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I. MODERN GLADIOLUS PRODUCTION
by Peter W. Larson

There are many types of gladiolus growers; and, unfortunately, too many mix the love of horticulture with the business. Unlike most greenhouse growers who have all seen the sign, "If people only knew how much heat, how many hours, etc., it takes, they wouldn't mind the price," field crop growers such as gladiolus growers don't figure their costs close enough!

Let's take some rough figures for example. The glads cost about \$10 per thousand for no. 2 size and less for no. 3's or "bulblets." Your land rental, soil preparation and machinery cost figures around \$75 per acre. Then consider weed control and irrigation. These are variable costs and the place where good management pays off. Pest control and grading are two further areas where profits can be increased.

By planting double rows, closer together, using good fertilizer and water management, we can more than double per acre production. Minimum cultivation with weed control chemicals further reduces labor cost. Thus, the range in per acre production is from 20,000 to over 50,000 corms planted. With miniatures this can double again by planting more densely.

Use of tractor-mounted equipment, multiple row setups and general mechanization may pay off if your volume of production is above the break-even point of equipment operation and ownership. Very few growers share equipment, but this spreads out the cost base and reduces operating fixed costs.

What is an economic operation? In general terms, it is a certain size operation which makes money. Fixed costs for small or large growers are about the same on a given area. The cost of owning a tractor, irrigation pump, sprayers, dusters, storage facilities and buildings are about the same for one acre or ten. An economic operation varies with the local price structure in different markets. Usually those getting a low return will grow more to make up the difference, whereas the backyard grower who retails his flowers concentrates on quality at top price.

The laws of supply and demand dictate what you can get to a point, but dump the surplus when it costs you money to sell them. You are not helping anyone by salvage prices. It is better to find out why they are not selling and adjust accordingly.