

MARKETING AVOCADOS

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When any forward movement in an organization is contemplated it is always interesting and instructive to picture the historical background by tracing the steps already taken. In the case of our organization this can be quickly done because we have been in existence for only eight years and during that time some of us have never missed a meeting and a smaller number have given intensive study to the problems which have confronted us. However, we do not have to draw upon our memories alone, for the seven annual reports which have been published, and which are a veritable treasure-house of information, contain the addresses which have been presented upon every phase of our industry, and in them we may trace the increasing knowledge of each subject which interests us. It is helpful, even to those of us who are old-timers to take up these reports in order and study the progressive thoughts and suggestion they contain on particular subjects such, as selection of varieties, selection and use of budwood, orchard planting, irrigation, heat and frost resistance, advertising and the like. Try it as a pastime some winter evening. Take such a topic as "Planning an Avocado Orchard," or "Diseases and Pests of Avocado Trees," or the "Food Value of the Avocado"; begin with the report for 1915, read all that is said upon the subject, make notes as you read, and after going through the seven publications in this way you will rise with an increased knowledge and interest which will be helpful in your work.

When the California Avocado Association was organized on May 15, 1915, its purpose was stated to be "The Improvement of the Culture, Production and Marketing of the Avocado." If we search through the annual reports to ascertain how we have carried out our purpose we shall find that the emphasis has been placed mainly upon the first two items, namely, the Culture and Production of the Avocado. It is natural that in such a new industry attention should be given first to problems of propagation, cultivation, fertilization, irrigation, pruning, selection of varieties, etc., and that the question of marketing should hold a minor place until there was something to market. However, the subject of marketing has had some attention from the beginning and with the increase of the crop has come into a paramount place.

In the first annual report methods of packing, shipping and marketing the Avocado in Florida, Mexico and other places are presented. In 1919, Mr. Geo. S. McClure of Riverside spoke on marketing from the seller's point of view. In 1920 the President said in his annual address, "Some action should soon be taken to assist members of the association in the sale of their fruit. Growers here and there who are favorably situated, or who have established a reputation, have no difficulty in disposing of the crops they raise at present to hotels and clubs, but we hear frequently of those who cannot market what they raise." The adoption of a standard type of carrier was urged upon the

Association by Mr. L. B. Scott, who advocated the six basket crate as used by the shippers in Florida. In 1920 also, Mr. A. F. Yaggy of Santa Barbara read his carefully prepared paper on "Marketing Avocados," and a similar paper full of practical suggestions on "Proper Methods of Marketing the Avocado," was presented in the following year by Mr. L. W. Albright of Los Angeles.

In 1921 a Market Department was launched by agreement with the American Fruit Growers, Inc., to market the fruit of the Association, and a form of contract between the Avocado Association and its active members was adopted. This marketing venture has failed because the scheme was premature, the crop of fruit was very light and only a limited number of active members accepted the contract but, in my opinion, chiefly because the preliminary work necessary to success had not been thoroughly done; namely, to instill in the minds of the growers a will to co-operate.

In the annual report for 1923 the President states that there is a "great crop" to market and this is the practical business problem which overshadows all others.

This brief recital shows two things: first, that from the beginning the Association has been mindful of the marketing problem, has sought all available information and studied its various aspects and, second, that by natural stages we have arrived at the period of production, towards which we have been looking, and further action must be taken. We have been fortunate, as a first step, in securing the services of a Manager and Secretary who, by training and capacity, is fitted to become the executive head. It now remains to study the methods used by successful growers' co-operative marketing organizations and proceed to form one of our own.

You may recall that Mr. George E. Farrand, general counsel of the California Fruit Growers' Exchange, in his able address at our last annual meeting, stressed the importance of a campaign of education preceding organization. He pointed out that success could not be assured until the demand for co-operation sprang from the growers themselves and that the form of contract should be so familiar to them in all its details, before being presented for signature, that each would knowingly and willingly append his name as to an attractive document. That is the order in which our Manager has tackled the problem. He has talked personally, as far as time and opportunity permitted, with the majority of growers and has held informal conferences at different • centers. The first of these conferences including the growers of the San Diego district was held at Chula Vista. By request of the President I will now try to summarize the point of view of the San Diego growers.

1. A co-operative marketing organization has become a necessity because of the large crop of fruit in sight, estimated by our manager at 560,000 pounds in 1923 as compared with 150,000 in 1922.
2. The will to co-operate on the part of the growers will be the foundation of success.
3. Marketing is a purely business proposition and the details of procedure and form of contracts must be familiar and attractive to the growers.
4. A local association may be formed to develop the local market, the members to contribute towards the overhead expenses of the central exchange but not towards the selling commission. The idea being to dispose of all the fruit possible in the local

pool and ship the rest to the central office, the fruit sold through the exchange being, of course, subject to the selling commission.

5. Growers who have developed private markets should be allowed to maintain and develop such markets on order from the Board of Directors, such growers to report their shipments to the central office and contribute to the overhead expenses. It was felt that the development of private and local markets, where the exchange had no agent, would be highly advantageous to the exchange, and that a precedent for so selling was to be found in the early days of the California Fruit Growers Exchange when the coast trade was handled outside of the Exchange.
6. Los Angeles and San Francisco with their large influx of tourists offer the largest and most accessible undeveloped fields and should be worked up first until the demand is greatly increased.
7. Advertising for the public and extensive educational work should be undertaken, as soon as circumstances permit, to secure wider distribution of the crop.

All this means a readjustment in our organization which some of our valued members contemplate with misgivings because the changing order of things seems to forecast an end to that type of meeting which has brought information, inspiration and pleasant friendly contact to so many. But this need not be so. I can foresee a new organization, composed strictly of growers, a California Avocado Growers Exchange, modeled after the greatest cooperative marketing organization of them all, the California Fruit Growers Exchange, which shall make California Avocados known everywhere, selling them in the principal markets of the country and disposing of the crop at prices advantageous to the producers. And I can foresee this present Association, which has served its purpose so admirably, continuing in a simpler form as the California Avocado Club, composed of growers, nurserymen, scientists and interested friends, pursuing further studies in the culture and production of the avocado, undertaking a propaganda of advertising, exhibitions and food demonstrations, its annual meeting affording, as at present, opportunity for the exchange of ideas and the preservation of this helpful social touch and friendly interest which we all prize so much.