

FOREWORD

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SAAGA embarked on a co-ordinated research programme since 1977. The characteristics of the research were:

1. SAAGA never appointed its own research workers but utilised facilities and research staff at several Universities, Department of Agriculture (later ARC), private enterprises, like Merensky Technological Services, Westfalia Estate, etc. This was the best way to stretch the very limited funds over the most serious problems.
2. A research coordinator (also non-SAAGA) who was also chairman of the Research Committee looked after the research programme and the budget.
3. Without fail, a Research Symposium was held each year where progress on the various projects were reported and evaluated.
4. A research report was compiled after each Symposium which became known as the Avocado Yearbook. The present Yearbook is the 17th. All the research since the inception of the research programme has been completely documented.
5. SAAGA has a proud research record. Not only was research the cement that kept a collection of progressive avocado producers together in one growers organisation, but research of international significance was produced.

Many refer to the work on trunk injection with phosphorous acid as our major contribution, but it is not quite true, although it certainly was a major breakthrough. Research on temperature control and the fine tuning of the cold chain made the remarkable progress of the Industry possible. This breakthrough came gradually. In the early years exports by sea were not possible because of lack of knowledge on the temperature requirements of the fruit at different stages during the season. The magnitude of the temperature research is fully appreciated if one considers the fact that we would have had to air freight some eight million cartons of avocados at present if the temperature regime and the fine tuning of the cold chain had not been in place.

But there are other less obvious contributions. Through our 18 years of research at Universities, scores of students were trained in avocado culture. Some of these "students" are leaders in the Industry today: Louis Vorster, Joe Darvas, Martin Slabbert, Andre Ernst, to mention but a few.

The Avocado Industry has probably had its honeymoon. Increases in production costs and lack of a price increase in real terms lie at the root of our problem. However, a farmer is an optimist. He has to be an optimist to survive. But unless the profit margin improves in the near future, avocado growers face problems.

It is most difficult to predict the future of the economy. It is almost like weather forecasting and fortune telling, especially if one does not have a data base as a departure point. The accumulation of economic trends on the overseas markets on a scientific basis' has been neglected for too long. SAAGA should have the funds and the authority to do scientific market research on an on-going basis. I hope that such a project will receive the blessings of the whole Industry and that it will get underway soon.

Leaders of the Industry think hard and serious over the function and future of SAAGA. It is right and proper that responsible leaders study developments and adapt to circumstances. However, one thing is certain: research will remain the backbone of the Avocado Industry. We must find ways of putting more fruit of excellent quality on our trees and transport them to the markets. We have to streamline all the different facets of the complicated export chain. We have to study the market mechanisms and ensure that more money comes into the pockets of the farmer-entrepreneur. What I am really saying is: Neglect research, Mr Grower, at your peril. But we must be sensible about it. Research priorities need to be discussed and determined on a democratic basis and low priority projects must be stopped. We must never be complacent.