

Report of the Variety Committee

As I submit this report at year's end, we find ourselves facing an on-year bumper crop and many marketing problems — especially with the green "thinskins." It is hard to believe; with all the warning signs we have had for several years, that there is still such a large acreage of Zutanos, Bacon, and Jims left. The '83-84 and '84-85 lighter crops with comparatively higher prices apparently gave the Zutano and Bacon growers false hope, figuring they could make it one more year.

It is to be hoped that 1987 will see the complete elimination of the Jim and the grafting over or abandonment of a large portion of the remaining Zutanos and Bacons, except for the Zutanos in the San Joaquín Valley.

A sad note is that the Fuerte, which for over sixty years had been able to command a premium over the other "greens," suddenly finds itself being classified as "just another green." I still feel if you have older, healthy Fuertes on low, frost-prone areas you should hang in there; as the other "greens" disappear, the Fuertes will pay their way. There are still a lot of housewives out there who appreciate that variety's fine flavor and quality.

The Pinkerton had some early season rough going due to poor select picking. It is a larger fruit than the Hass to begin with, so you cannot pick by size alone. In November and December, it requires picking the dull-colored mature fruit whether they are large or small. If it is handled properly, it is definitely a better fruit than the new-crop Hass. The housewife who has been used to the excellent regular-season Hass becomes disappointed with the early new-crop Hass, even though it passes our current maturity standards.

We were hoping that the Gwen would help fill the November-December void; however, evidence now is that it is very close to Hass in early season maturity. The limited supply of Gwens marketed in 1986 received good market acceptance. Some of the indicated pluses, besides early bearing, are more uniform larger sizes and more inside protected fruit than Hass. If you have any feedback, good or bad, on the Gwen, please let Dr. Bergh or the Variety Committee know about it. We need information on Gwen's bearing and performance from a lot more areas.

The Pinkerton Growers Association and the new Gwen Growers are doing a good job of educating the buyers and consumers. This will really pay off as production of these varieties increases in the years ahead. The procedures and the experience gained will be useful for promoting future new varieties.

There are currently about 40,000 seedling trees scattered throughout the coastal area from San Diego to San Luis Obispo for varietal observation. Many of them are now starting to bear; those that are slow are being girdled by Bob Whitsell to induce bearing. The results so far have been exciting: many new selections are passing the tough new evaluation standards.

This year, Dr. Bergh has around 25,000 more of the last large group of seedling

selections for placement and is seeking cooperators. Naturally, the selections will have to be concentrated in plantings large enough to make follow-up evaluation practical. Dr. Bergh emphasizes that this last large group is the progeny of already-outstanding parentage; therefore, the odds are quite favorable that out of the combined California plantings of these selections we should come up with candidates better than our current commercial varieties. Hopefully, we will find some late fall and early winter varieties to cover the only weak period in our California avocado production. Have patience; as even with our modern procedures, it takes at least ten years after discovery for a variety to go through all the testing stages and be accepted.

The Variety Committee, this coming year, will be working closely with Dr. Bergh and his staff to help with the enormous task of evaluating the bearing selections. University regulations now provide that Variety Committee members and selected, qualified growers can sign a non-propagation agreement permitting the release of graftwood from outstanding selections to carefully selected cooperators.

The California Avocado Society-sponsored Avocado Germplasm Reservoir, Field 44 at the South Coast Field Station in Tustin, is making satisfactory growth. It includes many older varieties and special trees, in case they are needed for future breeding purposes. An interesting addition this year was the grafting of several standby clonal Duke 7 rootstocks with wood provided by a Texas cooperator from trees that survived the recent Texas freezes that saw temperatures close to zero Fahrenheit. There is still ample room in the field to add new varieties if they qualify.

This year, we plan to have more Core Committee meetings in the areas where cooperative plots and special private selections are located. The full Variety Committee will meet at the South Coast Field Station in late February or March to review the performance of the Gwen, Whitsell, and Pinkerton varieties and the better UCR and private selections that are now bearing.

I want to thank all the Variety Committee members who provided fruit for our annual meeting display at the Bahía Hotel in San Diego and to others who helped with our display. It received a lot of attention and favorable comments.

Respectfully submitted,

Oliver Atkins, Chairman