

THE AVOCADO ADVISORY BOARD

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The Avocado Advisory Board has now been in operation about a year. This is much too early to assess its results, but not too early to assess the philosophy behind marketing orders.

As background information, I attended the formational hearing, speaking against the order and have attended two meetings of the Advisory Board as an observer since its organization in December, 1961. From what I saw in these two meetings and also in private talks with some of the directors, I will have to say that the Board is attempting to do a job for the industry.

There are, however, fundamental problems connected with a board of this type which are very serious. First, the members are not under either direct or indirect control of avocado growers. They are picked by the Director of the State Department of Agriculture from a list of nominees made at area meetings. These men are merely nominated, not voted upon in any manner by the growers and one to five or more may be nominated. The Director then selects the representative for the area from that list. It is not only possible, but has happened, that a man may nominate himself and get the position. In order to be sure of getting an inefficient director relieved from his position, not only would all growers present at the nomination meeting have to act in concert not to nominate him, but also a gag might have to be applied to the member himself.

Second, as the title states, this is only an advisory board. All of its actions are taken as recommendations to the Director of Agriculture. He may or may not accept this advice. Any major action of the board is null and void unless approved and implemented by a non-elected official. If there are actions taken with which you disapprove, you have little recourse for changes other than to ask to have the whole program abolished under its election procedure. Even if the industry is strongly opposed to the program it still is up to the Director's judgment as to whether he terminates it or not. Once the action has been approved by the Director, if the Board changes its mind about the wisdom of the action and requests changes, the Director can still leave the original action in force by refusing to take action on the request for change.

Third, the present five per cent gross sales assessment on all fresh fruit leaves the grower with no recourse if the money is not spent wisely. As an example, if you as a grower of Macarthur's are taxed five per cent and the bulk of the money is spent for Hass promotion, you are still forced to give up your money to be used for advertising a competing product. Unless your money is spent only for advertising California Avocados, with no mention of variety, size or color, it can not be spent equitably. If your production comes at a time of year when no advertising campaign is on, you are

penalized. If you are in a private organization and you have the impression, whether accurate or not, that your money being spent for advertising is not being wisely spent, you can attempt a change and then if you are not satisfied, resign. This is, of course impossible under the present system.

Fourth, advertising is most essential in a large crop year. Money, therefore, must either be held over from payments from the preceding crop, thus penalizing growers of that year or it must not be spent until the bulk of the large crop is harvested. There is a lag of thirty to sixty days after the fruit is picked before the money withheld from the grower is received by the state. Anyone who picked before the bulk of the advertising hit the market (probably timed to coincide with peak shipments) would receive little or no value for his money and would be subsidizing late pickers. An example might be early Fuerte districts with most of those growers' money being used to advertise middle and late Fuertes.

There are many other examples of inequities which can and probably will arise. However, apparent inequities are not my main cause of concern. My main concern is that a group of men, however sincere they are, not elected by growers, but appointed by the State Director of Agriculture, himself not elected by agriculture but appointed by a politician, advise, but can not direct this bureau head as to policy. If mistakes are made, the closest elected official who can be held accountable is the Governor of California. If mistakes are made, it is your money which is lost, and you have not even the recourse of resigning from the organization as you can from any voluntary group to which you belong.

There are a few instances in history where bureaucratic authority, once applied, has been lessened. In most cases it has increased. As an example, one of the directors of the Advisory Board has already suggested in public meetings that this advertising and promotion tax will not do the job and a pro-rate and volume control marketing order will be a necessity!

It is time for each avocado grower to awaken and realize that no one knows how to use his own money better than he himself does.