

California Avocado Society 1976 Yearbook 60: 14-17

Report From The Variety Committee of the California Avocado Society - 1976

The Variety Committee has had a very active year. The executive group, consisting of Bob Platt, Marvin Miller, Crawford Teague and myself, have met at least bi-monthly. We were also pleased to have other Variety Committee members and farm advisors join us when they were able.

On June 9th our full Variety Committee met at the South Coast Field Station with 22 in attendance. We are grateful to Dr. Randy Keim, superintendent of the station for the courtesies extended our group. Dr. Bergh conducted us on a tour of the experimental plantings of his long range breeding program. We are most optimistic on the performance of some of these crosses. This program has been a long hard row to hoe and, as the years go by, tries the patience of those in the industry who expect results overnight. We must remember, after a promising variety is developed it takes at least five years of trials in varied climatic areas to prove its worth, plus acceptance by packers and consumers.

After the station tour, the group met and discussed the pros and cons of our current commercial varieties plus the newer varieties under test. Crawford Teague and Bob Platt reported on the progress of the Kaiser Aetna Rancho California variety plot monitored by our group.

The Kaiser Aetna and California Avocado Society variety plot has made fine growth during the year. The varieties grafted in 1975 (see 1975 report) have made good growth. This year, 21 of Dr. Bergh's best selections were grafted onto registered two year old seedlings, plus a new variety submitted by Frank Gilkerson and Hank Brokaw, named Piercy. The grafting this year was done by Robert Whitsell, Crawford Teague, Roger Decker and some volunteer helpers. The follow-up work on this has been done by committee members plus some outside help paid from Society funds.

The original budded registered varieties planted in 1973 bore enough fruit this year to make some comparative evaluations. After next year's crop is observed we should have some useful information to publish. Included in our original planting was a rootstock experiment of Mexican, Waldin, Lula and Zutano. The scion tops were Zutano, Fuerte, Bacon, Reed and Hass, replicated several times. These scion rootstock combinations are being evaluated by Bob Platt for compatibility and growth comparisons. The industry is in need of test plots such as these under California conditions.

Crawford Teague, our most enthusiastic variety committeeman, is reworking the variety plot chart. Next year we hope to have enough interesting data to publish this in our yearbook.

A revised publication of the brochure Avocado Varieties for Commercial Planting in California, sponsored by the C.A.S. and edited by Bob Platt, was distributed. The original information in this has proved a most useful tool for new plantings and required

very few changes. A year from now we should have sufficient information to evaluate the Jim, Santana and Pinkerton.

Our display of varieties at the annual meeting in San Diego at the Bahia Hotel was well received. Our thanks to all the committee members, growers, farm advisors and University of California personnel who helped supply the fruit and set up and man the display.

We anticipate a busy year for the committee in the year ahead with more new varieties to graft in the variety plot and enough production on the grafted varieties to evaluate these as to their future worth.

In October, four members of our Variety Committee—Lois Lohneiss, Jim Bacon, Ted Todd and myself—were fortunate enough to go on the Tahiti, Australia and New Zealand avocado and citrus tour under the leadership of Don Gustafson. Some observations and comments on avocados are as follows.

On the island of Tahiti, we were met by former San Marcos and Fallbrook grower and packer, Bill Wilder and his wife Donna. They left California several years back on their yacht with Australia in mind. After spending some time in beautiful Tahiti, they fell in love with the friendly people and way of life and are now residents. They have acquired acreage and a new home and are experimenting with avocados. Donna was a most enjoyable guide and commentator on the day long trip around the island. There is a potential for limited avocado acreage and other tropical fruits. We visited an experimental station and were impressed with the interest in avocados and other fruits.

Our tour in Australia started in the Brisbane area where we visited avocado groves on Tambourine Mountain, a rain forest area with 60 to 70 inches of rain per year with thick luxuriant growth of large Eucalyptus, native palms and many other trees and shrubs. We toured the Alex Kidd avocado orchard containing some older California imported varieties. The Fuertes and Hass were producing well. The Australian variety Sharwill looked good—it should be tried more in California.

We noticed a branch tip die back on Hass, similar to some older Hass trees in California. *Phytophthora cinnamomi* is a serious problem and is hosted by some native plants and trees.

We visited the Graham Anderson nursery with a production of 10,000 trees annually. They are doing an excellent job of raising *Phytophthora* free nursery trees and galvanized grid benches under seran cloth. Guatemalan rootstock is used. They are also raising some Duke 6 by Marcotage for root rot resistance. They have an older grove of 25 year old Fuertes that had been cut back and regrown because of crowding. They are doing well with good production. Some of the acreage had papayas interplanted. The latitude of this area would compare with mid-Mexico in the northern latitudes. Anthracnose is a problem and requires bordeaux spraying. There should be sufficient acreage with reasonably good drainage to plant more avocados in this area.

We then flew to Adelaide in south central Australia and by bus followed the Murray river with its rich agricultural areas. Our guides were farm advisors from government research stations. This district is quite arid, very similar to our southern California citrus areas. Because of over citrus production, they are planting avocados in favored

locations with good drainage and suitable frost-free climates. There is some acreage previously planted to citrus that has been converted to avocados and they are doing well. Because of the limited supply of water there will probably be many more acres of citrus converted to avocados in the future as virgin land with adequate water is hard to come by. Most of the avocados were our familiar California varieties.

In the Renmark area we met with former Fallbrook resident and Avocado Society director, John Gordon. John and his family have pioneered a fine large citrus orchard and some avocado acreage overlooking the Murray River.

Much of the water of the Murray River is recycled or drains back into the river and is used further downstream with increased salt content. We were very impressed with the excellent engineering and management of this great water system as well as the cooperation of the many agricultural users. In the future this will become a major avocado producing area by Australian standards.

Our first introduction to avocados in New Zealand was in Tauranga in the Bay of Plenty area, the largest citrus and fruit growing part of New Zealand. This area is blessed with 40 to 80 inches of rainfall, depending on the location. Much of the land is volcanic in origin with deep soil and well drained.

Near Kati Kati we were hosted by Mr. and Mrs. Honeyfield. They have been planting limited avocado acreage as a hobby. I must say, this limited area was about as ideal for avocados as I have ever seen. Deep well drained volcanic soil, more than enough rainfall the year round and frost free with no extremes of high temperatures. The Honeyfield orchard has Hass, Fuertes, Bacons, Zutanos, Sharwill and Hayes bearing excellent crops from the third year on. The trees were vigorous and free from tip burn.

In all areas of New Zealand and parts of Australia, windbreaks are essential. In New Zealand, a wind-break is planted immediately after clearing the land.

The next area of interest was in the Gisborne district. Avocados have been pioneered here by Len Grey, a name familiar to California growers. He has been the major grower in New Zealand for years. He obtained his original scion material from California. The older orchards here have root rot problems due to the near level slopes lacking adequate drainage. The younger groves on selected sites with good management should produce well in the future. Avocados being planted are mostly California commercial varieties with Hass the first choice.

Avocados in Australia and New Zealand were bringing unusually high prices. They are scarce in most markets, but as the younger groves start bearing and production increases, many more people will be able to enjoy this wonderful fruit and at the same time it will be profitable to the growers.

We enjoyed this trip "down under" with fellow growers from distant areas, many of whom are Society members who had visited in California. We had a wonderful exchange of ideas and discussions of cultural and marketing problems. We were especially grateful to the government research and extension staffs along with marketing people who were generous with their time and provided us with most useful statistics and information.

Again I would like to thank our variety committee for their cooperation and help this past

year. It is most gratifying to help in a small way with the problems and challenges of the growing avocado industry.

Respectfully submitted,

Oliver H. Atkins, Chairman