



## GROWING CROPS FOR THE CANNERY

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In 1925 the Utah Packing Company began to build a cannery south of the Spanish Fork River in Utah County, near the settlement of Leland. Later the California Packing Corporation (Del Monte) acquired the cannery. Completion of the Strawberry Valley Project a decade earlier had made it possible for farmers in the area to grow crops that required more frequent irrigation. Farmers in and around Leland began to grow peas, green lima beans, and sweet corn and some tomatoes and pole beans as cash crops to sell to the cannery. An additional benefit of growing legumes—peas and beans—was their value as soil enhancers. The planting and harvesting of vegetables grown for the cannery was detailed by Glen R. and Genevieve E. Larsen in a recent history of Leland.

Peas, the first crop in the cycle, were planted early in April, weather permitting, using a grain drill “modified to accommodate the large pea seeds.” In late June or early July “a ‘fieldman’ employed by the canning company, would make a personal inspection of each farm and notify the farmer when the peas should be harvested.” In early years a horse-drawn hay mower cut the peas. The heavy vines were loaded onto a wagon with a pitchfork, hauled to a pea viner, and unloaded with a pitchfork. A conveyer fed “the vines, with peas still attached, into a revolving drum covered with light belting material with holes in it. As the vines passed on through the drum, paddles inside would knock the peas from their shells and they would fall through the holes...and down into boxes...The vines would go out the other end of the drum” to be stacked for use in the winter as livestock feed. It was backbreaking work, and scheduling might require a farmer to deliver his peas to the viner at midnight. The manufacture of pea combines pulled by tractors allowed vines to be threshed in the field, and “the peas were collected in large boxes and handled mechanically.” This cut into a farmer’s profit, however, as the cannery deducted the cost of this service from his check. Gradually most farmers in Leland stopped growing peas.

The other major crop grown in Leland for the cannery was green lima beans. Farmers planted this crop in May, after the last frost, using a modified beet drill. Limas “were cultivated with a regular beet cultivator...[and] weeded by hand using long handled hoes” or by hand pulling weeds growing too close to the bean plants. As with peas, the cannery representative would tell each farmer when to harvest the limas. “The beans were cut off at the roots by a bean cutter, pulled by horses...two rows at a time...[and] funneled into a single row by metal gathering rods on the bean cutter.” Again, the loading and unloading of the beans was done by hand using pitchforks. Lima beans were usually harvested in September, and an early frost sometimes ruined a farmer’s crop.

Pole beans, a very labor intensive crop, were evidently not much favored by farmers in the Leland area, but “the Leland Ward Elders Quorum had a fund raising project and grew a small field of pole beans on a plot of land... later covered...by I-15...No record is available of how much money the Elders made from their project.” Only a few farmers in Leland planted tomatoes because of the heavy soil locally and the problem of getting “irrigation water on exactly the right day that the tomatoes needed it.”

In the 1940s some farmers began growing sweet corn for the cannery, planting it in late May for harvest in August or September. At first the corn was picked by hand “and the ears thrown into wagons or trucks. It was all hauled directly to the canning factory and unloaded...processed and canned. The cobs and husks were hauled to a storage pit on the canning factory grounds, and...sold back to the farmers as silage for livestock.” Later, tractor-mounted corn pickers harvested the corn.

Eventually these vegetable crops produced less and less cash income for farmers in Leland as the cannery’s service charges increased. The Spanish Fork plant of the California Packing Corporation ceased operations after 1968, and the growing of canning crops came to an end in the Leland area.

Source: Glen R. and Genevieve E. Larsen, *Leland’s Legacy: History of Leland* (Spanish Fork, 1994).