



Reducing Production Costs in Citrus Orchards

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DURING and since the Second World War the cost of producing essential commodities in New Zealand has risen more or less steadily. To counteract such increases and yet maintain production the general trend has been for producers to increase the selling prices of their goods if possible. This spiral of ascending prices must reach its peak some day, and that day may not be far distant. When that time arrives the citrus-fruit grower, like all other producers, will be faced with the problem of how best to reduce production costs so that the margin between the cost of growing fruit and placing it on the market and the price that can be secured for that fruit will remain in favour of the grower.

WHOLESALE prices for New Zealand grapefruit and Meyer lemons have declined markedly from those of a few years ago, and should this position continue efforts must be made to effect an early reduction in costs of production. Though the collective efforts of the industry may assist in this direction, the principal reductions likely to be achieved will be in the individual orchard and packing shed. The cost of producing citrus fruits in New Zealand is influenced by a great variety of factors, including soil type, variety, strain, amount and type of cultivation, manurial programme, shelter, aspect, and marketing arrangements, but that which exerts probably a greater influence on production costs than any of those mentioned is orchard management.

Following are some of the many factors that should be examined as possible means whereby production costs might be reduced or, alternatively, buyers induced to pay higher prices for the fruit they require.

- More efficient management.
- Increased production.
- Increased percentage of high-grade fruit.
- More attractive presentation of fruit.
- Reduced cost of preparing fruit for market.
- Improved marketing methods.

Efficiency of Management

The factors included in orchard management are generally known to fruit growers, but the need and scope for greater management efficiency possibly is not fully appreciated.

To reduce production costs to a minimum it is essential that the citrus-fruit grower be fully efficient and have an intimate knowledge of the requirements of citrus trees, especially in such items as fertilisers, organic matter, and lime; he must know how these materials are best applied and worked into the soil and the number of applications and quantities needed each year. The rooting habits and irrigation requirements of the trees and soil conditions necessary for the production of maximum crops of high-quality fruit at a minimum cost are among the many other aspects of which comprehensive knowledge is necessary.

Another subject with which every citrus orchardist requires to be intimately acquainted is disease and pest control. This necessitates rapid identification and familiarity with the best of known control measures which are consistent with economy; in the case of many kinds of insect pests it also involves knowledge of their life cycles under local conditions.

In the main, this knowledge is available to all citrus-fruit growers who care to seek it earnestly. Some years of practical orchard experience coupled with keen observation will provide many of the answers to the questions involved, but this is not sufficient to keep up with present-day knowledge. A constant perusal of modern literature dealing with the problems involved, attendance at lectures and demonstrations concerning citrus culture, and submission of questions to the district Orchard Instructor of the

HEADING PHOTOGRAPH: Healthy trees in a well-managed citrus orchard. Sparrow Industrial Pictures Ltd. photo.