

International Marketing Order — an Idea Whose Time Is Arriving (By Boatload)

James McCormac

Avocado grower and editor of California Avocado Society's The Weekly News Line.

It is now the time of year when Chilean Hass avocados are arriving in our US produce market. Avocado imports from Chile are not expected to set a record this season, but more than thirty million pounds of Chilean Hass avocados are estimated to be sold in the US in the last three months of 1996. Chilean imports are not the only foreign grown avocados of concern to California avocado growers. All season we have been reminded of the efforts being made by Mexican avocado growers to export their Hass avocados to our US market. Meanwhile, the Dominican Republic, which has been sending West Indian varieties to the East Coast for years, is quietly planting Hass in their central highlands. Preliminary estimates suggest that they have the potential of producing fifty million pounds of Hass per year by the turn of the century.

Whether we California avocado growers like it or not, the international avocado industry is moving forward with new avocado plantings, state of the art handling and savvy international marketing skills. We, as an industry, can wait until enough foreign avocados are threatening to wash us away, or we can choose to act now to blaze a trail which will allow us to keep control of our industry.

Each avocado grower needs to be exploring every way possible to increase productivity. This is a banner that my predecessor, Warren Currier, waved for years, and it is still true today. Study your cultural costs, pollinating varieties, pollination, fertilization and irrigation. There is no mystery about this — productive growers will maximize their ability to remain profitable regardless of what foreign avocado growers do.

As an industry, we can and should be taking steps to maximize the value of the avocados we grow. We do this through our shippers, be they independent or cooperative, and through the California Avocado Commission. By these means, we have created a market with the highest avocado value in the world. It is no wonder the foreign producers are anxious to sell their avocados here. It is, however, a simple matter of equity that foreign avocado growers should pay to develop the US market that they are so eager to enter — we have been paying to develop our market for years.

It is safe to assume that there is a strong consensus among California avocado growers that foreign avocado producers should not get a free ride when they bring their fruit to our market. The only question is how should they contribute to building avocado consumption. One answer is that our industry could rely on foreign voluntarism; indeed, the Chilean exporters have made moneys available for the promotion of Chilean avocados. The amount has been about one-tenth what we in California consider

necessary to do the job.

Or, our industry can establish an international commodity marketing order with the power to assess all Hass avocados entering the US market. An International Marketing Order (IMO) would not replace our Avocado Commission. Rather, an IMO can be established which would interlock with our California avocado programs and provide funding for avocado promotions when we normally do not promote — such as right now.

An International Marketing Order for Hass avocados is an effective and efficient means to ensure that all foreign grown Hass avocados contribute their fair share to expanding US avocado consumption. This would enhance the value of avocados for all producers. This, after all, is what it is all about: increasing the value of avocados and thereby increasing the prospect of profitability for California avocado growers.