

## THE AVOCADO PICTURE IN VENTURA COUNTY

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It is indeed a pleasure for me to appear on your program this afternoon to discuss -with you the avocado situation in Ventura County. We wish to welcome all of you avocado growers and friends from all over Southern California to our county, and hope that your stay here will be a pleasant one. Some time ago your program committee contacted me and wanted me to give you an over-all picture of the industry in this county. So, in the few minutes allotted to me, I will try to give you that picture.



*High-producing tree, Santa Paula.*

Avocado growing in Ventura County is not new. Some of the oldest trees which I have located in the county are on the Fritz Huntsinger place on North Ventura Avenue, approximately two miles northwest of the city of Ventura. These old trees are Mexican seedlings planted in 1882 according to Mr. Huntsinger. The seeds were brought here from Mexico and planted by the original owner of this property. These trees are still bearing good crops, and appear to be fairly consistent in their bearing habits. These are immense trees, and in good healthy condition. Very few budded variety trees were planted prior to 1913. Most of the trees prior to that time were seedlings and scattered more or less over the planting areas of this county. Some budded varieties were planted in orchard form about 1913, but not to any great extent, and, as in most other areas, avocados were planted as avocados as very little information was available at that time concerning proper varieties to plant. As in many other areas of Southern California,

varieties were planted which have not produced satisfactory crops. Many of the varieties which were planted in those early days have been discarded and are not planted at the present time, although some of these have produced heavy crops year in and year out. One tree that I know of, of the Challenge variety, was planted in 1915, and has averaged about 40 boxes to the tree per year for the last 15 years, and one year produced the top of 100 boxes from the one tree.

The planting of avocado trees in Ventura County moved along slowly up until about 1942. According to the Agricultural Commissioner's Report of 1942, there were only 231 acres of avocados in Ventura County. About that time there was considerable interest beginning to show in the avocado business. Between 1942 and 1945 approximately 280 acres of avocados were planted here but still the variety problem was the important factor and very little information had been developed up to that time as to what varieties were best adapted to the various areas within the county.

Climatic conditions in Ventura County are well suited to the growing of avocado trees. During the heavy freeze years of 1948-1949 and 1949-1950, avocado trees planted in this county fared no worse than lemon trees, and the damage to our avocados was considerably less than it was in other avocado growing areas of California. From this experience we find that there is quite a large area in this county that could be planted to avocados without fearing severe frost damage. The Agricultural Extension Service in Ventura County has been very much interested in the avocado as a comparatively new industry and has been discussing this with many farmers in the county as an alternate crop in areas where old lemon trees have been pulled out. Since there was so much interest shown, the Extension Service in 1947 conducted its first Avocado School. This School met each Tuesday evening for a period of 6 weeks. Farm Advisors conducting this discussed all phases of the avocado industry as it existed at that time. George Goodall, Farm Advisor, and I conducted this school for three consecutive years, and each year the attendance at these schools has increased, so that last year the average attendance for 7 sessions was 189 people. There were 280 different people who attended one or more of these sessions. These school sessions greatly increased the interest in avocado production and many of the people who attended these sessions decided to go into the avocado business. In 1945 there were 379 bearing acres of avocados, and in the same year there were 129 non-bearing acres. At the end of 1950 there were 497 bearing acres and 674 non-bearing acres, making a total of 1171 acres. I was informed by Agricultural Commissioner Chester Barrett that this figure is not quite correct, and that he estimated that the figure was closer to 1500 total acres than the 1171, at this time.

As I mentioned before, climate is a very important factor in the production of avocados. In 1948 a survey was made to determine the number of acres of the various varieties in the county, and the bearing habits of these various varieties. This information helped us to determine what varieties are best suited to the various climatic zones. We found that varieties which did well on the coast did not do well in the interior, and others that did well in the interior were worthless on the coast. We roughly classified the county into three climatic zones—the coastal area extending back from the coast about 8 miles, which would be roughly through a line north and south through Saticoy and the Camarillo Heights area. The intermediate zone would extend from Saticoy east to about

half way between Santa Paula and Fillmore, and then the interior area from that point to the east borders of the county. In the coastal area the best varieties we had at that time so far as production was concerned were the Dickinson, the Anaheim, the MacArthur and the Carlsbad. Since that time we have found that some of the newer varieties are well adapted, and we suggest that they be planted also—they are the Hass, the Rincon and Zutano. I might say that the Zutano is very frost resistant, and the few trees we have produce good crops from the coastal area clear over to the interior area. In the intermediate area, we found that the MacArthur and Edranol were among the best producers. In the eastern edge of the district the Fuerte showed promise in certain areas. Of recent date the Hass has turned out to be an excellent variety for this intermediate area, and we are experimenting with the Rincon to see whether or not it will do as well. In the interior area, the Fuerte is well adapted to certain areas within that area. Between Santa Paula and Fillmore, north of the highway, there is an area where Fuertes have done exceptionally well, and the MacArthur and Hass have also done well in that area. We have found, however, when you get into the east end of the county, under hotter, drier conditions, that the Fuerte has been unsatisfactory. A few Mexican varieties have done very well, particularly the Topa Topa.

The Extension Service is testing a number of different varieties in the different areas of the county. We have test plots in the coastal area at Marion Walker's place, at Clyde William's place in the Camarillo Heights area, at the Janss Corporation properties in the Santa Rosa Valley, at the Dr. Horace Pierce place at Saticoy, and the Sespe Land & Water Company property at Fillmore. Also, we are working very closely with Harry Forbes at the Camulos Ranch in Piru on the test plot he has put out there to test a number of varieties. Some of these varieties in these areas look quite promising. From these plots we hope to develop information which we can use for future plantings. We still do not have the best varieties. However, we believe we are lots farther ahead today on varieties than we were six years ago. I mentioned the avocado as an alternate crop. Many of our citrus orchards are going out of production, or do not produce satisfactory crops because of old age or other factors. We have found that planting lemon trees in the same place where old trees are pulled out will result in production of only half as much fruit, age for age, as the original planting.

With land values as high as they are, it is necessary to get a crop which will produce a good return, and many of the growers have turned to avocados and have planted avocados in areas where old citrus was pulled out. Avocado trees will grow on almost any type of soil which we have. A deep well drained soil is our top quality soil for this crop.

Now, regarding propagating of the avocado tree. Most of the trees being planted at the present time are tip grafts, produced in local nurseries. This business is developed since many of us saw the demonstration of Walter Beck's of tip graft trees at the annual avocado institute held at La Habra 3 or 4 years ago. Tip graft trees have proved to be quite satisfactory provided the grower takes care of them properly.

This gives you an all-over picture of the industry in the county from the beginning to the present time. We believe this industry is going to continue to grow. I believe in the not too distant future you will find in Ventura County one of the higher producing avocado counties. I believe also it won't be far in the future that Santa Barbara and Ventura

Counties will have their own packing house to take care of the volume of fruit produced here. There is great interest in this industry in this county, and I predict that in a short time the avocado industry of Ventura County will be one of the major industries of this area.