

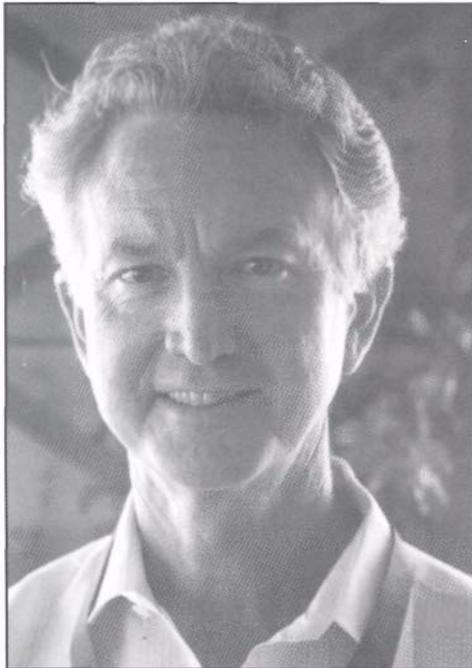
California Avocado Society 1998 Yearbook 82: 23-25

1998 AWARD OF HONOR PRESENTATION

• H. LEONARD FRANCIS •

Past President (1988-1989) California Avocado Society, Production Research Coordinator

Award presented by Robert Coleman



Mr. President, Fellow Board Members, past honorées, special guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

It is only seldom during one's professional lifetime that one is afforded the opportunity to make a special honorary presentation to a fellow industry member, especially for an honor as prestigious and select as the CAS Award of Honor. Today, I have that great opportunity. Each time this award is made, it is presented to someone within the avocado industry who has demonstrated outstanding devotion of

his personal time and expertise to this great industry. Prior recipients to a person have given selflessly and generously, in the interest and spirit of fostering the scientific understanding of this ever intriguing plant, the *Persea Americana* - our modern-day

avocado. Such is the case with today's Award of Honor recipient.

Today's honoree came to this industry circa 1963, while a beginning student at California Polytechnic College in Pomona. It was there that he had his first encounter with the avocado as there were no avocados available at that time in his home town of Lucerne Valley --a Mojave Desert community. He described that first encounter as "love at first bite." Having graduated from Victor Valley High School in 1962, he then attended Cal Poly, Pomona where he earned his Bachelor of Science degree with a major in Fruit Industries and a minor in chemistry. Following two years of teaching high school chemistry in Pomona, he accepted a position with Sunkist Orange Products in Ontario, California, where he was a chemist for two years. Then, once again feeling the call to higher education, he returned to college. While working graveyard and swing shifts at Sunkist, our honoree earned a Master of Science degree from the University of California, Riverside. In October of 1968, our honoree began an eight year career that he self-describes as "the best job in the world" — Farm Advisor for the Counties of Orange, Los Angeles, and Riverside. He even grew Christmas trees commercially while serving the U.C. Extension Service, honing his growing and scientific skills while helping others.

With the same enthusiasm, his trademark Will Rogers spirit, he and a partner started their own grove management company in the Temecula area, a region he had grown to love during his time as Farm Advisor. He tackled the task of assisting the owners of avocado and citrus groves to succeed with their agricultural investments. Now operating that business on his own, he is still in the Temecula area, and still assisting growers through advising, managing, leasing, and owning avocado and citrus groves. However, he has added yet other dimensions to his personal accomplishments.

Our recipient joined the California Avocado Society in 1980, and became a member of the Board of Directors in 1984. Not being content to just assist, he became President in 1988 and 1989. He also served as chairman of the Production Research Committee for over three years. Because of the tireless effort he expended on behalf of this industry, and the incredible contributions he made both to the University and to the avocado industry, he was "drafted" by the CAS Board to be the Research Coordinator for the Production Research Committee. He holds this position at present — totally as a volunteer, totally unpaid. He recently described his position of Research Coordinator as "the second best job in the world." I quote from a recent conversation with this gentleman: "Working with the researchers, seeing the results, seeing the benefits to the growers as the programs are completed and adopted, that is plenty of payment especially when the international liaison part of the program is thrown in." He also stated: "The personal value is in, a) seeing success and, b) making friends." How many of us could or would give so much of themselves?

In his "spare" time he served on the CAC Water Task Force helping to achieve the more than \$30 million water rate savings from MWD for California's farmers and ranchers. He generously contributes time and expertise to grower seminars, writes articles and topical reports for CAS and other organizations, travels extensively throughout the avocado growing region as well as internationally, and manages to attend CAS and CAC Board and committee meetings. I could go on and on. His contributions are, and have been, so numerous.

At this time, it is my great honor and privilege to present the 1998 California Avocado Society Award of Honor to a most deserving candidate — Mr. H. Leonard (Len) Francis.