources are likely to have on the future development of the

Negev. The vast subterranean reservoir is believed to stretch from Ein Gedi southwards to Timna, north of Elat, and onwards into Sinai. Geologists and hydrologists studying the new finds, as well as those at other sites, believe that the total quantity probably amounts to hundreds of millions of cubic metres in water supply.

At least eight new settlements in the desert can be established on the basis of these early finds. Moreover, the new source is also expected to substantially ease the plight of existing farming settlements in the Arava which have had to depend on water pumped long distances or on inadequate local wells.

**STOCKING UP**

Early winter rains filled reservoirs around the country, raised the level of the Kinneret by more than 35 million cubic metres and brought flooding and power blackouts to Israel's large cities. Strong showers also brought much needed relief to winter crops in the northern Negev desert.

Mekorot, the country's national water supply company, will soon put into operation new pumping stations at Gilgad on the lower Jordan River to tap the winter flood waters.

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