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Memorandum

To: Trialists

Fr: Curtis Meinert

Re: Counting pea aphids at Cal Pac

Cal Pac is shorthand for California Packing Corporation; Del Monte Foods. My counting was at Plant 114 in Sleepy Eye during my undergraduate college years. It was how I supported myself through college.

Aphids (*Acyrthosiphon pisum*) come in three sizes: babies, adults, and winged adults. You counted all three types.

The reason for counting was to determine if the field needed to be dusted.

You have to "high step" in peas.

Peas vine by tendrils. Vining is how they stand. No single plant can stand by itself, but vined together they can.

Aphid counting was a seven day a week drill. Each morning you showed up in the field office around 6:30am. There you got a list of fields to visit that day – about 20.

The "protocol" was to make 5 counts; one in each corner of a field and one in the center. Fields were about 20 acres so there was a lot of high stepping.

The sampling device was a pan about 4" wide and 12" long with a V shaped nose to make it easier to get under the vines.

When you got to a "sampling spot" you slipped the pan under the vines, gathered them over the pan and patted vigorously. Then withdrew the pan and counted: babies, adults, and winged adults.

Then onto the next sampling "spot".

So on through the day.

The truth be known. The sampling spots got closer as the day wore on.

In the morning you got wet from dew. In the afternoon you got wet from sweat.

You did a lot of walking so you drove where ever you could. Even after rains, if it looked like you could make it, you drove!

I remember a day after a gully washer. The field road was on the north side of the farmer's grove. I could see it was muddy.

I sized up the situation and figured I could make it.

Backed up about 30', threw my 35 in gear and floored it!

About 30' feet in I started spinning.

I kept it floored. Moved another 5' and then everything stopped – except my back wheels!

I shifted to reverse and went back – a little.

Slipped into 2nd and gunned it.

Got back to where I was, but no more.

Stuck!

Nothing forward, but I could inch back, about a foot a minute – so long as I keep it floored.

It was embarrassing to ask for help if you got stuck – too much shit to listen to in the plant!

You never wanted anybody to know you got stuck. But farmers are blabber mouths. Too many times you figured you were free and clear only to discover some blabbering farmer spilling the beans. The next you know it was all over the plant. Invariably there would be some wise ass asking if I got stuck.

"Of course not! Who told you that? You must have somebody else in mind."

Eventually I "smoked" myself out. The blue cloud hanging over the grove was roughly a 50:50 mix of oil (my 35 burned a lot of oil) and burnt rubber.

There was no way I could keep that one quiet with the ruts left behind.

In the morning you recorded your odometer reading and again at night. The difference was the miles driven for "mileage allowance" for the day.

That night I ended up with negative mileage because my odometer went both directions.

There was another time when I had a field about a half mile behind a farm place. It had rained a few days back. There was still water standing in a low spot in the field road.

My trained eye told me the surface was firm on either side of the pond. My only concern was getting through without stalling out.

I backed up a good 100 feet, threw the 35 in 2nd, and floored it! I hit the pond at about 40 miles an hour. I was planing over the pond. I could not see a thing. Mud flying everywhere.

I made it! But still could not see. I turned on the wipers but they didn't help.

"What the hell is going on? How can it be I can't see?"

I stopped to inspect.

The pressure of the water pushed the floor board up. The mud and water was from the bottom up.

The inside of the windshield was covered in mud! So was the ceiling. So were doors. So was I!

My own Mother did not recognize me when I got home that noon for dinner.