

AGRICULTURE - - Strawberry Farming and Beef Cattle

Norman May
536 No. 8 Road, Richmond, B.C.

Interviewed: March 1, 1973.

. . . born 1924 in Vancouver when family was living on Cambie Road between No. 6 Road and No. 7 Road.

. . . father Fred May came out from England 1910, worked several years for Twigg Bros. on Twigg Island . . . rented Twigg Island (200 acres) and farmed for himself . . . then moved to Cambie Rd. east Richmond, engaged in mixed farming - 140 acres . . . milk cow hay, grain usually oats. Cows were mostly Holsteins . . . grew netted gem potatoes - showed in fairs . . . later on grew early maturing varieties - white rose, kennebec, russet. Norman continued growing potatoes in own farm until 13 or 14 years ago, then switched to strawberries . . . did better with strawberry crop.

. . . a lot of fruit grown in Richmond before World War I, including small acreages in Steveston, by Japanese . . . when latter were moved larger farmers started growing strawberries.

. . . 1936 family home got electricity . . . agreed to pay base charge on electricity for 4 or 6 years.

. . . went to Bridgeport School grades 1 to 8 by bus . . . he was in last group to go through Cambie High School on four year plan before converting to junior, senior schools.

. . . Norman had two brothers, Dunc and John and one sister Rosemary. . . as youngster on farm milked cows at age of 8 years . . . worked with chickens.

1941 family got a milking machine, DeLaval . . . joined Canadian Air Force in 1942 and returned in 1945.

. . . father killed by a bull in 1943 but brothers still farming so 3 brothers continued farming acquiring present farm and farm adjoining home farm . . . 10 years ago divided up between the three

1953 - bought present farm at No. 8 Road . . . doubled milk production for 10 years.

. . . in youth on Cambie farm milk put into 10 gallon cans, cooled by water, picked up by truck to Vancouver.

1956 - Used different milk machine, ran pipeline direct to stainless steel bulk tank (refrigerated), then picked up bulk and pumped into truck . . . other farmers operated bulk tank . . . same time Sea Island farmers phasing out milking . . . Mays continued milking to 1963 then changed to beef cattle.

. . . personal interest was reason May changed to beef cattle - buying, selling, marketing. Started small way with 150 - 200 beef at present farm . . . then rented part of old Grauer farm (Fraser farm), pastured 300 - 400 head - fed in barn, finish in grain ration

. . . since built barns at present farm to house 800 head . . . buy beef over one year old . . . feed corn silage, hay, potatoes, 50% grain (rolled barley) . . . fatten to 1150 pounds then sold to market. Continuous beef turnover of 2,000 a year.

Types . . . of beef cattle vary . . . used to be white faced Hereford . . . now get exotic types from Europe.

Buy cattle (stock sales) everywhere in B.C. . . . Quesnel, Williams Lake, Kamloops, South Island Falls, Merritt, Fraser Valley has two markets a week: West Coast Auction, Cloverdale, McClary's at Abbotsford.

800 input means house 800 cattle in barns at one time . . . continuously buying younger cattle every week and selling some finished cattle almost every week . . . try to turn out 2000 head a year.

Beef cattle market to continue . . . May does not regard beef as "expensive" . . . all other products have gone up steadily . . . milk, bread, clothing up steadily, but doesn't look expensive . . . beef had fluctuations . . . price for beef two years ago exactly same as price in 1952 . . . thinks beef will maintain price because world wide demand for beef . . . keeps 2 to 3 horses to handle cattle summers, cattle were used to range life . . . in barn winter months . . . in summer pasture on own farm of 100 acres (#8 Road) and on rented 40 acres adjoining including rough pasture on peat land nearby . . . with amount of rainfall we get here no cattle could winter on Richmond soil without hooves cutting through grassland for following year.

1952 - started raising strawberries on home farm as diversion crop . . . soon after quit growing potatoe crops for berries. . . . bulk grown for jam . . . went to Empress Mfg. . . . if conditions right sold fresh fruit, Vancouver - grew 20 - 35 acres initially.

. . . all 3 sons continued in strawberries on individual farms . . . each May farm grows 30 acres. 1955 started strawberry growing present farm . . . fluctuated between 15¢ and 26¢ depending on extent of imports from California, Mexico . . . started shipping to Growers Wine, Victoria, 5 years ago - get one cent less but comparative market to berries for jam processing . . . simplifies picking operation. Wine Picking - pick into plastic buckets . . . ship in barrels, forklifted to semi-trailers which come into field

Norman May

- 4 -

. . . trailers ferried via C.P.R. barge to Victoria overnight, tractor stays ashore each end to take trailer off on landing.

Growers Wine - 1972 shipped 100 tons of May crop to Moose Jaw, pumping berries into stainless tankers.

. . . picking strawberries for wine not different for pickers, but handling of crates is a problem . . . use of plastic buckets into barrel easier . . . berries still hulled by pickers . . . labor soon a major problem . . . used Chinese crews in past . . . will pick what now planted and plant no more strawberries . . . phase out in two years.

Strawberries are perishable . . . require big crews 3 to 4 weeks to pick . . . crop peaks about July 1 . . . if can't get picked when ripe lose crop.

Norman and brothers supply 250 - 300 tons of strawberries to Growers Wine.

Dellis Cleland