

## Importance of Standardization of Grades and Maturity

**Paul K. Wilson**

*Dep. Agr. Commissioner, Los Angeles Avocado Growers' Institute, La Habra, Calif.—  
October 20, 1939*

Most tree crops in Los Angeles county have shown acreage decreases since 1920 except avocados and Valencia oranges. Records kept by the agricultural commissioner's office list avocado plantings at 260 acres in 1920. In 1939 the acreage has built up to 3,251 acres of which 2,976 is bearing and the remainder not yet old enough to be classed as bearing. The state crop reporting service has set trees that have passed their fifth growing season in the bearing group for the purpose of uniformity in making estimates.

Back in 1925 requirements for avocados were first included in the state standardization act. As you know, new commodities are added to the law and revisions made only when the growers request and favor such legislation.

Ten years ago when supplies were much smaller than at present and when comparatively few firms handled avocados, it was not as difficult as it is today to police wholesale markets. In Los Angeles more than fifty wholesale firms sell avocados. In addition, more and more fruit is handled directly from the grower to the retail market. This method of sale, of course, complicates the matter of getting complete coverage of fruit sold. There are nearly 8,000 retail outlets of fresh fruits and vegetables in Los Angeles County and a large proportion of these markets handle avocados, at least part of each year.

### **MATURITY CHIEF ENFORCEMENT PROBLEM**

Except in years when a freeze occurs, as was the case in 1937, the chief enforcement problem on avocados is maturity. During the past fiscal year, which closed June 30th, nearly 800 samples of avocados were tested for maturity. Bulk of the tests naturally come in fall and early winter months as marketing of the new crop commenced. A quarter of all the tests run were on fruit marketed in November, Demand for small sized Fuertes, together with high prices caused some growers to pick fruit before its oil content reached the legal minimum of 8%.

During November, 1938, reconditioning of 5,850 pounds of low test Fuertes was required in the Los Angeles wholesale markets. For the entire year 58,000 pounds of avocados were held for sorting because some or all of the fruit tested below 8% oil content. 20,000 pounds more were tied up because of rots in excess of the tolerance.

Now, it often happened that inspectors found—or growers reported— fruit on sale or display which appeared to be very immature. Size, color and skin texture indicated

extremely low oil content. When tests were run it often turned out that the avocados in question tested 8% or slightly higher. Nevertheless, many of the earliest shipments of small sized Fuertes shriveled and were unpalatable despite meeting the legal minimum. There was no alternative for the enforcing officer but to permit sale of this kind of fruit.

## **ENFORCEMENT PROCEDURE**

Perhaps you would like to know the procedure followed in enforcement of the law. When suspicious lots of fruit are found, the greenest specimens are taken for a maturity test. If the inspector is fearful that the lot may be sold he red tags the shipment pending the outcome of the results of the test. When tests are low, a violation notice in writing, with a duplicate copy for the grower, is given to the person in possession of the fruit. No lot is ever "condemned." That is, the law gives the owner or person in charge the right to sort out any part of the shipment that complies with legal standards. Sorting is always done under supervision of the inspector.

For the past three years, by arrangement with the State Department of Agriculture, doubtful fruit was tested by WPA chemists working under the direction of the Division of Chemistry, at a laboratory maintained in one of the Los Angeles wholesale markets.

Let's review for a moment the part of the law that sets up tolerances for defects. No lot tolerance is permitted for immaturity. The avocado section of the law says "Avocados shall be free from all defects, including but not restricted to those hereinafter mentioned, which singly or in the aggregate cause a waste of 10% or more, by weight, of the entire avocado, including the skin and seed. Not more than 5%, by count, of the avocados in any one container or bulk lot may be below the foregoing requirement.

"Defect" includes damage due to insect injuries, cuts, growth cracks, bruises, sunburn, freezing injury, decay, disease, over-ripeness, rancidity, or other causes."

## **TOLERANCE OF TEN PER CENT VERY LIBERAL**

When you analyze the tolerance that permits a waste of 10% of the individual fruit due to decay, freezing injury, disease, over-ripeness or rancidity you can see how liberal this law is. Often enforcing officers are called upon to pass fruit, because it falls within the tolerance when they know that within a few days or even within a few hours rots or decay will progress far in excess of the tolerance, yet at the time of inspection there is no alternative but to pass the lot.

The agricultural commissioner's office welcomes reports from growers or from anyone who sees avocados offered for sale that appear to be immature or which contain other defects which have just been mentioned. A prompt investigation will be made.