

AVOCADOS AS A COMMERCIAL INDUSTRY

ROBERT W. HODGSON

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

This afternoon I am experiencing a rather novel sensation. For the first time in my life I am literally as well as figuratively full of my subject—avocados.

The avocado as a home garden fruit and dooryard tree has long since proven its entire success in California and in Southern California particularly. There have been those, however, who have not believed that it would eventually become a commercial industry. I will admit that at one time thus it seemed to me. But at the present time I will have to confess that I believe the avocado has arrived as a commercial fruit industry; and there are a number of reasons why I think so. Let us apply a number of tests which one would ordinarily consider as marking the point when an industry is just emerging from the experimental period and entering the era of a commercial success.

Tests of a Commercial Horticultural Industry

In the first place, we now have quite definite information regarding a considerable acreage of land in Southern California which is adapted to the culture of the avocado. It is therefore no longer a venture to attempt to grow avocados in certain districts for they have become proven territory.

In the second place no longer do we have just a few dooryard trees. In my work I run across large numbers of commercial plantings of avocados. I would not be surprised if the total approximated one thousand acres in commercial orchard plantings at the present time. Then again there has been accumulated a fair and ever increasing amount of information relative to the cultural requirements of this fruit, enough to make it possible for the novice who will take pains to inform himself that he may be reasonably certain that he can grow the fruit without any great difficulty. Further, there is a substantial and increasing demand for the avocado.

Another reason why I believe the avocado has reached the period of commercial success is the growing recognition in other parts of the country that avocado raising in California constitutes a commercial industry. Situated as I am as County Agent in a county to which settlers from all parts of the country are coming, I receive a great many letters of inquiry regarding the prospects for engaging in various fruit industries. In the past three months, I have received at least twenty-five inquiries regarding the avocado industry. One prominent eastern apple grower stated that he was thinking of planting two hundred acres if prospects were sufficiently good.

I think we may safely say at the present time that the avocado industry has reached the stage when the pioneering is largely over. In other words, the commercial stage has

been reached. It is now possible for any person who will purchase a tract of good soil in a district proven for avocados, and who will purchase well grown trees of recommended varieties and plant them and care for them in the most approved manner, to be reasonably certain that he will receive crops of delicious fruits for which there is a substantial market demand. If that does not mean that the commercial era has dawned, I do not know what would mark the same.

It is not my wish to give the inference that there are not problems still to be solved by avocado growers. The more we investigate cultural problems the more we find that we have yet to learn. I suppose there is no branch of horticulture that has advanced farther in orchard technique than the citrus industry but citrus growers all recognize that as yet only a few of the important problems have been solved. There will always be problems with the avocado industry, but I feel thoroughly convinced that we have solved a sufficient number for the industry to be now considered as commercial.

Rapid Progress of the Industry and Its Relation to the Association

I think it is quite fair to say that in the past decade the avocado industry in this state has progressed perhaps as far as any other industry of a similar nature in twenty-five years. And I have been interested in thinking about the reasons for this. A number of reasons occur to me but I believe the outstanding, big reason for the phenomenal growth in interest and development of this industry is the California Avocado Association; and I congratulate the avocado that it has an association of this sort fostering its culture. I congratulate the association on the strides that the industry has made in this comparatively short time. For it is due to the Association very largely that we have so much information relative to the soil, climatic and cultural requirements of the avocado, and that we have the present comparatively large area planted. Of particular importance in the early history of this industry was the appointment of a Committee on Varieties, which sifted out the undesirable and unsatisfactory sorts and gradually reduced them down to the present approved list of five. It is really a remarkable thing to have occurred so early in an industry. Generally such a result comes only after years of commercial competition.

Having an Association of this kind behind the industry has meant saving literally thousands of dollars for those who have desired to engage in avocado culture. The Association has been responsible for enlisting the interest of the Department of Agriculture—that great institution which is spending so many millions of dollars in investigating problems for fruit growers and farmers. It has been through the Association that such men as Popenoe, Scott, Webber, Coit, Condit, Chace, Jaffa and others have interested themselves in the avocado. I am sure we will all agree that it is with the greatest benefit that they have done so.

The Association has been largely responsible for the interest of the State University in this fruit. Until recently there has been a Division of Citriculture of the State College of Agriculture which included the teaching and investigation of avocados. And in that connection I would bespeak your continued interest and support of this division. At the present time there exists no Division of Citriculture,—there is no one assigned to work on avocados. There are reasons for this condition. Many of you know that the State University has been passing through a very stringent financial crisis, the result being the

elimination of some of the best teachers and investigators from its staff. It is impossible for the institution to meet the situation. It can only do so with the continued support of associations of this sort. This association can do material good to itself and to the state by manifesting its continued support for the University.

Reasons for the Ultimate Success of Avocado Culture

There are some outstanding reasons why the avocado was bound to become a commercial success. The first one lies in the interest which is today as never before being shown everywhere among consumers and the general public in new and strange fruits. This is the result of cumulative publicity. There was a time when you could interest the American consumer only in the standard fruits to which he was accustomed. At the present time however, he is interested in new things and willing to try them. This is of immense value to a new fruit industry.

Then we come to a second outstanding reason, which is the marked excellence of the product. The avocado has no rival in nutritive quality and is ready to serve when ripe without any treatment or curing. When one considers the olive, its nearest competitor, which must be run thru a complex series of processes before being edible and yet which, since 1900 has reached the volume of business that the olive industry today enjoys, one can see what a big advantage the avocado has in this regard.

Then too, we must face the fact that the fruit is one that can be placed on the table all the year round. That is to say, there are varieties that mature all the year round and a supply can be kept coming to the markets continuously.

Last, but not the least reason is that the fruit ripens and bears sufficiently well in this state to make it possible commercially to put it on the market at a price which will absolutely defy competition when it comes to the nutritive value. ;

Problems Still to be Solved

There are problems confronting the industry with which it must engage itself if it continues to remain commercial. And I am pleased to see the way in which the Association is anticipating these problems. In the citrus industry the deterioration of varieties and maintenance of desirable varieties has played a very important part in the profits derived by growers. The question of bud selection and the maintenance of the best strains and varieties in the avocado is an important one and I have been very much pleased to see the Avocado Association organize a bud selection department so that its members may profit by the use of the best buds only.

Another problem is that of the standardization and marketing of the product. As soon as large quantities come on the market, which will be in a short time, then will come the necessity for rigid grading, careful handling and intelligent marketing. It is going to mean work, but when one recognizes the immense power of consumer publicity to extend and increase volume of business, one can see that the avocado faces a very bright future—in fact, there isn't any question about its future.

Again I want to congratulate this Association on the remarkable strides which the avocado industry has made and also to congratulate the avocado on having the Association behind it.

PRESIDENT SALLMON FOLLOWING MR. HODGSON

There are several things I wish to refer to before we adjourn. There has been placed in my hands a rather flashy circular and a letter of protest against the issuance of this circular through the country. One of the contributions which this association has made has been the suppression of misrepresentation of facts about the avocado. I am not sure—not having looked over this circular carefully—that facts are misrepresented, but some of our members believe that the facts are misrepresented, especially in that it is announced that this man, or firm, is selling avocados from Mexico. You know that is against the law and cannot be done legally in California. As this is not a business meeting of the Avocado Association and I think it would be unfortunate to attempt to delay this audience for the consideration of any such matter as this which requires investigation before we really can take action, I take the liberty of taking charge of this matter and bringing it to the attention of the Board of Directors at our approaching meeting. If there is any attempt at fraud, sufficient action will be taken.

It is the custom, when an exhibit of fruit is over, to sell all of the fruits which remain. Those of you who wish to purchase may find them for sale at the hotel lobby after this meeting.

There are several people and institutions who ought to be thanked for their co-operation in making this meeting a success. At our annual meeting it is customary to do this through the Committee on Resolutions. At this meeting it is the custom of the President to name these friends and institutions and to return thanks in our printed annual reports.

In behalf of the Association I wish to thank the speakers, Messrs. Griffin, Braunton, Coolidge and Hodgson for their helpful and inspiring messages; the exhibitors who have given us such a fine display of fruit, nursery stock and at this time especially, such a notable display of other semi-tropical fruits; the press which has been liberal in giving notices of our meeting; Mr. Rideout for that generous proposal of his to continue his gift of trees to the one who secures the largest number of new members. Next May someone will be given ten good trees through the generosity of Mr. Rideout. I wish to thank the manager of this hotel, Mr. Reid, for his courtesy, and Mr. Prentice for caring for the exhibit; Mr. Fred W. Herbert, of the Department of Agriculture, Chula Vista, who volunteered to take the stenographic report of this meeting, and our energetic secretary, Miss McNally, who has worked day and night for the success of this meeting which has brought greater care and responsibility than any meeting we have held.