

AGRICULTURAL EXPERIMENT STATION
Oregon State College
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Corvallis

Circular of Information No. 338

March 1944

HARVEST LABOR EFFICIENCY ON STRAWBERRIES IN OREGON*

Strawberries in Oregon require a large amount of seasonal labor for harvest during May and June. Data on labor requirements per average harvested acre indicate that approximately 386 hours of labor are required for picking strawberries (not including other harvest operations such as supervision, weighing, checking, hauling fruit, and hauling pickers), as a general average. Some fields require more, some less.

The shortage of men owing to the war has required the assistance of older people and youth for harvesting many crops in Oregon, including such crops as small fruits, particularly. The recruitment and placement of thousands of such workers has presented a major problem, involving estimates of the number needed for which information on relative efficiency has been inadequate. The data that follow should assist materially in meeting harvest labor problems on strawberries in 1944. It is planned to collect more complete data during the harvest season to supplement the information contained in this preliminary release.

Practically all of the commercial acreage of strawberries in Oregon is in the Willamette Valley. For detailed acreage and production statistics by counties in Oregon see Oregon State College Extension Circular 431.

During the summer of 1943, records were obtained from 72 young persons harvesting strawberries, working in platoons in Marion County. These records provided data on quantities picked per day by these young people of different ages. These records together with information from the other studies of adult workers referred to in the footnotes on pages 1 and 3 were analyzed and the results are presented in Table 1 and in Figure 1.

* A preliminary release prepared by D. Curtis Mumford, Head, and John H. Blosser, Research Assistant, Department of Farm Management, Division of Agricultural Economics, Agricultural Experiment Station; and L. R. Breithaupt, Project Leader, Agricultural Economics Section, Extension Service. Special acknowledgment is due the Marion County Emergency Farm Labor Service, Extension Service and United States Employment Service, cooperating. Acknowledgment is also made for helpful basic material supplied by the Farm Security Administration and the Bureau of Agricultural Economics, U. S. D. A. through Mr. Alvin Hobart and Mr. S. J. Janow.

Table 1 presents the average amount picked by each age group included in the study, and the relative efficiency for each age group in percentage of the group aged 18 to 55 years. The amount of work done per day by workers between the ages of 18 and 55 has been taken as 100 percent since these ages are normally considered as adult labor. The relative efficiency of each group is, therefore, shown as a percentage of the work done by adults. For example, the data indicate that youth under 13 on the average picked slightly more than 60 percent as much as was picked by adults from 18 to 55 years of age.

This study did not reveal the number of days per season nor the number of hours per day for the younger workers. On an hour basis, however, the youth groups probably were relatively more efficient than on the day basis, as youth work less time per day, according to another study on "Harvest Labor Efficiency on Cane Fruits in Oregon," Station Circular of Information 337.

In that study it was noted that, on the average, the older groups had more experience and the data collected indicated that pickers with one or more years of experience will generally harvest 10 to 20 percent more cane fruit per day than pickers of the same age without experience. Other data on the efficiency of youth in picking snap beans indicate that a six-hour day is better than seven or eight hours for young workers. The total quantity picked per day was as great with the groups working six hours as it was with the groups working seven or eight hours.