

Israel's Agricultural Exports A Large Success

By Judy Carr

From Israel's Ben Gurion airport, mighty Boeing jets roar out to destinations in America, Britain, W. Europe and Scandinavia -- and even Teheran carrying fruit, vegetables and flowers, newly picked from the fields of Israel, not 24 hours old and carefully and attractively packaged. Agrexco is Israel's agricultural export company, with a near monopoly of export of fresh agricultural produce, except citrus which is handled by the Citrus Marketing Board. Agrexco is a giant operation, controlling every step from the field to the packing house, from the packing house to the airport, and from there to Agrexco's twelve branches in various countries. Agrexco then completes the circle with distribution of the produce to wholesalers.

So it comes about that New Yorkers are buying Israeli roses and gladioli. Avocado, peppers, mangoes, grapes, persimmons and many other types of produce from Israel are eaten all over Britain and Europe, and even in Scandinavia. This year flights will carry fruit, vegetables and flowers to Malmo in Sweden to be sold in Sweden, Norway and Finland.

The whole Agrexco network is controlled by a giant computer in every one of the twelve branches, hooked up by telephone to the huge computer in Tel Aviv. This is so that orders can be sent out accurately: a wholesaler in Germany ordering 10 tons of avocados expects just that -- not a different amount.

Some of Agrexco's produce is sent by refrigerated ship to Marseilles and from there to European markets. Three refrigerated ships sail weekly at the peak of the season from November to March.

Agrexco specialists are continually experimenting with exports of new crops. Last year the big hit was the Chinese lettuce, a salad leaf that remains fresh in the refrigerator after cutting. This year radishes and cauliflowers, new crops here in Israel, are to be tried out. The now accepted export crops like mangoes and persimmons were once trial runs. Even the avocado was once only an experimental export crop. Now, after intensive sales pro-

motion, it is Agrexco's best - seller with sales of nearly 20,000 tons this season.

One reason for the success of Israel's agricultural exports is that they are winter crops, when there is less produce in European markets. However, Moshe Shavit, Agrexco's dynamic general manager warns, "Don't imagine that Israeli produce has no competitors. It does not go to an empty market. Israel sells peppers -- so does South Africa, southern Italy and even Bulgaria and Hungary."

Agrexco also handles flowers of which Israel will export around 750 million this season. The main flowers are roses, carnations and gladioli, but new flowers from Israel are coming into fashion, notably the Statice, a blue flower that is very popular in Europe. Israeli flowers are even opening up a promising market in America and are handled at a special Agrexco terminal at Kennedy airport.

Other agricultural produce is exported by Agrexco in lesser amounts, including goose liver, which goes to be processed into pate de foie gras in France, and honey.

Little Israel can compete in the markets of the world with her agricultural produce -- not by price, for her goods are not the cheapest, but by quality, where Agrexco is one of the best. Moshe Shavit proudly boasts that the quality of Israeli fruit, vegetables and flowers is competitive with that of the produce of any other nation.

This coming season Agrexco will earn \$185 million dollars from the sale of 250,000 tons of produce. Last year the figures were \$134 million and 195,000 tons. Six planes, five of them jumbos, will fly out exports from Ben Gurion airport in the coming season. They will fly to Cologne, Munich, Amsterdam, Paris, Marseilles, Zurich, Malmo, Rome, London and New York. Israeli agriculture, it may be said with truth, goes a long way.

NEW YORK CITY -- Eugene Gold, Brooklyn District Attorney, has been named as this year's chairman for the 1979 Salute to Israel Parade, which will take place on Sunday, June 3rd.

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