

## **Some Fundamentals of Picking, Packing, and Marketing**

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Fortunately for the avocado industry, sound methods for handling and marketing the fruit were developed in the early years of the industry. The accomplishments and benefits of organized effort, already so well demonstrated by the citrus and walnut cooperatives, were of great significance and aid to the pioneer avocado producers, when they were first faced with a commercial marketing problem.

### **Legal Maturity Standard Established**

Seeking to firmly and substantially build their industry for the future by protecting their own as well as the consumers' interests, they developed a legal maturity standard. The standard—requiring that all avocado varieties contain a minimum oil content of 8 percent by volume, before being offered for sale, was incorporated in the laws of the State of California. Enforcement is a duty of each County Agricultural Commissioner. The refracto-meter method is the official method by which oil content is determined; a method developed by the University of California College of Agriculture.

This legal minimum requirement is primarily to prevent 'deception, which would result in consumer dissatisfaction over immature fruit. A uniform minimum oil content for all the hundred commercial varieties was agreed upon in order to simplify effective enforcement of the law, and to avoid penalizing growers of the various varieties, the characteristics of which are inherently different, as they relate to oil content and flavor. Most of the avocados marketed are, when mature, considerably above the legal minimum oil requirement.

### **Selective Picking: Advised**

Selective picking, whereby the largest and most mature fruits are harvested, is a desirable practice and is followed by most growers. By this procedure, producers deliver their best fruit for sale and subsequently gain the size and weight developed by the growth of the remaining fruit between picks. This also extends the marketing season, and largely avoids periods of excessive supplies and market gluts. Selective picking implies making several picks of each variety during its marketing season.

To avoid skin abrasions on the fruit, most growers use cotton gloves while picking. They are likewise careful, when clipping the stems, to be certain the fruit is not damaged by a blade cut. In placing picked fruit into either the picking bag or box, gentle handling avoids bruising. Boxes of picked fruit should not be left in the sun. These precautions, regularly heeded, insure best appearance of the fruit when offered for sale.

Pooling is the most accepted, as well as the most practical, method followed in the marketing of an agricultural commodity by a group of growers acting together. It creates an incentive to the producer of quality products, and a quality product is a vital factor in successful marketing. It is this method, since the early commercial development of the industry, to which most avocado growers have adhered. Pools can cover any desired period of time, depending upon production and marketing objectives. The primary advantage afforded by the pooling method is to extend the marketing season and thereby reduce to a minimum unfavorable fluctuations in price. Most California avocados are therefore pooled for marketing. Pooling, in effect, prescribes that an individual grower's avocados, when received at the packinghouse, will be graded, sized and packed in accordance with the grading standards in effect, and the proper credits for such grades and sizes entered on that grower's account before his avocados lose their identity with fruit of like grade, delivered by other growers. Uniform grades, sizes, and packs are the result. Growers participate equitably in the proceeds of sale in relation to the quantity and quality of fruit they delivered during a given pool. This principle, as applied to marketing avocados, has greatly assisted in developing the support of the buying trade by assuring them of continuing supplies of avocados of uniform quality and size.

After avocados are packed, and before they have softened and are edible by the consumer, is the marketing period. During this period the fruit is subjected to commercial handling by the trade. It is the most important period in the life of the fruit, if complete trade and consumer satisfaction are to be realized. Regular commercial refrigeration facilities, usually suitable for storing most produce, are not adaptable to avocados, as the respiratory behavior of the fruit is unlike that of other tree fruits. Over a period of years, it has been necessary to develop specialized refrigeration facilities so that the life of the fruit can be temporarily extended for a short period to permit and assist in orderly marketing.

### **Cooperative Marketing**

Cooperative marketing has been an integral part of the avocado industry almost from its beginning. Through the combined efforts of growers who market their fruit in this manner, the industry has undoubtedly developed more rapidly and successfully than if growers had not the benefits of their own organization. In the avocado industry, cooperative marketing has rendered services to growers which are unobtainable otherwise. By their joint efforts, growers have developed facilities for the efficient handling, grading, packing, shipping, storing and sale of their fruit. Introducing a new perishable specialty tree fruit and developing a demand to purchase this fruit at prices which would keep the industry solvent, is self-evidence of the need for continued strong support by growers of this type of marketing. Cooperative marketing is based on the principle of member control; a principle, if wisely administered, which provides the mechanism by which growers can legally and effectively improve their bargaining positions in the country's markets—at absolute cost to themselves. Cooperative leadership in marketing is essential to the future of the avocado industry, if market demand is to be kept ahead of future increased production.

As individual producers, we number several thousands, each with a strong desire to excel in the production of quality avocados. The reward for those is the dollar return. To realize adequate returns implies individual responsibility in support of joint action through cooperative marketing. As growers, our welfare is more safely secured by retaining control of our production through cooperative marketing facilities.

The growing of avocados, no matter how conscientiously and skillfully conducted by the individual grower, is, at most, only half the battle in his efforts to make the grove profitable. The other half is best achieved through facilities for packing and marketing, owned and operated by a large group of growers for their mutual benefit.