75 Pct. of Plaquemines' Citrus Trees Now Dead

Betsy Setback Is Second in Five Years

Plaquemines Parish citrus growers, who were operating a $2.5 million industry before Hurricane Betsy struck Sept. 9, lost 75 per cent of their trees in the disaster, officials reported.

It was the second major setback for the growers during the past five years, as they were just recovering from a 1961 freeze which damaged 95 per cent of their trees, said parish county agent Murphy McEachern.

Winds and floodwaters brought by the recent hurricane killed at least 350,000 three-year-old trees growing between Nairn and Venice, Plaquemines' orange-growing heart. The trees would have reached full yield in 1966-67, said McEachern.

One grower, State Rep. Barney Schoenberg, was somewhat more fortunate than other flood victims. He and his associates harvested some 1,500 bushels of satsumas last week, he said, placing his loss from flooding at about 500 trees.

However, Wilmer E. Farris, manager of the Orange Grove Plantation, said his losses amounted to more than 16,000 trees, including more than 500 "old trees" which had survived two previous freezes. Farris said his yield this year from the "old trees" was expected to be greater than 1964's until the storm hit.

McEachern said Plaquemines Parish's citrus industry future depends on the number of farmers willing to begin again after two disasters in so short a time.

He said floodwaters apparently did not contain sufficient salt water to hurt the soil. Nevertheless, he said, costs run to $150 per acre to replant trees, and total $250 per acre before any yield at all can be expected.