

The Future of the Aguacate in Colombia

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This article is practical evidence of the determined manner in which Dr. Popenoe's new School of Tropical Agriculture at Tegucigalpa is attempting to carry out its main objective—the diversification of agriculture in those countries surrounding the Caribbean, by interesting the natives in new crops. This prepares the way for the students of the school when they return to their homelands. The article ranks high for simple style and the readability of its Spanish. California is proud of its own Wilson Popenoe and Professor Villegas is a native of Colombia.

The authors introduce the subject by telling of the many fine qualities of the aguacate fruit, its nutritional value, attractive flavor, the variety of its uses and its highly valued place in the diet of other Latin American countries. They then ask why it does not occupy a more valued place in the economy of Colombia, where it has been known throughout history and is certainly well adapted to many producing areas. They reply that up to this time, the situation has been entirely dominated by one race of aguacates, the Antillean or tropical, which has greatly restricted the localities of production and the length of the market season. They suggest the remedy may lie in the importation of the other races and their multiplication by vegetative propagation after trials in various localities.

A concise and interesting history of the aguacate is given, which seems to show that the fruit was well known in South America, prior to the advent of the Spaniards. This is followed by a discussion of the botany of aguacate and of the cultivated races of that fruit which is quite familiar to Californians and Floridians.

The possibilities in Colombia are then discussed in a manner reminiscent of meetings of the California Variety Committee. Before emphasizing the value of extensive experiments at various sites, which they later on suggest, the authors lay down two fundamental considerations first, the three races of the aguacate permit the culture of that fruit in Mexico and Central America from sea level to altitudes of 2500 metres; secondly, that the differences in the period from blossoming to maturity and the effect of altitude and latitude exerted on the period of maturity should give a country such as Colombia, with its varied topography, good aguacates the year around.

Quoting the California Avocado Society's Variety Committee: "As a general rule, the best varieties for a given region are those originating in that locality," the authors suggest that, in addition to certain known varieties which may be imported or which are already in Colombia, that seeds of these varieties which have been crossed with those of local origin may ultimately provide the varieties most ideally suited to growing and marketing conditions in Colombia.

A very considerable list of the varieties which might prove worthwhile in various locations in the Republic is given. The Simonds, Waldin, and Trapp of Florida and the Catalina of Cuba are mentioned among the Antillean varieties; the Panchoy, Itzamna, Taylor, Nabal and Nimlioh among the Guatemalans; the Puebla, Duke, Benedict and Topa Topa among the Mexicans. The Fuerte leads the list of hybrids which also contains the Florida originations, Winslowson, Lula and Gottfried. These representatives of the three races and the hybrids are recommended for trial in six areas of great variation as to climate, ranging from very tropical on the coast to considerable altitude in the interior. The Fuerte and Puebla are recommended for trial on the high savannah about Bogota, where they would have the advantage of the great markets of the capital city.

In conclusion the authors say "It has been our intention in this article to point out some of the possibilities, not yet realized in the cultivation of the aguacate in a country that seems naturally suited to this crop (in various regions) and which, in spite of the general recognition of the merits of this excellent fruit, has not taken advantage of the opportunities which it offers. It is Utopian to predict the obstacles which will be encountered; time and experience are needed to demonstrate how far Colombia is able to go to make the aguacate an important commercial crop, yet the intrinsic merits of the fruit clearly guarantee that. When one considers in this important paper what the aguacate has done in the various other tropical republics (Mexico, Cuba, Guatemala) and in recent years in the states of California and Florida in the United States, one is made to feel the desirability of undertaking a CAMPAIGN FOR THE AGUACATE, in order to determine conclusively the manner and the localities in which the Republic is able to increase its production, both in quality and length of marketing season, of this fruit, whose nutritive value is unsurpassed."