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Shipping and Marketing the Avocado

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Before proceeding with my subject I wish to state my pleasure in being associated with the Florida State Horticultural Society. Last evening was my first opportunity of attending such a meeting and I wish to state that the discussions presented, represented to my mind no little food for thought. This formation of thought will produce but one result, and that is a crystallization of the thought formed, and the Horticultural Society deserves the strongest support from every community in the State. The subject which has been assigned me—The Shipping and Marketing of Avocados—is of interest to the entire State and especially to Dade county, where the fruit grows to perfection in size and flavor.

The value of the Avocado as a food is equal to that of meat or milk, as the better varieties contain about 20% of vegetable fat; and the most delicate person can partake of them with relish. However, in the North, the Avocado is eaten mostly by the well-to-do classes as its scarcity puts it in the class with luxuries.

Owing to the peculiar nutty flavor the average person does not take to it readily. The taste must be acquired. This accounts to a large degree for the difficulty in marketing large quantities of the fruit. At the present time a hundred carloads of grapefruit and oranges can be sold where one single crate of Avocados can be disposed of.

We who know the value of the Avocado, feel that it is but a matter of time when the fruit will be as popular, and in as great demand, as the citrus fruit. Systematic advertising is all that is required. This systematic advertising has long since been acknowledged as the making of any article of value. Take the concerted advertising of the California raisins. A few years ago it was impossible to find a market for the small quantities produced; now, after a few years of advertising, all the wine grape vineyards are being converted into vineyards of raisin grapes. Hammer it home, as it were, and your task is accomplished. This same condition existed with the California walnuts. The Avocado is just as nourishing and very much easier digested than either the raisin or nut and is extremely appetizing.

Speaking of appetizing brings to mind an experience which I had some years ago when a brother visited me from California. After giving him a sample of the fruit he replied to my inquiry as to how he liked it: "Well, to be perfectly frank with you, I never tasted anything that resembled Octagon soap more than does this fruit." He further remarked, "I would not give you a dollar for all the Avocados in Dade County." Now he has me ship them across the Continent to him. We hope the day is not far distant when the Avocados will be taken out of the luxury class and be regarded as a staple, throughout this country as it is in the tropics.

The methods of handling the Avocado are of great importance on account of the extreme delicacy and perishable nature of the fruit. In our early days, dating back to 1911 when the industry was in its infancy, we used a long bamboo pole with a hook on the end to pull the fruit from the brittle limbs which could not be reached with the hand. Some of our seedling varieties tower twenty-five to thirty five feet in height and the use of a ladder against the brittle limbs is out of the question. So one man would pull the fruit with a long pole and hook while another would watch his chance as the one, two or three-pound Avocado gained momentum on a direct downward line towards him, allowing it, not infrequently to slip through his hands on to the ground and breaking into a dozen pieces or more, and occasionally to drop on top of his head. Now a small canvas bag is attached to the hook at the end of the bamboo pole and the greatest of care is taken in their gathering. Only the perfect fruit, free from all blemishes, is shipped to the fancy trade. All scarred and blemished fruit is shipped to a cull market.

By so watching and carefully grading our fruit, the little business of 1911 has grown to a point where it now handles about 70% of the entire production of Dade County. Shipments are selected carefully as many of the varieties do not carry well; some become soft in twenty-four hours while others hold up six or eight days. Those varieties that soften quickly are always sorted out and shipped to nearby markets, while the firmer ones are used for the distant markets.

Three styles of packages are used by our concern in making shipments. The one which is considered the standard crate contains about forty pounds of fruit net weight. This package is used more extensively than any other style of crate as it is recognized by the express company as the standard. The next style is the flat crate carrying about half the contents of the standard crate. For some years this flat crate, carrying one layer of fruit, was used in making long distance shipments such as across the Mojave Desert to the Pacific Coast with a great deal of success. As the war came on we were forced to abandon this flat ventilated crate, and after considerable experimenting, we invented a very inexpensive pony refrigerator which could be discarded at the receiving end owing to its cheapness of construction. We found this mode of transportation very successful as the express company was then delivering shipments of ventilated crates in a worthless condition on account of arriving long over-due. This refrigerator, which has its iced compartment immediately over the fruit, saved the day. No matter whether it was on the road ten or twenty days, as long as the crate was properly received, it carried the fruit in perfect condition. We are now using this style of package in all of our shipments except the immediate South.

Perhaps the greatest difficulty we have to contend with is the importation of Cuban and other foreign Avocados, which are dumped on our markets. Cuba makes no attempt to grade or cull her fruit, nor do we get much protection against the poor quality of fruit which is shipped into our large consuming markets from that country. I know it to be a fact that many of the Avocados that are shipped in here from Cuba are carried in bags, thrown over a horse's back, for a distance of many miles before the already bruised fruit is crated for shipment into the States. When we get protective tariff against this foreign fruit our markets will handle all the fruit that is now being grown, if properly distributed.

In addition to the foreign shipments that flood our leading markets, some of our good growers make bad conditions worse by shipping indiscriminately on consignment. To

my mind the consignment of perishables is not the proper method of marketing them. Would a shoe merchant consign his products to some distant points to be sold for his account? Do the California raisin growers ship their products to be sold for what ever the market will bring? Or do the nut growers of California ship in this manner? No. Are the tomato growers of Dade County shipping on consignment today? Very few. Why? Because they are being properly distributed and with such equal distribution that the demand holds up.

Just so is our method of marketing the Avocados. We buy and sell upon a plain business basis and never in our ten years of Avocado business have we consigned a crate of Avocados, except culls, which we would not put into our printed wrappers, or an occasional extra crate when the pickers misjudged the amount required for the day's orders and overpicked. We always try to pick the exact amount of fruit each day needed for shipment that day, whether it be fifty crates or five hundred crates. When markets are flooded with consigned fruit the tendency always is to bring the general price down to the level of the price brought by the surplus. Our motto is, "Create your market or sell to one who has created one. Never consign!"