

AVOCADO PROSPECTS IN EGYPT

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If I am writing this short report at all, it is because I have experimented during over 20 years in avocado growing in the Delta region area of Kafr-el-Dawar where about 500 trees were thriving a year ago, and many producing plenty of excellent fruit. Comparing notes with connections in Guatemala, Florida, California and Spain, I am certain that Egypt is ideally located and its soil and climate far surpasses those of countries around the Mediterranean where decisive efforts are being carried out to raise and propagate avocados. Nevertheless, probably less than 100 acres of avocados are grown in the whole of Egypt.

Why is the fruit not appreciated in Egypt? The only reason I can think of, and to my mind it is not valid, but I will mention it all the same, is that the avocado is not sweet to the taste like most of the fruit which are appreciated here, such as mango, custard apple, dates or melons. Perhaps it does not appeal to the oriental fancy which favors a sugary flavor? But artichokes, egg-plant, asparagus and mushrooms are extensively bought and appreciated, so why the avocado, which in many ways surpasses these foods in excellence and refinement, is not similarly grown and encouraged, I have never been able to understand.

The avocado was developed commercially in the United States in the early 1900's but it has been grown in Central America and the West Indies for many centuries. Compared to other fruit, it is therefore relatively new outside its countries of origin, but its popularity has grown to such an extent in the United States and Europe that today you will find choice avocados at the better fruit-mongers and grocery stores in the main towns and resorts of the above mentioned continents. Avocados are also grown to some extent in East and South Africa and in Australia.

The countries in and around Europe which have understood the worth of this fruit are Algeria, Spain, Israel and, to a lesser extent, France (because of her unfavorable climate), but it is Israel which has gone ahead most and acquired favor on the European markets with the excellence of its avocados.

As I see it, what is required to start the ball rolling is a well drawn up program of avocado growing and propagating by the Egyptian Government's agricultural authorities. But in order to do this, the first step, of course, is to obtain the very best varieties of avocados, the ones which have proved famous on the world markets. Another advantage of Egypt is that her climate will allow her to grow avocados of different varieties, all the year round without a break, thus representing a continuous flow in production and export.

I consider it is well worth closing the gap and catching up, for Egypt. Because the import

of fruit trees is forbidden, the work could start by obtaining graftwood from Central America, California, Florida and, nearer to Egypt, from Spain. Spain, Algeria, France and Israel had the same difficulties at the start but with their governments' help and encouragement they prepared large nurseries of stock saplings which they went on to graft with material sent to them regularly by air. Certainly a certain amount of experimentation will have to be carried out to discover the varieties better suited, and possibly to improve and create new ones, but as I said before, the spade-work has already been done by others, and without a doubt varieties such as Hass, Ettinger, Nabal, Lula, Collinson, Itzama, etc., should thrive in Egypt.

For reaching successful results I would suggest inviting a specialist from abroad to teach in the art of avocado grafting and budding. In Florida and elsewhere these operations are carried out almost throughout the year and attain up to 80% successful graftings and shield-buddings. My own experience here, using my own trained staff of grafters or the very best from the Government Horticultural Section has never produced better than 10%. I believe the reason for this poor showing is not the lack of adroitness, which these men possess to a high degree, but the lack of habit and thoroughness. Because mango is so extensively grown in the country and inarching is so widely and successfully practiced, why bother with the delicate art of choosing the buds or graftwood and following up with an operation which calls for so much minuteness?

It is especially important that the tissues of the stock be succulent and the scion be introduced into a pliable stem. These prerequisites are not understood generally or observed by our local personnel. They have the hand but lack the technique. Proper grafting wax will be required, and rubber or plastic strips are preferable to raffia.

Nurseries in Central America, in California, in Florida and elsewhere are accustomed to mailing graftwood around the world. The material is packed in polyethylene wrappings and shipped by first class air mail, just like a letter. From America it costs about five U.S. dollars to mail an envelope containing 20-25 scions. This is pretty inexpensive, when you consider what the introduction of a new avocado may mean. The scions or buds will resist several days thus packed, but it goes without saying that immediately on arrival the work of grafting should start. The contents are treated before dispatch against pests and diseases and this is certified by the senders, so it is not necessary to repeat the treatment by fumigation on arrival, as such a repetition has proved often to ruin the material. The avocado orchards of Algeria, Spain and Israel were formed in the way described above.

Before closing, I should mention that one of the very best varieties of avocado, the Fuerte, already exists in Egypt. There are a few hundred trees at Diffichou near Kafr-el-Dawar and in orchards around Cairo. Here in Egypt the Fuerte is a September to April variety. The Duke, a July to October variety, is also grown in Egypt; I suggest it be maintained until better summer varieties are obtained. The Duke does not travel well and its taste does not approach that of Fuerte.

Egypt today, in order to compete, has to catch up at least 10-15 years but this is well worthwhile, because once she will have closed the gap, no other country will be able to compete with her soil and climate, her nearness to Middle East and European markets. Geographically Egypt is, therefore, an ideal avocado country.