

AVOCADO CULTURE IN THE PHILIPPINE ISLANDS

Letter from Mr. P. J. Wester

The Bureau of Agriculture, Lamo Experiment Station, Lamo, Bataan, P. I.

August 30, 1916.

Dear Dr. Webber:

Your communication of the 17th ult. is at hand and contents noted.

Referring to your request for a paper on the avocado in the Philippines I should indeed be pleased to comply, but the fruit is here of no importance as yet, with the consequence that there is scarcely anything to write about as you will note from the following statement. I shall be glad to have you use the information contained therein in any manner you see fit. To me it appears to be too brief and unimportant for publication as a separate paper.

The date of the introduction of the avocado into the Philippines by the Spaniards is not known, but it was probably accomplished at least 25 years prior to the American occupation, for, according to the late Mr. W. S. Lyon, there was a large avocado tree growing on the Plaza in front of the Delmonico Hotel, in the old walled city of Manila, that was destroyed by a typhoon about 1910. As a matter of fact, the introduction of this fruit by the Spaniards is merely of historical interest as whatever introductions the Spaniards may have made never gained a permanent foothold. All trees now growing in the Archipelago are of American introduction, the first having been made in 1903 by Mr. Lyon, then horticulturist in the Bureau of Agriculture. This was followed by other introductions during the next few years. The annual importations of from 1000 to 3000 avocado seed since 1911 by the Bureau of Agriculture have been made because of the interest in the introduction of this fruit by Mr. O. W. Barrett, formerly chief of the Division of Horticulture, and myself. Travelers from the United States have also brought a few avocado seeds from time to time. All of the above introductions have come from Hawaii.

In 1912 budwood was received of the Dickinson and Cummins avocado from Mr. F. W. Popenoe, Altadena, California, which was successfully propagated at Lamo. Mr. David Fairchild, Bureau of Plant Industry, U. S. D. A., in 1913 sent a collection of budded avocado plants from Florida to the Bureau of Agriculture, but the plants arrived in weakened condition and nearly all died. Subsequent shipments of budwood sent direct to me during the next year were more successful, and we have now growing at this Station the Baldwin, Family, Largo, Pollock, and Wester, and 24 unnamed varieties, all of South Florida and West Indian origin.

Of Mr. Lyon's early introductions about 50 plants were set out at the Lamo Experiment Station, a few were planted at the Singalong Experiment Station, Manila, and the rest

were distributed throughout the Philippines. Those at Singalong proved to be an inferior type and were destroyed. Of those at Lamao only two have been found worthy of asexual propagation, the Lyon and one unnamed variety. Of those that were distributed outside of government institutions, a number of trees have fruited for several years for Mr. E. R. Case, Manila; there is also a tree in bearing in Imugen, Nueva Viscaya; one at Camp Overton, Mindanao; and another at Lipa, Batangas. A large tree also fruited this year for the first time for Mr. W. S. Lyon in Manila.

The trees from the more recent introductions and distributions naturally have not yet come into bearing. Many have of course perished, but it is probably true that there are now young avocado trees in all except the more remote provinces in the Philippines.

The growth of the avocado in the Philippines is all that can be desired.

In the nursery stage the plant has a very serious enemy in a species of *Helopeltis*, a sucking insect that attacks the tender parts of the plants. There is also a borer that is very destructive, attacking the trunk and larger branches. Some damage is done by a stem borer which enters the small twigs.

You will note from the above that there is no avocado industry in the Philippines at present. However, the introduction of this fruit may be considered permanent. Just how rapidly it may spread is difficult to say. The Filipinos do not seem to take much interest in the avocado as yet. In this connection it may be of interest to know that though the avocado has been introduced both in Java and the Malacca peninsula for years it is not yet cultivated by the natives and is never found in the markets.

Sincerely yours,

P. J. WESTER,

Horticulturist in Charge