

# Vegetable Growers Association in Session

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At the annual meeting of the Everglades Growers' Association at Zona, held on Saturday night last (January 17, 1914), the following officers were elected to serve during the year 1914:

President — A. B. Lowe  
Vice-President — Frank Voigt  
Secretary — H. E. Earle  
Treasurer — W. H. Hammer

The following, together with the officers, will act as directors: A. W. Potter, J. R. Porter and John Aunapu.

At the close of the reading of his annual report, President Potter stated that, owing to his duties as Secretary of the Southern Produce Exchange, it would be impossible for him to consider the work of President again, and hence would not be a candidate.

Mr. H. E. Meyers, Secretary of the Everglades Sugar and Land Company, and a member of the association, made an appeal for the members to continue their good work and stand together in the matter of shipping. He believed that the solution of the past difficulties would be in the harmonious working together of all in shipping through the central organization. He spoke in the highest terms of the selling agents of the Exchange and believed that no better firm for selling could have been selected. By the end of the season all the members would be glad they had made the brave stand they had.

The Association decided to buy a carload of seed potatoes of some 180 bags.

The Association now has some 86 members and is only one year old.

The following is a complete copy of the President's written report.

## Annual Report of the President 1914

### Everglades Vegetable Growers' Association, Davie, Florida.

In making this, the first annual report of the Everglades Vegetable Growers' Association, it will be proper to present a resume of the organization; but this I can do only from memory, leaving the more detailed summary of the history of the association to the Secretary.

Zona is a very new town. Davie farm settlers are composed mostly of northern men with northern notions, energy and thrift. They had seen the advantages of organization at home; they had, many of them, felt the need of co-operation; so, early in the life of the farm, they set about to organize for mutual protection and profit. In early December a meeting was called for the purpose of forming a society for mutual benefit and an association was formed under the name of Farmer's Central Union.

Unfortunately, however, most of the

*A 1911 newspaper article reprinted in the Winter/Spring 1990 issue of Broward Legacy and entitled "James McComb and the East Coast Fruit and Vegetable Growers Association" recounted that organization's efforts to secure fair prices and reasonable shipping rates for members' crops. In a similar vein, growers on newly reclaimed Everglades land in the Davie area united in 1913 to form the Everglades Growers' Association. This organization numbered among its members some of Davie's earliest and most prominent pioneers, and obtained the backing of the powerful Everglades Sugar and Land Company headed by R. P. Davie. Mr. Davie and his company had launched the settlement—the first on reclaimed Everglades muckland—in 1908 with the establishment of the Davie Experimental Farm, and thus his name was synonymous with the community from the beginning, although it was officially designated "Zona" until April 1914. As this article demonstrates, the Everglades Growers' Association provided Davie farmers leadership and unity, not only as an agricultural cooperative, but as a force for education and civic improvement.*

individual farmers had made contracts for packing and selling their produce with two separate individuals and there was nothing for the association to do but "do the best it could." It did attempt to see that the farmer, on complaint, got some consideration and some justice from the contractors, but the arrangements and the results were far from satisfactory, because its hands were tied and "a contract is a contract." Low prices were the rule, for, instead of selling, almost everything was consigned and the commission man got the profit.

But, while the association could not take a hand in shipping or selling, it did turn its attention to local help and building the town. A schoolhouse was needed for the children, and, while the Board of Education of the county supplied the lumber for the same, it expected the patrons to put this lumber together to form a habitable school building. Instead of asking the parents to assume this expense, the association took about all its treasury funds, or \$100, and not only built the building, but enlarged it 10 feet and painted the same. By this act, the association showed itself a public benefactor.

In prices for our produce things went from bad to worse; and to cap the climax, the flood of May 1913 [actually 1912], came down over the farm, then undiked, and all the crops were ruined. This was the disastrous ending of a disastrous year.

In the fall of 1912, those who had faith and had stayed, together with the new ones who came in — again from the north — reorganized the association, and it was incorporated in the following February, under the title of the Everglades Vegetable Growers' Association.

Right here let me say that the sincere thanks of this corporation are due to the Everglades Land Sales Company for its liberality in paying all the expenses for securing the charter-charter fees, advertising, attorney fees, etc. As no formal report was made of this work, this association has never placed itself on record as expressing its thanks to this company for its friendship and assistance.

The association was now free to act for itself, the old contracts for packing and selling having expired. What would it do? Would the members unite in selling the products of the farmers, or would it take the haphazard way of individual selling and shipping? The members had been so badly bitten the previous season that they determined to try individual packing. Some of the wavering individuals were strengthened and prompted by the so-called "tomato buzzards" — those advance agents of commission houses who, realizing that organization

meant their failure, did all in their power to create discontent among members. One of these "buzzards" paid as high as \$5 a hamper for beans for a non-member of the association, while prominent members thereof could not realize more than \$2 for as good a product.

The result was that every man shipped for himself — consigned — seesawing from city to city, chasing high prices, but never catching up. You older men know the result. The net return to the shippers were about as bad as they were the previous year, except that we had more stuff to ship and hence lost more.

In the fall of 1913, the whole body of farmers, not only on the 'Glades, but all along the coast, feeling that their very existence and success depended on more united efforts. It needed but a leader, an organizer, to lead the people out of the wilderness into the land of Canaan. This leader was found in the person of A. J. Mears who roused the people to the inequities of consignment and to their rights and needs. He did organize the people, and this association, being composed of people sensible to their own individual deficiencies in selling, and realizing that the "damnable" system of consignment was the real cause of all their woes, readily fell in with the movement and voted to sustain it without losing its corporate identity. So the Southern Produce Exchange came into being as the county organization to band the farmers together so that the old adage, "In Union there is strength," might be felt.

It has yet, however, to prove out, but it is the faith and belief of most of the farmers that many of the ills from which we have suffered, will be cured. It is earnestly hoped that all members of this association who have any produce to ship will stand out boldly for the principles involved and

represent a solid county organization, realizing that without their support the full benefits of cooperation can not be secured. If, perchance, such a county organization should fail, then there will be songs of joy among the foresaid "buzzards," if buzzards can sing, and corresponding signs of woe among the croppers.

Our future prosperity is at stake, and it behooves all of us to stand together even at personal sacrifice; for as Ben Franklin said, "We must all hang together, or we will all hang separately." He also said, "Unite or die."

But while the association, as such, could not benefit the croppers' selling, it has been the means of saving considerable cash, in toto, by buying for members such material as needed for his work. During the year it bought a carload of crates and assumed the debt of \$575 so that members could save 2 cents a crate.

It also bought 2 carloads of potatoes containing nearly 500 bags and saving over \$100 to the purchasers.

In an educational way it has been of great benefit. It has had lectures by such men as Walter Waldin, Prof. Hovey and Dr. Gifford (2 lectures). Besides there have been shorter talks from others outside the association as well as from our own members within. Among these have been talks by Mr. Earle, Mr. Hendricks and Mr. Werner.

All of these have been interspersed with many discussions on live topics of the hour under "Good of the hour."

So let us all stand shoulder to shoulder and fight our way to victory against outside foes.

God knows we have them on the outside; God forbid that we should have them inside our battlements.

But we will win; we are united in sentiment. Our banners wave above, our battle cry is, "Down with dishonest commission men; a just return for our capital and our labor."



South Florida vegetable farm, c.1911.