

## **Regulations for Marketing Avocados in California**

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Confusion and needless expense in the marketing of avocado fruit below the eight per cent oil content required by law can be eliminated only through a thorough understanding of the regulations and the methods of inspection now in effect. Attempts to market this fruit before it has matured, have in the past resulted in substantial losses to San Diego county growers.

Almost invariably the reason for condemnation of avocados by inspectors at the market results from the grower picking the fruit before it has matured—that is before it has reached the eight per cent oil content. I do not believe, incidentally, that Fuerte avocados are properly matured and good to eat at the time they contain that amount of oil. All of the eight-per cent Fuertes that I have tasted bore a close resemblance in flavor to a cake of low-grade laundry soap. Perhaps I am fussy, but as a consumer, I would rather wait a month and eat my Fuertes when they test 12 per cent or higher. For what seem like good reasons, the avocado industry has set eight per cent as the minimum oil content for all varieties. Among these reasons are that a low minimum oil content requirement allows a wider spread of the season, as, in the case of Fuertes, from November 1st until May, instead of from December or January until May, as would be the case if the minimum were set at 10 or 12 per cent. Another reason often given is that an increase in the minimum oil content requirement for Fuertes would necessitate changes in the requirements for other varieties, and, as there are so many varieties, this might result in hopeless confusion.

At any rate, the people of California have set eight per cent as the minimum oil content of avocados which are to be marketed, and have made it the duty of inspectors to see to it that fruit is not sold which does not meet that requirement.

### **AGRICULTURAL CODE**

Now, in regard to the law itself—who made it and how is it interpreted? The avocado sections of the Agricultural Code of California were written and presented to the legislature by representatives of the organized majority of avocado growers. Such has been the origin of all of the commodity sections of the Code. The citrus growers, through their cooperatives, have put strict requirements in the law governing the marketing of their product. For example, they do not allow the marketing of oranges which have less than eight parts of sugar to every part of acid in the juice, because they have found by test and experiment that fruit which does not meet that requirement is not palatable.

All avocado growers are entitled to a voice in the framing of their law, but, in order to

make themselves heard, it probably is necessary that they be organized for group action. Such a group as the Farm Bureau is suitable for this. I understand that the legislative committees that have passed on the commodity sections of the Code have always been willing to listen to representatives of all of the growers.

The sentence in the Agricultural Code which reads: "All avocados, at the time of picking, and at all times thereafter, shall contain not less than eight per cent by weight of oil," is the one that gives us all the grief.

## **TEST FRUIT**

However, the only definite way to determine the oil content of any one of your fruits, would be to take it to the County Agricultural Commissioner's office and have it tested by the refractometer method. As this is an expensive test, the Commissioner is compelled to make a cost charge of \$1.00 for each fruit tested. Of course, the Commissioner or any of his inspectors might be persuaded to make a guess as to whether the fruit is good or bad, but like the Literary Digest, they could be wrong.

The time of season at which fruit is mature varies greatly from year to year. In looking over our records, I have found that our average test on Fuertes in November of 1935 was 11.2 per cent; in October, of 1934, it was 9.44 per cent, while this year in November our average test has been 8.19 per cent. Apparently, this year they were late to mature in comparison with other recent years.

Last spring we had considerable trouble with immature Anaheim and Dickinson avocados picked in April and May. In April, our average Anaheim test was 7.2 per cent and the average Dickinson was 7.4 per cent. In May the averages increased to 7.3 for Anaheims and 8.2 for Dickinsons. Of course, all of the samples tested probably were chosen because the lots from which they were taken appeared to be immature.

This brings us to our methods of inspection: In taking a sample from a lot of immature-appearing avocados, or from a lot which is doubtful in any way, the inspector does not try to take the one and only immature fruit in the entire lot. Instead, he attempts to choose a fruit which is representative of the general run of immature fruits in the lot. That is to say, 25 per cent of a certain lot of avocados might appear to be immature, and the remaining 75 per cent would look fine to the inspector. In that case he would take one of the fruits from the 25 per cent portion—but not the greenest fruit in the lot.

## **INSPECTOR'S RULES**

If the sample taken failed to show eight per cent oil content, the inspector would order the lot to be reconditioned by the owner or agent in charge of the fruit. After the fruit was sorted, the inspector would destroy the culls and then take another sample of the reconditioned fruit. Should this second sample fail to pass, the inspector is required by law to order the fruit destroyed either by the owner or by court order.

Perhaps it should be added that the law also makes it the duty of inspectors to prosecute violators and that a violation, that is, the packing, shipping, transportation or sale of fruit which has less than eight per cent of oil, is a misdemeanor and punishable

by a fine of not less than \$50.00, or imprisonment in aggravated cases. Of course, the Commissioner and his inspectors do not like to prosecute when the violation is not intentional.

In the case of fruit being shipped by common carrier to other cities, the inspector takes a sample and if the lot is found to be immature, he notifies the inspector at destination of the shipment and the procedure there is to require reconditioning or dumping of the fruit at the option of the firm or agent in charge of the lot. At San Francisco, reconditioning of avocados has been unsuccessful, and produce houses there have been in the habit of destroying all immature fruit.