

Valley Crops Add Spice To World's Diet

Paprika in the Yakima Valley never was much of a crop. Nor was stromonium, whatever that is. Or sweet basil. Or henbane or rue. But sage! There's a crop with a flavor! Something like the flavor of \$150,000.

Most of the time farmers and ranchers in the Valley are meat and potato farmers; that is to say, they grow crops and livestock for which there is the greatest need. In this effort in the last half-century they have produced enough meat, potatoes, vegetables and fruit to sate the hunger of the 3 billion people in the world for more than just a few days.

Little Spice
But every once in awhile some farmer or rancher decides to add a little spice to the meat and potato diet. That's what happened in 1943 when some of the Valley's fertile fields bloomed with such exotic crops as paprika, sweet basil, henbane, rue, sage, wormwood, and sugar cane.

And stromonium.
That one is so exotic it's something of a mystery. Records at the Bureau of Reclamation office in Yakima indicate that in 1943 a farmer planted a half acre of Roza land to stromonium and reaped a return of \$3,200.

No Herb
The only trouble is, stromonium isn't in the dictionary. Seasoned home economists claim it isn't an herb. But, then, henbane, rue, and wormwood are not culinary herbs but medicinal herbs. Stromonium may be in that category but more than likely it's a linguistic malaprop—a misspelling.

Whatever it is, it paid handsomely for its lone appearance. So did henbane. A half acre brought \$3,500. Rue was even better. A half acre grossed \$5,000. But wormwood topped the list of medicinal herbs. For a half acre the grower reaped \$6,000. In fact, wormwood made such a good showing the grower tried again in 1944. The result was a mere \$1,000. That ended that.

Impressive
The result from two acres of paprika in 1943—\$8,000—was so impressive that the following year growers with paprika. But the bubble broke. The 19 acres grossed only \$3,680, and that was the last appearance of paprika on the reclamation bureau's crops reports.

An acre of marjoram in 1944 brought \$900 while an acre of sweet basil brought \$2,500. And that brings up the question of sage. In 1943, Roza growers planted 41 acres of sage but reaped only \$2,170. They must have had a crystal ball, though, for they came right back the following year with 100 acres.

The take was \$152,965!

Other Crops
The years 1943 and '44 were not the only years farmers took flippers with strange crops on Yakima Valley soil. In the early days of the Moxee area cotton was tried but the results never justified the efforts.

Tobacco, too, has been tried repeatedly. Again, in the Moxee area, the plants were large and healthy, their color good. There was only one thing wrong. The tobacco was so strong it could be used only for snoose.

Sugar cane has been tried,

too, but the results always have been about the same as they were in 1943. No crop.

Garlic, Too
Since onions do well in the Yakima Valley, a grower in 1948 decided to go a bit stronger. He devoted five acres to garlic. The result was so poor the experiment never has been repeated on a commercial scale.

The following year 102 acres were devoted to dill for the production of oil. The result was \$20,000. In 1950 the acreage was doubled but the income dropped to \$17,000.

Every so often Valley farmers will turn a few of their acres over to the growing of flowers. Two acres of iris in 1949 produced \$6,000 worth of bulbs.

Soybeans Appear
Soybeans put in their first appearance in crop reports in 1946. Radishes came along in 1948 with 30 acres and safflower made a timid showing with two acres.

The bureau's crop reports through the years not only show the ventures into the unknown but also show the ups and downs of agricultural economics and the shifts in crops caused by changing soil conditions and consumers' tastes.

Many of the crops grown in the Valley are old standbys, such as grain. Grain has been grown here since before the days of irrigation. Through the years the annual yield, until recently, has been fairly constant—in the vicinity of a million bushels—but the number of acres devoted to growing grain has decreased. This is a testimonial not only to the improvement of the species but to improved methods of farming and to the fertility of the soil. In the early 1950's the production began to climb, however, and now is four times the previous average.

Open Range
White man's first efforts in the Valley were in raising livestock. The land was open range and gigantic herds of cattle and flocks of sheep grazed where crops now are grown.

Then came irrigation and with it came fences and the end of the open range. Instead of decreasing, though, livestock raising is increasing. Feedlots packing plants turn out products that make the average American's diet the envy of the world.

In support of the livestock and dairy industries, much of the Valley's irrigated land, especially in Kittitas County, is devoted to the production of hay and other fodder. In 1963, for example, nearly 500,000 tons of fodder were produced and more than \$3,000 irrigated acres were used for pasture. The total cash value of these crops for only one year amounted to between \$8 and \$9 million.

Fresh vegetables, while always on the scene in the Valley,

have had their ups and downs. Not many years ago truck gardening played an important role in the Lower Valley's economy. Today some of the land once devoted to truck gardening lies fallow.

However, while truck gardening has been on the decline, vegetable production for commercial canneries has been climbing. Last year's asparagus crop, part of which was sold as a fresh vegetable and part for processing, grossed more than \$4 million for growers. Sweet corn for processing brought \$1.6 million while peas for processing brought almost \$1 million.

Roll Call
The list of vegetables grown in the Valley, past and present, reads like a garden roll call. There are cabbage, squash, turnips and rutabagas. There are snap beans, green onions, beets, cantaloup, cucumbers, lettuce and sweet corn. And there are tomatoes, watermelon, a r.t. chokes, eggplant, parsnips, peppers, pumpkin, spinach and carrots. The list goes on and on.

Early Start

Hops have been in the Valley since the beginning of irrigation. The first crop was raised by Charles Carpenter in 1872 with water taken from Ahlman Creek. Through the years the yield has increased and in

1963 the Valley produced 60 per cent of the nation's hops on but 18,000 acres. The yield was just under a ton per acre and the total crop was valued at \$14 million.

The production of mint moved out of the Middle West a number of years ago and settled in the Northwest. Today the Valley is one of the largest producers of spearmint and peppermint in the world but wilt is endangering the production.

New Arrival
Sugarbeets are something of a new arrival in the Valley but they have provided a steady and dependable income to the growers. In 1963 nearly 25,000 acres yielded close to \$6 million.

The Yakima Valley, of course, probably is more famous for its fruit than it is for any other crop. There are apples, peaches, pears, prunes and strawberries, and there are apricots, cherries, grapes, plums, raspberries, currants and quince.

In 1944 fruit production hit

500 million pounds and held there, except for 1948 when it dropped to 339 million pounds, through the early 1950's. By 1966 the total fruit yield was 700 million pounds and in 1968 the apple yield was more than that alone.

Production Up
Production dropped in 1968 but has been climbing again and in 1963 the apple crop alone weighed more than 700 million pounds. Pears and grapes each exceeded 100 million pounds. The total fruit production in 1963 on the Yakima Project was more than a billion pounds.

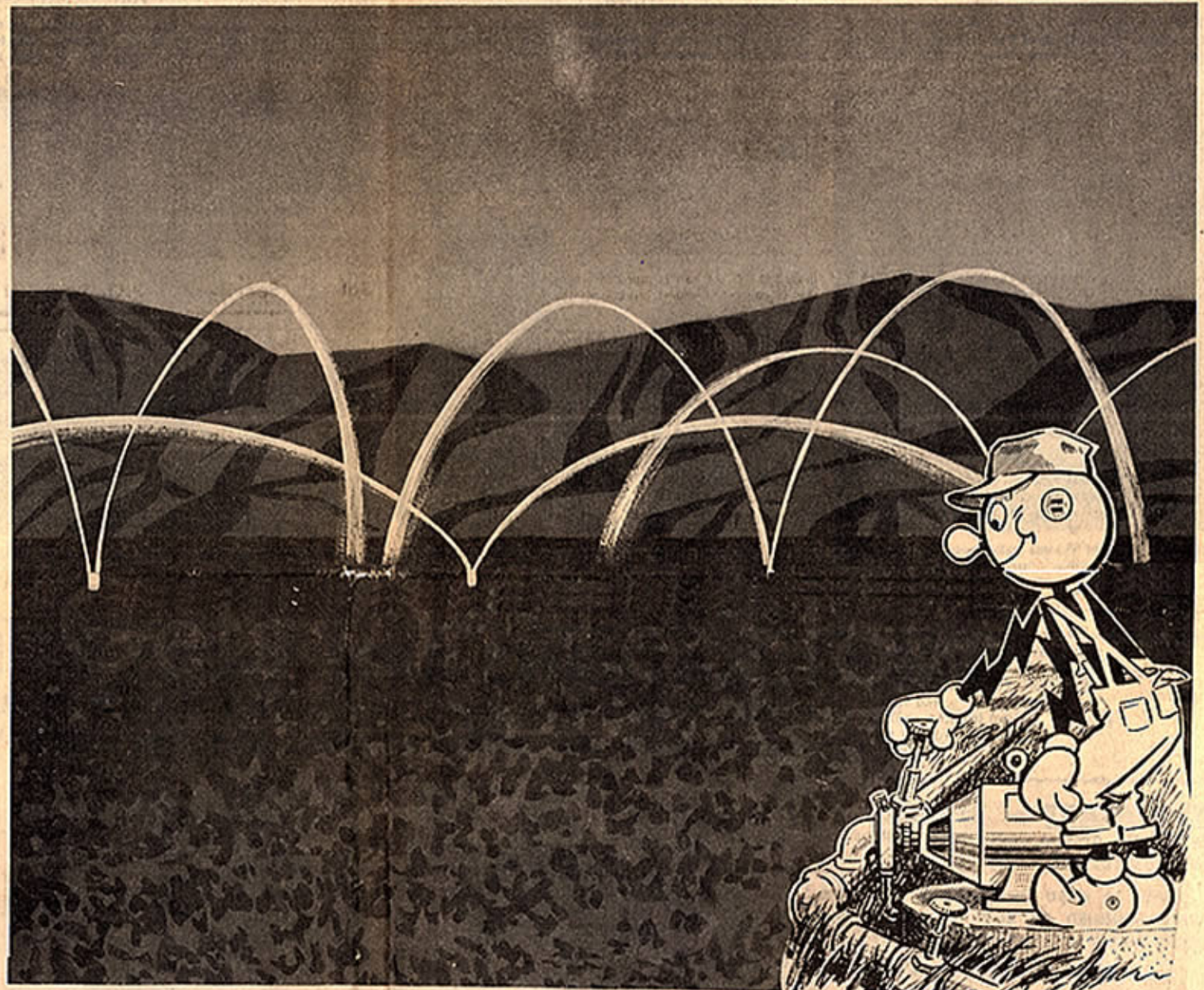
And so it goes—on and on and on through meat, potatoes, vegetables and fruit; and up and up and up through ever increasing yields and greater incomes. On and up because water comes down, down from the mountains and through the desert to convert the ancestral home of the lizard and rattlesnake into a garden for the world.


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