

ASSOCIATION HISTORY

E. C. Button

IN ORDER to understand the avocado industry in California, and to account for some very important points of difference between that industry and most other fresh fruit and vegetable deals, it is necessary to give consideration to some things that happened several years before there were any California-grown avocados to market. Having been deeply interested in the avocado and in close touch with its development in this state from the beginning, I will briefly touch on some of the significant steps that were taken to prepare the way for a successful and well-regulated industry.

While the first avocado tree to fruit was planted in California over 50 years ago, it was not until 1910 that real interest in this new sub-tropical fruit began to be shown. About that time it began to be known that there were several trees in various sections of Southern California that were producing a new fruit known as Alligator Pear that sold for \$1.00 or more per fruit. Very naturally this news aroused considerable interest, as well as some excitement, and a number of people planted avocado seeds. By 1914 the need was felt for organized effort and a notice was printed in the press asking for all interested to meet at the Hotel Alexandria in Los Angeles on May 15, 1915. At this historic meeting the California Avocado Association was organized. Its first president was Edwin G. Hart, who has been prominently identified with the industry ever since.

It is difficult for the present grower to realize that when the Association was organized the avocado was almost totally unknown to even the people of Southern California. So much of this was true that the handful of embryo growers did not know what to call the fruit they hoped to produce some day. In President Hart's first address he states: "The purpose of the Association is the improvement of the culture, production and marketing of the 'Ahuacate.' "Ahuacate is the Mexican name of the fruit and it was only after considerable debate that it was decided to use the word "avocado" in the Association work.

The Association members decided to hold semi-annual meetings and the first of these was held at the Hotel Alexandria on October 23, 1915, at which time a public exhibit of thin-skinned Mexican fruit was made, and little leaflets with avocado recipes were distributed. Even at that early date the little band of enthusiasts valiantly determined to acquaint the general public with the merits of the fruit they hoped eventually to produce, and by persistent and intelligent effort ever since that determination has been made good.

The need for exact knowledge was felt, also for more and better varieties, so the Association asked the University of California and the United States Department of Agriculture for help. This assistance was given in abundant measure.

Investigation developed that there were three general classifications or horticultural

races of avocados, the West Indian or strictly tropical, grown largely in Cuba and Florida; the Guatemalan, a sub-tropic race, and the thin-skinned Mexican race. The Guatemalan and the Mexicans are the avocados grown commercially in California. An extensive analysis of various varieties of the different races were made by the State University and by the U. S. Department of Agriculture and it was found that the Mexicans and Guatemalans as grown in California were much richer and higher in oil content than the West Indians grown in Cuba, Florida and the tropics. These analyses were made from the time the fruit was very immature until it was overripe, so that knowledge as to the best picking time might be made available. The high food value of the fruit was established and its exceptional oil, protein, and vitamin content shown.

The U. S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction spent the better part of ten years in exploring the avocado producing countries of the tropics for promising varieties. Many such were introduced into California. This work was done at the request of the California Avocado Association, and the California grower in a few years has had material made available to him that in some other fruit industries took centuries to gather.

The Association through its committee on varieties has constantly kept the planter advised of the latest information on this important subject.

Through its committee on standardization, the Association secured state legislation preventing the sale of immature fruit. This was a very necessary piece of work, as owing to the lack of knowledge by the public and the high price of the fruit, some of the growers and many dealers were tempted to sell < grossly immature avocados, in some cases fruit only one-third or one-half grown. Such practices are not conducive to the favorable introduction of the fruit, and were prevented by the legislation secured by the Association. Another important benefit of the standardization was the keeping out of the California markets of the inferior, immature Cuban fruit, vast quantities of which have been dumped on the United States markets of late years in order to take advantage of the educational work done by the California and Florida growers.

From 1915 on the Association held two or more meetings each year, well advertised, at which time exhibits of fruit were shown to the public, recipe leaflets distributed and every effort was made to acquaint the consumer with the merits of California's newest and most valuable sub-tropical fruit. As trees came into bearing and more fruit became available, larger exhibits were made at orange shows, fruit shows, food exhibits and so forth.

The officers, directors and members of the Association wrote numerous articles, well illustrated, for magazines, newspapers, etc., extolling the merits of the fruit, so that by the time the growers were confronted with a marketing problem, many people knew something about the avocado.

The Association early joined the California Development Association, the Agricultural Legislative Committee, and the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, and at all times has had the aid and assistance of these great organizations.

At all times the Association has worked in harmony with farm advisors, and agricultural commissioners of the counties in which the fruit grows, and in several of these counties

special avocado sections of the farm bureau have been organized and are engaged in cultural studies.

Beginning in 1915, each year, the Association has published a year-book, containing all up-to-date information on all phases of the industry, and these publications are everywhere recognized as containing the most authoritative data on the avocado. No publication on the avocado has been noted in recent years in any country, and in any language, that is not liberally interlarded with citations to the year-book of the California Avocado Association.

As stated before, there were no avocados to market when the Association was formed, and all this educational work was done before the commercial stage was reached.

At its very first meeting of the Association adopted a by-law providing that it should be the duty of the board of directors to provide for the cooperative marketing of the avocado crops when the production became heavy enough to justify a marketing organization. By the latter part of the year 1923 it was decided that the time had come for organizing a strictly cooperative marketing organization to properly pack, introduce, advertise and sell the California crop. After a series of conferences and growers' meetings, such a marketing organization was incorporated on January 21, 1924. This was the organization now known as the Calavo Growers of California, which took over the marketing business from the Association on Feb. 1, 1924, and has continued under the same management ever since.