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Present State of Cultivation of Avocados in the Argentine Republic

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(Translation)

AVOCADO OR PALTA (*Persea americana* and *Persea drymifolia*)

Early in the present century, the Company of Leach's Argentine Estates, Ltd., established in "La Esperanza," Province of Jujuy, sent to South Africa one of their employees named Mr. Robert McClintock Smyth, who was enthusiastic about the cultivation of subtropical fruits. Mr. Smyth secured there the first specimens of fruits from that region, which were introduced into Argentina. The plants of various descriptions which were grafted and which formed the original plantation which this firm owned in Calilegua, Jujuy, were the following:

2,500 avocado trees; 1,000 mango plants, and 5,000 banana stocks.

The varieties of avocados were the following: 1. Blakeman, 2. Dickinson, 3. Eaglerock, 4. Linda, 5. Lula, 6. Guatemala, 7. MacDonald, 8. Sharpless, 9. Spinks, 10. Pollock, 11. Trapp, 12. A variety whose identifying label had been lost and consequently was called "Smyth" by the Leach Company.

A large number of these plants, as well as of the mangoes, was lost in transit, so that only a few arrived at their destination. However, with the few that did arrive it was possible to start a nursery which has supplied the material for the present orchard consisting of 1,600 plants in full production and 3,000 new plantings in orchard rows.

This orchard of Leach's is the largest and almost the only commercial orchard in existence in the country. The trees have been planted in orchard form, at a distance of 8 x 8 meters apart, which distance is not quite sufficient. For these plants, which they have grown in their own nurseries, they have used stock belonging to the Mexican race.

Later, this same company effected new plant introductions, but on a greatly reduced scale. Among the new varieties introduced, the most valuable was the Fuerte, which constitutes the bulk of the plantation in Calilegua.

During recent years other introductions have been made. The most important of these were those made by Senor Carlos Gayer, who has brought together on his farm more than 100 varieties. Other valuable introductions have been made by the Agricultural Experiment Station of Tucuman and the Ferro Carril de Pacifico which, in its experimental orchard, has gathered about 25 varieties, principally of the Mexican race, with some of the Guatemalan race. The writer has a collection of varieties on his own farm consisting of 36 varieties of all races. Other introductions of less importance have been made in different parts of the country.

All of these importations have come from the United States of America (California and Florida), South Africa, Transvaal, Argelia and Brazil. At the present time we have under cultivation about 15,000 plants, all grafted, of which about 12,000 are in production and the rest are in orchard rows. Aside from these there are about 5,000 plants of seedlings, the great majority of which are from the Mexican race. These are distributed throughout the entire northern part of the Republic.

The plants which have been propagated in the Argentine have been grafted, about 97% of them on stock raised from seed of the Mexican race, and the rest on stock raised from seed of the Guatemalan race. So far as I know, no West Indian stock has been used.

The production of the trees under cultivation is quite uniform, year after year, reaching at the age of eight years an average production of 500 fruits per tree, fluctuating between 400 and 600 fruits. There are also cases on record, of more than 1,000 fruits per tree, but these are only isolated cases.

The greatest fault with orchards in the Argentine is the reduced space between the trees—8 x 8 meters and under—since the soil in the regions where the avocado is being cultivated today is very rich and fertile, and a distance of 10 x 10 should be the minimum, and in many cases even that distance would be small.

Up until now there have been few pests or diseases observed on the avocado, although in the more humid regions where the rainfall is around 2,000 mm, such as at Misiones, the anthracnose is sufficiently strong to give considerable trouble to the orchardists. My plantation is located in this region.

The demand for this fruit is enormous, and in the Buenos Aires market, principally, very high prices are received for the fruit, and the present production is not even one-third of the present demand, despite the fact that the great majority of the population does not even know the name of the fruit and nothing has been done to advertise the fruit nor to promote sales.

Prices to wholesalers in the Federal districts are as follows: From 50c to \$2.50 per box (Argentine money), depending on the season of the year. The boxes used are small, containing about a dozen fruits. On occasion, large boxes or crates are used, with a capacity of 60 to 90 fruits. The present rate of exchange is about 4.80 pesos argentinos for one United States dollar.