

Report of the Variety Committee

As the years go by, it seems that each year is unique, or different from other years in some respect.

1985 will go down in history with extreme differences. Prices ranged from red ink for "Greens" to as high as \$1.75 per pound for Mass. Contributing to this, the industry overestimated the crop by a wide margin. We had a bumper crop of "Greens" that flooded the fall of 1984 and early 1985 market. This demoralized prices at the start of the season; and growers found themselves receiving some of the poorest prices, relatively speaking, in history. Growers who had a well balanced variety mix and with patience and good judgment marketed the balance of the crop received some of the highest prices in history. Unfortunately, most of the growers receiving the poor prices were in San Diego County or the southern area of our California plantings.

With our improved estimating procedure and better variety mix, it is to be hoped that these extremes will never happen again.

Our unbalanced variety mix played an important part in this year's problems. This will take care of itself, as many thousands of Jims, Zutanos, and Bacons have been either abandoned or grafted over to Hass, Gwen, or some of the other new selections from Dr. Bergh's breeding program.

There are those—mostly the packers or those directly involved with selling — who would like us to grow only Hass. This thinking will not stand up, as there are so many climatic areas where the Hass will not produce enough to show a profit year in and year out.

The alternate bearing characteristic of the Hass varies enough in many individual groves to give reasonably even production from year to year. There are other groves with an ideal micro-climate that give consistent profit-making production. Unfortunately, the latter groves are few and far between.

What do we do about this? First, we have to take a hard look at our groves and the varieties we have currently planted and the production records available from several years. Where Hass are bearing satisfactorily, leave these as they are. The areas with poor production should be studied to find out what is wrong. If it is a cultural, soil, irrigation, or disease problem, do not blame the variety. Correct this first. In situations of poor soil or that are beyond correction, think of an alternative crop.

If you have Zutanos, Bacons, or Fuertes on low ground with a history of frost damage, do not waste time and money working these over to Hass, Gwen, or other Guatemalan varieties that are susceptible to frost damage. Leave them as they are. As time goes on, our markets will provide a niche for the "Greens" that we currently have. A variety that over a period of time is a loser will gradually be abandoned. In areas that are exposed to the full brunt of Santa Ana winds, grafting over to Pinkerton should be considered. I have observed Hass and Pinkerton side by side after a big wind. Fruit of the Hass were

ail over the ground; hardly any of the Pinkerton's fruit were blown off.

If you have Reeds in a well sheltered area that bear well, do not give up on them. The Reed blooms later in the spring than most varieties and sets late in most coastal areas. This contributes to its consistent production. Even though it passes maturity regulations in the spring, do not pick it. Give the consumer a break, and pick it in July or later in southern California. The Reed is an excellent buy because of its size and quality, especially for the restaurant trade. The Reed is also one of the few varieties not bothered by the increasing infestation of thrips.

The Pinkerton variety, with help from the Pinkerton Growers Association, is starting to find its place in our California variety mix. It does tend to alternate some, but will out-produce the Hass, year in and year out. It is superior to the Hass in the early part of the season. The industry would be better if we would hold up on marketing the Hass till about March first, in California.

This coming year, we will have our first production of the Gwen in sufficient quantity and in enough areas to evaluate it. Because of its close resemblance to the Hass except for its green color, it should not create any marketing problems. A market promotion system patterned after the Pinkerton Growers prototype is in the offing. For Hass groves that have been thinned, or in which thinning is contemplated, consider grafting every other tree over to a Gwen. In four or five years, you can decide which variety you will want to keep. If you have had severe alternation and poor production with Hass, consider mixing in some Whitsells (B flower) to help pollinate the Hass and Gwen (A flowers). The Whitsell is a quality fruit that should not create any marketing problems.

There are many of Dr. Bergh's newer selections that he and his staff and the Variety Committee members are working with. These will be publicized for experimental planting after passing the stiff evaluation procedure now in use. Any with weaknesses are dropped.

Mention should be made of the largest cooperator with Dr. Bergh in his avocado breeding program. The gentleman is Jose Felipe, who with his two sons has a planting of approximately twenty acres in the Nipomo area of San Luis Obispo County. The grove is double-planted to some of the latest selfed and selected seedlings from Bergh's breeding program. Robert Whitsell, Dr. Bergh's assistant, has girdled some of the trees to induce early bearing.

The Variety Committee is keenly interested in this project. Our hats are off to Mr. Felipe for his faith and confidence in avocados. We are grateful, also, to Fruit Growers Lab in Ventura for soil and leaf analysis help to correct some deficiencies noted by Hank Brokaw and myself when visiting the planting this summer.

The CAS variety plot is making satisfactory progress. Bob Whitsell's current procedure is to allow the clonal Duke 7 trees to reach sufficient size before grafting them over to the new experimental varieties. It is anticipated that this plot, supported by your Society, will start paying off with beneficial results in the coming years.

Our plan originally was to stick to Duke 7 rootstock for a fair variety comparison. However, the Variety Committee is considering using some G755 and some others of Dr. Coffey's root rot resistant rootstocks, mainly for observation of compatibility and

bearing performance.

Gray Martin, the latest addition to Dr. Bergh's team, is an extremely dedicated young man who takes his job seriously and has the incentive and the patience it takes to make an avocado variety evaluator. It is important that we have qualified people to carry on and help with the large work load of the variety cooperators scattered through the avocado areas.

We are most grateful to the grower cooperators who donate planting space for the new experimental varieties; also to the nurserymen for their donations of trees and variety experimental assistance. If it were not for this help, we would not be able to continue the variety program. Varieties and plant breeding are usually low in the 'pecking order' when it comes to receiving production research funding because results take time. However, we must realize that if we don't improve our varietal mix with quality better producing avocados, we will not be able to stay in business.

I would like to thank all the Variety Committeemen and the growers who helped with our variety display at the annual meeting and those who sent fruit to be exhibited. In spite of the seasonal scarcity of fruit, we were able to come up with a fine collection. Thanks, also, to all who helped with our special meetings.

Respectfully submitted. *Oliver H. Atkins, Chairman*