

THE AVOCADO INDUSTRY OF VENTURA COUNTY-PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

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INTRODUCTION

The rapid growth of the avocado industry has been one of the notable developments in Ventura County agriculture during the past thirty years. This period has witnessed a transition from a dooryard curiosity to commercial fruit industry embracing approximately 3,200 acres. The development of the avocado industry of Ventura County parallels that of California.

SITUATION

California produces over three-fourths of the avocados used in the United States. A large portion of this production is consumed within the state. Florida is the other principal supplier. Prior to 1961, substantial quantities of avocados were imported from Cuba during the summer months.

Ventura County avocado industry ranks second to that of San Diego in both acreage and production. This situation will remain for many years.

PRODUCTION

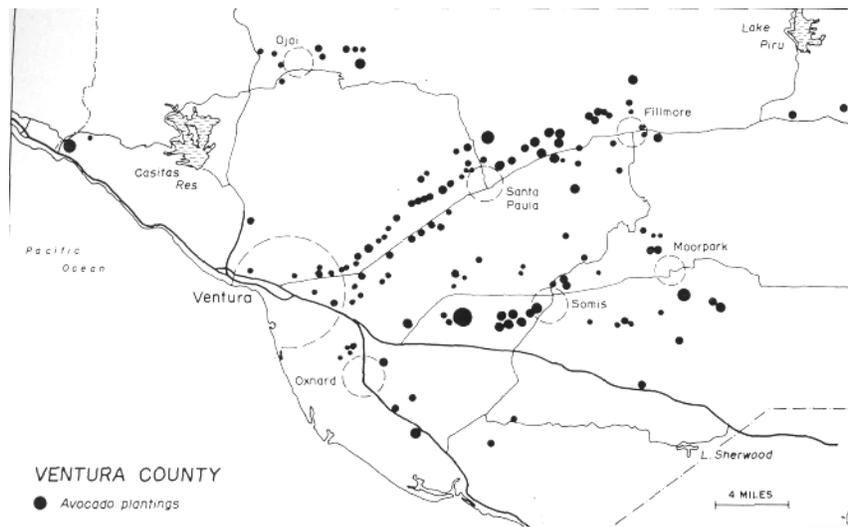
The avocado is a tender, evergreen, subtropical fruit tree, whose commercial culture is limited to localities of relatively mild winters, such as occur only in tropical or subtropical regions.

The principal climatic factors which limit the commercial culture of the avocado appear to be the (1) winter frost hazard, (2) low mean temperature during the flowering and fruit-setting period, (3) sudden heat waves, and (4) wind.

Extensive experience with the avocado tree has demonstrated its success on a wide range of soils. Commercial plantings occur on nearly every soil texture from fine sands to clay loams. The avocado tree is extremely sensitive to the effects of poor soil drainage. Prior to planting, it is most important that subsoil conditions be carefully determined. Structural faults, such as clay pans, hardpans, or other features which interfere with the free downward movement of water and restrict aeration, are especially unfavorable.

HARVESTING AND MARKETING

Avocados are harvested every month of the year. The two principal varieties, from the standpoint of acreage and shipments, are Fuerte and Hass. The Fuerte, a green-skinned fruit, is marketed during November through June. The Hass, a dark-skinned fruit, is marketed from June through October. Climatic conditions are unfavorable for setting Fuerte fruit in Ventura County. Hass, therefore, is the most important commercial variety. A number of other varieties are marketed in smaller quantities throughout the year. These varieties include Bacon, Zutano, MacArthur, Rincon, Edranol, and Nabal, to name a few. An effort is being made to reduce the number of varieties to three or four to facilitate harvest, packing, and marketing.



Map of Ventura County showing distribution of avocado plantings.

LABOR REQUIREMENTS

It is estimated 72 man-hours of labor are required per year to raise and harvest an acre of avocados.

The long storage life of the avocado on the tree permits a prolonged harvest period. Labor for harvesting, therefore, seldom reaches the critical stage. Picking is usually done with the regular farm labor crew and is interspersed between other cultural operations.

CHARACTERISTICS OF AVOCADO ORCHARDS

By definition, a commercial avocado orchard consists of 100 trees, or less trees with a total production of 100 40-pound field boxes annually.

As of October 1, 1966, the commercial bearing avocado acreage in Ventura County consisted of the following size orchards:

<u>Number of Trees</u>	<u>Number of Growers</u>
2000+	39
1000 to 2000	52
500 to 1000	63
100 to 500	267
	<u>Total 421</u>

The number of trees per acre varies with age and growth habit of the variety. The older orchards with spreading-type trees may have as few as 40 trees per acre. Orchards with upright-growing trees may have 145 or more trees per acre. For practical purposes, 90 trees per acre is average.

The large avocado acreages usually are a portion of a diversified farm involving citrus. The avocado, because of its low labor requirements and esthetic value, is conducive to weekend farming and estate living. These acreages are usually less than two acres.

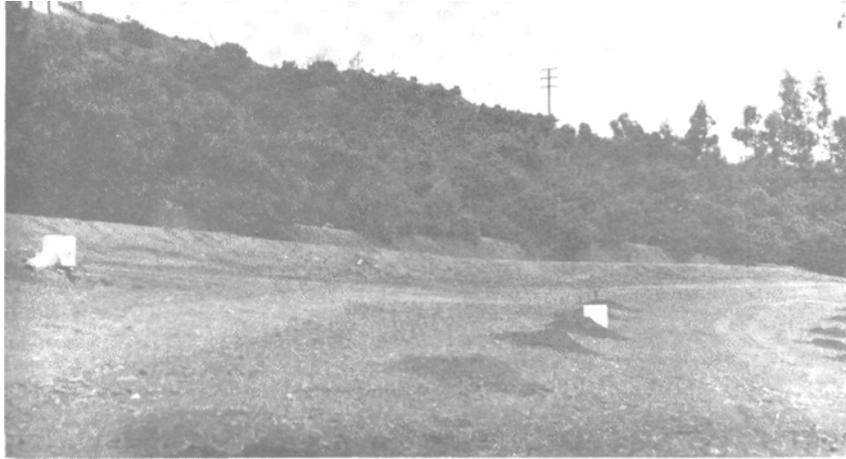
ACREAGE

California has about 24,000 acres of avocados in the seven southern counties. During the last five years, total production per year ranged from 23,658 to 54,580 tons with an average of 43,007 tons per year. The alternate bearing habit of some varieties and variations in weather cause yields to fluctuate considerably.

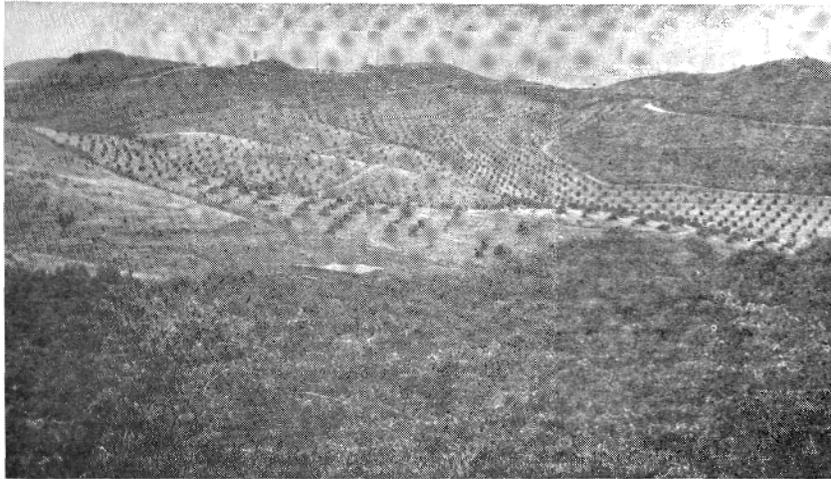
The avocado is a relatively new fruit industry in Ventura County. Acreage has increased steadily from 507 acres in 1945 to 3,248 in 1966.

LAND AVAILABILITY

Bare land for avocados is difficult to find. Barren hills suitable for avocados are available but without water. As water, either supplemental or locally developed, becomes available, additional acreage can be planted to avocados. In addition, most land now planted to walnuts, oranges, or lemons, and some vegetable land could be planted to avocados. Although urbanization will restrict avocado acreage, its effects will be minimized because most plantings are not near urban developments. Practically no avocado acreage has been removed for this purpose. Avocado acreage, conservatively, could increase by 1,500 to 2,000 acres during the next decade. Assuming taxes, zoning, and fruit returns remain favorable for avocados, any increase in acreage will depend on the loss of other crop acreage or development of new water sources for land presently unplanted to crops. Avocados have one advantage over other horticultural crops. They can be successfully planted on land considered too steep (20 percent) for other tree crops.



Typical Ventura County scene showing expansion of avocado acreage. Older trees on terraced hillsides. Preparation for new planting in foreground.



Young and old avocado plantings on hillside north of Santa Paula.

More than 1,000 acres of land on the mesa above the Rincon between Ventura and Carpinteria are now served by Ventura River Municipal Water District. With water, some of this land is suitable for avocados and lemons. There are some limitations and a prospective grower should thoroughly investigate a given parcel before planting. Soils vary considerably. Some are too shallow to support tree growth. Others contain too much clay or have impervious subsoils. Some soils contain lime which may limit the planting of avocados or lemons because of lime-induced iron chlorosis. The service of an agricultural laboratory could delineate the areas containing too much lime to successfully plant.

OUTLOOK OR PROJECTION

The outlook for avocados in Ventura County for the next ten years appears favorable.

With ever increasing land values, especially in the more climatically favored portions of the state, crops and fruits yielding high returns per acre must be grown. The avocado meets this requirement.

Avocados, like other tree crops, require several years before they begin to produce and become financially self sufficient. Inherent factors such as varieties, soil, water, climatic conditions, and cultural care govern the precocity of the avocado. While some varieties, with good care, may start producing at the third year, it is usually five years before they return a profit. In an urbanizing area this long period between planting and a profitable return may be a deterrent to commercial avocado development. This would not affect the small growers who desire a weekend farm or those who value the avocado for its aesthetic value on a homesite.

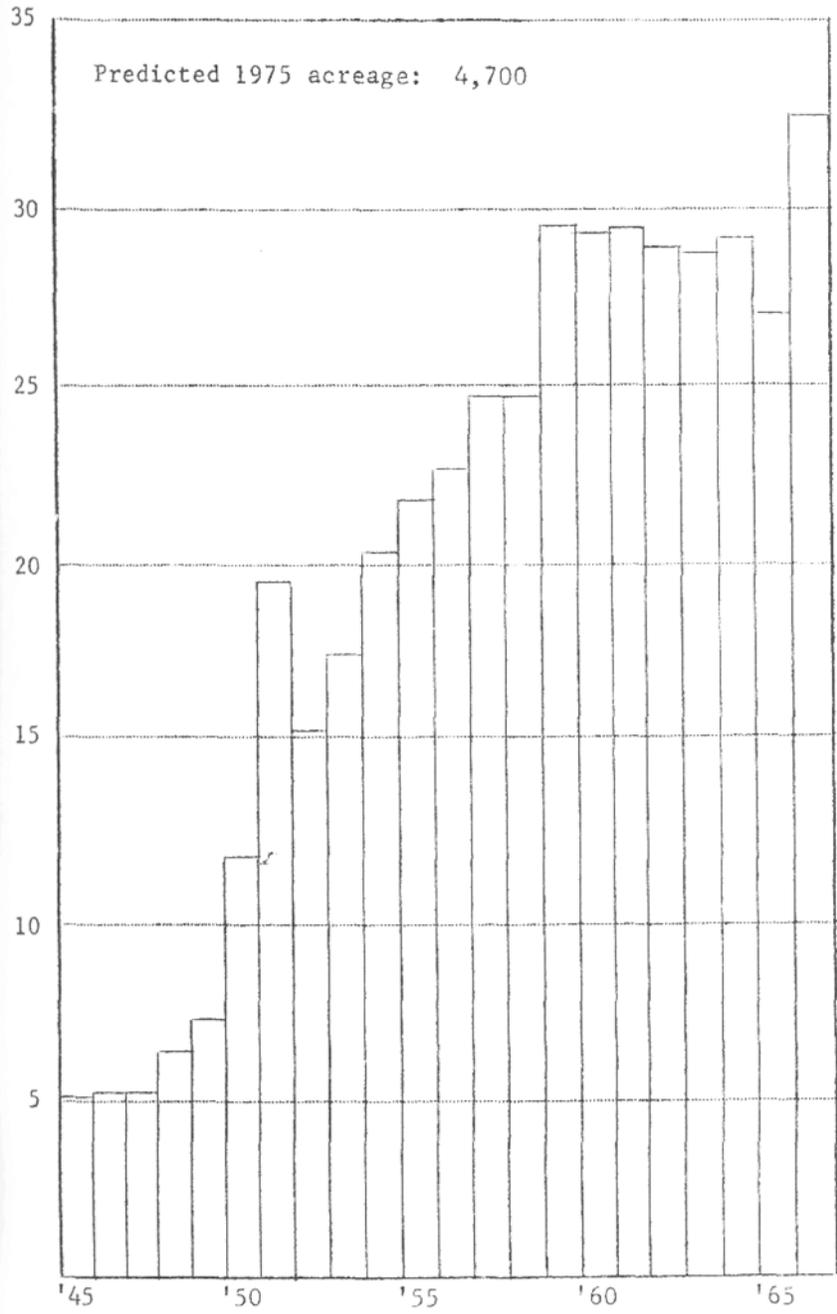
The food value of the fruit itself, the possibility of increasing per capita consumption from the present half pound per person per year, the new freezing process for marketing a ready-to-serve product, and its potentially high return per acre are sufficient reasons to justify its place in Ventura County agriculture for many years.

VENTURA COUNTY AVOCADO STATISTICS*

<u>Year</u>	<u>Acres</u>			<u>Pounds</u>	<u>Value</u>
	<u>Bearing</u>	<u>Non-Bearing</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Production</u>	
1945	379	129	508	648,006	\$ 172,185
1946	430	85	515	1,021,000	161,902
1947	430	83	513	861,782	167,902
1948	422	227	649	1,030,820	166,348
1950	497	674	1,171	653,546	146,545
1951	512	1,437	1,949	1,071,521	188,405
1952	548	971	1,519	2,199,366	380,299
1953	700	1,046	1,746	2,326,650	376,937
1954	738	1,298	2,036	1,714,040	325,383
1955	1,365	815	2,180	5,960,300	566,244
1956	1,841	436	2,277	2,070,391	948,410
1957	1,977	504	2,481	2,864,212	630,127
1958	1,766	716	2,482	8,670,818	1,228,986
1959	1,829	1,122	2,951	14,693,672	1,364,413
1960	2,084	843	2,927	11,040,000	1,217,628
1961	2,383	554	2,937	8,550,000	1,688,000
1962	2,336	552	2,888	10,768,000	1,109,600
1963	2,574	300	2,874	9,308,000	1,242,700
1964	2,649	263	2,912	14,592,000	1,882,400
1965	2,359	348	2,707	7,664,000	1,931,300
1966	2,661	587	3,248	18,840,000	2,430,000

* Sources "Annual Report and Crop Statistics," Agricultural Commissioner of Ventura County

VENTURA COUNTY AVOCADO ACREAGE



Reduction of acreage in 1952 and 1965 due to resurvey of tree crop acreage by State Department of Agriculture.

VENTURA COUNTY AVOCADO STATISTICS

