

Oregon Gardeners and Ranchers Association

By Les Ordeman, Oregon Journal

In this photograph, Nick Sunseri, a truck peddler, pays cash for produce at the Oregon Gardeners and Ranchers Association market, while Joe Amato looks on. Originally established about 1915, the market was the first wholesale market on the east side of the Willamette River in Portland and was located near the river. By 1930, the market had moved east from the river to Southeast Tenth and Belmont, where this photograph was taken. A 1952 map of wholesale produce markets in Portland indicates five smaller produce houses clustered around the truck-only Oregon Gardeners and Ranchers Market.

Portland became an agricultural production and marketing center shortly after Euro-Americans descended on the region during the early 1840s. Many settlers came to Oregon because its rich farmland and vast spaces seemed to promise an escape from the industrial cities of the East. Settlers in the region quickly improved transportation by building farm-to-market roads and developing river transport, and by the time Oregon's citizens voted for statehood in 1857, the production and sale of produce was already a pillar of the state's economic and social structure.

The history of produce marketing in Portland is directly linked to the city's Italian American population. Historian Charles F. Gould concluded that, by the early 1900s, "Italians [had] fairly well captured all phases of the local fruit and vegetable market." Many settled on the east side, renting or buying land along Sandy Boulevard or in Ladd's Addition. They grew vegetables and berries, and initially sold, or "peddled," produce in trucks that they drove - via motor or horsepower - throughout the city.

Joe Amato, in the photograph above, is likely a relative of Frank Amato, who first came to the United States from Italy in 1888. He first worked on the railroads, then saved money and entered the produce business in Portland. After saving more money, returning to Sicily, marrying, and coming back to Portland, Amato prospered in the produce business.

Further reading: Gould, Charles F. "Portland Italians, 1888-1920" *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 77:3 (September 1976): 238-260 Toll, William. "Ethnicity and Stability: The Italians and Jews of South Portland, 1900-1940" *Pacific Historical Review* 54:2 (May 1985), 161-189. Written by Eliza Canty-Jones, © Oregon Historical Society, 2007.

Oregon History Project

<https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/oregon-gardeners-and-ranchers-association/>