

## AVOCADO - FARM ADVISOR REPORT - SAN DIEGO

Gary S. Bender

Requests for assistance from the farm advisor's office rose dramatically in 1937. Despite some opinions that "agriculture is going out in San Diego County", we seem to be busier than ever. Although vegetable acreage is definitely declining, tree crop acreage in avocado, citrus and minor subtropicals is at an all time high for the county. It is true that the water was turned off to some groves in late 1967, and urban development has occurred on some older groves, but newer groves being planted on steep slopes would appear to offset some of this lost acreage.

Other reasons for the intense activity in this office include the following:

- 1) Growers have been seeking information on grove recovery following the freezes in January and December of 1987, the Palomar fire and subsequent flooding in the fall of 1987.
- 2) Growers are interested in alternative crops, especially deciduous fruits for planting in frost-damaged areas. There is currently a great deal of interest in Asian pears, low chill apples and Fuyou persimmons.
- 3) The number of commercial tree crop growers appears to be increasing. I know of several large groves that are being split into small "ranchettes". For instance, a 200 acre grove (with one experienced grower) is being split into 80 smaller avocado groves (with 80 inexperienced growers). These people, mostly transplanted urban dwellers, have an eager interest in learning farming "overnight".

In order to cope with the requests for information, we have instituted the Extension Club for consultants, PCA's, packing house fieldmen, etc., usually meeting on a monthly basis to discuss topics of current interest. I write a newsletter and a monthly column for California Grower magazine, in addition to various county publications. In conjunction with CAPCA and the extension specialists, I am currently teaching a weekly course on avocado growing for new growers. Our next course will be on alternative tree crops.

Research activities on avocados include a rootstock trial (with Mass and Gwen scions) at South Coast Field Station (with Mary Lu Arpaia), irrigation/fertilizer trials at Corona and Valley Center (with Mary Lu Arpaia, Jewell Meyer and Tom Embleton), and a thinning vs stumping plot in Bonsall. I am coordinating looper and amorbia trap counts in San Diego County for Blair Bailey. A plot looking at the effect of legumes/soil amendments for replanted avocados in root rot soil was lost to the freeze in January. We hope to establish a rootstock replant trial in root rot-infested soil later on this year.