

THE AVOCADO IN AUSTRALIA

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I have just returned to my home town of Brisbane, Australia, after spending eight weeks in California, and most of this time was taken up finding out all about avocados. I found out very early, in fact on my first visit to the Calavo headquarters in Los Angeles, just how big the industry was in California, and just how small it was in Australia.

Avocados grow in California from Goleta in the north to San Diego in the south: roughly a strip of 200 miles in length, with depths to 40-odd miles.

The avocado in Australia is grown in a similar coastal strip with Brisbane in the centre, north approximately 100 miles and south to the New South Wales border, a distance of approximately 70 miles. There are no plantings further inland than 20 miles. Commercially we have only about thirty growers, and many of these have thirty to fifty trees as a side line, and are not true avocado growers, as apart from picking and packing these growers know very little about the mysterious avocado.

I have two avocado farms in the area, one 25 acres situated at Eagle Heights, at an elevation of 1,850 feet, 40 miles south of Brisbane, and 12 miles from the coast; the other farm of 15 acres is at Redland Bay on the shores of Moreton Bay and 25 miles south of Brisbane.

Practically all parent trees in Australia came from California, and the following varieties are the main ones: Fuerte, Nabal, Hellen, Edranol, Ryan, Duke, Jalna, Zutano, Hazzard, Anaheim, Benik, Hass, Puebla, Panchoy, Spinks, Northrop, Mexicola and Topa Topa. Unlike California, Fuerte does well right on the coast and is the main fruit grown, although several farms have Fuerte and Nabal, Fuerte being fall-to-winter fruit and Nabal picking in the spring.

Puebla, Panchoy, Benik, Spinks, and Northrop are not now grown, and there are only a few trees of these varieties. Hellen, Edranol, Ryan, Duke, Jalna, Zutano, Anaheim, and Hass are being planted, but it is too early to comment on their bearing habits in our different localities.

At my farm at Eagle Heights I have found, with 5 year old trees, that Hellen, Edranol, Anaheim, Duke, and Zutano set very few fruit; Jalna sets big crops, alternately as does Nabal. Nabal almost breaks the tree with medium to large fruit in great numbers. Cole Fuerte is in most areas alternate bearing.

Our conditions differ very much in many ways. Our average rainfall over the coastal strip is approximately 40 inches, of which more than half falls January to March as summer rains, and in good years the remainder is nicely spread. This has happened for the past two years, during which period I have not had to water any of my four hundred

trees. On the other hand we do experience dry winters, that is, from May to September, but this is not as bad as a dry summer, which can go from September until early in the year. In 1947 we had a dry spring and practically no rain from September to late February. This meant irrigating all this period. Our irrigation is mostly basin type.

The soils on which most avocados are grown in our area is red volcanic, very free with great depth of soil. I have tested to 60 feet on one property, and to 40 feet on the other, and I still have the same soil.

We have some avocados growing on a grey sandy loam on which they do very well, except they need more irrigating, and the trees need more care in dry times, as the soil dries out to a greater depth in less time than the red soil.

When the American forces came to Queensland in 1942 the demand for avocados increased, and all who had an avocado tree or trees, hastily plucked the fruit, put it all into cases, and sent them to a hungry market. Unfortunately this situation still exists and avocados are still marketed in cases used for tomatoes, which takes two layers each way and is about 18 inches long. Other than myself I know of no farmer who grows avocados exclusively, and apart from about five or six others very little interest is taken.

The remainder know little of the avocado and the various varieties, and when the fruit appears big enough it is all picked and packed with very little grading, seedlings and all, with the result that really good avocados such as Calavo and other organized bodies put on your market, are little known in Australia.

However, our Queensland Government Department of Agriculture and Stock, the Committee of Direction of Fruit Marketing, and a small body of enthusiastic growers, all of whom I represented when on my trip, are now getting together and working out the best ways and means to build our new industry upon your experiences for the benefit of consumer public and growers alike.

I hope to return in a few years to re-cover the avocado territory again, and to report much progress of the avocado in Australia. I would like to thank your President, Elwood Trask, and Directors for their invitation to a board meeting; also Geo. B. Hodgkin, Manager, William F. Cowan, Field Manager, Jack Shepherd, Assistant Field Manager, Geo. L. Smallen, Fieldman, all of Calavo Growers; also Mr. M. M. Winslow of the University of California, Riverside, and John H. Shepard of Carpinteria for their valuable assistance to me on my trip.

