

# Canadian Mennonites and the Japanese Berry Farmers in British Columbia after the Evacuation of 1942

T.D. Regehr, *University of Saskatchewan*

The Japanese Canadians who were forcibly evacuated from their Pacific Coast communities during World War II left behind many prosperous farms, and much other valuable property. The subsequent administration and disposal of this property, and the inadequate compensation received by the Japanese, has been critically discussed and reviewed repeatedly.<sup>1</sup> There were, however, other farmers who filled the economic vacuum created when the Japanese were evacuated. Among those who availed themselves of the opportunity to grow crops for markets formerly served by the Japanese there were a disproportionate number of Mennonites who became particularly active in the growing of raspberries and strawberries. The Japanese had dominated the berry industry before their evacuation.

The income earned by British Columbia strawberry and raspberry farmers in 1941 only comprised about 2.6% of gross farm revenues in the province. Berry growing was, however, largely restricted to the lower Fraser Valley where it accounted for a little more than 5.3% of gross farm revenue.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1**  
**Berry Farming and British Columbia Gross Farm Revenue, 1941**

Type	Province	Lower Fraser Valley
Gross Farm Revenue	33,622,142	13,294,050
Value of Strawberries	642,190	527,443
Value of Raspberries	229,294	182,110 <sup>3</sup>

Statistically the importance of berry farming in British Columbia was not great. Agricultural historians George Britnell and Vernon Fowke have noted that, "In economic terms the combined prewar production of all such fruits [tender tree fruits and berries] was rather less than apples alone."<sup>4</sup>

Wartime developments in the berry industry are, however, of considerable interest in a study of the consequences of the Japanese evacuation. The Japanese had achieved a dominant position in that sector of the farming community. It is more difficult to study the impact of the evacuation in industries, such as fishing, dairying, poultry, greenhouse and nursery farming, where the Japanese comprised only a minority of the operators. The berry industry offers an insight into the way others, in this case specifically Mennonites, filled the economic vacuum created by the Japanese evacuation.

Japanese farmers had achieved their dominant position in the berry growing industry of British Columbia through much hard manual labour. Berry farming was highly labour intensive, and carried on mainly on small farms, many of which were less than ten acres in size. Large capital investments were not required, and there were almost immediate returns for strawberry growers. Raspberry growers usually had to wait two or three years before newly planted canes produced significant crops, but carefully tended plants produced well, even on marginal land, and became a favorite with Japanese farmers who had little capital but were willing to do much hard manual labour.

The extent to which Japanese farmers had come to dominate the berry industry in British Columbia in the depression of the 1930s was indicated by one British Columbia government inspectors who estimated that in 1934 Japanese farmers owned sixty-three per cent of the cultivated farm land in the Fraser Valley, and produced eighty-five per cent of the raspberries and strawberries grown in the valley.<sup>5</sup> Another government report, written in 1942 just before the forced evacuation, indicated that the Japanese produced eighty-three per cent of the strawberries and forty-seven per cent of the raspberries grown anywhere in the province.<sup>6</sup> Japanese farmers, in short, had achieved a dominant position in British Columbia's berry industry.

The sudden removal of the Japanese created a large, and in the case of the berry industry an obvious, economic vacuum. Government officials and businessmen who handled, processed and marketed the berry crops all wanted that vacuum to be filled as quickly as possible. Some of those officials were, however, disappointed when they discovered who was moving in to fill the economic vacuum in the berry industry. Veterans Affairs administrators, who thought the Japanese farms should be held for returning veterans, noted angrily that many of the new farmers taking over former Japanese berry farms were "Mennonites of fairly recent vintage from the prairies."<sup>7</sup>

The Mennonites were pacifists who refused to fight in the war. The number who took over former Japanese farms in 1942 and 1943 was not as large as was suggested by Veterans Affairs officials, but within five years of the evacuation of the Japanese, Mennonite berry farmers dominated the berry industry as effectively

as the Japanese had before 1942. The process whereby that happened was, however, complex and controversial.

The physical removal of the Japanese was entrusted to the federally organized British Columbia Security Commission. Japanese property, including farms and lands, were entrusted to the Custodian of Enemy Property. Initially the Japanese were told that they were only being evacuated for the duration of the war, and would be allowed to return and reclaim their farms after the war. These assurances encouraged Japanese farmers to make interim arrangements whereby their property would be looked after while they were away. The preferred arrangement was for the Japanese farmer facing evacuation to negotiate a lease of his farm, with an experienced white farmer.<sup>8</sup>

J. B. Shimek, the General Manager of the Pacific Co-operative Union<sup>9</sup> which handled and marketed most of the berries grown by the Japanese farmers, provided leadership in drawing up and negotiating appropriate leases for the Japanese farms. Shimek was not himself Japanese, but he was deeply concerned about the ongoing success of the Japanese farms and of the Co-op which handled, processed and marketed their crops. The leasing arrangements he negotiated in 1942 covered more than half of all Japanese berry farms in the Fraser Valley and had several unique features.<sup>10</sup>

The Pacific Co-operative Union, like many other producer co-operatives, had retained a small sum for every pound of produce handled, and thus built up a sizable capital fund to finance expansion and the construction of new facilities. Early in 1942 Shimek and his directors agreed to use this capital fund to finance the leasing and operating arrangements between Japanese berry farm owners and white lessees. Model forms of leases, requiring no initial capital outlay by the lessee, were prepared. The Pacific Co-operative Union advanced or paid the Japanese owner the amount due under his lease, and also advanced funds to the lessee to pay for his operating costs. In return, the lessee was obliged to ship all the berries grown on the assisted and leased farm to the Pacific Co-operative Union. All funds advanced to pay leasing and operating costs were to be deducted from payments due to the lessee for produce delivered.

Two hundred and fifteen separate leases of this kind were negotiated. Many covered more than one small Japanese farm. Veterans Affairs officials reported that more than half of the roughly 1,000 Japanese berry farms in the lower Fraser Valley were leased in this way in 1942. The remaining Japanese berry farms were either sold or leased privately by their Japanese owners, or simply abandoned when the owners were forcibly evacuated. Thirty-seven of the two hundred and fifteen white farmers who leased Japanese berry farms in 1942 had ethnic "Mennonite" names.<sup>11</sup> This was not the majority indicated by Veterans Affairs officials, but the Mennonite participation in the leasing of Japanese farms was disproportionate to their numbers in the British Columbia population generally. The census of 1941 indicates that there were only 5,119 Mennonites in British Columbia that year, thus comprising approximately 1/160th of the provincial population. Yet they signed one sixth of all the Japanese farm leases in 1942.

There were several reasons for this disproportionate participation by Mennonite farmers. Small numbers of Mennonites had begun to settle in the Fraser Valley in the late 1920s when a large tract of land was purchased at Yarrow. Throughout the 1930s the community had waged such a desperate battle simply to survive that local health officials feared their abject poverty would lead to serious health problems.<sup>12</sup> The soil at Yarrow was heavy and poorly drained, resulting in poor yields and frequently crop failures. The situation improved somewhat in the mid-1930s, thanks to the development of a new strain of raspberry, the Newburgh variety, which produced well on Yarrow soil.<sup>13</sup>

The grinding poverty of the Mennonite farmers at Yarrow did not entirely stop the flow of more Mennonite migrants from the prairies to British Columbia. The prairie Mennonites faced even more serious economic problems in the 1930s, which became desperate after the outbreak of war. More than twenty thousand had migrated to Canada from the Soviet Union in the 1920s. Most had incurred heavy transportation debts, and had then greatly increased their indebtedness by acquiring heavily mortgaged prairie grain farms at the inflated land prices prevailing in the late 1920s. These farmers had great difficulty dealing with drought and low grain prices in the 1930s. When war broke out many hoped and expected that wheat prices would rise, but those hopes were dashed by the Canadian wheat crisis of 1941.<sup>14</sup> The floor or minimum wheat prices established by the government did not provide reasonable returns on heavily indebted farms. Military service offered an alternative for many, but it was not alternative service which even heavily indebted Mennonite farmers favoured. Instead, they sought new farming opportunities.

The destitute prairie Mennonites who left their farms in the 1940s usually had large families and a stern work ethic which rivalled that of the Japanese farmers. Highly labour intensive berry farms which could be leased without any immediate capital investment met their needs exceptionally well. It could also be argued that in taking good care of the farms, the lessees were actually doing the Japanese owners a favour. As a result, Mennonites participated in disproportionate numbers in the leasing scheme initiated by the Pacific Co-operative Union.

The 1942 leases, however, proved to be a disastrous failure for all concerned. The most serious problem was created when the Custodian of Enemy Property insisted that all leases must be for one year only. The Custodian believed the lands must be held ready and available for whatever purposes the federal government might choose. The Japanese owners, on the other hand, wanted to lease their farms for the duration of the war.<sup>15</sup> A short term lease offered no encouragement for the lessee to make any long term repairs or improvements, or to replant berries which would only mature two or three years hence. The leases negotiated through the auspices of the Pacific Co-operative Union were therefore for the duration of the war. The Custodian repudiated that provision, insisting that only leases of one year's duration would be approved. The result was both predicatable and unfortunate. The British Columbia Coast Growers Association offered this blunt and harsh criticism of the policy.

A one seasons lease on a berry farm is positively violent and destructive to these farms.

No department in Ottawa or elsewhere could expect these tenants to do the best possible under the circumstances. A meeting of tenants of Japanese farms was held last Wednesday and they decided that unless they get better encouragement than they have had so far they will leave these farms and it doesn't take much imagination on your part or ours to realize that the farms, so left, would naturally be in what we call a dirty condition.<sup>16</sup>

A visiting berry farm expert from Ontario was equally emphatic in his denunciation of the policy of the Custodian. He urged Ontario farmers to increase substantially their berry plantings because the British Columbia berry industry would not be able to supply its traditional markets.

All one has to do is drive the byways and highways where berry patches a year ago were properly cared for and this year they are nothing more or less, in the great majority of cases, than weed patches. Between weeds and disease, there won't be much left. Another very serious item, of course, is re-planting. Berry plants are only good for three real good crops and there is negligible replanting this season, so at the outside, 2 to 3 years and berries will be through.<sup>17</sup>

The inexperience of many of the lessees with berry farming further contributed to the disaster.

No doubt the newcomers from the Prairies thought all they had to do was step on to these Japanese farms, and harvest the crop. However, old Mother Nature dumped alittle too much water down on us, and I think it is safe to say that at least half the crop stayed in the fields as far as strawberries are concerned. All we needed was heat on top of this moisture to bring up a plentiful crop of weeds and native grasses. One would need a periscope to find strawberries on many of these places.<sup>18</sup>

Matters were made even worse when the government decided that the Japanese should not be allowed to return to their British Columbia farms after the war. Instead, the Custodian of Enemy Property was authorized to sell to the Veterans' Land Administration all the Japanese berry farms deemed suitable for the purposes of veterans' resettlement after the war. More than 800 farms were involved, and later evidence indicated that the Custodian sold the farms at roughly twenty two per cent of their market value in the depressed real estate market of 1942.<sup>19</sup> The Custodian held the proceeds of the sale in trust for the former Japanese owners.

The Veterans' Land Administration lacked both the staff and the competence to administer the former Japanese farms. They still insisted that only one-year leases be signed, but were willing to renew expiring 1942 leases for an additional year or until the land was needed by returning veterans. The result was that in 1943 only 581 of the 817 berry farms acquired by Veterans Affairs were covered under a lease of any kind,<sup>20</sup> and almost all the farms suffered from general neglect and serious deterioration.

The badly flawed leasing policy was compounded by serious problems related to the prices paid the producers for berries which were harvested and delivered in 1942. The Canadian Wartime Prices and Trade Board set firm price ceilings on jam and preserves, but not on fresh fruit and berries. Wartime

transportation difficulties, however, made it difficult for the British Columbia producers to get their fresh produce to traditional prairie markets. Competition from earlier maturing American berries also undermined the fresh fruit market of the British Columbia growers and more of their berries had to be processed into jam and preserves. Large quantities of berries, particularly raspberries, were also packed in barrels in an SO<sub>2</sub> solution which decoloured but otherwise preserved the berries which were then exported to Great Britain at government controlled prices.

All the packers and processors faced rigid price ceilings for jam, preserves and SO<sub>2</sub> packed berries. They were therefore unable to pay the producers a sufficiently high price to meet production costs. This led in August of 1942 to a mass protest rally by Fraser Valley growers. A Veterans Affairs official who attended the rally reported that "the situation was painted so black that if it were depression days one would expect the majority of these growers to beat a track to the relief office."<sup>21</sup> Eventually the government decided to offer a two cent per pound subsidy for the 1942 crop, rather than authorize higher prices for jams, preserves, and berries packed in SO<sub>2</sub> for export.<sup>22</sup>

The low 1942 prices left the lessees of Japanese farms in a particularly difficult position. The deductions or payments to be made when the crop was delivered were sometimes insufficient to meet the lessee's obligations to the Pacific Co-operative Union, or at best left him with only a very meager return. Veterans Affairs officials, who had been critical of these particular leases from the start, noted smugly that:

A number of people with whom Shimek has arranged leases are Mennonites of fairly recent vintage from the Prairies. Already some of them are wondering where they are going to get any money out of these crops for themselves.<sup>23</sup>

I believe that when all deductions are made these people will find themselves in debt to the Co-operative. I am also inclined to think that the far-sighted ones see the writing on the wall as, with very little new acreage being set out, the tonnage available for the Co-operative to handle this coming year will become smaller and smaller.<sup>24</sup>

These officials proposed a radical solution. The government should simply release the lessees from all their contractual obligations to the Pacific Co-operative Union. That would probably bankrupt the co-operative, but the fault lay with Shimek who had prepared leases under which the Japanese "have received payment for a crop in advance at a figure equal to what they would have made net if they had handled the crop themselves."<sup>25</sup>

J. B. Shimek responded to this threat by agreeing voluntarily not to hold the lessees to the strict terms of their contracts. The growers were encouraged to deliver their berries to the co-operative, but they were also given assurances that they would be allowed a return sufficient to make it possible for them to continue operations. By this means Shimek barely saved his co-operative, but it handled only 1/3 as many berries in 1942 as it had the previous year. In 1943 its volume of business fell to only one fifth of the 1942 volume.<sup>26</sup>

Two years of government administration ruined the Japanese berry farms.

One third of the farms were simply abandoned. The remainder were leased, but on terms which gave little incentive to keep the farms in good operating order. Production consequently declined sharply on almost all the former Japanese farms. The lessees were frustrated and angry. Those determined to remain in the berry industry began to look for opportunities to acquire their own farms and thus escape the malevolent influence of the Veterans Land Administration. That was certainly the preferred option of most Mennonite berry farmers after their 1942 experiences on leased farms. New raspberry farms were developed on hitherto unoccupied or under-utilized land in the Yarrow area.

Blown out and destitute prairie Mennonites had also begun to move onto rough, logged over land near Abbotsford in the 1930s, and that movement accelerated rapidly after the evacuation of the Japanese berry farmers. Much labour was required to clear the land of huge stumps and the slash and deadwood left by the logging companies, but the soil at Abbotsford was well suited to the growing of strawberries. Many of the early fields were literally planted between or amongst the stumps, but increased wartime demand and sharply reduced production on the former Japanese berry farms provided profitable markets for these strawberries.

J. B. Shimek of the Pacific Co-operative Union had watched these early Mennonite efforts to grow strawberries and raspberries, and developed cordial relations with the newcomers. He had met as early as 1936 with some of the Mennonite raspberry growers at Yarrow, and encouraged and helped them to establish their own Yarrow Growers' Co-operative. Shimek wanted to address the chronic problem of over production of berries before 1942. He assisted in the establishment of the Yarrow Growers' Co-operative in return for assurances that the Mennonite growers would not sell their produce at prices lower than those agreed upon by a new berry growers marketing agency — the British Columbia Coast Growers Association.

The operations of the new Mennonite Co-op were still very small in 1941, handling only about one percent of the British Columbia berry crop. The Pacific Co-operative Union, by contrast, handled well in excess of half of the 1941 crop,<sup>27</sup> but relations between the two co-operatives were generally cordial. When the Japanese berry farmers were forcibly evacuated in 1942, Shimek devised his leasing scheme in a way which he believed would appeal particularly to Mennonite farmers recently arrived from the prairies. The limited success of those leases made possible the survival of the Pacific Co-operative Union after 1942, but its operations were sharply reduced.

The Yarrow Growers' Co-operative, by contrast, grew even more rapidly than the Pacific Co-operative Union declined after 1942. The Yarrow growers added a consumer co-operative in 1941, and in 1942 they purchased equipment for the packing of berries in SO<sub>2</sub>. The following year they built their own jam factory. The speciality of the Yarrow Growers' Co-operative, however, was the packing of strawberries and raspberries in SO<sub>2</sub> for export to Britain.

The British contracts, and sharp reductions in Canadian berry supplies due to the damage done to the former Japanese farms, led to shortages where there had

previously been substantial berry surpluses. The Wartime Prices and Trade Board responded with a domestic rationing system, together with new price ceilings which applied to fresh berries as well as to those packed for export or used for the manufacture of jam.<sup>28</sup> These new price ceilings were designed to provide producers with a return "approximately 90% above the average for the four years [1938, 1939, 1940 and 1941]."<sup>29</sup> These new price ceilings did not eliminate complaints from British Columbia berry growers,<sup>30</sup> but for the Mennonite farmers the year 1943 marked a decisive turning point. They increased their acreages substantially and were able to sell all that they produced at remunerative prices. A correspondent for a denominational newspaper reported late in 1943:

The crops were good again this year, and with the exceptionally high prices many have not only been able to repay all their debts, but also to expand substantially their farms and businesses. Wages were also very good. People could acquire things that previously had been impossible.<sup>31</sup>

The *Vancouver Sun* carried a major article on the Mennonites of the Fraser Valley late in 1943, noting particularly the dramatic improvement in their economic circumstances. It described the move of the Henry B. Falk family into their new home.

Until Tuesday the family had shared the long chicken house with the chickens, but through thrift and careful cultivation, have now been able to build their own home. With seven cattle and 10 acres of land, Falk says, 'we can make our own living'.<sup>32</sup>

Nothing demonstrated Mennonite success in the lower Fraser Valley more dramatically than the phenomenal growth of the Yarrow Growers' Co-operative. In 1940 the Yarrow growers had processed and shipped only 146 tons of raspberries, but by 1948 they had more than 6,000 tons available.<sup>33</sup> They handled only 1 per cent of the total raspberry and strawberry crop in the valley in 1941, but five years later they processed and marketed more than fifty per cent of the crop.<sup>34</sup>

These statistics demonstrate several things about the berry industry in the lower mainland of British Columbia in the 1940s. The first and most obvious fact is a great overall increase in the production of both strawberries and raspberries, but particularly of raspberries. The total value of strawberries grown in the Fraser Valley fell sharply after the evacuation of the Japanese farmers, and did again reach pre-evacuation levels until 1945. Raspberries were a much less significant crop for the Japanese farmers, but the total value of all raspberries grown in the lower mainland increased dramatically in the 1940s. A second conclusion to be drawn from these statistics is the fact that the industry was highly volatile. There were sharp fluctuations in the amount of produce sold fresh, and that packed or used in the manufacture of jam. Much of that volatility, and one of the main reasons for the rapid overall expansion of the industry, was due to the various wartime and immediate post-war contracts with the British government for berries packed in SO<sub>2</sub>. A third fact demonstrated by the statistics is that the relative importance of strawberries, when compared with that of raspberries, declined somewhat.

The evacuation of the Japanese berry farmers in 1942 was only one of many factors influencing the berry industry in British Columbia, as were the disproport-



**Table 2.**  
**Strawberry Production in the Lower Mainland of B.C.<sup>35</sup>**

Year	Packages		Manufactured		Total Value
	Crates	Value	Pounds	Value	
1940	237,185	288,511	6,392,936	335,471	623,982
1941	247,500	350,400	8,190,888	470,976	821,376
1942	62,761	158,028	5,373,008	429,841	587,869
1943	62,500	306,250	1,629,556	252,581	558,831
1944	63,000	204,750	2,608,923	384,816	589,566
1945	33,000	115,500	5,487,834	1,371,959	1,487,459
1946	90,000	450,000	4,773,683	852,580	1,302,580
1947	80,000	360,000	9,525,836	1,571,763	1,931,763
1948	75,000	318,750	16,197,927	2,753,648	3,072,398
1949	175,000	656,250	10,037,898	1,355,116	2,011,366
1950	125,000	468,750	12,522,188	2,754,881	3,223,631
1951	186,718	793,552	5,584,662	1,116,932	1,910,484
1952	75,000	307,500	13,026,985	1,628,373	1,935,873
1953	60,000	225,000	15,092,106	2,188,355	2,413,355

**Table 3.**  
**Raspberry Production in the Lower Mainland of B.C.<sup>36</sup>**

Year	Packages		Manufactured		Total Value
	Crates	Value	Pounds	Value	
1940	51,357	77,036	2,730,059	163,804	240,840
1941	44,800	8,400	2,116,280	158,721	236,621
1942	15,485	44,907	3,119,143	327,510	372,417
1943	34,690	176,919	4,112,985	596,383	673,302
1944	30,000	105,000	5,760,555	835,208	940,208
1945	30,000	106,500	7,943,950	1,151,873	1,258,373
1946	45,000	180,000	10,665,428	1,633,944	1,813,944
1947	55,400	235,450	16,427,361	2,505,173	2,740,623
1948	65,000	243,750	12,740,241	1,401,427	1,645,177
1949	110,000	374,000	6,515,337	651,534	1,025,634
1950	90,000	315,000	8,138,895	1,058,056	1,373,056
1951	295,727	1,108,976	3,903,395	585,509	1,694,485
1952	100,000	375,000	7,100,552	887,569	1,262,569
1953	50,000	175,000	13,141,500	1,971,225	2,146,225

tionate numbers of Mennonites who leased the Japanese farms in 1942 and 1943, and subsequently established themselves on their own berry farms. If the pessimistic revelations of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee are to be believed, government administration and management of the Japanese farms resulted in the destruction of at least half of them, and seriously reduced production levels on the others.<sup>37</sup> The increased production of strawberries and raspberries came mainly from newly developed farms owned by Mennonites. The leases of 1942 and 1943 nevertheless gave many destitute prairie Mennonites the opportunity to establish themselves in the berry business. The removal of the Japanese farmers, and British wartime contracts, created the economic opportunities which prairie Mennonites, in disproportionate numbers, exploited in the 1940s. These developments in the berry industry, moreover, were similar to those in the vegetable gardening, dairy and poultry industries, although neither the Japanese before 1942 nor the Mennonites after that date ever achieved as clear a dominance in those industries as they did in the berry industry.

Mennonite acquisitions of Fraser Valley farms did not go unnoticed. The local press and some local politicians became highly critical of these newcomers who, for reasons of conscience, refused to serve in the armed forces but were reaping the economic benefits of the war. Several Fraser Valley municipalities passed resolutions urging provincial and federal governments to prohibit all land sales and leases to Mennonites and to disenfranchise them for the duration of the war.<sup>38</sup> A local paper even argued that "between Japanese and Mennonite settlers, the Jap was the lesser evil in building up the community."<sup>39</sup> Little came of these proposals, mainly because they were *ultra vires* of municipal and provincial governments, and the federal government refused to restrict Mennonite property, civil or electoral rights.<sup>40</sup> Exceptionally strong Mennonite participation in the Victory Bond drives after 1943 helped to alleviate local antagonism while also demonstrating their increasing prosperity. In a 1943 bond drive, for example, \$15,000 had been allocated to the overwhelmingly Mennonite community of Yarrow, but \$28,600 were subscribed.<sup>41</sup>

Mennonite dominance in the berry industry of the lower mainland of British Columbia proved to be only of short duration. The Yarrow Growers' Co-operative, and the Mennonite berry growers whose produce the co-operative handled and processed, depended heavily on British contracts for packed berries.<sup>42</sup> The British contracts continued for several years after the war, but were terminated in 1948.<sup>43</sup> The Yarrow Growers' Co-operative was wrecked in the ensuing crisis, and thousands of acres of raspberries and strawberries had to be destroyed as producers struggled, with the help of important short-term government assistance, to bring supplies down to the level of the sharply reduced demand.<sup>44</sup>

The Japanese berry farmers were removed from British Columbia in 1942. Arrangements made for the leasing of the vacated farms were particularly attractive to destitute Mennonites from the prairies. Farming was still the traditional and preferred way of life for Canadian Mennonites in the 1940s. They were prepared to do the hard physical work necessary on a berry farm, but most lacked the necessary capital to get started. Leases requiring no initial capital outlay seemed ideal.

Government administrative bungling, particularly the insistence of the Custodian of Enemy Property and of officials of the Veterans Land Administration that all leases be restricted to one year terms, made leasing less attractive and ruined most of the former Japanese berry farms. It drove many of the Mennonite berry farmers onto marginal land where they established their own farms, and quickly achieved a dominance in the berry industry similar to that held by the Japanese before 1942.

Strawberries and raspberries, whether grown by Japanese or Mennonite farmers, were not of great significance in the national war effort. A review of the history of berry farming in the Fraser Valley is, however, significant and interesting because it shows how one small ethnic group, the Mennonites, effectively replaced the evacuated Japanese in an unstable and comparatively unimportant sector of the Canadian agricultural economy.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Two of the best secondary sources on the subject are Ken Adachi, *The Enemy That Never Was. A History of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart) 1976; and Ann Gomer Sunahara, *The Politics of Racism. The Uprooting of the Japanese Canadians* (Toronto: Lorimar, 1981) p. 101. The most important primary sources documenting the evacuation and subsequent administration of Japanese farm lands are: National Archives of Canada [hereafter NAC], Record Group [hereafter RG] 25, Vol. 3004, *Report of the British Columbia Security Commission*; NAC RG 14 [Records of the House of Commons] Vol. 653, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Commons to accompany the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts*, presented to the House of Commons on Tuesday, 17th June 1947; NAC RG 38 [Records of the Department of Veterans Affairs] Vols. 401-403, File V-8-10; NAC RG 64 [Records of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board] Vol. 986, File 4-13-1, Vol. 1172, File 16-3-2, and Vol 567, File 16-6-11; NAC RG 117 [Records of the Custodian of Enemy Property] Vol. 1, File 2.

<sup>2</sup> These percentages combine the value of both strawberries and raspberries grown in British Columbia. The value of each is given in Table I. The value of all "small fruits" produced in British Columbia in 1941 was \$1,148,230. The lower Fraser Valley (British Columbia Census District # 4) accounted for \$833,061 of that total.

<sup>3</sup> CANADA. *Eighth Census of Canada, 1941*, Census of Agriculture, British Columbia, Tables 30 and 40.

<sup>4</sup> G. E. Britnell and V. C. Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace, 1935-50* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press, 1962) p. 327-8. Britnell and Fowke devote considerable attention to two major agricultural casualties of the war - wheat and apples. Problems of the berry growers were not regarded by administrators of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board as particularly urgent or significant.

<sup>5</sup> Adachi, p. 149. These figures are higher than other estimates of Japanese involvement in farming activities in the lower Fraser Valley. All the sources agree, however, that Japanese growers produced more than half of all berries grown in the valley.

<sup>6</sup> Sunahara, p. 101.

<sup>7</sup> NAC RG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10, I. T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 2 June 1942. See also letters from Barnet to Murchison dated 19 May, 16 July and 9 September 1942.

<sup>8</sup> There were also a small number of Japanese farmers who were able to sell their farms, either before their evacuation or through agents after the evacuation but before the farms were officially taken over by the Custodian of Enemy Property. A very small number were also sold to local farmers by the

Custodian, before the block sale of the farms to the Veterans Land Administration was finalized. These private sales were unusual, and probably did not involve any Mennonite purchasers since they required cash payments that the impoverished Mennonites could not make. The overwhelming majority of the Japanese berry farms, but not all of them, were sold and then leased by the Veterans' Land Administration until they could be assigned to returning veterans.

<sup>9</sup>The leasing scheme was well known to officials of the Department of Veterans Affairs who were skeptical, and of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board which was more supportive. The Pacific Co-operative Union handled and marketed the produce of both white and Japanese farmers, but Japanese farmers dominated its affairs until 1942. General Manager Shimek wanted to safeguard the interests of these farmers and also ensure that the farms and the Co-op would continue in business.

<sup>10</sup>A complete list of the 1942 leases of Japanese farms negotiated by the Pacific Co-operative Union, together with a discussion of the terms of those leases is available in NAC RG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10, I. T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 9 September 1942, and in other letters from Barnet to Murchison which are also available in this file.

<sup>11</sup>It was still possible in the 1940s to identify ethnic "Mennonite" names. These people had migrated to the Canadian prairies in two major waves - the first in the 1870s and the second in the 1920s. Mennonites had distinctive names, and there had not been much integration or assimilation before World War II. The term "Mennonite" has both ethnic and religious connotations, but is used here primarily in the ethnic sense. These were people who would have identified themselves as Mennonites in the national census, but some had not accepted adult baptism and thus become members of a Mennonite church. The surnames of the Mennonite lessees were Banman, Conrad, Elias, Ewert, Friesen, Froese, Harder, Hamm, Harms, Heinrichs, Hildebrandt, Janzen, Klassen, Martens, Mierau, Niessen, Nikkel, Pankratz, Redekopp, Rempel, Retzlaff, Siemens, Teichrob, Thiessen, Toews and Wiebe. The entire list is attached to a memo from I. T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 9 Sept. 1942, NAC RG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10.

<sup>12</sup>Evelyn Macquire, A.A.Sc., R.N., "The Mennonites in British Columbia," *The Bulletin of the British Columbia Board of Health*, Vol. 8 (Aug. 1938), p. 171-3.

<sup>13</sup>A detailed description of the Newburgh variety of raspberry is given in I. C. Crane, District Horticulturalist, Abbotsford, B. C., "Observations on Raspberry Varieties Grown in the Fraser Valley." A copy of this pamphlet is available in the Agriculture and Forest Products Library at the University of British Columbia.

<sup>14</sup>The 1941 wheat crisis was a result of mistaken calculations by the federal government. In 1939 and 1940 Canadian Department of Agriculture officials believed the demand for wheat would increase sharply, and urged prairie farmers to plant as much wheat as possible. The fall of Europe, and hence the loss of the entire European market, together with changed food policies of the British government, sharply reduced the demand for wheat. Canada was left with a huge grain surplus and farmers had to be encouraged to shift from cereal grain production to other commodities. Floor prices were established for wheat which covered production costs, but not the capital costs of heavily indebted operators. Farmers with large mortgages also had great difficulty if they tried to raise the additional capital needed to diversify their operations. Mennonite emigrants who had acquired heavily mortgaged prairie farms at the high prices prevalent in the late 1920s were very hard hit.

<sup>15</sup>The Japanese had been assured that they would be allowed to return to their farms at the end of the war, but political pressure was growing to repudiate that promise. The Custodian of Enemy Property acted on the assumption that the Japanese would not be allowed to return, and that their farms would be made available to returning veterans after the war.

<sup>16</sup>NAC RG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10, D.W. Strachan to George Murchison, 28 July 1943.

<sup>17</sup>NAC RG 64, Vol. 1172, File 16-3-2, G.F. Perkins to "All Members Interested in Strawberries," 29 July 1942.

<sup>18</sup>NAC RG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10, I.T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 27 August 1942.

<sup>19</sup>NAC RG 14, Vol. 653, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Commons to accompany the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts*, presented to the House on Tuesday, 17

June 1947.

<sup>20</sup> The complete list of the 1943 leases is available in NAC RG 38, Vol. 404, File V-8-10, dated 18 October 1943.

<sup>21</sup> NAC RG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10, I. T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 22 August 1942.

<sup>22</sup> NAC RG 64, Vol. 986, File 4-13-1, See particularly the document entitled "Berry Men Seek Subsidy."

<sup>23</sup> NAC RG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10, I.T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 2 June 1942.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, I.T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 22 August, 1942.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, I. T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 2 June 1942.

<sup>26</sup> NAC RG 64, Vol. 986, File 4-13-1, memorandum entitled "Berries - 1941," and NAC RG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10, I. T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 14 July 1943.

<sup>27</sup> Details on the volume of produce handled by each of the handling and processing company or co-operative are given in NAC RG 64, Vol. 986, File 4-13-1, Memorandum entitled "Berries - 1941."

<sup>28</sup> A concise summary of wartime government regulations pertaining to tender tree fruits and berries is given in G. E. Britnell and V. C. Fowke, *Canadian Agriculture in War and Peace 1935-50* (Stanford, Ca.: Stanford University Press) 1962, p. 327-30. Detailed information is available in relevant files of the Wartime Prices and Trade Board. The Board's main files pertaining to berry administration are NAC RG 64, Vol. 986, File 4-13-1; Vol. 1172, File 16-3-2; and Vol. 567, File 16-11. See also *Ibid.*, Vol. 50, Wartime Prices and Trade Board, Administrator's Orders.

<sup>29</sup> NAC RG 64, Vol 1555, Handbook entitled "Stabilization Controls and What They Do," prepared by an interdepartmental committee composed of representatives of the Departments of Finance, Labour, Agriculture, the Wartime Prices and Trade Board, and the Wartime Information Board, December 1943.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, File 16-6-11, L. R. Wilson to E. J. Chambers, 29 May 1944, and C. Howard Fisher to Donald Gordon, 7 June 1944.

<sup>31</sup> *Mennonitische Rundschau*, 15 Dec. 1943, translated by T.D. Regehr.

<sup>32</sup> As republished in the *Abbotsford, Sumas, Matsqui News*, 22 December 1943, quoting the *Vancouver Sun*.

<sup>33</sup> Agatha E. Klassen, *Yarrow. A Portrait in Mosaic, Revised Edition* (Yarrow: Klassen, 1976) p. 69.

<sup>34</sup> NACRG 64, Vol. 986, File 4-13-1, Memorandum entitled "Berries - 1941." NACRG 38, Vol. 403, File V-8-10, I. T. Barnet to G. Murchison, 14 July 1943, and Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture, Province of British Columbia, 1944, p. V34.

<sup>35</sup> The statistical information in this Table is drawn from the Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture, Province of British Columbia, for the years concerned.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> NACRG 14, Vol. 653, *Appendix to the Journals of the House of Commons to accompany the Fourth Report of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts*, presented to the House of Commons on Tuesday, 17 June 1947.

<sup>38</sup> Public Archives of British Columbia GR 1222, Box 161, File 6, William Wright, Secretary-Treasurer, Associated Boards of Trade of the Fraser Valley and the lower mainland to John Hart, Premier, 16 June 1943. See also *Vancouver Sun*, 20 March 1943, and *Vancouver New Herald*, 22 May 1943.

<sup>39</sup> *Abbotsford, Sumas and Matsqui News*, 7 January and 22 April 1942, and *Chilliwack Progress*, 23 June 1943.

<sup>40</sup> Canadian Mennonites were very effective in explaining their interests to federal politicians. The Prime Minister had gained a favourable impression of the Mennonites while growing up in Waterloo

County, and had worked closely with the leaders in the Mennonite immigration during the 1920s. Mennonite leaders also contacted all the Members of Parliament in whose constituency there were sizable numbers of Mennonites, and kept them informed of Mennonite interests and problems.

<sup>41</sup> *Chilliwack Progress*, 19 May 1943. See also Agatha E. Klassen, *Yarrow. A Portrait in Mosaic, Revised Edition* (Yarrow: A. E. Klassen, 1980).

<sup>42</sup> The Yarrow Growers' Co-operative specialized in the packing of raspberries and strawberries for export to Britain because the Newburgh raspberries which flourished on the heavy and wet lands near Yarrow were not well suited for the fresh fruit market. Newburgh canes produced more berries than most other varieties, but were used mainly for the manufacture of jam, or they were packed for export.

<sup>43</sup> The weak position of sterling against the dollar in 1948, and the unwillingness of the Canadian government to provide appropriate export credits to finance additional berry exports led to the termination of the British contracts.

<sup>44</sup> In 1948, after the termination of the British berry contracts, the federal government provided subsidies to cover the cost of the barrels and packing baskets used for packing berries in  $SO_2$ , but the Yarrow Growers' Co-operative ended the year with more than 5,000 packed but unsold barrels cluttering up all available warehouse space and spilling over into the open yards. These berries were eventually sold to the government of Ireland under temporary federal export credits. The Yarrow Growers' Co-operative might have survived, but it lost local support when it agreed to rigorous supply management arrangements. One unsophisticated Mennonite farmer said simply, "Whether we will sell the crop or not, we can only farm the good and proper way." Orders by their own co-op to bulldoze hundreds of acres of productive berry fields were greatly resented. A more complete explanation of the 1948 crash is given in CANADA. *House of Commons Debates*, 25 March 1949, and in Agatha E. Klassen, p. 70. The major flood of 1948 destroyed many berry fields, and this helped substantially in reducing supplies.