

## **PHILIPPINE ISLANDS LETTER**

(ADDRESSED TO CALIFORNIA AVOCADO SOCIETY, JULY 20, 1967)

I would like to emphasize that I hardly consider myself qualified to write on the subject of avocados.

However, for whatever interest it may inspire, the following are my personal observations regarding avocados in the Philippines.

As far as can be deduced, there are no large scale or commercial plantings of avocados in the islands. I would guess that there are less than 100,000 trees throughout the seven thousand islands and the majority are back yard plantings. Due to the perishable quality of the fruit, they are all marketed in the locality where they are grown.

Since there has been no commercial appraisal or interest, no work to index the various varieties has been done. I personally have encountered five distinct varieties, that vary in seed size, fruit size, shape, texture of the flesh and taste.

Most plantings are propagated by seed. Budding or grafting of this fruit, although known, is very seldom practiced.

Although the fruit generally appears seasonally at the same period of the year, slight climatic condition between the islands will produce an early avocado which at times may reach the larger segments of population and bring a higher price while offsetting the difficult and costly transportation.

This is the exception rather than the rule, therefore when the fruit is in season, the market floods and a basket containing a hundred or more can be purchased for the equivalent of 70 cents.

Many of these would be considered undersize by commercial standards but they are deliberately picked immature to withstand short distance transportation or in cases where the tree owner fears theft, if the fruit is allowed to stay on the tree longer.

The establishment of large modern hotels and the influx of tourists may cause a rise in prices and an effort to produce a more mature fruit in the near future.

To this end, the writer has planted an experimental 100 trees of the several local varieties and these are now 1½ years old from seed. These trees are getting normal commercial care, along with ring weeding, irrigation, fertilizing and occasional spraying.

These are also being cultured and pruned to prevent their extremely tall growth which is prevalent in the average back-yard tree.

Several of these trees were recently experimentally budded and grafted from 3 varieties which arrived from Brazil courtesy of Dr. Ary Salibe. It is hoped that these new varieties may produce off season fruit to fill the gap in the market.

Avocado trees generally grow vigorously under Philippine conditions and very little care other than weeding and fertilizing is needed. The writer has experienced the decline of several half grown trees to the ravages of an unidentified borer but this is usually evident in poorly drained areas.

It may be of interest to the reader that Filipinos do not as a rule eat avocados as Westerners do, but instead they mash the pulp, add sugar and milk and prepare a sort of cream mixture usually consumed as a dessert, and called "Halo Halo."



Author with 1 1/2 year old avocado tree in Rizal, Philippine Islands.

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