

Status of the Avocado Industry in San Diego County

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There has been no material change in avocado acreage during the past year. New plantings have been about balanced by acreage that has been drowned, pulled, or abandoned, and no extensive plantings are planned for 1933. The total acreage for the state remains at approximately 11,000 acres, divided by counties as follows:

San Diego	7,261 Acres
Orange	1,271 Acres
Los Angeles	1,600 Acres
Ventura	272 Acres
Santa Barbara	216 Acres
Twenty-six other counties, 350 acres, (before the December cold snap in the San Joaquin and Sacramento valleys).	
Total	10,970 Acres

Of this total, 7,500 acres, or approximately 70%, is signed up with Calavo Growers, a net increase of 16% over 1932. About one-third of the total acreage can be considered of bearing age.

The total packed crop of the 1931-32 season, ending September 30th, handled by "Calavo Growers" totaled 3,543,348 pounds and was sold for \$561,-151.24,. or a gross of over 15c per pound. The net return to members was a little over 8c per pound. No figures have been made available for the amount of fruit sold by independents, or their returns.

The quality of the 1931-32 crop in general was good, 80% being of sizes 16 to 30 fruits per flat,—the most desirable sizes. Some difficulty was experienced with the Puebla variety during November and December, the fruit "cutting" black. This hurt sales. Some trouble was also experienced with Fuertes from the coast section, due to *Dothiorella* rot turning the outside of the fruit black upon ripening, but not discernible at picking time.

The normal expectancy for the 1932-33 crop would be about 4 1/2 million pounds. A light set and a heavy drop have reduced this estimate to about 2 1/3 million pounds. This light crop is bringing a greater gross price than last season. Early season indications were that the light crop would increase the overhead expense somewhat.

However, later returns indicate that the refunds from the retain, together with the original pool return, will net the growers better returns than last year. Those growers who have a fair crop should make a profit. Many growers have had little or no fruit. The scarcity of fruit has greatly increased the losses from theft. In most avocado districts, therefore, it has been necessary to establish patrols.

The avocado industry is feeling the effect of the depression, as reflected by the reduced buying power of the public. Retail prices, in many places, have not fallen in keeping with wholesale prices, and the movement of the fruit has been slow in such markets. Net returns have been unsatisfactory to many growers, and demands are insistent for lower overhead marketing costs, and reduced retail margins.

Seasonal variation of yields is one of the major problems of the avocado industry. Research on this problem has been desultory and results almost negligible. A real contribution would be made to the avocado industry if the plant physiologists of the University and the Experiment Station could ascertain the factors incident to the setting of fruit.

Diseases and insects attacking the avocado are being studied at the Experiment Station at Riverside, and in the field. Some progress is being made. The most important diseases at present are the *Dothiorella* rot fungus and what appears to be a virus disease known as "Sun Blotch." Insect pests include red spiders, thrips, *Latania* scale, *Serrica*, and several leaf eating moths, such as the omniverous loopers and the amorbia. More detailed information on avocado diseases and insects and their control will be presented to this institute later in this program.

The variety situation is improving slowly, as unworthy varieties and seedlings are being eliminated. Fuerte, Nabal and Puebla are still the three leaders, with the probability that Puebla will shortly be replaced by a better variety, probably Benik or Taft for the time being. Anaheim remains a favorite with many growers on account of its high yielding qualities, but is not well favored in the markets. A number of promising seedlings, are under observation, due to the establishing of a seedling registration service by the California Avocado Association.

Remarks on the status of "cultural practices" in the avocado industry would seem to be pertinent to the subject of this paper. The avocado industry is still too young to have eliminated many of the ill-advised, foolish, and expensive practices which were induced by fruit selling at high prices. The culture of the avocado is not greatly different from our other semi-tropic fruits. At present, and expected future prices, the avocado can not support the large investment and heavy expense which has been lavished upon many orchards.

Investment figures must be brought more closely in line with actual values if the avocado grower is to make even a paper profit. Residential and home values should be eliminated from the business aspects of avocado growing. The physical attributes of soil, climate, slope, water, transportation facilities, age, size, variety and condition of trees should be taken as the basis for the valuation of the avocado orchard as a business enterprise. Unnecessary and expensive cultural practices must be eliminated if costs of production are to be brought to a level that will allow sufficient margin between costs and returns. Mr. Wahlberg in the talk to follow this paper, and Mr.

Schoonover, in his talk this afternoon, will point out many ways in which you may increase your profits by cutting costs, even in essential cultural practices. However, I am going to mention some of the more or less common practices which I place in the category of unnecessary and expensive, knowing that you will not all agree with me. They are as follows:

Blasting and subsoiling. (Land requiring this treatment should not be planted to avocados, not to mention the large amount of this work that has been on clay soils to no avail); digging of holes for trees three or four feet or more in diameter, and of equal depth,, and putting a lot of manure in the bottom of the hole, and filling it up with top soil. (If the general soil conditions are so poor that such treatment seems to be necessary, then again, such soil is not suitable for profitable avocado production); elaborate staking and wiring systems. (If a tree does not have the strength to stand up of itself after it has overgrown the nursery stake, then something is wrong either with the tree itself, or the system, of growing it); fancy basins. (A basin of sufficient size and flat on the bottom is all that is required); basin system after the second year, unless a shortage of water exists, or the contour of the land requires complete basins; forested plantings, with resultant high acreage cost for trees and generally poor tree condition as they grow older,, requiring excessive pruning and thinning—I am not arguing against intelligent inter-planting at the time of setting the original orchard; seedling windbreaks. (If you require a windbreak, use standard varieties); waste of irrigation water. (A common sin of many avocado growers, resulting in loss of water, labor, fertility, and in some cases, of the trees themselves); use of unnecessary and expensive fertilizers. (There is a definite limit to the financial return that you can get from the use of fertilizers); excessive cultivation, and I might add the opposite, excessive lack of cultivation. (Overcultivation makes "both the farm and farmer poorer," and permanent cover crops must be handled with great care and intelligence.

All of these practices have been and still are more or less common, and for this reason have a place in a discussion of the status of the avocado industry. I do not wish to imply, however, that avocado growers in general are backward in their cultural practices; far from it, in fact. I have been trying to point out some of the negative and unprofitable things in avocado culture. I am depending on Mr. Wahlberg and Mr. Schoonover to emphasize the positive things in good and efficient cultural practices under present conditions.

I believe that the avocado industry holds an enviable position among California fruits. It is about the only tree crop that is not threatened with an immediate surplus. With an increased volume of fruit, per acre, and for the industry as a whole, costs of production can be lowered and the expense incident to developing markets, handling and selling the fruit can be materially reduced. With the return of consumer buying power, this industry should provide ample profits for those avocado growers who have their enterprise established on a sound business basis.