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Some Observations on Avocados in Custard Apple Muck

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In April, 1919, I paid my first visit to the territory lying on the south side of Lake Okeechobee, known as the Ritta section. The land is a rich custard apple hammock soil, well drained, and has on it a growth of tall custard apple trees, or where these have blown down, a thick growth of elders. We found a hotel at the mouth of the Miami Canal, and from that point visited the section along the lake for a distance of ten or twelve miles, also Ritta Island.

At every home, we found a few Avocados; seeds having been planted, and in every instance, they were growing fine, and some of the stories told us were unbelievable. The oldest tree was on the Sewell place, having been planted in 1910, and at this time was about forty feet in height and eighteen inches in diameter at the base. None of the trees had had any fertilizer, and from appearances, they had had no care. On this immediate shore, there seemed to be no effect of the cold of 1917, as Royal Palms, Avocados, guavas, Australian pines, rubber trees and other tropical growths were doing fine.

We were unable to locate on this trip, any budded stock, and were disappointed with the amount of fruit that had set on the seedling trees, but everyone told us they had carried heavy crops the year before.

Later, we made a trip to the plantation of Mr. Ed. Forbes on the north end of Ritta Island, and to the grove of T. D, Feister on Kramer Island. We found plantings of Trapps and Pollocks at these places. At that time they were very small, but at this time have attained a wonderful size for their age. The trees on the Forbes plantation that are two and one-half years old are eight to nine feet in height and have set a crop of fruit of about a box to the tree. And the trees in the Feister grove, which were four years old last September, are eighteen and twenty feet high, and are carrying a crop of seven or eight boxes to the tree. The trees have been given no fertilizer.

Physical development in the Glades is in a pioneer stage. Transportation is very slow and uncertain. The cost of developing and handling fruit is high, but the prospects are bright, as a railroad is being constructed from Moore Haven to Sandy Point; there is talk of a bond issue of $350,000, for a good road from West Palm Beach to the south side of the lake and on towards Ft. Myers.

During the spring of 1920, we made some purchases at the Sewell plantation, so that I have been back to this country almost every month since that time. All of the seedlings have produced heavy crops during the years. There is one large tree on the Sewell place that bore a crop of over seventeen hundred fruits, and the indications are that it will have a goo3 crop this year.

I have discovered only one or two Avocado trees of the Guatemalan type in the Glades

and they are only three or four years of age. These have produced the same amount of growth that the seedlings and West Indian varieties have. The Winslow variety bore a fair crop in 1920.

The custard apple soil seems to have all of the ingredients necessary for the raising of Avocados and producing good crops of fruit and all interested in the Avocado industry will watch this section closely, for as soon as transportation is improved, a heavy production of Avocados is bound to come from the south shore of Lake Okeechobee.

W. J. Krome: This concludes the program to be offered by the Committee on Avocados and Sub-tropical Fruits, and if there are any questions anyone would like to ask in regard to any of the papers that have been presented along the lines of Avocados or sub-tropical horticulture, the members of the committee will be glad to answer them before we adjourn.

Mrs.__: I would like to ask what to do for the Avocados and Mangos dropping the small fruit.

W. J. Krome: We have had that trouble at various times in our groves and it may result from several causes. A very heavy rain during the time that the bloom is open seems to result almost certainly in the dropping of fruit. The presence of either thrips or an infection of the anthracnose fungus will have a similar result. The thrips injury will quite frequently take place, throw off the bloom and in most cases the fruit will not actually set. The dropping from the anthracnose fungus usually takes place about the time the fruit is the size of a bird's egg and seems to be due to a weakening of the union between the stem and the branch upon which it is located. I think that there are several other reasons but those have come under my own observations. Possibly some member of the committee can more fully answer that question.

H. H. Hume: I might say in behalf of the Society that we appreciate very much the program on Avocados which these gentlemen have given us this afternoon. There is no question about the importance of this branch of horticulture in Florida. It is one of the coming things; it has been a long time coming because there have been a lot of difficulties and a lot of unknown things to be worked out but we are gradually getting around to it and I think before very many years we will have an Avocado industry in Florida that will be of first great importance in the horticulture of the State, and these men who are on this platform today are the men who are making it, are doing the work and Florida owes much to that type of pioneers in an actually new field so far as we are concerned.