

AVOCADOS AND LIMES IN FLORIDA

LUTHER L. CHANDLER

Chairman, Florida Avocado & Lime Commission, Goulds

I am happy to tell you about a few things about the avocado and lime industry in Florida.

Let me pay tribute to my old friend, W. J. Krome. All of you know who he was, and of the wonderful things he did for all agriculture in south Florida, and especially avocados and limes. He left us a heritage of knowledge information, and pioneering, together with a wonderful wife and family. Every time I meet Mrs. Krome I can't help but feel better for having done so. I pay tribute to her and the Krome family.

History is now being made with respect to avocados and limes. There are those who are very unhappy with the avocado and lime industry. To you I shall make this statement: "Do not sell Florida avocados or limes short." Surely we are having our troubles and as one of the largest avocado and lime growers in the state I am having my share of troubles with you, but there can't be continued unhappiness in this industry if we growers will but do our part. I am very pleased and happy that many of those steps toward success are being taken. Let me enumerate some of the evil practices that have gone on, and this is true with both avocados and limes.

1. For many years avocados and limes have been shipped before they were matured.
2. A great percentage of the fruit has been shipped without being properly graded, without being properly packed and without much regard for the quality of the fruit. Avocados had no regulations as to maturity of them at all. Efforts were made to find a yardstick for maturity and those efforts failed.
3. Too little effort had been made to scientifically produce the fruit.
4. The manner in which much of the fruit was harvested and then handled in such terrible manner as to cause a heavy percentage of mechanical injury.
5. Much of the fruit is sold by shippers, who within their own rights, do a good job and make a great effort up to that point where they meet competition with other Florida avocados and limes. Then the price cutting begins and the grower pays the bill.

The above is not 100% the case but sufficiently so as to keep us in trouble. What have we done on the right side of the ledger to offset the above evils and poor practices?

1. The Congress of the United States, by and through the efforts of the Florida delegation in the Congress, amended the Marketing Agreement Act so that if there is a Marketing Agreement in Florida on avocados and limes as well as tomatoes, mangos and other commodities, then any order coming from such Marketing Agreement and after being approved by the Secretary of Agriculture applies to all the imports for that same period of time. What does this do? It gives the Florida grower the incentive to enter into a Marketing Agreement, regulate their industry and correct the evils named

above. With the application of this law imported avocados and limes must now conform to the same standards of size, grade, maturity, quality as the domestic growers impose upon themselves. This amendment became known as the Golden Rule Amendment. In order to force the imported fruits to meet the standards we must first meet them ourselves. These orders emanate from a committee of Florida growers and shippers. There is now in effect a marketing agreement on avocados and one on limes. A separate committee handles each one of them. Mr. Frank Kent is chairman of the avocado committee and Mr. Robert MacDonnell is chairman of the lime committee. Obviously these two committees cannot work miracles, yet we feel that almost miraculous results are being obtained because despite the fact that we shipped more fruit in the summer of 1955 than in 1954 we have maintained in some instances as good a price and in some periods in spots not so good, but please be reminded of this: In the months of 1955 as compared with 1954 shipments from Florida in July showed an increase of 36%, August 110%, September 16%. Cuba, on the other hand, did not ship quite as many, 173,000 in 1954 and 170,000 in 1955 for June, July, August and September. However, California showed an increase of 206% for the month of June, for the month of July, 191% for the month of August and 142% for the month of September. For limes, the figures are not shown. Price comparisons cannot be had yet, it is too early. But with that increase in shipments during these particular months named it is almost miraculous that the market did not flatten into disaster. The growers feel that they simply cannot go wrong by shipping a better size, graded and matured fruit.

For your information, only a few weeks ago a Tomato Marketing Agreement was voted in by the growers of this state. This will be handled in the same manner. We think a new day has dawned.

2. There was passed a lime maturity law which is nothing but a juice content requirement. It has been in effect several years. It began at 40% juice content by volume and is now placed at 42%. This is confirmed by state law and is fixed. The marketing agreement committee, however, could increase this juice content by an order and this order would apply to both Florida and Mexico, the principal source of imports.

3. These two marketing agreement committees can regulate the container situation. There have been containers adopted and these will be put into force as soon as the old supply is used. All the possible educational practices and other methods possible have been invoked to bring about a better handling of the fruit. How was this done? By simply imposing in the grade requirements an order prohibiting shipping of fruit that has been bruised, cut, broken, stem or flesh damaged. This has caused the growers to do a better job than they have been doing before.

Now about this time one would suspect that this completed the picture. The growers are now talking very strongly of getting together and insisting that there be a plan adopted whereby centralized selling and distribution would take place. This does not mean that anyone will be driven out of business, but there is surely some way whereby this price cutting evil can be corrected. The growers feel that with the marketing agreement in effect and regulations and what is being carried out with advertising now set up that this centralized marketing and distribution is the last and final step necessary to correct the evils in our industry.

It was felt by the growers that since all of these regulations are in force or in the making that we should advertise which has only been lightly touched upon in the past. The Florida Citrus Commission has administered a lime advertising fund of 4c per 1% bushel box of limes. This was hardly enough to make a splash yet it has done a great deal of good. The Florida legislature, in its last session, created the Florida Avocado and Lime Commission. There are nine members and their duty is to administer sales promotion, advertising, publicity, and public relations, and for their expenses there is 10c per bushel excise tax. All of this should produce about \$100,000.00 per year to do the job. I am chairman of the Avocado and Lime Commission and feel greatly honored to have this responsibility.

Will you please indulge with me as to the situation now. All of the orders and regulations of marketing agreements, all the advertising, sales promotion and publicity efforts being applied leave us but one major objective at the moment and that is a process of marketing and distribution whereby price cutting among ourselves can be corrected. We believe it can be. We believe that competition can still be had but we think competition had better aim upward and not downward.

The avocado and lime growers of this state are very grateful to the Florida State Horticultural Society for the privilege of being a part of this program. We earnestly solicit your best judgment, your aid and cooperation that we may carry out this ambitious program that I just explained to you.

For the opportunity to have this program set up as it is now done we are grateful to Senator Holland and Senator Smathers in Washington. Equally grateful to Hon. Syd Herlong, Congressman of Florida who was a member of the House Agricultural Committee, Congressman Bill Lantaff, Dwight Rogers of the Florida delegation, and to Dr. Paul G. Harding. We are grateful to the Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, the Florida Avocado and Lime Council, to the legislature and all of those individuals who contributed so much to the setting up of this program which is really a dream of rules and regulations all for the good of the avocado and lime industry.

We now have everything except the plan and operation by the growers and shippers to stop the price cutting competitive duel that goes on in which process we growers pay the bill.

In behalf of the growers and shippers of avocados and limes in Florida, may I commend the Florida State Horticultural Society for this and all the years previous scientific study and addition to agricultural knowledge of not only our commodities, but all agriculture in the state. I don't believe the average person realizes the far reaching good that has been accomplished.

The consuming public must now realize that vegetables and fruits from Florida are "GENUINE" as to integrity of sizes, grades, maturity and quality.