

Avocado Decline in Central America

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Dear Dr. Coit:

. . . My principal reason for writing at the moment is to talk a little about that "tree decline" matter. Naturally, you folks have gone into this whole problem **much** more thoroughly than we shall ever do for many years. We have nothing but casual observation on which to go. But the more I travel around the tropics, the more I note that avocado culture is limited to regions and soils which have good drainage. For example, in Jamaica you find avocados on the limestone soils between Kingston and Mandeville, and mighty few of them on the flat sugar cane lands on both coastal plains. The limestone soils are on the hills, and usually shallow; but "pears" do well on them just as they have done on many of those thin soils in Florida.

Then in Puerto Rico: it has always been notorious that you can't grow avocados in most parts of the island, but there is a region on the south coast where there are plenty of trees, and here again it is a limestone region.

Then in Cuba: at the western end of the island, where you are on shallow limestone soils, as around Habana, avocado culture is important; but when you go toward the east, onto the flat clay lands where cane is the big crop, you don't see avocados very often.

As you point out, if the trees are healthy they can harbor a lot of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and probably other things (down here), which to me means that the way to grow avocados is to keep off the badly drained lands where you can't get healthy trees. We have just this week had a fine example of what wet feet do to avocados. We put out an orchard of six hundred trees last August. They all did well till last month. After seven or eight very dry months, we had about 16 inches of rain in June. In our orchard there are about three spots, perhaps 100 to 200 feet in diameter, where we found, when we dug holes for the planting, that we had a plastic clay and sand mixture at one foot depth, running down a foot or two, to the coarse gravel and sand which is under all our land here. On these spots the trees, in the past fifteen days, have just simply collapsed.

Best regards always,

Wilson Popenoe