

MARKET VALUE OF THE AVOCADO

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When one begins planting on an extensive scale, the first consideration should be, and usually is—"What is the market value of the product that he proposes to raise?" He may be very fond of the fruit of his choice, very much interested in fruit-growing in general, a thorough botanist and an experienced horticulturist, but all this is subservient to the question—"What will the fruit which I hope to produce sell for? What is it bringing in the market at present and what is it likely to sell for in the future?"

The very first avocado trees in California were doubtless planted with little regard to pecuniary returns. When Mr. Harvey set out the trees on what is now known as the Buddington Place, Los Angeles, and the Walker Place at Hollywood, he doubtless felt that he was doing little more than trying a doubtful experiment. Other trees planted at approximately the same time in Pasadena did not prove a success because they were of hot country types. With better judgment, Mr. Harvey selected seeds from the uplands of Mexico, where the climate is similar to ours. Among the resulting trees were the original trees of the well-known varieties, Challenge, Royal and Walker's Prolific, and another tree on the Buddington place which came into bearing even earlier than the three above mentioned, but was not so prolific and has not been propagated as a variety so far as I am aware.

Somewhat later Mr. Murrieta planted similar Mexican seeds and from them came the Murrieta varieties, of which the Murrieta, a round green fruit, is of unexcelled flavor.

About the time these trees came into bearing, Los Angeles was assuming a metropolitan aspect and metropolitan habits, and beginning to show in its markets, evidence of the rapid increase of wealth and intelligence of its people. It may be stated that Mr. Walker's tree of the Prolific produced fruit which sold in Los Angeles for \$400 in one year. Mr. Walker did not try to advertise this, but rather the opposite, for he feared that much increase in production would glut the market, and not liking the fruit himself at that time he did not see how the taste for it could be cultivated very much. Since his Challenge and Royal, much better varieties have come into bearing, I fancy that he has changed his opinion.

But the news of such great prolificness and profit leaked out and inquiries disclosed, that in addition to the local product there was a more or less regular importation of avocados from Hawaii, Mexico and elsewhere, which were retailed, at what then seemed, the rather startling prices of \$4.00 to \$6.00 per dozen.

Looking back, it seems as obvious as can be that there was a big future for fruit which could bring such prices under any conditions and that the worst that could happen, were

very many grown, would be to cheapen the product somewhat but not in proportion to the increased consumption. Indeed I doubt if the price for large thick-skinned avocados will ever be on a par with that received for other fruits. How many people do you suppose in Los Angeles know this fruit even by name? One in ten, in think, would be a liberal estimate, and the number here is far in excess of other large cities in the United States, whose markets we have yet to investigate, educate and supply.

We are justified in expecting continued high prices if we do this thoroughly. When imported avocados sell well, there is no reason why home grown fruit, if equally good (and ours is), should not do the same, especially as it has the advantage of always arriving in good condition, while the foreign is liable to be more or less decayed. The chef or steward who uses considerable quantities at a time and regularly all the year around, when he can get it, would much prefer to have the fruit hard, so that he can do his own ripening and have an edible supply on hand when needed. We have doubtless much to learn as to the keeping qualities of the various varieties and the stage of maturity at which they should be picked, whether for shipping long distances or for immediate home consumption.

There are people who "knock" the avocado one way or another, of course, but they are few. One young man in particular has given those who received high prices for the best fruit, quite a scolding in an article read before the Farmers Institute held at Stanford University last August and afterwards published in the Monthly Bulletin of the state Commission of Horticulture, and in that excellent magazine, the Citrograph. In it he states quite vigorously that the high prices of avocados don't suit him at all and that by taking them the growers are guilty of "shortsighted greediness" which will "strangle" the industry and that the "greatest problem" of this Association is to put an end to such a lamentable state of things and bring the fruit within the reach of the "masses." Just how making money out of an industry is going to strangle u is not very obvious. As to the greediness,—well, the best you can say about that is that it is merely an impolite remark. The prices will adjust themselves as the supply increases and the one object of this Association is to see to it that the classes get this fruit at good prices as long as they want it and are willing to pay for it, and the "masses" will have to wait until there is enough for both.

This is not a philanthropically organization, though there is nothing to hinder its members individually from being as benevolent as they please. I know a doctor who bought avocados on the open market at \$1.25 each for a poor patient whose stomach could retain nothing else and to whom they were a great benefit. This was philanthropy on the part of the doctor and business on the part of the dealer and both were satisfied.

Really, it is no business of anyone's, what the prices are, except those concerned in the transaction. No fruit is wasted in order to maintain the prices. No necessity of life is being cornered. No one is compelled to buy. No one is any worse off, than if there were no avocados grown. No need of being scared over a situation which didn't exist and never will! The real "greatest problem" is so to direct matters that avocado growers will receive the full value of their products.

There is also something to be claimed for the pioneers in this, as in any industry. Usually they have tried many things unsuccessfully and taken unusual risks and

expense, so that when an opportunity arises for abundant or even phenomenal returns they are certainly entitled to them. We growers are all to a greater or less extent pioneers and this Association is a pioneer association, and I do not think any attempt will ever be made by it to induce its members to take less for their products than the market warrants, but on the contrary one of its objects will be so to distribute them that the prices may always be maintained, proportionate to the supply.

DISCUSSION

Mr. Taft (in answer to question): I am raising only thick-skinned varieties. Whereas last year I received as low as \$3.00 to \$6.00 a dozen, there have been very few this year that I have sold for less than \$9.00 a dozen.

Chairman: While on this business, would it not be well for the Association to give some information that the committee can work on in regard to selling prices? Last month an article appeared, showing that \$1.25 a crate was paid for avocados, while a crate of the same size in December brought \$36.00. All the leading varieties at the present time are spring and summer-bearing, and there is no question in my mind but that just as quick as we get a good winter-bearing, thick-skinned variety all the now leading varieties will drop back to fourth or fifth place. Of course, for home production they are all right, but for commercial business there should be a winter-bearing variety. The best variety is a winter variety. The summer-bearing will net very little revenue in my judgment.

I think that we, as an Association, ought to develop the market for the entire year, not for any particular month. If we develop a market for winter varieties, we are developing at the same time a market for summer varieties. The avocado can be produced here for ten months out of the year and probably soon will be produced during the entire year.

While there is an advantage in producing fruit at a time when most people are not producing them, it is a good deal a matter of judgment and I do not believe that Florida is really a criterion of our condition. In summer, they go into competition with a lot of Cuban varieties. There is not an organized market to accept the fruit when it is sent in. The dealers do not know when they are going to get shipments, and fruits frequently arrive in bad condition. If dealers were getting shipments so that they could provide their market in advance and know the price, they would be a great deal better off than they now are. At the present time the West and the adjoining states will provide a market for everything we can grow, and this will be the case for the next ten years. At the end of that time we may have to go into the Eastern markets. There is an opportunity of getting a dollar apiece for fruits there, where we may get fifty cents apiece for them here, or in Denver or Salt Lake. I think we can take Los Angeles as a fair sample of market conditions.

There were ten avocados eaten in Los Angeles last year to one eaten before. I think the price last year was higher than before. The fact that there was a lot of thin-skinned varieties on the market had no particular effect. Their production and sale will, I think, stimulate a taste for the better varieties, and one of the great things for this Association to take up is that of standardization. During this year we shall undoubtedly get on a firm basis. At the present time there is no worry about a market. A good avocado will bring

such a price that if a man had an acre of them, it would make a small fortune for him every year. I think we can handle every city in the West as we are handling Los Angeles today. If Los Angeles is a good example, we shall have a long future when we extend our shipments and take up San Francisco, Portland, Seattle, and the Middle West, like Salt Lake, Denver, and El Paso. They will keep up business for some time.

The trees are not going to come into market with one fell swoop. Three years from now,—and there will not be much production before that time—I think the market can easily be developed to keep up with the development of the orchards planted.

The surplus of the fruit here will be as in Florida, of the thin-skinned varieties; that is, the summer and the fall-bearing stock. We are not looking at the past, we are looking to the future, and I believe it is a self-evident proposition that the winter-grown fruits are going to bring high prices. Our efforts as an Association must be to develop the market for the year around.

Mr. Whedon: Every person advocates his stock. A man selling a piano, auto, or anything else, advocates the one he carries as the best. Some say the small thin-skinned varieties are the best in our market. Everybody going into the business is new to it, and I think it would be no more than right that the Association should place itself on record as to what is the best variety, so that we would not be compelled to rely on any individual's opinion. It is a pretty hard matter to say which is the best, but the Association would probably have the best opportunity of knowing what would be the best.

Chairman: That is the purpose of the committee we have recently appointed to classify and register all varieties. I think their statement as to varieties and qualities will be far more impartial than if the Association or its officers acted. This committee was appointed from people who have no commercial interest and are especially qualified to act on these very questions. This committee has been chosen because they are the best qualified people to pass upon the question and are not interested commercially. While statements may be correct from a writer's standpoint they are naturally prejudiced to some degree in his own interests. When the Association goes on record, it wants to go on record through its committee.

Question: I would like to ask Mr. Taft whether he has noticed a tendency of the thick-skinned varieties to bear on alternate years?

Mr. Taft: Yes, with some. Really the industry has not been established long enough to lay down any rules. Sometimes a tree bears on alternate years, especially if one year it bears an enormous crop. If it over-works itself one year, it is apt to rest the next. I have known trees, to bear enormous crops for three years in succession and beyond that our experience does not go.