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U. S. Department of Agriculture

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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Saturday, April 10, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "NEWS NOTES FROM WASHINGTON." Information from the Office of Information, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

More news from Department of Agriculture laboratories has arrived today in our weekly Washington letter -- news about new baskets that may bring tree-ripened peaches with their fine flavor to market, and news about research on the watermelon, and -- but let me read the news just as our correspondent reports it in her letter.

"One of these days," she writes -- "one of these days not so far away, let's hope, we'll be able to go to market and buy tree-ripened peaches, even though these peaches have been shipped quite a distance. At least that is what E. D. Mallison, fruit marketing specialist of the Bureau of Plant Industry, has been working toward in designing a new ventilated basket for shipping peaches. This new basket allows the fruit to be refrigerated more quickly so peaches that are riper (or more mature) may be packed and shipped. The basket is slatted or spaced for ventilation. It has a crown-shaped lid, also of open construction, which allows the air to pass through. Instead of a solid cushion between the lid and the fruit, it has a ring-type ventilated pad with a circular hole in the center. A slotted paper liner completes the outfit.

"Mr. Mallison ran a series of temperature tests at Fort Valley, Georgia, to try out the new ventilated basket. He found that peaches packed in this new way cooled off 3 times faster than those packed in the old-style, unven-tilated basket with the standard pad. The new container also had other field tests last year. And in all these tests, the fruit cooled more quickly than in usual containers. Also in long-distance shipping, the slatted sides, open crown, cover and ring pad and perforated lining did not bruise the fruit, even at the top, anymore than the basket generally used.

"Of course, you know that precooling itself, now widely used in the commercial peach orchards of the South, is a comparatively recent process by which fresh fruits and vegetables are chilling immediately after loading into the refrigerator car. It was the first step in preserving ripe fruit for shipment. And this new basket favors even more rapid and better results from precooling. Before the days of precooling, peaches had to be harvested while they were still hard so that they would remain firm in transit. Naturally some of the flavor was sacrificed for appearance. But proper packing plus precooling allows peaches to keep both their flavor and their looks.

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"So much for peach news. Now a little news about watermelons. Department of Agriculture scientists at the vegetable-breeding laboratory in Charleston, South Carolina, are hoping to develop a watermelon to fit the home ice-box. Great huge watermelons are picturesque fruits but are inconvenient in most homes because they are too big to go into the refrigerator for chilling. In fact, a melon is too large if the family cannot eat it up at a single slicing. And it is too large, if they have to cut it up to get it into the refrigerator. A melon cut before chilling, you see, loses quality.

"Smaller size is not the only quality both growers and consumers want in watermelons. They also want a tough but not thick rind for protection in shipping. And they want a melon that is resistant to disease. And, of course, they want delicious flavor. The scientists working on melon-breeding say that seed of melons from Asia and Africa may contribute some of these qualities, but for flavor no melons on earth are better than the best of American varieties.

"Now here's some news for American salad-eaters which came recently to the Bureau of Agricultural Economics from Milan, Italy. The news is that Italy appears to be confronted with a serious olive-oil shortage. Both Italy and other Mediterranean countries had a very small olive crop last year. As olive oil is the chief fat consumed in Italy, a number of measures have been taken there to offset the shortage. The principal one is an export tax of 3 dollars and 60 cents per 100 pounds of olive oil. Wholesale and retail prices have also been fixed. The present situation in Italy, and especially the new export tax, is likely to affect this season's supply of edible olive oil in the United States.

"Italy, as you may know, is the world's largest exporter of refined olive oil. Average exports during the 4 years ending with 1935 amounted to 23 thousand short tons of edible and 8 thousand tons of inedible oil annually. The United States happens to be by far the most important single export outlet. Other important purchasers are Argentina, Germany, Brazil, Canada, and Great Britain.

"The last bit of news I have to tell you is an insect story -- a true story, just told me by the entomologists, which almost convinced me that there's no justice in this world. It is about lazy insects living at the expense of industrious ones. Entomologists studying grain pests in Kansas last summer found beetles, which they say were adults of the false wireworm, robbing small red ants of their store of seeds. These beetles gathered in large numbers on the little hills of the mound-building harvester ant and ate the seeds that the ants dropped here and there. Occasionally several beetles set on a home-going ant. The ant promptly dropped her load of seeds and defended herself by biting the beetles' legs. Though the beetles stole part of the ants' winter food supply, the entomologists say that the ant colony did not appear to be much disturbed by the thieves camping on the doorstep, so to speak."

That's all of the news from the Department of Agriculture today. More next Saturday.

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