



THE BATTLE FOR BOONDOGGLE

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This is the story about a small town somewhere in America. To protect both the innocent and the guilty we'll call this town Boondoggle, USA. And what happened in Boondoggle could happen anywhere.

Boondoggle was a sleepy little town tucked away in a valley that time forgot and the decades could not improve. It's singular claim to fame, besides the perfect weather, was the fact that it produced the worlds most delicious peaches. These peaches were so famous that people came from all over the world just to buy a bag or a box.

At first there were just a few growers - family farms mostly, growing peaches and selling them from the front porch or out of the back of the family pick-up. Mom, Dad and the kids out there in the orchards picking in the cool of the morning and selling in the afternoon. It was a good life with plenty of business for everyone.

Over the years, Boondoggle grew. People moved in from all over. Everyone had his or her reason for moving there. Some moved because of the weather, some because of the unhurried pace, and some just to grow peaches. It seemed the more peaches they grew the more people were there to buy them. Billboards along the main highway showed pictures of big beautiful baskets of fresh, ripe peaches, and the names of the different farms with maps on how to get there.

About this time someone got the great idea of putting up a fruit stand on the side of the main road leading into town and selling peaches to the visitors driving by. This saved them the bother of driving out to the orchards and saved the farmers the time and expense of driving their trucks into town. Even though the farmers had to pay a small commission for this service, they were more than happy to spend the extra time back on the farm. As they soon found out, they needed to spend more time in the orchards just to keep up with the increased demand.

As the farmers increased production, they also hired additional help, purchased new equipment, installed state-of-the-art irrigation systems, and introduced new and more attractive packaging. They even developed several new varieties of peaches to satisfy an increasingly sophisticated clientele. As the orchard business became more competitive, many of the farmers increased their advertising budgets with the billboard companies, others hired full-time sales reps to go around and pass out flyers and pamphlets advertising peaches, while others just went directly to the fruit stand owners and offered them a slightly higher commission. Even with the increase in commissions and advertising costs, the farmers still considered the growing of peaches in Boondoggle, USA to be the best business in the whole world.



It might have stayed that way forever, except for two events that would completely change the way peaches were bought and sold in Boondoggle. Historians still disagree on the exact date, but all concur that when the folks from Shineola moved to town and opened up Fruit stands Incorporated, life for the peach growers got worse. The first thing Fruit stands Incorporated did was paste their name and phone number on all the flyers and handbills the farmers had distributed all over town. The next thing was to paint over the names of the orchards and the maps on the billboards and replace them with the name of Fruit stands Incorporated and maps that led directly to their fruit stands. After that, they started advertising like they were a farmer, even painting the peach boxes with their own name and number. The visitors to Boondoggle quite naturally assumed they were still buying peaches directly from the peach growers. Finally, Fruit stands Inc. stopped paying the farmers at the end of the month and began keeping the growers money for sixty to ninety days or more. Soon, most of the fruit stands in Boondoggle were doing the same things. Some of the fruit stands actually went out of business owing the farmers hundreds of thousands of dollars.

The second event that historians agree changed the map of Boondoggle was the day the Mirage Gaming Association opened their first casino. Boondoggle was just the place Mirage had been looking for - perfect weather, lots of people on vacation with plenty of money, and a marketing system ripe for a takeover. They knew from past experience that one out of every six couples who came to visit the Casino would end up spending \$20,000 dollars or more. So shortly, after building their first Gaming Palace, the Casino owners went to Fruit stands Inc., as well as others, and offered them hundreds of dollars for every couple they could convince to come over and visit the casino. To the casino owners it was a pure numbers game. But, even then, it takes hundreds and hundreds of patrons to keep a big casino going. So, to further encourage folks to take the Casino Tour, the fruit stands began offering peaches at half price.

Most of the farmers were still getting a fair price for their peaches and actually saw an increase in peach sales. Even the farmers who felt that gaming was inherently corrupt had no objection to the arrangement as long as they got paid. Only a handful of the farmers refused to sell their peaches to the casino owned fruit stands. Strong moral conviction they said. Within a few months most of them had either changed their position or were out of business and living in homeless shelters.

As more casinos' were built and more money from gaming came pouring in, the fruit stands became more aggressive in their advertising. Some erected big signs that said FREE INFORMATION or just FREE PEACHES! Others put up signs that made them look like official representatives of the



AMERICAN PEACH GROWERS ASSOCIATION with flashing arrows that pointed to signs that read VISITOR CENTER. As competition along the highway increased, some fruit stand operators started standing out in the middle of the highway stopping cars right there in the middle of the road.

With money from the Casinos, the Fruit stands began buying up many of the most prominent billboards leading into town. Even the billboards erected by the city fathers to welcome visitors to the "Peach Capital of the Worlds," were plastered over with pictures of gaming tables and scantily clad showgirls. With the fewer and fewer visitors able to find their way out to the orchards to buy directly from the growers, the farmers found they had to pay higher and higher commissions to the fruit stands just to keep up their volume. And with the huge subsidies from the casinos, the fruit stands could sell peaches at any price they wanted, or give them away from that matter.

Because they knew that people were really coming to Boondoggle to buy peaches, they did whatever was necessary to control the market on peaches. Many of the growers tried increasing their advertising; some cut back on advertising, and some discontinued advertising altogether. Most postponed buying new equipment, replacing worn out irrigation systems, or investing in the development of new varieties of peaches. With almost complete control of the sales and marketing of peaches, the fruit stand owners began to tighten their grip. Commissions were soon 50% or more, and any farmer who tried to compete by selling his peaches at a discount directly to the visitors was immediately blacklisted.

As earnings for the farmers decreased, workers had their wages cut or were laid off altogether. With no way to attract customers to buy directly from the growers, with commissions so high that even increased volume only increased the amount of money they were losing, and with no way to compete with Fruit stands Inc. that could sell peaches below cost, the orchards one by one began to close.

The story of Boondoggle could have ended right there. But, as you know, farmers are resilient and resourceful bunch, and not predisposed to giving up without a fight. In spite of the fact that they were competing with each other for the same market, the farmers got together and formed the **Amalgamated Orchards Association**. Thus united, they began a campaign to regain control of an industry that they had built and which was their rightful heritage. First they got the City Fathers to pass a law that prevented anyone from painting over an orchards' name or number. The law also required the Fruit stands Inc. to post a special bond and remit full payment to the farmers in a reasonable time.

Next they convinced some of the billboard owners to greatly reduce fruit stand advertising. They then negotiated better advertising rates with these billboard companies and shifted limited dollars away from Fruit stand Inc. dominated billboards to these companies. They also found a few fruit stand owners who were not beholden to the casinos and formed partnerships that included commission caps and



enforceable ethics standards. They were also able to use the collective buying power of the Association to reduce the costs of irrigation equipment, fertilizer, and insurance, just to name a few.

Finally, knowing that most visitors were still coming to Boondoggle because of the peaches, they launched an aggressive campaign to educate them about the benefits of buying directly from the farmers or from fruit stands that were partners with the Amalgamated orchards Association. When visitors found that they could buy quality peaches without having to go to the casinos, or wait in long lines, or end up with a box of peaches that were all rotten on the bottom, they began to once again buy directly from the farmers. They also rediscovered the pleasure of talking directly with the growers themselves instead of some city slicker who didn't know the difference between a peach and a persimmon!

The greatest discovery of all was that they could not only get a quality product that was guaranteed by the farmer himself, but often at a price that was as good if not better than what many of the fruit stands were offering.

EPILOGUE

The story of Boondoggle had one more chapter. Like the farmers, the fruit stands and the casinos were there to stay. But as the peach growers began to slowly take back the marketplace, the number of peaches they made available to casino controlled stands began to decrease. These fruit stands were finally forced to lower their commissions to acceptable levels or face the prospect of having no peaches to sell.

For as one fruit stand owner later admitted -- "Life without peaches is the pits!!!"

The End