

California Avocado Society 1955 Yearbook 39: 97-99

AVOCADO DEVELOPMENT IN VENTURA COUNTY

Calvin C. Delphey

County Director of Agricultural Extension Service (Ventura County), University of California.

(A talk given at the 26th Annual Institute, La Habra, October 9, 1954)

Ventura County is rapidly getting into the avocado business and will soon be one of the major producing counties in California. To date we have over 2,000 acres of avocados in our county which is over four times as much as there was ten years ago. A large proportion of this new planting has taken place in the last five or six years. Many of those early plantings are now in production so that the estimate for 1955 is somewhere between 80 and 100 thousand 40-pound field boxes. This is almost twice as much as the 1954 crop.

This being a comparatively new industry in Ventura County, many problems had to be solved or at least worked on before getting off to a good start. I want to give you some of the experiences and ideas which we helped work out in the development of this industry in our county.

The location of the orchard is a very important factor. During the recent freeze years of 1949 and 1950 we found that there were no banana belts in Ventura County, but we did find out that there were certain satisfactory locations within our county, and observations made during those two years gave us an idea where avocados might be produced with minimum damage. George Goodall, now farm advisor for Santa Barbara County, in a talk before the annual meeting of the California Avocado Society in 1 Santa Paula in 1951 stated that there were approximately 25,000 acres of land in Ventura County which could be planted to -avocados. Of course not all this land will be planted to avocados. Much of it is in citrus at this time. However, it does indicate that there are a great many acres that are suitable for this crop.

Another important factor is soils. Some of the best soils in the country are found in Ventura County and are classified as Yolo-type soils. We have other upper terrace soils known as Rincon and Montezuma clay-adobe which are also being used. All of these soils will produce avocados if properly managed. One of the most important things to look for is a well-drained soil. Some of the heavy upper terrace soils will need to be managed with great care. We have a large planting of new avocados on this type of soil. So far we have had little difficulty with this type of soil, and have found no cinnamon fungus in any of them. Drainage is one of the very important factors of successful avocado production. If we should have a very rainy season such as we had in 1940-41, we could have some difficulty on the poorly drained soils. Most of our plantings of avocados are on deep well-drained soils.

Another factor of importance is that of the water supply. Proper irrigation of avocados is

necessary to produce the crop. So far in Ventura County we have had sufficient water to take care of our needs. Conservation of water supply in the county is being undertaken at this time by the building of San Felicia Dam on the Piru Creek north of Piru. Water will be impounded during rainy seasons and released during the rest of the year to assist in the replenishment of the underground water supply. This is a step in the right direction in preventing much of our water running to the ocean during wet seasons. Water quality is an important factor where-ever we raise avocados. Water containing large quantities of minerals may have some detrimental effect on the trees by salt accumulation in the leaves. This has happened in some instances, and where this does happen it is desirable to add sufficient water so as to leach out the accumulated salts from the soil.

After the selection of the location, the soil type, and proper water supply the next thing is to plant the type of trees which will do well in a given locality. Planting the right variety in the right place is very important to a successful avocado enterprise. You must have production of fruit if you are going to stay in the business. Many new varieties are being developed, and many old varieties which have proven themselves in a given location are still being planted. Ventura County is roughly divided into three climatic zones. Varieties which do well in the interior will not do well on the coast, and those on the coast will not do well in the interior. In the intermediate zone we find certain areas where coastal planting-type fruit are satisfactory. The same is true with the interior planting fruits. In 1948 a survey was made of our avocado business in this county. From this survey we determined what varieties were best adapted to these climatic zones. We found that the Hass, the MacArthur and the Rincon, being somewhat newer varieties, were well adapted to coastal planting and for the intermediate zone planting, and now we believe that the Hass and MacArthur may have a place in the interior. Old varieties such as the Dickinson, Anaheim, and Carlsbad which do well on the coast are not adapted for interior planting. Varieties such as the Fuerte used for planting in the interior and possibly some of the warmer spots of the intermediate zones are worthless on the coast so far as production is concerned. In fact, In Ventura County there is only a small area between Fillmore and Santa Paula north of Highway 126 in which the Fuerte has been commercially successful.

After we have decided what varieties to plant the next thing is to select good trees. The best tree is none too good when being set out in the field. Selection of young vigorous trees for planting is desirable to develop the best possible grove. Two types of trees are used in Ventura County planting. Approximately 90% of the plantings at this time are tip graft trees which are from 6 to 9 months of age at the time they are set in the field. These are excellent trees if they are handled right. Since they are grown under hothouse conditions they must be handled with care during the first season. They must be shielded by protectors of various types and be watered often enough to insure moisture for the roots at all times. Some balled trees are being used but not enough balled trees are available for the large plantings that have taken place in the county. Also, balled trees are slow in taking off and are somewhat higher in price.

Care of the trees for the first season is very essential because it will determine whether or not the tree will make the grade. Again let me emphasize that irrigating the trees at the right time and as often as necessary during the first growing season are important in developing a well-grown tree. We do not advocate fertilizing the trees for the first year.

Concentrated fertilizers may have a detrimental effect on the tree with the possibility of burning the young roots. Oft times well-rotted manure, bean straw, shavings, or other organic matter placed in the basin around the tree as a mulch helps to conserve moisture.

I have given you briefly some of the steps that will be necessary to get into the avocado business and be successful in it. Summarizing, let me state that location, type of soil, adequate water supply, frost hazards and protection, selection of variety, and selection of trees are important factors in getting started in this important avocado business.