

Chapter 5

AGRICULTURE

Although less than three per cent of the total work force of the metropolitan area is actually engaged in primary production, some two-thirds of the area is still used for rural purposes, either for grazing livestock or growing fruit, vegetables and other agricultural crops. Less than 20% of this rural land is under cultivation, most of the remainder being used for grazing.

Within this area are grown about 28% of Victoria's fruit (excluding oranges), and between 50% and 60% of the State's supply of vegetables other than field crops such as potatoes and onions. From this area also come nearly 50% of the State's total supply of poultry (excluding domestic fowls), and 2% of its livestock, including cattle, sheep, pigs and horses. More than three-quarters of the employment in these primary industries is located in the outer municipalities to the east and south-east of Melbourne, where practically all the fruit and most of the vegetables are grown and dairy and poultry farms located. The outer western and northern municipalities are mostly grazing areas. The location and relative importance of the principal agricultural and grazing areas are shown in maps 17 and 18.

With so many of the needs of the city being produced in the surrounding countryside, it becomes the task of the planner to determine the importance of this production, and to reconcile this with the ever-increasing land needs of an expanding metropolis. Some detailed consideration of the principal rural activities within the planning area is therefore appropriate.

Livestock: Excluding animals in transit, or held at sale-yards and abattoirs, or used for racing or domestic purposes, the total number of livestock maintained on rural holdings within the metropolitan area is approximately 35,000 dairy cattle, 7,500 beef cattle, 15,000 pigs, 95,000 sheep, 6,000 horses and 3,000,000 fowls. In providing for the needs of the city, the most important of these are the dairy cattle, the fowls and the pigs.

Melbourne, however, is now far less dependent on the dairy cattle in this area than in the past, when they provided almost the whole of the city's milk. Today about 80% of the daily milk supply of Melbourne comes from outside the planning area, most of it from Gippsland by large motor tankers. The majority of the large pasteurising, bottling and

distributing organisations handling Melbourne's milk supply find it more convenient to receive milk in bulk from country districts. It is reasonable to assume, therefore, that as the city grows, the local dairy herds will supply less and less of its milk requirements.

With regard to poultry, although the planning area provides a high proportion of the total State supply, these farms occupy relatively small areas and present no special problems. They have tended to congregate around Melbourne because of the convenience of acquiring food from the central produce market and because of proximity to the principal selling market. Two-thirds of the total number of fowls are located to the south-east in the Mulgrave-Dandenong area.

The number of pigs reared near Melbourne has declined considerably in recent years because of the scarcity of cheap food and the opportunities for more profitable forms of farming. However, the planning area provides about 8% of pigs reared in Victoria, and in view of the extensive use of metropolitan refuse as pig food, the number could increase if pig farming becomes more profitable.

The remainder of the livestock, including beef cattle, sheep and horses, are grazed on rural land less suitable for more intensive agricultural development.

Fruit: Except for tropical fruits, which come from northern New South Wales and Queensland, and citrus fruits, most of which come from South Australia, the great bulk of all fruit consumed in Melbourne is grown within Victoria. From the figures given in Table 14 for the year 1950, it is estimated that the metropolitan area provides about 28% of the State's overall supply of fruit.

Practically all this fruit, except pears, is now consumed or processed in Melbourne. A large proportion of the pears is still exported.

The total area under fruit cultivation comprises some 13,500 acres, of which 90% is in the Doncaster, Nunawading and Ringwood areas to the east where the silurian soil is most suitable. However, the importance of this area is declining with the development of improved means of transport, which has enabled perishable fruit to be delivered into Melbourne from more distant centres. The land itself has in some areas been allowed to deteriorate after years of intensive cultivation, while in others the encroachment of

Table 14
FRUIT GROWING WITHIN MELBOURNE
METROPOLITAN PLANNING AREA, 1950

<i>Crop</i>	<i>Acreage bearing fruit</i>	<i>% of Total Metropolitan fruit production</i>	<i>% of State Total for each crop</i>
Apples	4,887	36.0	36.0
Pears	2,691	20.0	26.0
Peaches	2,831	21.0	22.0
Apricots	469	30.0	11.0
Plums	758	60.0	32.0
Cherries	592	40.0	80.0
Quinces	127	10.0	63.0
Lemons & Limes	1,027	80.0	71.0
Other fruits	94	1.0	—
Total	13,476	100%	28%

urban settlement has had an adverse effect on its fruit-growing capacity. When orchard land is sold and leaves the possession of a good orchardist it often becomes neglected, breeds and harbours pests and the work of adjoining orchardists is made more difficult. Many orchards in this district are changing from apples to lemons, pears and peaches. Peaches do extremely well, and because of the more perishable nature of this fruit, local growers tend to have a greater advantage over more distant suppliers than with most other fruits.

In the eastern part of the metropolitan area are some of the most experienced and capable orchardists in the State, but the rising value of land because of the influence of potential subdivision and adverse factors associated with urban encroachment are causing many orchardists to sell out. Unless the present unrestricted urban expansion is brought under control, this area will gradually decline in importance as a fruit-growing district.

Vegetables: More than half the vegetables consumed in Melbourne, excluding potatoes and onions, are still grown in the metropolitan planning area. Over 80% are obtained from within a radius of 25 miles of the city. Most of the remainder come from other parts of Victoria, principally Gippsland and the Murray and Goulburn Valley areas. A proportion of some vegetables, such as beans, peas, tomatoes and celery, come from interstate sources, especially during local out-of-season periods, but these amount to less than 10% of Melbourne's overall vegetable supply. More than 90% of the city's vegetables come from within Victoria.

Although there are no statistics available to show the actual quantity of vegetables consumed in Melbourne, either as fresh vegetables or for canning and processing, agricultural authorities estimate that probably 80% of the State's production of vegetables is marketed and consumed in the metropolitan area. The consumption per head of commercially-produced vegetables is considerably higher in the metropolitan area than in the country districts, where more are grown

as domestic crops. The total production of vegetables within the planning area of Melbourne for the year 1950 expressed as a percentage of the total Victorian production is given in Table 15.

Less than 5% of Melbourne's total supply of potatoes and onions is grown within the planning area and these mainly cover the early crops which are more suited to the sandy coastal soil. Most potatoes and onions are grown as field crops throughout the country districts surrounding the Port Phillip district.

More than two-thirds of the total area under vegetable cultivation around Melbourne is devoted to leaf vegetables, especially cabbages and cauliflowers. Root crops account for nearly one-fifth of the total area used, while all the other vegetables, including beans, peas, tomatoes, gourd and stem vegetables, barely account for 10% of the area. Most of Melbourne's tomatoes are grown near Bendigo and in the Goulburn Valley area around Shepparton where the climate is most favourable. Victorian tomatoes are generally available from November to June and supplies for the remainder of the year come from Western Australia, Queensland, northern New South Wales and South Australia. A substantial quantity of beans and peas come from Gippsland, while additional supplies come from as far north as Queensland during the off season. A considerable proportion of Melbourne's gourd vegetables and the winter supply of lettuce and carrots now come from the Murray Valley area between

Table 15
VEGETABLE PRODUCTION IN THE
METROPOLITAN AND ADJACENT AREAS (1950)⁽¹⁾

<i>Type of Crop</i>	<i>Melbourne Metro- politan Area (tons)</i>	<i>% of Total Metro- politan Vegetable Production</i>	<i>% of Total State Production of each crop</i>
<i>Root Crops:</i>			
Carrots, Parsnips, Beetroot, Turnips, Artichokes, Radishes, Spring Onions	20,508	17.6	24
<i>Beans and Peas:</i>	1,860	1.6	15.8
<i>Tomatoes:</i>	2,675	2.3	4.8
<i>Gourd Vegetables:</i>			
Melons, Pumpkins, Marrows, Cucumbers	3,839	3.3	25
<i>Leaf Vegetables:</i>			
Cabbages, Cauliflowers, Brussel-Sprouts, Lettuce, Silver Beet, Spinach	84,749	72.9	90
<i>Stem Vegetables:</i>			
Celery, Rhubarb, Asparagus	2,663	2.3	58
Total	116,294	100%	54%

(1) Including the area in Werribee immediately adjoining the metropolitan boundary.