

AVOCADO FACTS AND PROBLEMS IN SAN DIEGO

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In 1910 a giant tree on the W. W. Prior Ranch at Escondido was the only avocado in San Diego county; in 1920 there were over a thousand trees, and in a seven-year period following, over 140,000 trees, of which we have record, were added, with planting still going on. The real development started in 1924, when over 5,000 trees were planted; in 1927 over 40,000 were planted; in 1927 over 40,000 were planted, and 1928 may have surpassed that figure. At the present time, in round figures, the avocado acreage in San Diego county is between 2,500 and 3,000, establishing it well in the lead over other counties.

It is interesting to note that most of the avocado orchards have been planted by newcomers. This is due largely, of course, to the development of irrigation water by the construction of Hodges and Henshaw dams. Lake Hodges supplies irrigation water for the Rancho Santa Fe, and the contiguous coastal areas of Solano Beach, Cardiff, Encinitas and Leucadia; while Lake Henshaw supplies the water for the Vista District. It is in these sections that the greatest development of the avocado industry has taken place. Extensive plantings have also been made in the Carlsbad, Fallbrook, Escondido, La Mesa and Grossmont districts.

Several years ago, the California Avocado Association attempted to save the industry from the sad experience that all other fruit industries have passed through—of a great multiplicity of varieties, by providing a recommended list for planting. The one variety of this list that has lasted from start to finish has been the Fuerte.

The Association has maintained a variety committee that has studied and passed upon the merits of the various seedlings that have appeared from time to time. Favorable reports have been made on many varieties, among which have been Anaheim, Dutton, Dorothea, Mayapan and Panchoy. Our avocado survey of San Diego county shows that the Fuerte comprises about sixty percent of the total planting in the county. Puebla, one of three varieties that remained longest on the recommended list is second, and Dickinson, the third variety, represents a little over four per cent. In other words, the recommendations of the California Avocado Association on the three varieties that carried its approval for the longest time are reflected in 71 per cent of the plantings in San Diego county, a truly remarkable record, and one that justifies the existence of this organization for this one purpose alone.

The variety question and its solution are of extreme importance to the avocado industry. Avocados, lemons and oranges are the only California fruits that can be marketed in the fresh state every month in the year. The variety problem in the citrus industry has apparently been definitely settled, but not so for the avocado. Perhaps it is not to be

expected that two or three varieties may be found to fill all the market demands of this fruit. The Fuerte is unsurpassed in its season. Incidentally, it has a long season when advantage is taken of the various districts in which this variety is produced. The great need of the avocado industry in southern California is for a variety that will produce summer and fall fruit, of Fuerte quality and of Fuerte appearance. At the present time, the market apparently demands in the avocado a medium-sized, green, pear-shaped fruit.

Everyone admits that the big problem of the avocado industry is to increase consumption. The Calavo Growers of California constitute the one organization working definitely to increase the consumptive demand for this fruit. Avocado growers should work with this organization by producing the kind of fruit that the market demands, rather than by hampering it by producing fruit of all colors, sizes and shapes. San Diego County apparently is doing its part.

The future development of the avocado industry in San Diego County depends entirely upon the economic success the industry achieves. Let us apply the four common factors:

First, the quantity of production: Up to the present time, there has not been an overproduction of avocados. The market has taken the crop at high prices, which indicates that more production will follow. The increase will come in two ways: First, greater production per acre; second, more acres. The trees in San Diego County are all young. It is logical to assume that a great increase of pounds of fruit per acre will occur as orchards become older. There has been a great increase in acreage of trees, most of which are not yet producing. This increase in acreage is still going on.

In my opinion, we are increasing our acreage of avocados too rapidly to insure profitable returns to all those who are making plantings. I hope I am wrong, but only time will tell. I believe in the ultimate success of the avocado industry in San Diego County, in the sections that are adapted to the production of this delicious and nutritious fruit, but it seems to me that the development of production is ahead of the consumptive demand at the present time.

The second factor is economy or efficiency of production. The avocado industry is too new, and we know too little about it to make many statements on this point. Overhead expenses, the cost of land, the cost of trees, the cost of water, the cost of fertilizer, and the cost of cultivation, and other care, all enter into the matter of efficient production. Suffice it to say that San Diego County offers adequate opportunity for the efficient production of the avocado.

The third factor is quality of production. Quality means the production of desirable varieties of proper size and shape, properly handled and packed. The Fuerte is the recognized leader of avocado varieties and this county has a well defined and extensive "Fuerte belt," extending from Fallbrook on the north, through Vista, Escondido, El Cajon, Grossmont and Lemon Grove, to Chula Vista on the south. Other high quality varieties are being grown in the sections along the Coast.

The fourth factor is efficient marketing. No one doubts that the success of the avocado industry depends on its ability to educate the consuming public to buy increasing

amounts of avocados. In order to do this, the merits of the avocado, its high nutritional value, its appealing flavor, its economy as a food product, must be demonstrated and advertised. A "luxury" demand at high prices cannot take care of the production of the extensive acreage of avocados now planted in southern California. Avocado growers are fortunate in that they can take advantage of an organization already functioning for this sole purpose—The Calavo Growers of California.

Now, just a few predictions as to the future of the avocado industry in San Diego County: first, acreage will continue to increase; eventually, San Diego County will have at least five thousand acres of avocados; second, prices, per pound will decrease. Third, gross returns per acre will increase. Fourth, trees will be planted farther apart. Fifth, more attention will be paid to fertilization. Sixth, the "basin system" of irrigation will be discontinued, except for one or two-year-old trees. Seventh, the commercial variety problem will be settled by reducing the present number to not more than four. Eighth, the industry will get out of the promotion and into the production stage. Ninth, most growers will see the light and join the cooperative marketing association. And tenth, the avocado industry will become the leading industry in San Diego from the standpoint of gross returns.