

THE AGUACATE IN MEXICO

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(Ed. note: Papers of Henry Dalton indicate the avocados were planted on his ranch in what is now the city of Azusa as early as 1858.)

The word Aguacate in Mexico traces its origins since Aztec times, when the fruit was called AHUACAQUAHUITL. The different name given to this fruit, thus derives from its original Aztec terminology. In México, Central America and the Caribbean Islands the common name for the fruit is Ahuacate or Aguacate, which in the United States changes into Avocado or Alligator Pear. This last term was designated by the investigator Sir Hans Sloane, who in 1696 while in Jamaica, gave the name to this fruit as "Aguacate or Alligator Pear" due perhaps to its form and surface presentation.

It is interesting to note that the origin of this fruit can be said to be Mexican according to different archeological investigations where the avocado tree appears in several hieroglyphics of the Aztecs. According to the historians Fray Bernardino de Sahagún and the Priest José de Acosta, during the Conquest of México by the Spanish forces in the sixteenth century, avocado trees and small plantations were found not only in México but in Central America and in Perú.

Another reference of the time is that of Fray Francisco Ximenez in 1615 who gives medicinal uses to this plant and recommended its curative properties to the King of Spain.

This fruit in present times has propagated in many countries. One of the main producers of avocados is the United States where this fruit was brought, according to different versions, around 1800 by the Spanish near Miami, Florida. It is believed that the first introduction in California was in 1871 when R. B. Ord planted the trees in Santa Monica.

México, being considered the place of origin of avocados, is also a large producer of this fruit which is widely consumed by the population who includes it as part of the diet in many parts of the country. Production of avocados in México vary from backyard planting, which is a common practice in many areas, to large scale systematic plantations in several states of the Republic. The fact that many people in the country plant avocado trees in their backyards makes it rather difficult to have an accurate statistic of its production and capacity.

In some areas the recollection of the fruit is also a difficult task because buyers have to deal with too many producers who own less than twenty trees. Therefore, it is quite difficult to obtain uniformity in quality or varieties. Usually the commercial practice is to sell avocados in wooden boxes known as huacales of about 50 lbs. The wooden boxes

would not only be full but they must have, according to commercial practices what is known as "colmo" or "copeteado." This means that the boxes must have an extra quantity of fruit on top of the already full box. To hold this extra and as a means of cover, the boxes are wrapped with thick paper and sent to the markets.

The most common varieties planted in México are:

| <i>Name</i> | <i>Group</i> | <i>Ecologic group</i> |
|-------------|-----------------|-----------------------|
| Mexicano | Querétaro | Mexicano |
| Fuerte | Puebla, Pue. | Mexicano |
| Puebla | Atlixco, Pue. | Mexicano |
| Gottfried | Atlixco, Pue. | Mexicano |
| Atlixco | Atlixco, Pue. | Mexicano |
| Taylor | Guatemala, C.A. | Guatemalteco |

In the past few years many other varieties such as the Pollock, Booth 7, Booth 8, Hall, Choquette and others are grown in commercial scale in different areas of the Country. These last varieties came mostly from the United States.

In recent years the Government, through the Secretary of Agriculture, has been promoting campaigns to grow avocados as a means of improving the standard of living in poor farming areas where the traditional crop is corn. One of the most outstanding programs is that of the Mexican Institute of Coffee whose members are diversifying their coffee plantations by growing other commercial plants including avocados on large scale. This is done so as to help coffee growers to balance their economy when international fluctuations in the price and quotas of coffee occurs. The measure taken is significant and widely known through the country as an intelligent and rational plan of agricultural economics.

To understand the importance of the avocado industry in Mexico allowing statistical information is valuable. This data will give an idea of the development of avocados from a reasonable time before, to present days. It also includes production and output increases from forty years to date.

STATISTICAL DATA ON MEXICAN AVOCADOS

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Cultivated Area in Hectares</i> | <i>Trees under Production</i> | <i>Output per Hectares in Kilograms</i> | <i>Output per tree in Kilograms</i> | <i>Production per Tons</i> |
|-------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1929 | 2965 | 444,803 | 9230 | 62 | 27339 |
| 1930 | 2970 | 445,444 | 10205 | 68 | 30278 |
| 1935 | 3866 | 579,858 | 8084 | 54 | 31221 |
| 1936 | 4046 | 606,866 | 5578 | 40 | 30632 |
| 1940 | 4898 | 735,406 | 10536 | 70 | 51607 |
| 1941 | 4892 | 734,514 | 11838 | 79 | 57912 |
| 1945 | 5316 | 797,398 | 11707 | 78 | 62235 |
| 1946 | 8036 | 803,599 | 7788 | 78 | 62583 |
| 1950 | 8387 | 838,747 | 7501 | 75 | 62915 |
| 1951 | 8483 | 848,170 | 7396 | 74 | 62744 |
| 1955 | 6778 | 1,016,638 | 11850 | 79 | 80527 |
| 1956 | 8042 | 1,206,326 | 12000 | 80 | 96647 |
| 1960 | 8349 | 1,252,345 | 12150 | 81 | 101138 |
| 1961 | 8723 | 1,308,475 | 12450 | 83 | 108057 |
| 1965 | 10080 | 1,511,741 | 13100 | 87 | 132048 |
| 1966 | 10150 | 1,521,907 | 13000 | 87 | 131950 |

This statistic gives us an idea of the increase of avocado production on a commercial scale. The development is considerable if we realize that there are besides this, a great quantity of backyard growers who produce for household consumption. It also shows that the techniques used are improving; thus, a better yield is obtained every year. In general it is possible to say that Mexican avocado producers are more conscious of the importance of this fruit and are studying new methods, techniques, and varieties as well as doing more investigations.

Another interesting fact to note is that the commercial consumption of avocados is also increasing at a high rate. This can be seen in the following table which give us data on the past few years.

| <i>Year</i> | <i>Production</i> | <i>Index 1956=100</i> | <i>Imports</i> | <i>Exports</i> | <i>Consumption</i> | <i>Index 1956=100</i> |
|-------------|-------------------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1956 | 96647 | 100.0 | — | — | 96647 | 100.0 |
| 1957 | 100190 | 103.7 | 1 | 4 | 100187 | 103.7 |
| 1960 | 101138 | 104.6 | — | 5 | 101133 | 104.6 |
| 1961 | 108057 | 111.8 | — | — | 108057 | 111.8 |
| 1964 | 131721 | 136.3 | 176 | — | 131897 | 136.5 |
| 1965 | 132048 | 136.6 | — | 1 | 132047 | 136.6 |
| 1966 | 131950 | 136.5 | — | — | 131950 | 136.5 |

This table gives an idea of the potentiality the avocado market has in México. It is believed that the demand for avocados is increasing every year as well as the preference of consumers for better types, both commercial and in production.

Avocados are produced in most of the States of the Republic. In some areas in larger

quantities than others. Also there are differences of varieties according to the climatic conditions. This gives the avocado market a situation of continuous supply during most parts of the year. The following table gives an estimate of production and plantation in the different states of the Nation taking 1963 as a sample year.

| Avocados In Mexico By Zones — 1963 | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|---|--------------------------------|---|
| <i>Zone and states</i> | <i>Surface in hectares</i> | <i>Output per hectares in kilograms</i> | <i>Production in kilograms</i> | <i>Harvest months</i> |
| <i>North Zone</i> | | | | |
| Coahuila | 6 | 6900 | 43,200 | June, July, August |
| Chihuahua | 21 | 18600 | 396,720 | August, September |
| Durango | 88 | 13950 | 1,236,465 | July, August, September |
| Nuevo León | 60 | 8400 | 510,050 | July until October |
| S. Luis Potosí | 211 | 13800 | 2,926,400 | June to September |
| Tamaulipas | 76 | 13200 | 996,800 | June to September |
| Zacatecas | 19 | 14550 | 271,500 | June to September |
| <i>Gulf Zone</i> | | | | |
| Campeche | 187 | 16350 | 3,051,702 | June to September |
| Quintana Roo | 25 | 12000 | 298,750 | July to September |
| Tabasco | 369 | 14850 | 5,504,890 | June to September |
| Veracruz | 1147 | 13650 | 15,704,315 | June to November |
| Yucatán | 173 | 12600 | 2,184,840 | July to September |
| <i>North Pacific Zone</i> | | | | |
| <i>South Baja</i> | | | | |
| California | 21 | 11700 | 248,290 | August to October |
| Nayarit | 82 | 15600 | 1,277,950 | June to September |
| Sinaloa | 91 | 16800 | 1,523,180 | August, September |
| <i>South Pacific Zone</i> | | | | |
| Colima | 38 | 13050 | 490,045 | June to September |
| Chiapas | 661 | 15150 | 10,019,834 | July to September |
| Guerrero | 385 | 14550 | 5,602,066 | January to August |
| Oaxaca | 349 | 15600 | 5,467,163 | January to August and October to December |
| <i>Central Zone</i> | | | | |
| Aguascalientes | 4 | 16650 | 71,200 | August to October |
| Federal District | 2 | 5100 | 8,655 | June to September |
| Guanajuato | 794 | 13200 | 10,474,250 | June to September |
| Hidalgo | 319 | 10800 | 3,443,501 | May to September |
| Jalisco | 304 | 14100 | 4,271,411 | June to September |
| México | 724 | 15000 | 10,886,433 | May to August |
| | | | | October to December |
| Michoacán | 923 | 9750 | 8,925,245 | March to September |
| Morelos | 421 | 12600 | 5,298,695 | April to October |
| Puebla | 2118 | 11550 | 24,552,753 | April to October |
| Querétaro | 334 | 12000 | 3,994,170 | May to September |
| Tlaxcala | 20 | 15450 | 305,650 | June to September |
| Total Republic of México | 9,972 | 13050 | 130,046,123 | |

This study on the avocados of México gives a general picture of the situation of this fruit in the country. It can be said that the importance of Avocados has been increasing each year and that in the coming years México can be one of the major avocado producers in

the world.