

Notes on Avocado Growing in Northern California

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The acreage of avocados in central and northern California, according to the latest figures available, is approximately thirty-two acres. On a trip into the northern counties during September, 1938, we made an effort to find [a] knoll of the acreages and trees the location of which we had definite knowledge. There was some difficulty since apparently very few people know of the whereabouts of either individual trees or small commercial plantings.

Districts where avocado trees were found were as follows: The hill section lying east of Porterville in Tulare County; the district northeast of Visalia and southeast of Fresno in the subtropical fruit district of Fresno County; northeast of Sacramento in Placer County; in Butte County east and north of Oroville; in Santa Clara County on the campus of Stanford University; at Los Altos; at Los Gatos; and in Santa Cruz both in the city of Santa Cruz and in the hill section of the county, and in the Arroyo Grande section of San Luis Obispo County.

FREEZE OF 1932 SERIOUS SETBACK

Before the freeze of 1932, in the northern part of the state many budded trees had been planted and were old enough to bear, but in practically all cases, as near as could be determined, these varieties, unless of the Mexican or thin-skinned race, were frozen down to below the bud. Some of the Mexican seedlings observed were very large trees. Budded Guatemalan or hybrids of Mexican and Guatemalan which had been frosted, had grown up from below the bud and, in many cases, were not bearing. Very large seedlings were observed, especially in the hill section east of Porterville in the portion known as Success and Pleasant Valley.

For districts in the inland sections of the state, the type of avocado trees needed is one which blooms in March or April and matures the fruit so that it can be marketed before the danger of frost, probably by October or November. The trees on the campus of Stanford University are mostly seedlings including at least one Fuerte. These trees are quite well protected by buildings and seem to be growing and producing quite satisfactorily.

In the vicinity of Los Altos the more tender varieties have been affected by frost during the past several years although Fuerte trees are in existence which have withstood the colder temperatures there. Soil problems seem to be the main factors involved in the Los Altos area although by carefully studying the soil moisture regulation, no doubt in that area avocado trees may be successfully grown. Water tables seem to prevail in some areas. Some of the trees in orchards in Los Altos have apparently been kept too

moist or else drainage has not been satisfactory, resulting in the dying of roots.

POSSIBILITIES AT SANTA CRUZ

A number of budded trees and seedlings, as well, were found in backyards in the city of Santa Cruz. Small orchards are located in the smaller canyons fairly high up in the Santa Cruz Mountains. One planting of large seedling trees was observed in one of the valleys of that district. These were thin skins. Where Fuerte trees safely pass through a period of cold weather in the hill section of Santa Cruz County, they have been located at the head of a so-called "draw" where the cold air flows down into the lower part of the canyon. The thin skin varieties have withstood the low temperatures better than any Guatemalan or hybrid.

MEXICAN VARIETIES SUCCEED AT LOS GATOS

In the vicinity of Los Gatos, Santa Clara County, a number of small orchards are in existence. Fuerte trees and Guatemalans have suffered some from the frost, especially the Guatemalan type of avocado, but the thin skin Mexican varieties have weathered the cold temperatures during recent years and are bearing quite satisfactory crops.

At Arroyo Grande 20 to 25 acres of Fuertes have been set out but are now under several ownerships. These trees have apparently not been subjected to as low temperatures as were experienced in most districts of southern California in January 1937.

The planting of avocado trees on a commercial basis in practically all of the counties of northern California is predicated on a careful study of weather conditions and, with very few exceptions, will require the planting of the thin skin varieties or, at least, varieties which are quite cold resistant. It would appear that with careful consideration of all factors and with the right varieties of avocados some commercial avocado production could be carried on in the vicinity of Los Altos, Los Gatos, a portion of Santa Cruz County, the east portion of Tulare County east of Porterville, and the higher and more protected locations of some of the other counties of the Sacramento and San Joaquin valleys.