

PROBLEMS IN THE GROWING AND MARKETING OF AVOCADOS

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Ladies and Gentlemen: The Federal Farm Loan Board recently refused to accept avocado groves as security for substantial loans on the ground that avocado growing was not a business, but an experiment. While we may not fully agree with Uncle Sam in this ruling, I think we *can* agree that there are still a number of problems to solve before avocado growing can be called a stabilized business. If you will glance at your program, you will find that all I am supposed to do is discuss some of these problems in the production and marketing of avocados. The answers to these problems you will have to work out for your selves or find in the back of the book.

The one big problem confronting all avocado growers is how to produce a crop which can be sold for more than it cost to produce. This is further complicated by the fact that avocados can no longer be produced and marketed as a luxury, but must compete in the open market with staple and better known fruits. Inasmuch as it may be safely assumed that the future of the avocado lies in mass production at a reasonable price, rather than a light production at a high price, the value of all groves will eventually have to be judged on this basis. Only land which is particularly suited to avocados on account of soil and climatic conditions should be considered for future plantings.

In order to solve the big problem, it seems to me that we must have standardized varieties of more uniform quality and appearance, as well as regular and heavy production. It is surely possible to develop better types than the accidentally produced commercial varieties of the past and the grower today is badly in need of better—and

If every grower were to fruit a few selected seedlings each year, the development of a more nearly ideal fruit would be greatly hastened. The creation of a consumer demand in new markets is handicapped by the wide variation in both appearance and flavor of the fruit now grown. About the time a new customer gets the idea that an avocado is a large, light green fruit with a thin skin and a certain flavor, his request for more avocados is met by small, purple fruits, with a shell like a warty coconut and an entirely different taste.

The main marketing problem is how to get the great number of people who are financially able to buy any fruit which appeals to them, but who do not know whether an avocado is an alligator egg or a new card game, to become avocado conscious and clamor for avocados and then more avocados. My personal opinion is that if the possibilities of the avocado as a standard article of diet for the American people are ever to be realized most of the selling and distribution must be done by the growers themselves. The commission merchant is a necessary factor in the present system of handling perishables, but it is not reasonable to expect him, to spend his own money in building new markets for a product in which his financial interest, after all, is slight.

Furthermore, such missionary work as is done by these merchants, is only to increase the demand for avocados, not particularly Florida avocados, but any old avocado which happens to be cheapest and easiest to get. This results in a switch to other kinds of avocados, at the very time Florida is in greatest need of an outlet.

If the foregoing is true, it seems that the only agency which could hope to do this work is a growers' association. This brings us to a problem as is a problem. As they say back in Georgia, it is "the old he" problem. That is, how to get a bunch of farmers, regardless of whether they are hay and straw farmers or fruit growers, to stick together and work in the same direction long enough to accomplish anything. I would as soon undertake to herd hummingbirds, or drill gold fish in close formation, as undertake that job, but it seems to me that is the only way a really stable avocado business can be built up.

I do not mean to make any odious comparisons, but somehow or other, whenever I see a farmers' association starting out I am reminded of the old farmer who was driving a bunch of strong minded and lively shoats. After running and throwing clods till he was breathless, he broke out with, "Scatter, blast ye, scatter! If there warnt but one of ye, you'd scatter."

You have all noticed that a bachelor can always tell you just how to manage a wife, and an old maid is the last word on how to bring up children. On this same theory, I am qualified to make suggestions about marketing avocados. It seems to me that a great many Florida growers are overlooking a good market close to home in their mad scramble to ship everything to New York. Three or four years ago we had a large fall tomato crop to market. About the time we were ready to ship, California, with her characteristic lack of consideration for our wishes, ignored the fact that her season was supposed to be over and continued rolling about a hundred cars of tomatoes a day to the Eastern markets, which was just too bad for the Eastern markets. With all of the big terminal markets flooded and prices at a ruinous level, we had everything to gain and nothing to lose by concentrating our sales efforts on the territory lying south of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi. With a little hard work, we were able to dispose of every car in this territory at a satisfactory price, until near the end of the season when the Northern markets cleared up and began paying good prices again.

I admit selling tomatoes and selling avocados are two horses of different colors, for anyone knows what a tomato is and when and how to eat it, but I claim that the same buying power which will create an f. o. b. price of two to three dollars for tomatoes during a time of low prices, is plenty able to absorb avocados at a profitable price if they can be properly distributed.

The avocado is so radically different from all other fruits and its quality is so dependent upon its being eaten at the proper stage of maturity, that some form of distribution will have to be used which will go directly to the retailer and in sure that the fruit is presented to the public in such a way as to give it a fair chance to win new users. Having seen avocados which I shipped North to supposedly intelligent people eaten green, allowed to rot before serving and even the flesh thrown away and the seed served, I am firmly convinced that there is a great deal of educational work to be done in new markets.

I note in the last report of the California Association that over one half of last year's crop

was delivered by refrigerated truck. Records show that with regular supplies of fruit, a per capita consumption of over one pound per annum is easily reached. On this basis, there is a market for at least twenty million pounds of avocados within trucking distance of this hall. The last problem is to find a way to reach these potential avocado eaters, and I will leave you to work this out at your leisure. I thank you.