

conclusion that within the lower size ranges customers regard a rather wide assortment of tomatoes as being equally acceptable.

EVALUATION

This study indicates that the standards currently employed in marketing Florida tomatoes delineate quality differences that are finer than the perceptions of purchasers in retail stores. Under most conditions consumers regarded two or more grade-size categories of tomatoes as equally acceptable. For the smaller sizes and lower grades the indifference zone of the consumer covers a rather wide assortment of grade and size combinations. The preference patterns which emerged from the study are especially relevant to the Florida tomato industry in two respects. They serve to provide guidelines for the development of specifications for grades and standards which might be simpler and more effective, and they provide evidence that would be of considerable assistance if the tomato industry should engage in collective action involving marketing control programs that use quality as the regulatory device.

Ostensibly, both demand and operational requirements for efficient trading are reflected in the system of differentiation provided by the existing grades and standards. The study results suggest that a much simpler system of grading would suffice from the standpoint of the demand side of the problem. Consumers do not discriminate between all the grade and size designations for tomatoes that the standards provide.

Conclusions regarding the operational feasibility of trading under a simpler set of standards must be approached with somewhat greater caution. The study did not reckon with the problems of variations in loss rates or handling costs for tomatoes of varying grade and size characteristics as they move through the distribution system. However, a casual examination of the marketing system would seem to indicate that these considerations fail to support a need for the existing number of grade and size categories. Perhaps the strongest tangible evidence in support of this contention stems from the frequently followed practice of selling tomatoes under combination grade designations and the fact that sales are sometimes made on the basis of quality designations such as "U. S. No. 2 or Better" and size designations such as "6 x 7 or Larger."