

AVOCADOS IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

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The avocado industry of Santa Cruz County is still in its infancy. There are approximately 90 acres in the county of which less than 20 acres are bearing. The first commercial planting was made in 1959.

Plantings are scattered in small acreages in the foothills east of Watsonville and north to Corralitos. A few are found northeast of Aptos and as far as Santa Cruz. Dooryard trees are found throughout the milder parts of the county, some over 20 years old.

Most of the plantings are made by people who have purchased small acreages for homesites, consequently, individual plantings are small.

Limits to Production

The most limiting factors to planting avocados in this area are climate, soils and water. Thermal belts exist along the foothills, but microclimates vary with each ridge and canyon. It is difficult to find more than a few acres of suitable soil per site within these thermal belts or pockets. Water is at a premium in these areas where apples were traditionally dry farmed. Most of it is supplied from springs or low yielding wells. The water supply should be developed before planting.

Varieties

Two varieties, Bacon and Hass, dominate with approximately 75% of the acreage, Bacon is the most consistent producer in Santa Cruz County. It matures in early summer. Hass bears good crops in warm locations, but is inconsistent. It matures in the fall and may be picked through the Holiday season.

The Camulos variety is third in terms of number of trees planted, but are not in production yet.

Zutano is a consistent, heavy producer, but fruit is frequently of poor quality due to corky development at the blossom end.

Several trees of other varieties have been planted for experimental purposes. Only time will tell if they have a place in this area.

Planting Methods

Since several plantings are on steep hillsides, extensive terracing has been done. Some

of these terraces are rather narrow and will present problems as the trees mature.

A few plantings are contoured without terraces, others are planted on a square without regard to the slope. Most spacings range from 18 x 20 feet to 20 x 20 feet.

Problems

Deer, gophers, earwigs, and snails are the major pests in this area. Avocado root rot has been identified in one small planting, but the causal organism, *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, is commonly found on ornamentals throughout the county.

Avocados have been planted on a wide range of soils. Orchard life may be short on those sites with dense subsoils.

Future

Interest runs high with many inquiries about planting avocados. The acreage may easily double or triple by 1975. So look out Southern California, a new avocado producing area threatens.