

The Avocado Industry in Ventura County

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The avocado industry in Ventura County has developed slowly and conservatively. It began with a few individual trees planted by farmers and at city residences during the period of 1910 to 1915, using seedling trees and budded trees of varieties prevalent during that period. Farmers usually planted these trees in the family orchard. There were no commercial plantings during that period.

In the spring of 1936 a survey was conducted by the Agricultural Commissioner's Office in Ventura County to determine acreage and number of trees for the various horticultural crops. It was found that there were 6,145 non-bearing avocado trees and 18,960 bearing avocado trees. Since there is a wide range of number of trees per acre planted to avocados, it was impractical to use a definite figure to determine acreage. It is estimated that there are approximately 275 acres in avocados in Ventura County. In comparison with other lines of horticulture, the avocado industry in Ventura County is still in its youthful period. The plantings range from under an acre to a maximum of approximately fifteen acres; the number of properties involved, therefore, would amount to approximately 150.

Since there has been very little real estate promotional development in the avocado industry in Ventura County, the major portion of the avocado plantings has been undertaken by orchardists growing other crops, such as citrus or walnuts, on an experimental or trial basis. This has been a good thing for the avocado industry in Ventura County. It has affiliated a large number of farmers, who have had many years of experience in cooperative marketing in other industries, such as lemons and oranges, with the avocado industry. These growers should be of invaluable service to the avocado industry as these acreages expand.

ADVANTAGE OF LATE MATURITY

The climate in Ventura County is well adapted to the growing of avocados, having three principal climatic zones, the coastal, transitional, and interior, with border lines between these depending on location and exposure. The climate of Ventura County has been conducive to later maturity of the various varieties in comparison with other districts in the southern part of the state. The same varieties grown in these various districts range from a month to two months later in Ventura County than in other districts. This has proved of advantage to Ventura County avocado growers in that it has enabled the industry to have a spread in the marketing period, lessening the congestion in avocado production for a more limited period of maturity.

The soils in Ventura County, which are mainly the Yolo Loam series, are well adapted to avocado production. The Yolo Loam series of soils has a relatively high moisture holding capacity, uniform in cross-section, and high in fertility.

VARIETY QUESTION UNSOLVED

One of the principal handicaps in the expansion of the avocado industry in this county has been the doubt in the minds of many growers as to the most desirable varieties to grow. Some growers have become discouraged with the Fuerte variety, especially in the coastal belt, although this variety apparently is more successful in the transitional and in the interior conditions of Ventura County. It is the belief of the avocado growers, and especially the avocado department executive committee of the Ventura County Farm Bureau, that the study should be continued under our climatic conditions to determine the varieties which will respond best here, having in mind their marketability and productive characteristics. The industry is still too young to determine positively what those varieties should be.

The possibilities for future expansion in the avocado industry in Ventura County are great. There are many thousands of acres of land available for plantings. The walnut industry is undergoing some changes during this period, with approximately five hundred acres being pulled up in 1936. These lands will be planted to other crops. Most of these orchards are on lands well adapted to the growing of avocados. Judging from the experiences of the past, it is not expected that there will be a rapid expansion in the avocado industry in Ventura County. It is well that this expansion should not be rapid, but should have a steady growth to enable the consumption of avocados to keep up with the production. In the meantime orchardists will have developed better knowledge of varieties and production problems to enable them to determine their expansion program in avocados.