

PREFACE

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Chairman, SAAGA Research and Technical Committee



I am most grateful to each member of the Committee for contributing to make the Research and Technical Committee a very significant part of the SAAGA organization.

The annual research symposium once more took place at the Magoebaskloof Hotel. It was indeed the occasion of the year, with 140 people attending. Thirty papers were presented which is also something of a record. The highlight of the 1991 symposium was the remarkable progress made in the field of high density planting, which resulted in very high yields. High density planting is a scientific study and will contribute a great deal in future to increase production. The other highlight was Biological Control, which showed particular promise for the control of postharvest diseases. But the symposium is made up of progress reports and I can say with gratitude that research progress is very good.

Many South Africans attended the Second Avocado World Congress in California. A great number of us presented papers. There is no doubt about it, that although we are small in the avocado world (less than 2% of total production), our research contributed significantly towards the science of avocado production. This shows that the South African Avocado Industry was right years ago when they took it upon themselves to do their own research.

Thanks to California, we have cultivars like Fuerte, Hass, Gwen, Pinkerton, Ryan, Edranol and rootstocks like Duke 7. I am completely convinced that international cooperation in the scientific field is essential. During the international symposium, I took the opportunity to negotiate with the University of California to attend the annual symposium of the Californian Avocado Growers and invited them to attend ours. This was accepted with enthusiasm and I think we will see more Americans at our symposia in future. The idea also appealed to the Australians and to the representative from Israel, Dr Blumenfeld.

An important breakthrough was made recently. Hans Merensky Holdings launched a processed avocado product. Although processed avocado products have appeared on the market in the past and oil extraction has been done for a long time, we feel this is the big one that everybody has been waiting for. This is good news for our local market, because hopefully a lot of low grade fruit will now be processed, which may result in a stronger market for the fresh product. There are also rumors that more oil extraction plants may come into operation soon.

What does the future hold for our industry? I have no doubt that we have to find ways to increase yield per hectare, without neglecting existing projects like high density plantings and tree manipulation.

We have no problem with flowering but fruit drop is too severe. In Israel it was shown that cross-pollination was under-estimated in the past and that Hass yields can be increased significantly through cross-pollination. The abscission of normal fruit during summer months has been neglected in the past. In other parts of the world directed pruning and the use of growth retardants improved yields. We have to investigate these aspects further. We still have to do a lot of fine tuning to irrigation and the application of nutrients during critical periods. We have to stop unnecessary fruit drop and increase fruit size.

We have an excellent team of research workers and I am sure research will show the way to higher yields — soon.