

April, 1966

Agr. Econ. 396

THE 1966 SPRING CROP TOMATO SITUATION

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## The 1966 Spring Crop Tomato Situation

### General Situation

Indications are that the 1966 spring tomato crop in Florida will be above that of last year. Plantings in December were substantially below those in December 1965, but those for January and February have been well above plantings for the same period last year (Figure 1). Total plantings since December 1 amount to 20,610 acres compared to 14,250 acres for the same period last year (Table 1). This represents a 44 percent increase. Acreage planted since February 1 in Florida is up 448 percent over that of last year. Plantings in Texas are 1550 acres, or 20 percent below 1965.

Table 1

Comparisons of Acreage of Vine Ripe Tomatoes with  
Total Tomato Plantings and Plantings After December 1  
in Florida, By Seasons, 1959-1960 to 1965-1966

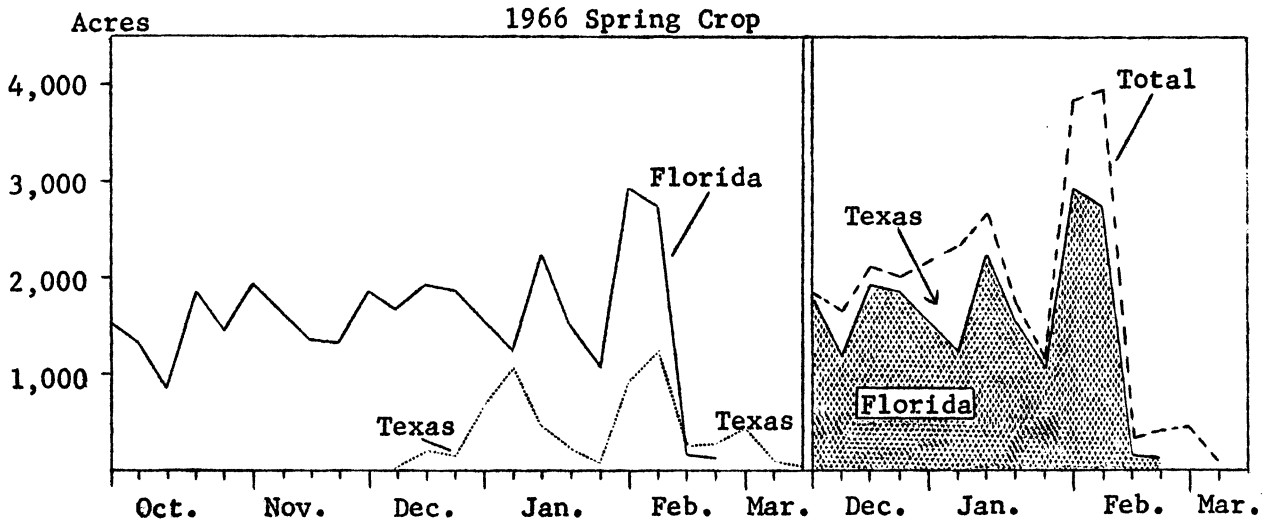
Seasons	Total Tomato Plantings		V i n e R i p e T o m a t o e s			
	Total Acreage	Acres Planted After Dec. 1	Acres Planted	Percent of Total Crop	Acres Planted After Dec. 1	Percent Planted After Dec. 1
1959-60	38,270	14,000	2410	6.3	150	1.1
1960-61	40,640	13,470	3550	8.7	40	.3
1961-62	41,520	15,130	3350	8.1	330	2.2
1962-63	44,150	15,430	4120	9.3	690	4.5
1963-64	43,420	14,800	5190	12.0	460	3.1
1964-65	50,200	14,250	6780	13.5	510	3.6
1965-66	51,710	20,610	8330	16.1	2370	11.5

Source: U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

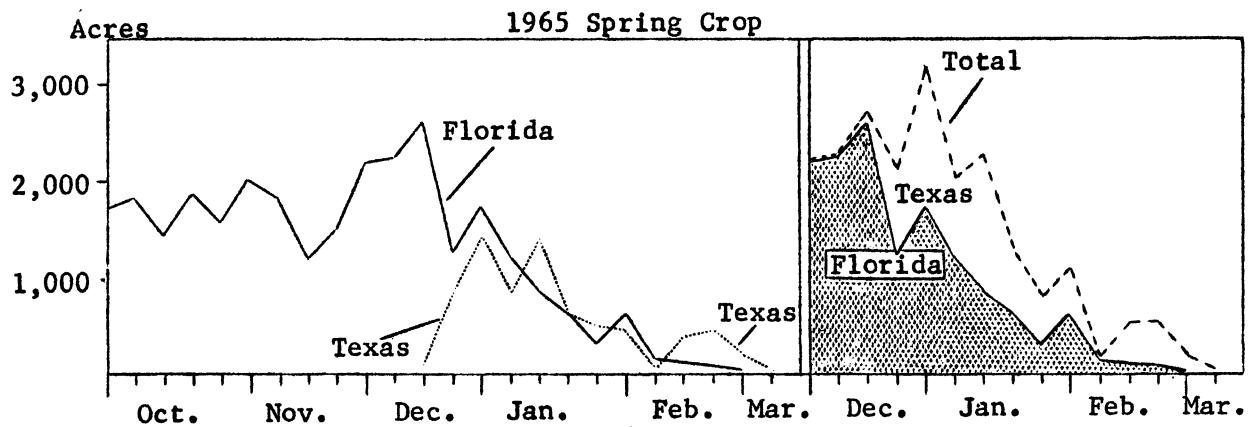
Total plantings for Florida and Texas since December 1 are 4780 acres, or 22 percent, above the same period in 1965. Much of the plantings in Florida since February 1 is perhaps replantings resulting from the freeze in late January. Of course, normal seasonal weather between planting and the time of harvest often drastically reduces the size and quality of the spring crop in these two states, especially during the late spring season.

Table 1

Acres of Tomatoes Planted Weekly in Florida and Texas  
1964-65 and 1965-66 Seasons



Florida plantings in January and early February 1966 were much higher than those last year, as were total plantings in Florida and Texas.



Source: U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

Further indication regarding the outlook may be seen by comparing the present stage of development of the crop with that of last year in the two states (Table 2). On April 16, 1966, there were 16760\* acres of tomatoes yet to begin harvest compared with 5740 on the same date in 1965. This added 11020 acres is mostly concentrated in the Ft. Pierce, Immokalee, and Manatee areas. Texas has 1660 fewer acres to harvest than at this time a year ago and the crop is also a bit later than last year's.

Crop by States and Major Production Areas

Florida

Planting and transplanting of the winter and early spring fresh tomato crop in Florida was completed by March 5. For the entire 1965-66 season the acreage for harvest is 51,610 acres which is only 1,410 acres or 3 percent above last season (Table 2).

Table 2

Florida and Texas Acreage Inventory  
April 16, 1966 with Comparisons

Area	Stage of Development of Acres Growing or in Harvest							Harv'd to Date
	Acres for Harvest	Pre-Fruit Set	Fruit Set	Harvest Begin 2 Weeks	Harvesting Number Times Picked			
					One	Two	3 or more	
Vine-Ripe	8310	330	350	460	280	310	3200	3380
Dade	18030	190	220	100	900	460	400	15760
Ft. Pierce	8350	660	2630	1390	40	80	180	3370
Immokalee	9520	290	1580	1980	1240	320	80	4030
Manatee	6190	350	4880	140	---	---	---	820
N. Central	1210	1210	---	---	---	---	---	---
1965-66 Total	51610	3030	9660	4070	2460	1170	3860	27360
1964-65 Total	50200	300	2610	2830	2870	2900	3410	35280
TEXAS 1965-66	5940	4320	1620	---	---	---	---	---
TEXAS 1964-65	7600	4520	3050	30	---	---	---	---

Source: U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

\* It is estimated that 2000 acres of this will go to processors in 1966 compared with 1200 acres in 1965.

Vine Ripes - Acreage is steadily increasing each year. The 1965 acreage was 32 percent above that for 1964, and 1966 acreage shows a 23 percent increase over that of 1965. Harvest of the vine ripe crop for this season is also behind that of last year. By April 9, 1965, about 63 percent of the acreage had been completely harvested, while only 35 percent had been harvested by the same date this season.

Dade County - There are 18030 acres planted in this area for winter and early spring harvest, representing 35 percent of the Florida acreage for the season. Total acreage last season in Dade was 23,150 acres or almost 22 percent above that for the current season.

Fort Pierce - Acreage is up from 6,980 acres in 1965 to 8,310 acres for 1966. This represents a 19 percent increase over 1965.

Immokalee-Fort Myers - There are 9,520 acres for harvest this season and 6,880 acres last year. The increase for 1966 over 1965 is 38 percent.

Manatee-Ruskin-Wachula - The 6,190 acres for harvest this year is 860 acres (16 percent) above last season.

North Central - Acreage in this area is somewhat above (12 percent) last season. There are 1,210 acres for harvest this year and 1,080 acres in 1965.

#### Texas

Acreage in the Rio Grande Valley of Texas has declined for the last two years. The 1965 acreage was 30 percent below the previous year, and the 1966 acreage is 20 percent below that for 1965.

#### Mexico

Growing conditions have been favorable this season, and the production of staked or vine ripe tomatoes continues to increase.

A report on the Mexican vegetable outlook for 1966 sums up the situation for tomatoes as follows,<sup>1</sup> "Growing conditions for vegetables on the West Coast of Mexico have generally been excellent this season. Rains in September and October caused a slight loss of seedlings but were for the most part beneficial.

"The trend to pole or staked tomatoes continued this season, with an estimated increase of 4,000 acres of pole tomatoes and a decrease of almost 7,000 acres in ground tomatoes. Since pole tomato plants will produce 3 to 4 times as many marketable tomatoes as those unstaked, an increase of about 10 percent in production is expected.

"The most popular varieties of pole tomatoes are Indian River and Manapal. Culiacan No. 1 is popular for early planting, but yields are low. Homestead is the most important green variety."

Tomato Acreage, West Coast of Mexico<sup>1</sup>

Type of Tomato	1963-64	1964-65	1965-66
	<u>1,000 acres</u>	<u>1,000 acres</u>	<u>1,000 acres</u>
Ground Tomatoes	16.7	14.9	8.1
Pole Tomatoes	12.9	16.1	20.0

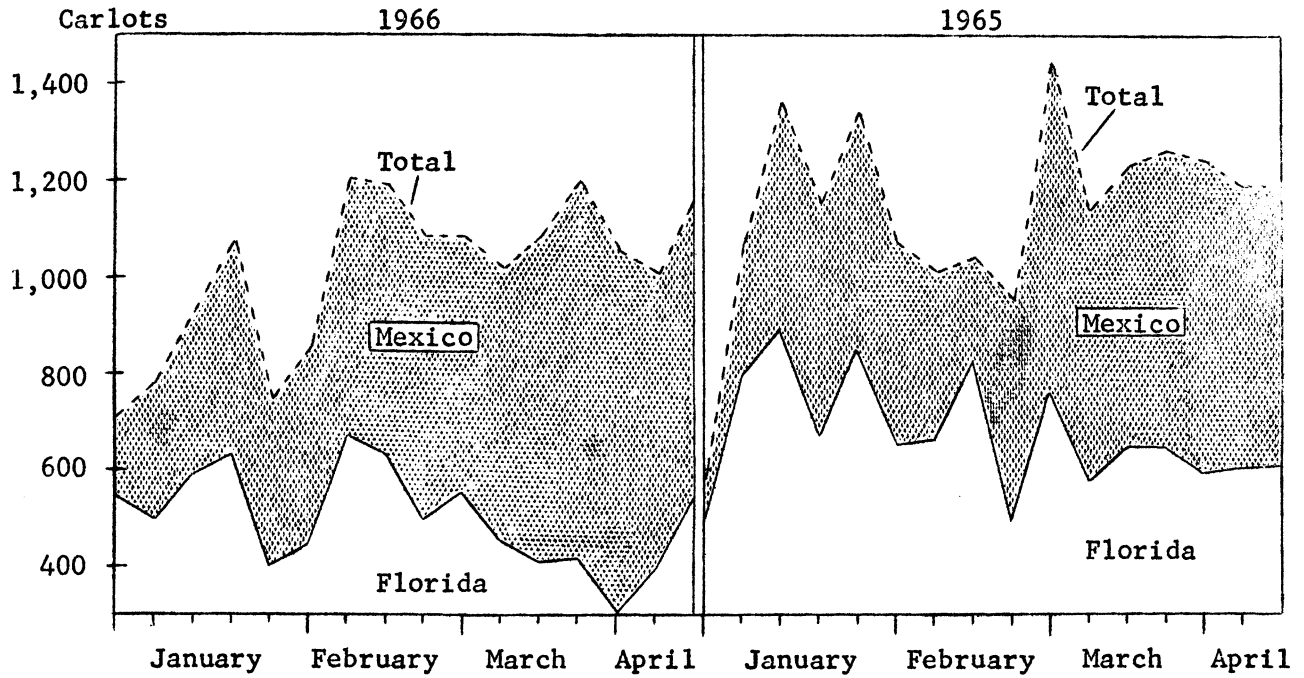
Shipments

Reported shipments of tomatoes in the United States for the six week period March 5 - April 16, totaled 772 cars or 10 percent below the like period last year. During this period, shipments from Florida were off by 32 percent, while those from Mexico were up by about 12 percent (Figure 2). Starting from this date (April 16) shipments from Mexico would normally be expected to decline rapidly (Figure 3). However, in recent years the shipments of Mexican tomatoes in volume has extended later and later into the spring.

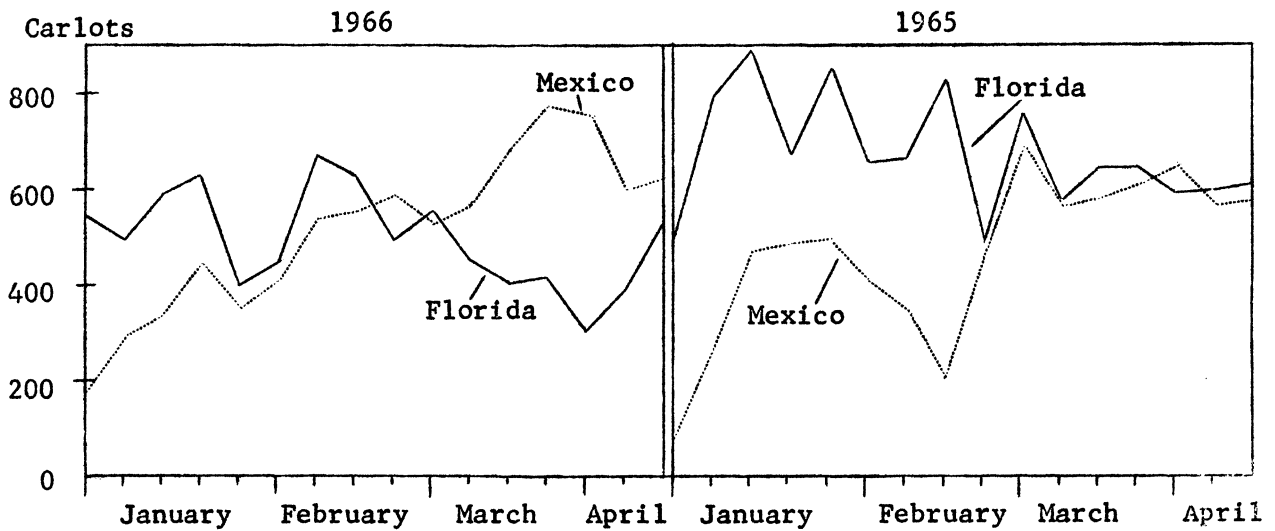
<sup>1</sup>U.S.D.A., F.A.S., "Foreign Agriculture," Washington, D. C., Jan. 10, 1966

Figure 2

Weekly Shipments of Tomatoes from Florida and Mexico  
1965 and 1966 Spring Crops



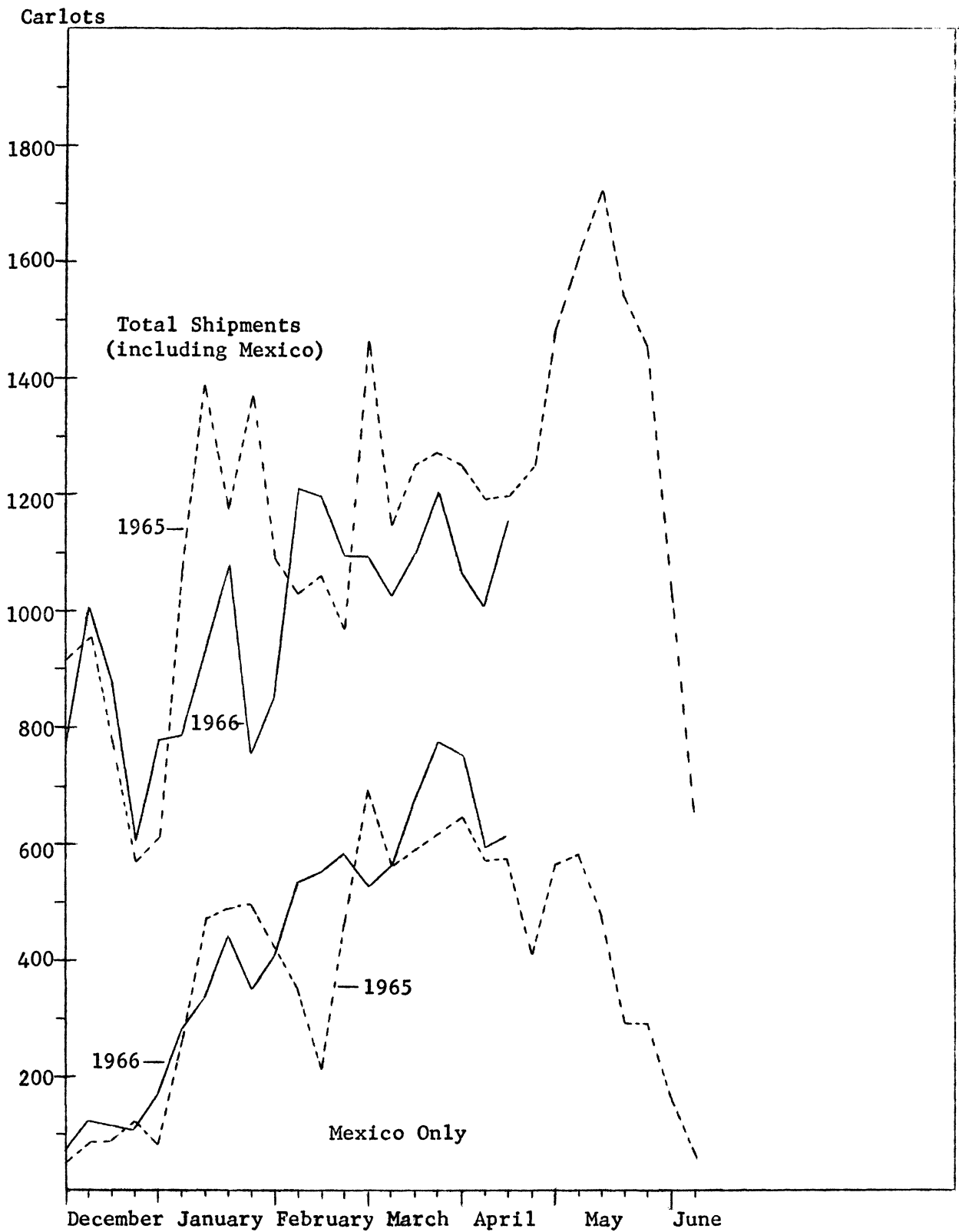
Total shipments and shipments from Florida in 1966 have generally been lower than in 1965. Shipments from Mexico since mid-March 1966 have been higher than for 1965.



Source: U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida

Figure 3

Fresh Tomato Shipments in the United States  
December-June 1965 and 1966 Seasons  
(Florida, California, Texas, and Mexico)



Source: U.S.D.A. Statistical Reporting Service, Orlando, Florida



Shipments After May 1, from Mexico

	<u>Carloads</u>
1962	1171
1963	785
1964	1569
1965	1969
1966	?

Prices

Tomato prices in the Cleveland Market for March-April, 1966, have been below corresponding weeks for 1965 (Table 3). Greenhouse prices averaged approximately 10 percent below those last year for the seasons first five weeks, while vine ripe and tube tomatoes have averaged about 15 percent below last years March-April prices. Since total shipments during the recent weeks have been below last year's one might have expected the 1966 price to be higher instead of lower. The deviation cannot be explained by consumer income or economic conditions. Perhaps it is because of the cold and rainy weather or possible inaccuracies in the data on shipments. If, on the other hand, the lower price is a reflection of reduced demand for tomatoes due to the higher price of other, more staple, foods which take a larger share of the food budget while leaving less for such items as tomatoes, the problem is a more serious one.

Conclusions

Current low prices for fresh tomatoes coupled with large unharvested acreage in Florida and continuing shipments from Mexico all are unfavorable factors facing the growers of 1966 spring greenhouse tomatoes. The outlook for the remainder of the 1966 season looks more like 1963 is than for other recent crops. In that year Florida shipped heavily, while Mexico was lighter than usual after May 1. If prices decline to 1963 levels, the Mexican shippers may again find it unprofitable to ship in 1966.

Table 3

Comparison of Weekly Average Tomato Prices on Cleveland Market  
for 1965 and 1966 Spring Crop Seasons

Week Ending	1965	1966	Difference
	(\$)	(\$)	(\$)
GREENHOUSE (8-lb. basket)			
March 4	-	-	-
March 11	-	-	-
March 18	-	-	-
March 25	3.75	3.25	-.50
April 1	3.47	3.25	-.22
April 8	3.25	3.25	00
April 15	3.25	3.09	-.16
April 22	3.25	2.65	-.60
VINE RIPE (8-lb. carton)			
March 4	2.09	1.54	-.55
March 11	2.10	1.75	-.35
March 18	2.42	2.00	-.42
March 25	2.85	2.10	-.75
April 1	2.55	2.45	-.10
April 8	2.25	2.78	.53
April 15	2.90	2.60	-.30
April 22	2.90	1.90	-1.00
TUBE (10-tube carton)			
March 4	2.29	1.82	-.47
March 11	2.62	2.00	-.62
March 18	2.75	2.12	-.63
March 25	2.72	2.15	-.57
April 1	2.62	2.17	-.45
April 8	2.72	2.68	-.04
April 15	3.25	2.86	-.39
April 22	3.12	2.70	-.42

Source: Based on Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Market News, U.S.D.A., C&MS, Cleveland, Ohio

On the less unfavorable side, Florida weather after May 1 is seldom ideally suited to tomatoes either for quality or yield. It is probable that shipments will be much less than planted and unharvested acreages would indicate. A decrease in both market quality (shelf life) and eating quality is almost certain for much of the Florida crop yet to be harvested.

It is possible, also, that the heavy Florida acreage may have discouraged some plantings in late spring states, thereby reducing the pressure of supplies in June and July. Data on this are not yet available.

Nevertheless, the present competitive supply picture is such that tomato prices in April-May, 1966, appear almost certain to be lower than in the like period, 1965.

Since greenhouse tomato growers cannot afford to get shelf space by offering lower prices than their competitors, it should pay them to do more towards selling retailers and consumers on the other advantages of their product. There has probably never been a time in the history of the industry when aggressive selling and promotion would offer more rewards than during the next few weeks. Perhaps it is still not too late to try something in one or more markets in 1966.