

Paying Tricks in Picking Avocados

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Mr. President and Ladies and Gentlemen: I don't know about the paying part of this subject, nor about any tricks either so I will confine my remarks to a review of my own experience and base my talk on growers' viewpoints. Back in 1918, 1919, and 1920, most of the trees were small and it wasn't any trouble picking the fruit from the ground or with step-ladders. The color of the varieties told us when they were ready to be picked and we did not have very many problems to bother about. But it was not long before problems appeared, and they have been coming along ever since. One of the first things was that young Fuerte trees, after they had a good crop were apt to take a vacation the next year, and some people thought it was because they bore too much the year before and therefore took a rest the next year and that possibly by thinning the fruit they could overcome that. Working along that line, I devised a cheap cutter which was mounted on a short piece of 3/8" iron, and with this apparatus would go around and snip off the fruit and not consume very much time. These instruments were made up by the late Harry Kendall, North Whittier Heights, and developing this idea he devised a picker with a movable cutter on the end of the pole, and a little bag to catch the fruit, which was probably one of the first pole pickers, and the most efficient to be devised. There was no regularity in our organization; everybody was on his own; and it wasn't very long before some unscrupulous buyers began buying the crop on the trees and would grab off all the fruit whether mature or not. And then a very few of the growers began picking the fruit off of the ground. It so happened that these few individuals had places in locations exposed to wind, and had a lot of fruit knocked off by the wind. They used to pick up the fruit and send it to market.

I remember seeing on fruit stands in Los Angeles some avocados—green Spinks—that were shriveled and black, which I don't think were good enough for a pig to eat. I feigned ignorance and asked what variety they were and he lied and said they were imported from Central America. These abuses led to agitation on the part of some of the more thoughtful growers who had the interests of the industry at heart, to try to secure legislation. This resulted in the 8% oil content law. This law cut out a lot of these abuses. It then appeared necessary to give a little wider spread for the marketing period for Fuertes. So I went picking around to most of the trees for fruits that were mature early in the season. There is the point where a pole picker comes in handy. This idea of running up and down ladders involves lots of energy. With a pole picker one can pick out good fruit and use less energy. There are several other factors in picking large fruit first. I think all of you will agree that the longest period over which we can market our

fruit is to our advantage. Another thing is that picking off the fruit as they grow—the larger fruit first, going over the orchard several times—the trees are considerably relieved of part of their load fairly early. It don't take very much argument to convince growers that it don't take so many big fruit to make a box as it does with seven or eight ounce fruit. So by picking to size, he eventually gets enough tonnage to pay for the extra cost of picking. In picking some very large trees, which is a very difficult problem from the ordinary everyday trees, I have in mind one orchard of trees that were close to thirty feet high. They had been very carefully wired with a ring in the center and wires radiating from that out to the branches, and as the trees increased in size and got higher another set of wiring was put in above that so that the trees had two or three stages of this wiring. The custom in picking this orchard was to use a crew of about four men. Three would go up the trees because they had such a wide spread. They climbed up in the trees and sometimes one foot was placed on the branch and sometimes on this wire staging itself. From there they would use long-handled pole pickers. Instead of the regulation picking sack they used canvas buckets such as are used in the army for cattle and horses. There were iron hooks by which these buckets could be hung on a convenient limb and when you got the bucket full it could be lowered to the man on the ground who would put on an empty bucket, and the man on the ground would empty the bucket into boxes. This four-man crew could pick sometimes as many as seventeen boxes off one tree. There are some few growers that adhere to the view that they have just got to get the fruit off early in the season in order to be assured of a crop for next year.

There may be a little basis for that idea, but there are several other considerations. In the first place, there are so many other factors in the setting of a crop that picking the fruit off isn't the only thing. There is the matter of a cold, wet winter. Another thing is the condition of the orchard. If the trees are well cared for and selected picking has been practiced; that is, the large fruit picked off first, it stands a very good chance of getting a good crop of fruit anyway. There is another feature. If everybody had the same idea, the market would go smash. Obviously, the people who do practice this idea of picking their fruit early in the season, regardless of size, are marketing on a market that is maintained by their fellow growers who are picking only according to size. This practice is obviously unfair. I believe that the Federal Government, in arranging pro-rates on the marketing of other fruits, has held the view that no individual or minority group is entitled to market its fruit in a way that is harmful to the interests to the majority. So, if everybody picks when the fruit is ready to pick, our market would be better. Probably a lot of you have had the experience of reaching up for a Fuerte fruit that was pretty high up, and tried to hold it with one hand and tried to clip it with the other and maybe pulled it down a little and had the disappointment of getting a cull. In cases like that, I might very well borrow a trick from the lemon pickers' book. The way it goes is something like this. (He illustrates the trick.)

IT PAYS TO PICK ACCORDING TO SIZE

There is another point about picking at the present time that comes to my mind. When labor is so very scarce, we have to hire people who are inexperienced. Those people sometimes clip the stems so close that they cut a little piece of the peeling off of the top

of the fruit, which puts it in an inferior grade.

In conclusion, I rather believe that most everybody that has been in the avocado business for two or three years has developed a sound system of picking, which is strictly in order in view of the reputation of American farmers for "rugged individualism." Far be it from me to tell anybody how to pick his avocados.