

The Care of the Avocado Grove

Jean C. Miller

San Diego County Agricultural Agent

Large numbers of people new to the avocado industry are requesting information about the care of their avocado groves and where they may obtain various types of services and materials.

We are all anxious that these new growers develop into expert orchard managers.

We are all very proud of our avocado industry of over 8,000 acres here in San Diego County and in which more than 2,000 of our people are interested.

For the last ten years some of you growers have cooperated with the Agricultural Extension Service in the cost of production efficiency study. This study of avocado groves shows that the net return from each grove differs from the net return of all other groves, ranging from a low of \$10 an acre to a high of \$1800. Groves under fairly comparable conditions frequently vary over 100% in yields.

This indicates the direct effects of managerial ability on avocado orchard profits.

The development of a capable orchardist is a long time project. Experience and factual information are both needed. Time and effort will supply the experience. When taken alone experience is an expensive and usually a poor teacher, but experience well balanced with information forms an ideal and practical basis for learning to properly care for an avocado orchard.

There are many sources of factual information and assistance available to the avocado orchardist. The U. S. Department of Agriculture experiment stations. The University of California experiment and research activities. The general farm organizations such as the Farm Bureau and the Grange. The many cooperative associations such as the Calavo Growers and our own Avocado Society all serve avocado growers in various ways and their functions are quite well understood by most avocado growers. An example is Calavo Growers offering a service of marketing avocados. They maintain a staff of field men to facilitate the harvesting and orderly movement of the crop to market. You would expect these men to be interested in and helpful in many ways for they are close to you avocado growers and they are very cooperative with all public agencies in the conduct of educational and regulatory programs for farmers, but you would not expect Calavo field men to conduct educational programs or attempt to duplicate services offered by the various public agencies.



Jean Miller and Nelson McIninch

Our Avocado Society has a very definite purpose and place in the avocado industry. It is essentially a group banded together to promote the avocado industry. It may do anything that is necessary to gain the end of improving the industry. In most instances and with a few exceptions such as the variety committee's work and the publishing of the Yearbook, it uses its force and influence to encourage other organizations and agencies to do necessary work to meet the needs of the avocado industry. The society has encouraged the University of California to study and work on certain cultural problems—it works with the Farm Bureau in matters of legislation and it cooperates with the educational programs of the Agricultural Extension Service and the regulatory activities of the County Agricultural Commissioner.

I think we all resent the complexity of life. Most of us do not have time to determine just where certain public services or information may be obtained. There may at times seem to be needless duplications of effort on the part of public agencies. No one has yet been able to demonstrate a plan whereby the police of a city, the sheriff force of the county, the State highway patrol and the F.B.I, could be consolidated into one single police force. Their services may at times overlap. This need not provide a problem of competing to do the same service, but rather an opportunity to do a better service through cooperative effort.

Agriculture today is a highly specialized industry and requires many highly specialized services. Farm leaders have given much thought and study to their problems and have from time to time had legislation enacted to set up facilities to do certain things. Usually some agency or organization is set up to do the job or provide a certain needed service. Of the many agencies useful to avocado growers, there are five here in San Diego County whose services are especially important. I am thinking of the Farm Credit Administration; The Farm Security Administration; the Agricultural Production and Marketing Administration; the Soil Conservation Service and the Agricultural Extension Service.

First suppose we list the functions or services that avocado growers may need in the care of their groves. They fall into about eight rather general fields, namely:

Research
Experimentation
Information
Education
Service
Administration
Regulation
Policing

Then too we may well keep in mind the factor or area such as the county, state and nation, and the responsibilities involved in the functions and services of these agencies.

Farm Credit Administration

Financing the purchase of farms and the production of annual crops has been a very real problem to farmers. The past history has been that when money became tight short term credit was called in, leaving the farmer in a sorry plight, frequently crops were disposed of at a serious disadvantage and farm mortgages were not renewed in depression periods, thus a demand for full payment was made when the farmer was least able to obtain money or to pay.

To meet these and other related problems farm leaders developed the idea of creating farm credit facilities built especially to meet their needs; thus was born the Farm Credit Administration with its land bank loan associations, to finance on an amortised basis the farm mortgages; the Production Credit Associations to finance the farmers annual crop production needs and the Bank of Cooperatives to meet the specific needs of farmer cooperatives. It is not easy for the new farmer of today to visualize the progress made in this field of farm financing.

In our classification of agencies let us classify this agency whose function is one of financial service, as a service agency.

The Farm Security Administration

During the depression of 1929 to 1933, many farmers, through no direct fault of their own, lost their farms and homes. Their financial reserves and credit was destroyed by falling price levels. Such a condition was recognized as extremely unhealthy in a democracy. Several laws were enacted to correct some of this problem. The Farm Security Administration was created to meet this situation. The program included the loaning of money on less security than was usually required. The loan was made and used under a strict family budget and farm management plan.

This agency carries on a close farm management supervision of its borrowers. It conducted educational programs with its members in cultural practices and home economics much the same as the Agricultural Extension Service provided for all farmers

and farm families.

Today the Farm Security Administration is assigned a field of work with veterans who wish to become farm operators. Their program of loans to under financed farmers has greatly decreased during the war period. This agency would be classified as a service agency to underprivileged farm families with strong education and information functions to its clients.

The Agricultural Production and Marketing Administration

A new name for the A.A.A. after having absorbed several other U.S.D.A. administrative agencies as a result of an attempt to consolidate about 30 specialized agencies in Washington.

During the depression years farm commodity prices fell to levels dangerous to our National economy. Farm leaders decided three types of problems should be met:

First, Soil fertility should be conserved and restored. Second, Production of food, fiber and oils on farms should be balanced with the nation's needs.

Third, Prices of farm products should be adjusted to a parity with those existing in the 1909-1914 period. That is farm goods should have the same purchasing power in 1933 as they had in the base period of '09 to '14. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration was formed to accomplish these needs.

It is essentially an administrative agency. It makes payments to farmers who carry on certain soil building and range improvement practices, pays milk and meat subsidies and was assigned many duties of an administrative nature during and after the war period.

The Soil Conservation Service

For many years the subject of soil and water conservation was a part of the educational program of the Agricultural Extension Service. During the period of the midwest drought and dust bowl period, much thought was given to ways and means of preventing a return of this catastrophe and attention was directed to the alarming rate at which water erosion of farm soils was occurring.

Legislation was enacted to set up a special agency to concentrate its efforts in this particular field. All America is soil conservation minded and much fine work has been done in this field during recent years. This agency may be thought of as a service agency, rendering an engineering service to farmers in drawing up farm plans for the conservation of water and soil. They cover a specialized field in the information and educational functions that are associated with soil conservation practices, farm lay out, and soil erosion prevention constructions.

The County Agricultural Commissioner

As the business of agriculture becomes more specialized and more intensively

competitive, and as the technology and science of agriculture has become more exacting farmers have recognized the need of special services and regulations. Rules to which they agree through legislation to require the individual to conform to practices for the best interest of the entire industry. To exclude insects and diseases dangerous to local agricultural crops. To standardize packages and materials used by farmers and a wide range of specialized services such as inspection of equipment and certification of pest control operators, bee inspection, enforcement of county ordinances and state laws, literally any service or function farmers desire and prescribe in state laws and county ordinances.

The county Agricultural Commissioner's Department is the result of meeting these many requirements of our widely diversified and highly specialized agriculture. It is a regulatory-policing and service type of agency. They make use of the educational and information function to obtain farmer adherence to regulations in the place of the use of legal powers.

This agency cooperates closely with all other agencies serving the agriculture of San Diego County since its services and functions are interrelated with those of practically all other agencies. Its close relationship to the state Department of Agriculture is demonstrated in its many mutually conducted quarantine and regulatory activities.

The University of California Agricultural Extension Service

Early in this century farm leaders and educators observed that the State and Federal Agricultural Experiment Stations were developing a great deal of information that was very slow in reaching the farmer. There appeared to be a need for a trained agriculturist to work with farmers in the local adaptation of new information, methods, crops and materials.

Many commercial groups found the idea of placing agricultural agents in the field to help farmers learn to use their products was very well received and an effective method.

Farmers reasoned that they would rather have their own agent who was entirely unbiased in his presentation of facts relating to their farm and livestock operations. About the same problem existed in relation to the farm home and farm living. Farm women expressed a desire to have local teaching and guidance in the arts of homemaking.

Farm boys and girls were not obtaining the same opportunities for social and economic improvement as were their city cousins.

From these and other needs developed the idea of an Agricultural Extension Service; a part of the state's University, College of Agriculture, but located permanently in the county.

Boys and girls 4-H Club work; home demonstration work; and farm advisory work is carried on in cooperation with the local farm people who help plan the program of activities to meet their particular and most essential problems.

The Agricultural Extension Service is essentially an educational and information type of agency that makes use of the experimental function to adapt new information, methods,

crops and materials to local conditions and to assist in their introduction into the local agriculture. The cooperative conduct of test and demonstration plots is an essential part of this educational program. This field of providing information and education is just as wide as the field of agriculture and the needs of the farm family, but it does not involve the fields of policing, inspection, enforcement administration and services of a commercial and non-educational nature.

Information on a wide range of subjects is presented at field meetings on agricultural production and marketing. Five meetings a month are held on avocado and citrus culture in the various citrus and avocado producing districts. All persons interested are invited to attend these.

A supply of literature on all phases of Agriculture and Home Economics as well as boys and girls club work for free distribution is maintained at the Agricultural Extension Service office, Room 404, U.S. Customs Bldg. in San Diego.

It is planned to have one of the Farm Advisors at the office each day for conferences with farm people on farm problems.

One or more schools are conducted for new people in avocado and citrus production each year.

It is my belief that a new avocado grower can through his attendance of the Agricultural Extension Service field meetings and by his participating in the other activities of the industry together with reading the available literature become an expert in the care of an avocado grove.

Accurate information on basic principles, the acceptance of proved cultural practices together with a few years of experience and with a knowledge of where to get the kind of information or service needed should result in the development of a capable orchardist who will know how to care for an avocado grove.