

AGRICULTURE - - Farm, Farm to Greenhouse

Ralph Fisher

1010 Cambie, Richmond.

Interviewed - March 14, 1973.

Born 1913 Cogland, B.C. near Aldergrove. Dad paid \$1,000 an acre for 5 acres of stumps which he cleared, farm started . . . 1914 World War I he went overseas . . . on return moved to Richmond to 40 acre Soldier Settlement Board farm at Cambie and #4 Road . . . 3 acres were cleared, balance jackpine and hardhack was ploughed with horses . . . 1919 this bog worth \$125 an acre so farm worth \$5,000 . . . extended to Rifle Range.

1925 - money scarce so to keep up payment sold "back half" 24 acres, leaving 16 acres . . . mother working . . . children fed the chickens . . . grew potatoes, strawberries (truck gardening) . . . sold around town plus retail selling . . . meanwhile dairy farming with 15 cows.

1935 - Dad died . . . Ralph left with mortgage . . . mother sold part of farm for her share . . . Ralph later bought back this corner at four times the price . . . now have 16 acres minus road allowance for Odlin Road which bisects the farm . . . all land subdivided early days by C. Gray Realtor at 455 West Pender . . . by 1935 in business ploughing gardens . . . garden contracting . . . everyone grew vegetable garden. Comment on Marketing Board established by Natural Products Marketing Act which said if 60% of growers in any commodity wished to market under a co-op the other 40% must fall in line, also established quotas.

1940 - sold out all dairy stock, horses, etc. as Ralph called up for World War II, but polo earlier killed military service . . . worked at "job" for three years.

After World War II - started with two tractors "dusting" potatoes, and planting; grew strawberries, raspberries, small fruits all retailed, finally making money . . . neither strawberry nor raspberry growing successful because of low area . . . Red Steel disease affected strawberries . . . raspberries had root problem in wet area . . . grown 5 years.

1945 - 1950 - started flower growing business, same time started gladiolus . . . cut 450 glads daily at average price 19¢ per dozen so stoppe d . . . floor price now 50¢ per dozen now under Flower Growers Co-op which began 10 years ago this month . . . early glad names - Snow Princess, Sans Souci, Red Charm.

1950 - returned to potatoe business, retailing until 4 years ago - Netted Gems, Kenebec, Red Pontiac.

1952 - started greenhouse business . . . now fulltime . . . reason "something that is better and ability to no longer attract slave labor".

Agriculture, Horticulture is not under minimum wage law, also not compulsory to have compensation, only recently Unemployment Insurance included. Agriculture - "only the real strong make it, others don't". Belief is that food is something that should be produced for virtually nothing, farmer by tradition should not be part of industry.

From tomatoes (food product) to ornamental which sells to a different class of society (people willing to pay a fair price for the product) . . . now global . . . we're at mercy of other countries who can undersell us, and government who trades tariff privileges the farmers might enjoy to benefit of producer of a natural product which occupies a larger part of the economy that is very important to the country to have it exported.

Tomatoes grown were greenhouse "Vetomold" . . . largest  
tomatoe growers in Victoria . . . one in Richmond, Tony Kavelaars,  
River Road . . . tomatoes now grown in sawdust . . . comments on  
proposed provincial Bill 42.

Greenhouse - 3 parts:

- 1) Potted chrysanthemums - all year
- 2) Spring - annuals
- 3) Fall - poinsettas and cut flowers for Christmas market

Sales - market all flowers to Flower Co-op. Annuals, either delivered  
to garden centers or sold at greenhouse.

Predicts garden centers in area will not increase in number -  
Lang, Knapps, Reeds. Fisher's Greenhouse sales depend on word of  
mouth publicity.

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Early first days in area -

1919 - family depended partly on Dad hauling rocks for municipality  
. . . says Cambie Road very little improved in 40 years. . . .  
rock scow came to slip at end of Cambie . . . farmer's wagon pulled  
up, rock loaded by hand into wagon, team of horses hauled wagon to  
Cambie, wagon box made by 4' x 4' so these were pried up and rocks  
fell through, then men with round mouth shovels turned over backwards  
would level out rock, shovels would wear down . . . Today's scene -  
1 man uses shovel and 8 men stand "guard" . . . farmer paid \$6 a day  
for team and wagon. Taxes then \$125 on 14 acres - now \$3,000.

(Not on tape) - 1935 - 40 worked night job in Cannery (McKinnon's).  
stacking cans at 35¢ per hour . . . Mr. Butler owned Shingle Mill  
next door . . . 8 hour shifts in canneries then.

Ralph Fisher is president of United Flower Growing Co-op Association  
620 Malkin Ave. which has 46 members and holds auction at 7 a.m.  
Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

Dellis Cleland