

Novel Lettuce Refrigeration Methods Showing Signs of Being Successful

Experimental research being conducted in Palmer by State Senator Jan Koslosky with the assistance of the University of Alaska has been described by Governor Walter J. Hickel as being, "of great significance to the future of produce farming in the Matanuska Valley."

Koslosky, who has been experimenting with various ways of retaining the freshness of lettuce, met with Governor Hickel recently to report on the preliminary results of his experiments.

These experiments, Koslosky said, have been concerned with holding lettuce in cold storage for long periods.

He presented the governor with samples of lettuce which appeared quite fresh although they had been in storage for over two months—twice the length of time previously thought possible.

Koslosky noted that lettuce farming in the Matanuska Valley is presently worth \$300,000 annually to the farmers there and predicted that if his project proved successful, lettuce farming could be developed into a million-dollar-a-year industry.

"We feel certain that by making lettuce less perishable, we can stimulate its production in the Matanuska Valley," he said.

Working with Koslosky on the experiment are Dr. Horace Drury, Ivan Branton and Charles Logsdon of the University of Alaska.

The team has tried several different ways of storing the produce by changing such variables as temperature, humidity, oxygen content and different types of containers as well as some experimenting with nitrogen gas and plastic bags.

The method currently being used involves packing the lettuce loosely in cardboard boxes and storing them at a constant temperature slightly above freezing. After packing, the crates of lettuce are stored at the Four Corners refrigeration plant in Palmer.

Koslosky says that he hopes some private firm will "pick up the ball" and develop the project



STATE SENATOR Jan Koslosky (right) of Palmer shows Governor Walter J. Hickel some heads of lettuce he has kept in storage for two months. Koslosky is working with the University of Alaska to develop a method of cold storage which he hopes will help stimulate lettuce farming in the Matanuska Valley.

—Photo by WARD G. WELLS

into a money-making venture.

"Alaska produces the best quality cool weather vegetables in the U.S.," he said. "There's no reason why we can't compete with the outside market and provide a better product at the same time."

Lettuce grown "Outside," Koslosky noted, usually goes through many different temperature and humidity changes in shipment and is often poor quality by the time it reaches Alaskan markets.