

Avocados and Oak Root Fungus

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Extensive infestations of oak root fungus in citrus orchards and the comparatively prohibitive costs of controlling this disease have caused citrus growers to look around for other crops to plant in the infected areas. Of these crops, avocados have received the most attention from citrus growers, especially in those areas where lemons grow well. Such areas as these should be satisfactory for the avocado, provided heating equipment is installed for the occasional frost which is experienced in those places.

This interest in avocados by citrus men is stimulated by the belief among avocado growers that avocados are immune to the attacks of oak root fungus. This, however, does not appear to be entirely true. A survey conducted by letter among many workers in the avocado field throughout the state indicates that from present knowledge the avocado appears to be not immune but possibly highly resistant to the attacks of oak root fungus under field conditions.

In his many years in avocado work, Dr. J. Eliot Coit recalls only two instances where he found avocados attacked by the fungus, and can cite a few instances in which avocados were planted in infected soil and apparently have survived so far.

Vincent Blanchard, late farm advisor of Ventura County, recalled that a number of years ago, when he was assistant in Los Angeles County, he had the opportunity of inspecting a number of avocado trees infected with the fungus. He stated that he also had seen some trees attacked in Ventura County.

Dr. Harold E. Thomas, assistant plant pathologist of the University of California, states that he was able to infect a number of Mexican seedlings at the San Jose Station which were sent to him by the Citrus Experiment Station from a nursery at Encinitas. He also indicates that he recalls one avocado orchard planted in an infected prune orchard in which the trees were killed out in four or five years. It is his opinion that the avocado cannot be considered highly resistant, and that it might be more susceptible than citrus.

In any case, growers who are anticipating planting avocado trees in oak root fungus infected land should consider that they are pioneering experimental work in this regard. However, we do have records of avocados planted in infected land which have attained an age of fifteen years apparently without any harmful results, but we have no way of knowing whether they will continue to resist the attacks of the pest. There are a few cases under field conditions in which the avocado appears to be highly resistant to oak root fungus. Growers should take the stand that this question is very much in doubt and use caution in planting in infected land.

—Los Angeles County Farm Bureau Monthly,