

## FLORIDA AVOCADOS IN CALIFORNIA—WHY?

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Many growers have seen Florida avocados in southern California markets in recent years during December and January. They have asked how can Florida growers ship avocados into Los Angeles, the heart of the nation's avocado industry, and sell them at lower prices than California avocados bring. In December of 1956 I visited Florida where I saw the production areas, talked with producers, and in so doing obtained information that helps to explain the reasons for this situation.

The main reason for this situation is Florida production has been steadily increasing since 1948 and new markets had to be found.

### Florida Production

Year	Tons
1948	3,100
1951	6,500
1953	10,600
1955	12,500
Expected by 1960	20,000

California was the natural place for Florida to ship its best fruit since avocado consumption per person is higher here by far than anywhere else in the United States. Prices for even Florida type fruit were as high here, including differences in shipping costs, as elsewhere in the United States. This made it profitable to ship to California and made a new market for Florida's big crops.

Florida production has increased because two-thirds of the existing acreage in Dade County, the major avocado area, was planted since 1946. These plantings have consisted of varieties like Lula, Booth 8, and Taylor which are all good producers and high enough in oil to meet the California eight per cent minimum maturity law.

Production of 10,000 to 20,000 pounds per acre annually is obtained in good groves of Lula and Booth 8, although the average state production is much lower. It costs about \$235 per acre for labor and materials, mostly fertilizer and sprays, to produce avocados in Florida. In addition interest on investment and picking run \$150 per acre or more. To

break even, according to a Dade County Cost Study, a grower there needs to produce 7,200 pounds per acre if he receives 5½ cents per pound for his fruit—the average price 1953 through 1955. This higher production in Florida from good groves with a lower cost of production makes it possible to sell in a Los Angeles supermarket a 16-ounce Lula, 3000 miles from where it was produced, for the same price or less than an 8-ounce Fuerte.

There are, however, some bright spots for the California grower in this Florida deal. First, a serious hurricane is long overdue in Dade County and it would eliminate production for at least two years. Secondly, many growers are losing money because their production is low due to wrong variety, too few trees per acre, poor fertilization, inadequate fungus control, or just poor care. Third, and increasingly important, is land values have skyrocketed because of the press of subdivision and this has been a major factor in preventing further planting since 1954. Due to unprofitable production and increased land value it is estimated by avocado people in Florida that in 10 years there will only be 5000 acres left instead of the current 8500. This 5000 acres of reasonably high producing avocados will be capable of an annual production of about 15,000 tons.

Therefore it appears to me that Florida avocados will continue to enter California markets as long as they are produced in quantity cheaply and California has light crop years. To live with this situation in California in the fall, local growers will need to raise heavy producing varieties like Zutano, Bacon, and Hass. Outside of California our avocados meet price competition from Cuban and Florida fruit from July through February. This competition may be partially or even materially met in many areas with greater and more consistent California production of a limited number of varieties of good quality.

Time can be on the side of the California avocado producer. In five years Florida's avocado production will be leveling off to declining and California's should be increasing and more consistent. This hinges on whether the California avocado grower who has a healthy but poor producing orchard changes now to the variety which is the most consistent producer of quality fruit that can be grown in the area where his orchard is located. California avocado growers must not overlook quality in this race for total production and keep their quality fruit like Fuertes where they are productive. Also to maintain quality, California growers all need to eliminate the 200 low quality, odd type varieties which now confuse the consumer and often are poorer quality than Florida avocados.