

## AVOCADO STEPPING STONES

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A word of warning to avocado planters would seem hardly necessary at this stage of the development of the industry, so well has the work of this Association been done. The grower today has available much reliable information gained from the costly experience of our pioneers. These data, covering all the features of avocado growing are sufficient to guide the would-be planter so safely that he does not need to make vital mistakes. Yet there *is* evidence that some are being made. The greatest danger is that in a period of activity in avocado land selling and planting such as prevails now, he may trust too implicitly to the advice of the over zealous real estate agent who is selling the land but who is not familiar with avocado growing. I fear that some mistakes are being made in the northern San Diego County district where great activity is going on under the control of real estate firms who are making a specialty of promoting avocado planting. For the most part these salesmen are reliable and conscientious men. In a few instances they are not. The danger to the would-be planter lies in the possibility of accepting the salesman's statements without taking the precaution to make an outside and impartial checking of the same. He should take a multitude of counsel. If he is able to weigh the evidence wisely and to discriminate between the sound and the unsound, he is safe. If not, of course, no hope for him. If he listens to the siren tones of the agent who is selling him land that is cold and sour, and which, within a foot runs into hard-pan and granite, he is done for. Or if he yields to the eloquence of some nurseryman who is infatuated with a particular variety, and who tells him that he is going to net \$12,000 per acre, provided he plants three hundred trees of that *variety* to the acre, he will have a rude awakening from his dream of a rich harvest and unbounded wealth.

What I mean is this: The California Avocado Association is your best friend. Its Committee on Varieties is an asset of immense value that you can avail yourself of. The questions of culture have been discussed by the members of the Association for the past twelve years, and a digest of all this information is to be had in the annual reports. If you are not a member of the Association, join it and become one. But even if you do not become a member you may, through it, still secure the combined wisdom of its several hundred members and the results of the costly experience gained by them in pioneering the progress of the industry. If, with the door of opportunity thus open wide, you still do make serious mistakes, you are beyond the reach of our efforts to be helpful and we, at least, are not to blame.

### **The Variety Question**

Although here in California we are growing many avocados of excellent quality, we are also growing and marketing large quantities of inferior fruits from inferior varieties. In

proportion to the number of inferior fruits that we are marketing, is the industry being retarded. The variety question is still our big one, greater even than the problem of distribution. It will doubtless continue to be so for a number of years. In the words of Dr. Webber, "It is not enough to produce fruit for the market. We must produce fruit that will extend the market. Only by the production of the best fruit can the industry be extended to the proportions we all conceive as the future development."

Of course we all want trees that will bear, but we all ought to also want only trees that will bear fruit of the highest quality. That old time thought that haunted our minds for a while that pretty nearly any kind of an avocado would do, has been outlawed. But because many consumers have not yet learned to know the quality of the different varieties, the marketing of inferior fruits is still a menace to the growth of our business. Through the teachings of this Association, however, wisdom is being gained by the public so that in increasing proportion each year the producer of low grade fruits will find himself in a position of definite and marked disadvantage.

Our effort, then, for the upbuilding of this great industry is not only to be very careful to plant the best varieties we have today, but to increase our diligence in the work of developing still better kinds for the future. To this end I urge an increase in our experimental work. I also urge that this be done very largely within the confines of the varieties recommended by our Committee. If every nurseryman will make it his particular duty to bud a limited number of all those considered by the Committee on Varieties to be worthy of attention, and if planters will co-operate and buy and plant at least one or two trees of each of such varieties, we will in a few years gain the necessary information as to these varieties, their requirements of location and culture, as well as the desirability of the fruits themselves, that will enable us either to discard them or to plant them more largely. Some of our nurserymen are continuing the practice of propagating varieties which have been tried and found wanting. This practice surely should cease. If our nurserymen will take upon themselves a larger measure of responsibility in this matter, and will clean up on the rubbish, devoting their attention solely to the propagation of the more promising kinds that are not yet fairly tried out, the result will be of immense value to the industry.

### **Our Fruit Exhibits**

The fruit exhibits of this Association are among the most valuable features of its work and meeting. The interest in these displays has always been keen, showing that not only our own members, but our visitors as well, find profit in studying them. Nothing is more inspiring than to see a display of fine avocados. To look them over acts as a tonic, and they set a mark for continued and increasing effort. Without our fruit exhibits these meetings would be much less interesting, and certainly they would have failed in accomplishing the results we are proud to say this Association has achieved.

And while these exhibits have really been creditable and very helpful, nevertheless, for several years it has seemed to some of us that we could and should make our fruit displays a great deal more important than they have been. It is through these exhibits that we can best reach and interest the public, increase our attendance, diffuse information, and popularize our product. The industry being young and the acreage limited, we cannot of course hope to compete with our citrus friends, who put on the

great Navel show at San Bernardino and the wonderful Valencia exhibit at Anaheim but we can do more than we are doing. It should not be said of the California Avocado Association, which is the parent concern, that the displays made at Carlsbad and Whittier are more attractive than those staged in connection with these meetings. On the other hand, it ought to be that all such outside exhibits are small indeed in comparison with ours.

So I believe I am stating a fact when I say we have not yet awakened to the importance of our exhibits, nor have we made the necessary effort to work them up and stage them. Whatever the required expense might be, it would be well invested. For a month before the date of a meeting, the full time of one or two of our directors or members could well be given to the work. This would mean expense, of course, as compensation would be necessary for the time and effort; but it would be well worth while. Not only do we want all varieties represented, but we want them represented in quantity. It is on quantity that we have never seemed to act. Looking at a fine avocado is an interesting thing, but looking at a hundred of them is much more impressive.

This matter can be worked out in a practical way. It would involve as a foundational principle that arrangements must be made in advance for the sale of all fruits at the close of the meeting. In other words, arrangements should and could be made in advance so that all the fruits were sold, and were only used here for exhibit preliminary to their delivery to the purchasers, who would in nearly all cases be dealers. Such arrangements can be made if necessary effort is put into them. Purchasing dealers would quickly see the advantage of buying these unusual fruits, selected for exhibit because of their perfection. Such institutions as the Model Grocery, Pasadena, Hamilton's in San Diego, Diehl's in Santa Barbara, and Young's in Los Angeles, could secure some very desirable publicity by displaying a purchase of these fruits and placarding them as exhibition avocados. And this publicity would in turn be of no inconsiderable advantage to this Association and the industry. In this way we could stage an exhibit of almost any size and degree of impressiveness.

The fruits of some varieties desired for exhibit might of course be immature and so could not be sold. Of such fruits a limited display would suffice, and our strength could be thrown into an extensive and impressive exhibit of varieties which were sufficiently mature to go into the hands of dealers in the manner suggested. At the recent Whittier exhibition, an excellent one, I noted a display of thirty-five varieties made by our Mr. J. M. Elliott. Such an exhibit is in itself a remarkable and highly creditable thing. However, quite a large number of these varieties were marketable, and if a hundred or two hundred fruits of each of those had been included in the exhibit, it would have been little short of spectacular.

Such a fruit display as I have in mind and am trying to illustrate, would need, of course, greatly increased space. This would possibly involve a change in the character of our meeting places, but no insurmountable obstacle presents itself here. Either larger accommodations can be secured in connection with some hotel or public room, or we could house our meeting and display in a tent similar to the one used at Whittier. As I say, all of these details can be worked out. Then if we had a really extensive exhibit handsomely staged and displayed, we could, by proper publicity, which would of course be necessary, draw a crowd ten times or fifty times larger than the one we have had

today.

Competition and awards of merit would naturally enter into the makeup of such an avocado show. Indeed, the displays should be largely competitive, and no doubt the competition would be keen. Ribbons for first, second and third prizes in the various classes would be an incentive to individual and community contest. Classes could be arranged for individual or specimen fruits of each variety, for plate displays of a half dozen or a dozen fruits of the various varieties, for quantity and quality individual exhibits, for the largest number of varieties by an individual, for the largest and best display by an individual, and for community displays of many kinds. New fruits and fruits from unnamed seedlings could have a place. The largest avocado and the most fruitful branch could be shown. Prizes for new and attractive methods of serving the avocado would be included. Nursery stock could be more largely featured. All awards might well be blue, red or white ribbons—at least nothing more costly than a bronze medal for a sweepstake prize need be provided. Money prizes would not be in keeping with the spirit of sportsmanlike competition that our members would feel. This matter I am sure is worthy of the most serious consideration of our membership and directory. In my judgment, one really worthy and well executed effort along this line would convince us that we have lost time and opportunity in the past.

### **Avocado Standardization**

The early history of fruit marketing in California included so many disastrous experiences and so many complaints that it was found necessary by the various organizations in turn to secure legislation which would prevent disaster by attempted sales of early season fruits in order to profit from the high prices. Our own industry was no exception to this procedure. The sale of windfall and immature fruits was easily possible, because of the difficulty of the buyer in determining the maturity of an avocado. This was taken advantage of; I regret to say, by some who sought their personal temporary gain rather than the building up of our industry. Much discussion was had at directors' and membership meetings before we took the matter seriously. The first paper on the subject was by Professor Condit and was read at our Fourth Annual Meeting, in Pasadena, on May 10, 1919, six years ago. At our next meeting Ernest Braunton made a plea for an amendment to the fruit standardization law to include the avocado. At the same meeting I presented a resolution for the standardization by law of the commercial varieties of the avocado to check the sale of immature fruits, which was voted down, but the discussion of the subject was continued with such vigor that at the semi-annual meeting in November, 1923, a committee on standardization met with growers, commission men and others for the purpose of further considering this important matter. At the next annual meeting, Professor Jaffa read a very convincing paper on the subject, and recommended a standardization test which would require as a standard seventy-five per cent of the maximum oil or fat yield of the respective varieties when fully ripe. In May, 1925, our Committee on Varieties made this recommendation: "The experience of the Exchange during the past year has emphasized more than ever the necessity of standardization. This means, as it has in other fruit industries, the growing of a limited number of varieties, while the quest for further improvements must continue. The commercial avocado industry must be based upon a few varieties that meet standard conditions, and the maintenance of a large

number on the part of growers only postpones the day when more satisfactory marketing conditions will obtain."

Legislation was finally secured, and on July 24, 1925, the laws and amendments providing for the standardization of the avocados took effect, requiring a minimum of eight per cent of oil or fat before a fruit could be legally sold.

That was only a short time ago, but our experience during this short time leaves no question as to the desirability of the law, and very few indeed would be the voices raised in appeal for its revocation. A greater confidence was injected into the marketing of fruit and a stabilizing influence was felt that was marked. Incidentally, the theft of fruit, which had become a serious menace to the grower, was found to be checked because stolen fruit was largely immature and could not be sold. Finding immature fruit for sale on the fruit stands often lead to the detection of the theft, and in some cases to conviction.

Thus the results of the legal standardization of the avocado have been excellent; but having gained this much ground, we should go further. In my judgment, the minimum oil content of eight per cent is too low. If Professor Jaffa's recommendation had been accepted, while it would have involved us in establishing a maturity test for each variety, the result would have been a considerably higher average than eight per cent. In fact, the average would probably have run around twelve per cent.

The purpose of our effort is to create friends for the avocado. We need to develop the avocado appetite in more people. It is a simple principle that demand will be in proportion to the quality and desirability of our product. With a minimum of eight per cent of oil, many fruits can be legally marketed, and are, which do not do the avocado justice or help to cultivate a public taste. I am a firm believer in increasing this minimum to at least ten per cent. This would not be a radical move, but I know such a proposal will meet with opposition. This is not because it ought not to be done, but because the human mind is loath to meet such an issue. It wants to be left alone and not disturbed nor required to make an effort, nor to reach a decision; but in our endeavor to carry out the constitutional proviso of the organization, which reads, "The purpose of this Association shall be to improve the culture, production and marketing of the avocado," we should consider this matter seriously, discuss it fully, and be prepared to act on it officially now or at our next annual meeting.