

## Avocado Marketing

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Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Mr. Hodgkin, who was scheduled to make this talk, has charged me with the responsibility of bringing his message to you, and of reporting to you his sincere regret that he is unable to be with us today.

As you know, there are many new growers in the avocado industry. A considerable number of these growers have purchased their groves at high prices. They will want to know what is in the future. There are other avocado growers — comparative old-timers — who are planting new groves and adding to existing ones. Why are people buying these groves and why are growers planting more acreage? They are optimistic, their optimism is based on beliefs that avocados are a good food product, that the area in which avocados can be produced is limited, and that the market for avocados is

unlimited.

Fundamentally, these beliefs are correct. Avocados are one of the best foods nature produces. They are nutritious, digestible and good. They contain nine vitamins, have high energy value, contain about fourteen minerals. Their protein content is high for fruit; their starch and sugar content low. Altogether, the facts justify the growers' belief in their product.

The area of avocado production is limited—perhaps even more than we know. There are only a few sections of Florida and a few sections of California where fruit can be grown successfully on a commercial scale. In California, the avocado belt is mainly confined to Santa Barbara, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, and San Diego counties—and only in ideal districts within these counties. There are undeveloped areas, it is true, which may be suitable for avocado growing—but they will not be developed unless and until adequate irrigation water can be made available.

A rather peculiar situation exists, with reference to avocado culture. The climatic likes and dislikes of avocado trees closely match those of the people who grow and eat them. The mild, uniform climate that brings people to California is necessary to the health and fruitfulness of avocado groves. That is why areas like Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Whittier, and La Mesa—important in past or present avocado history—are increasingly populated by humans, to the reduction or elimination of avocado plantings. The industry, therefore, is constantly on the move.

It can be conceded that the area of production has restrictive boundaries.

And is the market unlimited? That, too, seems to be a true assumption. If everyone in the United States were to consume as many avocados each year as are consumed per capita in the Los Angeles area, the required volume would be fantastic. Los Angeles consumers do away with four or five pounds of avocados per capita per year, on the average. The people of New York or Washington or Philadelphia or other large eastern cities, in contrast, use as little as one per cent of that amount per capita. Thus, to bring the nation to our local consumption level, production would have to be increased a hundred fold or more.

The market appears to be virtually unlimited.

While the three counts of optimism seem to be justified, the last one at least presents certain problems. Are customers going to take your fruit simply because you have produced it? The answer is obvious. Possibly, many of you can recall your own first experience with an avocado. Many of you, undoubtedly, left that first fruit only partly eaten. Its flavor was new, strange, and not too appealing. Now that you know and like avocados, you may recall that eastern friends to whom you sent gift shipments of avocados were not wildly enthusiastic. They may even have written: "The alligator pears are beautiful, but what do you do with them? How long do you boil the seed? Do you slice the fruit and fry it? Or should it be dipped in batter? Just what should be done with the darn things?"

As a matter of fact, an illustration of this point just recently came to my attention. A Los Angeles employee of Calavo never eats avocados. He has never eaten one. Years ago, his wife bought, tried, and disliked an avocado. She told her husband she did not like

it—and so our co-worker does not like avocados either, although he has never tasted one.

The following is an actual—and typical—letter received by the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce recently. It points out the problem to be faced in developing the unlimited market:

"Eastern people have little or no knowledge of avocados grown in your state. We are writing to inquire if, when the avocado turns black on the outside skin and inside the fleshy part of it, is it then unfit to eat; or if it turns black it is in a fully ripened condition and better to eat at that time. Sounds like a foolish question but no grocer I have contacted can answer that question. They even look foolish when they have to admit they know nothing about the fruit. Kindly advise what the proper condition is when avocados are fit to eat. My wife loves them and has four or five a day when they reach the price of ten cents each.

"P. S. Why don't the growers educate their customers or don't they realize we are so dumb—grocers as well."

An educational job is indicated if we are to capitalize on our unlimited market. That job must be carefully planned and executed if it is to be effective and not too costly. Fortunately, the industry—through its cooperative association—long ago saw and met this need. A program was started, developed, and will continue on into the future as conditions dictate. Such a program has several elements. First, the established jobbers, wholesalers, and retailers must be made acquainted with the product. They are the folks who handle your fruit before it reaches the consuming housewife. They must be taught how to handle it properly.

An adequate teaching job requires the employment of trained personnel, equipped with adequate tools such as proper refrigeration and ware-housing. These "producer representatives" know the avocado, and can do much to eliminate the dilemmas of consumers, like our man who did not know whether the avocado that is black was right to eat or ready for the garbage can. Other tools are necessary also, such as advertising material, market promotional ads, and the like. Let us consider a few examples of these tools. Early in the season a "broadside" is mailed to jobbers and distributors which calls their attention to the crop to be marketed. Then, as reminders, postcards are mailed periodically to the same people. Some even feature "pin-up" girls to be tacked on the wall over the telephone—constant reminders of the Calavo trade-mark (which also appears prominently). That such material is not merely thrown away, ignored, is proved by a visit to a produce house where our advertising material of several years ago can be found on the walls.

Other material used in the program includes instructional leaflets, recipe folders for retail distribution, display pieces, and various similar types of point-of-sale items.

The objective in all cases, of course, is to make the avocado well known through the device of repetition, and to instruct everyone concerned in the handling and use of the fruit.

To dieticians, chefs, hotel people, and other institutional users, we send dietetic and nutritional material and mass-serving recipes. Nutritional folders, for example, have

been sent to more than three thousand dietetic experts— making them aware of the high food value of your product.

Market promotion, in another important form, is accomplished through visual demonstration and display. People can be told that avocados are good; they will believe it if given the opportunity to eat a sample of a properly prepared fruit. To that end, the cooperation of home economics specialists is enlisted, and demonstrations are presented to interested groups of housewives. Never letting the consumer forget our avocados, we barrage him with radio announcements and newspaper ads. Newspaper ads, spaced over a period of a few weeks at a time, carry such information to the consumer as. "Avocados are back again"; "Salad oil is not needed for avocados"; "Avocados are delicious as a spread", etc., etc. Campaigns of this kind are conducted in principal market centers throughout the country. They are an integral part of market promotional activities which must continue unceasingly. Because cooperative growers must foot the bill—or rather, must make this advertising investment—care must be exercised to use advertising appropriations skillfully.

In addition to this advertising paid for by Calavo, advertising by retailers themselves is done in cooperation with the marketing organization. This cooperative assistance on the part of retailers is largely an outgrowth of activities of your sales promotion personnel. It is an evidence of the value of frequent personal contact between trades-people and the avocado marketing agency. It is a dividend from man-power efforts; from personally seeing John Doe, dealer, Bill Smith, retailer, Joe Doaks, wholesaler, and telling them about the merits of avocados, pointing out to them why they should specialize, why they should get behind this particular product, that there is a sales campaign on and they will want to be on the band-wagon.

We will make it easy for them to cooperate in their own advertising. Newspaper cuts are offered to them free of charge. These cuts help to dress up Mr. Retailer's ad; incidentally they just happen to mention Calavo avocados.

The value of this advertising, not paid for by the avocado industry directly, runs into thousands of dollars annually. It is not entirely free, as I mentioned, because a lot of foot work and brain work has been needed to bring about the desired result. Up to the time of this meeting, something like 1200 retail dealers had run something like 5000 ads in the newspapers of several hundred cities.

I would like to read you the names of a few of the cities in which this type of dealer-paid advertising has appeared this year: Aberdeen, Washington; Abilene, Texas; Ada, Oklahoma; Akron, Ohio; Albany, New York; Alhambra, California; Amarillo, Texas; Asbury Park, New York, and so on. That is just the beginning of an alphabetical index of cities in which you have had advertising help at no direct cost to the avocado growers of California.

I would like to repeat that the most important phase of the promotional and educational campaign is the dealer service—the actual market contacts, the pounding of the pavement, the talking to the retailer, the setting up of demonstrations, the dressing of store windows, the education of clerks and other handlers of the fruit. I have made that statement long and drawn-out to emphasize that it is the personal touch that does the job—particularly when supplemented with the traditional type of advertising.

Does all this activity pay? The record would seem to indicate that it does. In 1944, a two and one-half million flat crop returned more than \$3,800,000 to Calavo members. In 1945, a crop less than half that size returned approximately the same total number of dollars. And in 1946, the return to the present time for a two and one-third million flat crop looks as though it will break all dollar-return records. The increase in returns to the grower is not entirely due to your market promotional activities, of course. Other factors have played a part. But you can bet your bottom dollar that this activity has been responsible for a good share of the increases in dollars that have come back to the growers.

By way of conclusion, it appears that the optimism of avocado growers in buying groves at high prices, and the optimism of other growers in developing additional plantings is justified. The fruit is good, the area of production is limited, and the market is unlimited—but only so long as growers will work together in a coordinated program of marketing designed to promote and make profitable the sale of your fruit.

Go ahead and plant your avocados; go ahead and buy your avocado groves. Let us work together in a sound marketing program and the industry will prosper.