

Displaying and Selling Avocados in Eastern Markets

A. J. Thille

Calavo Director, Santa Paula

Because of space limitations I shall try to summarize the observations given at length at the California Avocado Association's annual dinner at San Diego on May 11.

About two months ago Manager Hodgkin made an inspection tour of the sales offices in the east. It was my good fortune to be invited to go along with him, provided, of course, that I paid my own expenses. This trip included visits to 18 large cities and the back country served through them, which accounts for more than 90% of this country's population.

Stops in Texas were made at Dallas, San Antonio, Brownsville, and Houston. Avocados are pretty well known there. This year sea trains will bring in carloads of Cuban avocados to Houston, which means more competition for both Florida and California.

Most of the State of Florida was covered by plane, looking over the freeze situation. We found that the West Indian varieties were quite badly frozen, but the Guatemalan varieties seemed to stand the freeze quite well and showed indications of production for this coming year. The tendency in Florida is to plant more of the Guatemalan varieties in order to get production later in the year, which does not conflict as much with the West Indian varieties from Cuba. This later production will unquestionably become more and more competitive with our California crop.

The New York market receives about 200,000 carloads of fruits and vegetables a year from all sources. Over 100 separate produce items (fruits and vegetables) are trying to get the consumer's attention and cash. In the Pennsylvania Station is a high class fruit stand where it is estimated about 150,000 people pass every day. The owner of the stand puts on huge displays of fruit, with lots of educational and advertising material. The same thing could be done with good effect in many other places to help make more folks in the east think about California avocados and buy more of them.

Food habits in different sections of the country have to be reckoned with in building demand for avocados. In Boston folks go for baked beans, in Philadelphia for scrapple, and in St. Louis, corned beef is a favorite. We need to get these folks to consume avocados as well as their favorite local tidbits.

Cities like Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, St. Louis, and Kansas City are fine potential markets, about the size of San Francisco, on the average. These large population centers will take plenty of California avocados, once the per capita consumption is built up to the kind of figures we have in our home state cities.

Chicago has a vast population in which to build up future California avocado sales. Most of the better class stores handle our fruit, and we now need to get them to handle more

and also to get the fruit into the "average neighborhood" stores.

Selling California avocados in eastern markets starts with the dealers. Wholesalers and retailers have to be educated on proper handling and displaying, pricing and selling. Dealer-service work combines educational and selling effort. Dealers are serviced with Calavo advertising material that helps sell the fruit to consumers. Selected locations get demonstrations, where the fruit is displayed in ready-to-serve form and female demonstrators serve samples. This method of demand-building is sound, but it costs money and we have to fit the program to our purse.

We visited wholesalers, called on retail stores and fruit stands, and talked with the clerks and managers. After being back east and seeing all of this, I realize that we growers are simply competing with each other— and I wonder for whose benefit. I am satisfied that the possibilities are present for the sale of our fruit. Avocado advertising is successful when it is backed up by the orderly regulation of shipments to the various markets in line with what those markets have been developed to consume. The distributing machinery is already set up, merely awaiting the working together of the growers here in Southern California.

A united industry could unquestionably return to the growers more money than they are now getting.