

Avocado Growing in Hawaii

EDITOR THE HONOLULU ADVERTISER:

Jared Smith's write-up of the avocado situation will be read with interest by a great many people in the Islands. So many persons now have money invested in this product that his assertion that the fruit-fly embargo can be lifted or circumvented, is certain to raise hopes that may have been faltering.

"The thing can be done," he declared, "if our powerful local commercial interests will give it their attention."

If this eminent agriculturist is correct in this, it behooves everybody who has the welfare of Hawaii at heart, to concentrate on these "commercial interests" to see that they get busy. There is no time to lose.

For the past two years the local market has been so oversupplied that most growers have not made the cost of production. In fact, it is doubtful if those on the outside islands received more than enough to pay the freight. I know of some instances where shipments did not bring enough to pay the handling charges. And yet but a small part of the trees already planted have come into bearing.

At a rough estimate there are about 300 acres planted to avocados, not including "door-yard" trees of which there is a large aggregate. Probably not much over 50 acres of the commercial plantings are yet of bearing age.

Within five years the present indications point to an outturn some 500 or 600 per cent greater than today. Truly, our local commercial interests, political interests and any other interests, have no time to lose!

Nor should too much assurance be placed on securing an open market on the mainland. Southern California has already developed an avocado industry that is keeping their highly efficient cooperative organization right on tip-toe to market its product. Last year this organization (which numbers about 2000 members and controls between 80 and 90 per cent of the output) sold 3,097,332 pounds of fruit. The estimate for the season, just closing, was 4,235,500 pounds. For 1932-1933 the estimate is 7,135,000 pounds; for 1934-1935, 13,350,000 pounds. Five years from now the expectation is for about 20,000,000 pounds and by 1942 the total will probably run over 30,000,000 pounds.

A few years ago the California grower realized from 35 to 50 cents a pound for his fruit. Last year he got 13 cents, and for the present season (the figures are not yet out) he will probably average something like 10 cents.

Perhaps Hawaiian growers could compete on the mainland at these prices. But they couldn't do it off-hand without careful preparation and organization. Markets are not built up without hard work and heavy financial cost.

The Calavo Growers of California, which is the name of the California cooperative, has about 2000 members; has assets in land, packing-houses, machinery, etc., amounting to \$200,000; and last year did a business of over \$600,000. With sales offices in Chicago, New York, Dallas and a number of other points, supported by an advertising appropriation last year of \$60,000, yet this superb business machine is unable to compete in the eastern markets during a portion of the year with the Cuban and Florida crops. It may well be noted just here that Cuban imports of avocados during a three-month period last year amounted to 10,000,000 pounds; and they sold as low as 1 and 2 cents per pound in New Orleans.

Now, Mr. Editor, all this doesn't mean that I am knocking avocado growing in Hawaii. Or that I don't believe in it. If I didn't, do you suppose I'd go to the trouble to dig up the figures I have just quoted? I do believe in knowing the facts. Several other growers in the Islands also feel this way, and to that end pay \$5 a year each as membership dues in the California Avocado Association. Through this affiliation they are kept well informed on all phases of the avocado industry.

I want to emphasize again the fact pointed out by Mr. Smith, that Hawaii needs strong help in this avocado business. We can't see very far ahead, but we do know we can grow the fruit—and this is something. Like Mr. Smith, I believe that sooner or later the fruit-fly quarantine will be overcome. Also the uses of avocado oil may prove worth while. Other uses also may be found (there is a small sized scientific army working to that end) and at the bottom it is hard not to believe in a golden future for a product as wonderfully good as is the avocado.

Hawaii deserves to profit from avocados, if any part of the world does. Much of the foundation work was done here. I believe the first grafting of avocado trees was done by the Hawaii experiment station nearly 25 years ago. The first comprehensive bulletin ever published on avocado culture came from this station. On the Island of Maui, Dr. W. D. Baldwin has spent most of his time for some 15 years or more in a painstaking study of the avocado and the problems connected with it. The money he has spent in developing his 65 acre orchard is probably more than he can ever hope to get back from it. Yet I am sure should avocados ever attain the dignity of an industry in Hawaii he will feel amply compensated, because it is to that end that he has worked. His work has been scientifically done, and his records form an invaluable library on the subject. He has written many papers on various phases of avocado culture, and he is frequently consulted by growers in California and other parts of the world.

Hawaii can and should develop an industry in avocados. If the commercial interests which Mr. Smith mentions are awake to the signs of the times they will furnish the backing which is needed. But the small investor has no business risking his money in it. It is altogether speculative and the profits which may some day be realized are probably a long way in the future.