



The Fruit MARKET

at Benton Harbor,
Michigan

The Fruit Market at Benton Harbor, considered the largest market of its kind in the world, is owned and operated by the city for the benefit of farmers and buyers. For generations Southwestern Michigan has been one of the greatest diversified agricultural sections of the country and the practice of marketing in Benton Harbor grew during the past 50 years rather than having any definite date of establishment.

Congestion of the city's streets led, in 1930, to the construction of an 11-acre market in a section of the community which would eliminate many of the problems of street traffic and yet would be within easy access to the two national trunk lines, US-12 and US-31, which serve the community in addition to state and county roads.

Even during the lean years of the depression, which lowered prices to disastrous levels to fruit and vegetable growers and killed consumer demand in all sections, the market has continued to grow. Additional loading platforms have been added to the city market each year and with the continued financial success of this municipal enterprise the Market Board hopes to add a number of improvements that will be of benefit to the grower and the buyer.

Despite the low prices for products, sales on the market for the past three years were:

1931	\$2,822,285.00
1932	2,981,131.00
1933	<u>2,633,673.00</u>
Three year total	\$8,437,089.00

BERRIEN COUNTY AS A FRUIT CENTER

The success of the Benton Harbor Fruit Market, as well as the rich territory which surrounds it, lies in the diversity and volume of its' products. Located in one of the nation's greatest agricultural counties, Benton Harbor also is adjacent to several other counties which are leaders in fruit and vegetable production.

The rank of Berrien County, the county in which Benton Harbor is the largest city, is clearly shown by the 1930 census reports published by the U. S. Department of Commerce.

<u>CROP</u>	<u>RANK</u>
Black Raspberries	1st
Blackberries	3rd
Dewberries	3rd
Peaches	4th
Pears	9th
Grapes	10th
Cherries	12th
Apples	18th
Strawberries	24th

Since these figures of 1930 were released Berrien County has experienced a great increase in her production of tomatoes. Each year has found the crop acreage getting larger. In 1933 almost \$400,000.00 worth of tomatoes were sold by growers on the Benton Harbor market. From July 15 until early in November this community will furnish a large share of the Middle West with sun-ripened tomatoes.

Some of the other Michigan counties, extending as far North as the Grand Traverse region, which supply the Benton Harbor market with products are also leaders. This assurance of a wide variety and unlimited volume of products has built the reputation of Benton Harbor as the fruit capital of the Middle West. From Spring until early Winter buyers continue to come to the Benton Harbor market for supplies.

THE FRUIT SEASONS

The approximate seasons (subject to slight variation from year to year due to growth conditions) for products on the market are:

<u>PRODUCT</u>	<u>SEASON</u>
Strawberries	June 1st to July 15
Asparagus	May 15th to June 25
Gooseberries	June 14 to July 14
Cherries	June 15 to July 30
Raspberries	June 19 to August 7
Apples	June 22 to Nov. 12
Currants	June 22 to August 1
Celery	June 23 to Nov. 12
Black Raspberries	June 25 to August 8
Blueberries	June 25 to August 24
Potatoes	June 28 to Nov. 12
Tomatoes	June 26 to Nov. 6
Cucumbers	June 29 to Oct. 25
Beans	June 29 to Oct. 30
Dewberries	July 7 to August 11
Cantaloupes	July 6 to October 8
Plums	July 9 to October 8
Peaches	July 10 to October 25
Pears	July 13 to Nov. 5
Onions	July 13 to Nov. 12
Peppers	July 15 to Nov. 2
Grapes	August 10 to Nov. 7
Quinces	August 25 to Nov. 2

The Benton Harbor market opens for active operation on June 1st and closes about November 12th. The initial crops sold on the market each year are strawberries and asparagus. Activities on the market are suspended each Saturday due, of course, to the fact that retail stores in the consuming area are closed the following day.

THE 1933 SEASON

A fair picture of the scope of the Benton Harbor Fruit Market may be gained from a perusal of last year's figures for trading, although the 1933 fruit season in Michigan was the poorest in eight years from the standpoint of volume. The figures are taken from compilations from the U. S. Bureau of Agriculture, Michigan Department of Agriculture, the Market Master, and the Market department of the Benton Harbor News-Palladium.

The number of day-buyer (trucker) registrations during 1933 amounted to 8877 or 1697 individual registrations.

Carlot equivalents for the year aggregated 6798 carloads, or sufficient to fill a train extending 55 miles.

Growers loads in 1933 amounted to 112,430.

Truckers come to the Benton Harbor Fruit Market to buy from Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Kansas, Iowa and South Dakota.

The number of packages, estimated receipts and carlot equivalents for the 1933 season follow:

PRODUCT	PACK	RECEIPTS	CARLOT EQUIV.
Strawberries	243,267	\$245,719.87	476.85
Black Raspberries	153,407	170,281.88	247.42
Red Raspberries	115,253	157,896.61	160.07
Dewberries	49,968	71,454.24	96.07
Blackberries	7,175	9,461.00	13.79
Blueberries	7,738	18,164.80	14.88
Gooseberries	2,763	5,415.48	5.31
Cherries (sour)	61,130	59,907.40	99.57
Cherries (sweet)	20,795	30,984.55	33.27
Currants	10,776	13,901.04	20.72
Cantaloupes	255,773	149,731.43	639.46
Apples	579,686	430,706.70	1,123.42
Peaches	36,550	65,424.50	91.37
Pears (12 qts. & bu.)	82,561	84,212.22	206.40
Plums (bu. & $\frac{1}{2}$ bu.)	75,223	62,925.81	126.20
Grapes (4 quarts)	1,169,677	133,709.62	284.48
Grapes (12 quarts)	2,131,887	390,135.32	1,501.32
Quinces	2,575	3,450.50	6.44
Tomatoes	733,033	367,249.53	1,047.19
(4 qts., 12 qts. & bu. also in 4, 6 & 8 basket crates)			
Lima Beans, in pod	54,307	21,016.81	77.50
Lima Beans, shelled	2,418	4,134.78	3.49
String Beans (12 qts. & bu.)	24,153	8,418.93	36.03
Cucumbers	57,884	21,069.81	96.47
Peppers (12 qt. & bu.)	13,563	5,357.39	19.38
Potatoes (bu. & 100 lbs.)	23,108	34,939.30	59.87
Onions (10 & 50 lb. sacks)	31,169	18,888.41	49.42
Celery	183,166	34,068.88	203.52
Eggplant	3,385	1,455.55	8.46
Miscellaneous	38,378	13,951.40	58.26
TOTALS	6,073,282	\$2,633,673.12	6,797.73

HOW THE MARKET OPERATES

The Benton Harbor Fruit Market is laid out in parallel lanes, each lane being situated next to a "through alley" lane. On both sides of the trading area are rows of loading stalls, many of which are rented by season buyers at \$50 a season. Other stalls are rented to day-buyers who pay \$1 a day to load a truck, other subsequent loads in the same day being paid for at 50 cents each. The day-buyer then has the use of a stall on one of the loading platforms.

Growers, on entering through either of the two gates at the East end of the Market, pay 10 cents and are assigned to one of the lanes. Buyers bid on the loads and when a price is reached that is satisfactory to the grower, he is given a sales slip by the buyer and advised on which stall to unload his produce. The grower then drives down one of the "Through alley" lanes to the far end of the market and swings back on the outside of the trading area to the stall shown on his sales slip. Employees of the buyer then check over the number of packages as they assist the grower to unload. These employees also pay the grower at the price shown on the sales slip.

In the event that the grower is dissatisfied with offers for his produce he has the privilege of returning through the space used for unloading and going down the lanes until he sells.

The Market has 190 stalls (each 10' x 14') and several spaces out in the open where some buyers prefer to load their trucks.

Differences between growers and buyers, when they pertain to market operation, are decided by members of the Market Master's force, and when they pertain to quality of fruit are settled by representatives of the State Department of Agriculture which maintains an office on the market and employs inspectors to examine produce brought on the market by growers.

Every buyer on the lot wears a badge or ticket showing the number of the stall assigned him. Season buyers, those who pay \$50 a year for a stall, are given badges. Day-buyers are given a ticket which slips over a coat or shirt button.

Buyers who do not feel qualified to judge fruit themselves can purchase as many loads as their needs demand through season buyers on the lot who charge a nominal brokerage fee for their part in the transaction.

Strict regulations forbid the purchase of fruit and vegetables for resale being made in any section of Benton Harbor except the Fruit Market.

OUT-OF-STATE CROPS SOLD ON B. H. MARKET

Frequently truckers bring on the market the products of other agricultural sections. Included among these offerings are citrus fruits from Florida, truck crops from Tennessee, Indiana and Illinois. Such loads are termed re-sale loads, unless accompanied by an affidavit that the seller is the grower. If the produce is up the standard of quality required by Michigan and U. S. law, the load is permitted to come on the market upon payment of \$1. Growers, regardless of the location of their homes, however, pay only 10 cents for the privilege of selling their own crops on the market. Many truckers find it profitable to bring quality offerings from other sections to be sold on the Benton Harbor Fruit Market, and take back with them produce purchased here. This practice affords a pay load both ways.

TRANSPORTATION FACILITIES

Since Benton Harbor is located on Lake Michigan there are facilities for shipment by water. The city also is on the main line of the Pere Marquette Railway. A short branch line connects Benton Harbor with the main line of the Michigan Central Railway. The Michigan division of the Big Four terminates at Benton Harbor. Thus produce bought at Benton Harbor may be shipped by any of the three railways or by water.

Trucking, however, is the most popular mode of transportation for fruits and vegetables. Several fruit hauling companies have headquarters in the city. They are registered with the Michigan Public Utilities Commission and must meet requirements as to equipment, load insurance, etc. Loads are accepted to practically any point designated by the consignor.

DISTRIBUTION

The shipping radius from the Benton Harbor Fruit Market, which is covered almost daily during the harvest season, extends in a 600-mile circle. The bulk of the produce, however, is distributed within 350 miles of the city. There are exceptions----North Carolina truckers come for onions, Florida sends for grapes, Georgia cities are regular customers for grapes and apples, and cities in Nebraska, Kansas, North and South Dakota have been consumers of products trucked from the Benton Harbor Fruit Market.

The extensive use of the truck has permitted distribution to many points never before supplied from Southwestern Michigan, reflecting favorably on the return to the grower through his being able to keep products away from large glutted consuming centers. Wider distribution, frequently into communities too small to absorb carlot shipments has tended to aid both grower and buyer.

THE MARKET BOARD

The governing body operating the market is composed of five of the city's business men, whose only interest in the market is that it be operated in justice to the grower and the buyer. Members are appointed for five years by the Mayor, with one retiring each year and being replaced by another for a five year term.

QUALITY

Growers using the Benton Harbor Fruit Market, perhaps more than producers in many other fruit and vegetable areas, are convinced that a quality pack is the only paying policy. The record of several growers who have attained wide reputation on certain commodities bears this out. In the area which supplies the Market are growers of prominence whose insistence on quality has built for them a demand which spells financial independence. Among their numbers are growers of strawberries, cherries, asparagus, peaches, apples, pears, tomatoes, cantaloupes and many other products.

INSPECTION

The Michigan Department of Agriculture maintains an inspection staff on the Benton Harbor market, whose duty it is to see that fruit and vegetables brought on the lot for sale are up to grade. While the policy generally has been one of education, convictions follow in a few of the instances when violators are flagrant offenders.

BLOSSOM TIME

Thousands of persons are attracted to Berrien County, Michigan, early in May each year by the annual Blossom Festival, which in the past has been advertised from coast to coast.

The profusion and variety of blossoms offer a spectacle never to be forgotten by tourists. The many hills offer vantage points from which miles of peach, apple, cherry and plum blossoms can be viewed. Their pink and white tones blend with the vibrant green of spring.

Cities throughout Michigan hold "Queen" selections shortly before the Festival each year and the winner is picked at Benton Harbor through a grand elimination contest. She is the "Blossom Queen" and is selected by an impartial committee of nationally-known persons. To the "Blossom Queen" goes the honor of presiding over the Festival and also of riding in regal splendor on the Queen's float in the great Blossom Parade.

Blossom Week is brought to a climax on Saturday each year with a gigantic parade, similar in many respects to the Mardi Gras parades of New Orleans. Floats depicting the fruit industry, the rich history of the section, and the beauty of the blossoms are mingled each year with nearly two score bands, some from the largest universities in the midwest.

At tremendous cost to the Market Board, the County Board of Supervisors, and to both Benton Harbor and St. Joseph, the annual Festival proves a thankless task to those responsible for its arrangement but it places before the public, as nothing else can, the value and importance of Berrien County, one of the most important agricultural counties in the nation, as a producer of quality fruit and vegetables.