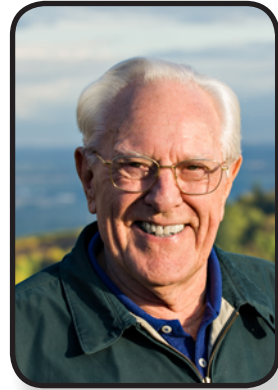


# California Avocado Society

## In Memoriam\*

**Charles Gilman Henry**  
(1925-2013)



**G**il Henry, whose innovations helped transform consumer demand for avocados, died on May 18, 2013 at his avocado tree-shaded home in Escondido, California. He was a lifelong resident of Escondido who devoted his life to his family, his friends, and to the farming, packing, and marketing of avocados. During his lifetime, Gil did as much or more than anyone to shape our industry.

He was a second generation avocado grower. He was born in 1925, the year his mother and father planted a Fuerte grove on land surrounding their newly purchased home in Escondido. His parents soon established the Henry Avocado Company to pack their own and a few neighbor's avocados. While growing up on the avocado farm, Gil helped with the work after school and on weekends, joining the family enterprise full-time upon his return from service in the Army during WW II. While his mother kept the books, he and his father planted more acreage on the Henry ranch, and Gil worked to grow the business by expanding the packing operations, calling on potential customers, and making deliveries to Los Angeles. When his father died in 1953, Gil enlisted his younger brother Warren into the business and together they helped transform the California avocado industry.

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Their first innovation was to establish the vertical integration of the Henry Avocado Company in order to encompass sales, distribution, packing, and farm management. Working together, these components would ensure customers a reliable supply of quality fruit. To help achieve this, they brought in their cousin George Schoeffel to open a sales office at the Los Angeles produce market. During this period of growth in the industry, the Henry brothers believed that Hass would be the best variety for the future, so they planted Hass groves financed by investor partnerships under the control of their farm management operation. This gave them extraordinary control over the freshness, quality, and harvest-timing of the avocados they marketed. Their vision of what an avocado company could be was a revelation to many others in the industry.

Perhaps the crown jewel in Gil's career was his vision of marketing pre-conditioned avocados. Collaborating with Vic Tokar in the early 1980's, Henry Avocado Company built the first forced-air avocado ripening room in the industry at the Escondido packinghouse. Jack Shepherd, when awarding Gil the Avocado Society's Award of Honor in 1989, said, "It would not be too far off to call this important development the Gil Henry Pre-Ripen Program." At that time, there was plenty of talk that offering ripe avocados at retail would boost consumption and demand for avocados. Gil was willing to take the risk as well as do the work of convincing retailers to radically change their avocado handling and merchandising methods. Offering consumers ripe avocados has proven to be a completely winning program resulting in dramatically increased avocado consumption.

Gil willingly engaged in leadership positions in our industry. He was instrumental in both the founding of CADO (California Avocado Development Organization) and in the founding of the California Avocado Advisory Board, (the predecessor of the California Avocado Commission), and was instrumental in selecting Ralph Pinkerton to be its first president. Gil also shared his knowledge and insight with growers and avocado organizations throughout the world.

In short, Gil exerted a powerful influence during a crucial developmental period of the avocado industry, and will be missed by all who knew him.

*\*Contributed by Phil Henry and James McCormac*