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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

FRIDAY, MAY 13, 1938.

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SUBJECT: "TIPS FOR FRIDAY FOOD SHOPPERS." Information from the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, United States Department of Agriculture and the Consumers' Counsel, Agricultural Adjustment Administration.

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Friday is go-to-market day for many listeners -- the day they lay in food supplies for the week-end. Just in time for Friday shoppers, along comes our fortnightly news of trends in prices and supplies of seasonal foods.

You can probably guess which food has first mention this month. Strawberries, of course. May is strawberry month. Berry prices hit bottom in late May. The parade of berries to market reaches its peak this month as supplies come in from practically every strawberry-producing State at some time during the month. North Carolina, Arkansas and Tennessee are the major sources of supply during the first half of the month. Unless the freeze damage of early April proves serious, strawberries are expected to be more plentiful than a year ago. Strawberry season ends in early July.

This is the month, too, when cherries, peaches, plums, watermelons, honeydew and honeyball melons and cantaloups begin to move to market. Fruit prices usually are relatively high until volume shipments begin in June. Here's the way the seasons run for the fruits just mentioned. The cherry season is from May to July with June as the month when shipments reach their peak -- and prices are usually lowest. For peaches, the season is longer -- from May to September with July as the peak. The plum season lasts from May to October with the peak month in September. Cantaloups are on the market from April to October with the peak in August. Watermelons are for sale from May to September. Their big month is July. As for honeydew and honeyball melons, you can have them from May to November, but they are most plentiful in July.

Other foods that hit their season's peak in May are onions, rhubarb and pineapple. But the lowest onion prices do not come until October when the harvest of the late-crop onions is at its height. Most of the May onions come from Texas. The current Bermuda or new-onion crop in Texas is about as large as last year.

Many more new potatoes will be on the market this month, which will probably more than offset the sharp reduction in old-potato shipments which usually occurs as the old-potato season nears its finish. As for the price of new potatoes, that will go down as usual from now until mid-summer. Old potatoes will probably remain at about their present price. The 1938 crop of new potatoes will most likely be smaller than last year but prices will continue under their 1937 level.

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Now a little good news for salad-eaters: The predictions are that we'll have more lettuce at much cheaper prices during this month. And the heads will probably be larger and better in quality. The recent high lettuce prices were the result of a slow California crop along with an early ending of the Arizona season--all of which meant a short supply. Much more lettuce usually comes on the market in May and lettuce hits the season's peak in June and July. The California crop, which is the principal source of supply during the remainder of the spring, is about a fifth larger than a year ago. California lettuce growers plan not to sell the lower grades of small heads of lettuce if the volume of shipment at any time causes prices to drop much.

But you'll have fewer cucumbers this month than average. Cucumber production in States shipping primarily in May probably will be a third less than last year. While the Florida crop of cucumbers will be larger than in 1937, the whole Texas crop was ruined by a cold wave.

But you can count on plenty of tomatoes for your salads this month. Florida and Texas are the States that send most of the tomatoes to market in May. The Florida crop is more than double last year's crop. Total production of tomatoes in the May-shipping States is expected to be about 50 percent larger than last year.

Now for some asparagus news. In May asparagus supplies come to market from Delaware, New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland. The California shipping season ends early this month.

What about the vegetables that will be going into cans this season? The prospect is for fewer canned supplies than last year -- at least fewer acres planted to canning crops than were planted last year at this time. The sharpest decreases will come in sweet corn and tomatoes. But there are also fewer green peas planted for canning. However, slightly more acres are given over to snap beans for canning. On the first of April stocks of canned vegetables on hand were considerably larger than a year ago, especially stocks of canned corn and snap beans.

That concludes the food shopping news for today. But I think I have just time to answer one question. A listener asks where she can get the latest information on the proper canning of her garden fruits and vegetables. In reply, I am sending her a copy of Farmers' Bulletin No. 1762 called "Home Canning of Fruits, Vegetables and Meats." As long as the supply lasts, copies of this bulletin are free from the Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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