

THE LAST THIRTY INCHES



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As I stand here before you this evening digesting the wonderful dinner I have just eaten, I am reminded of an after-dinner speaker I once heard who had made an overnight trip to attend the banquet. He rose and said to his hosts, "Ladies and gentlemen, let me thank you for your many kindnesses to me since my arrival and for the wonderful meal I have just eaten. All this is bountiful evidence of your generosity, but I want you to know that I will not be imposing further upon you for a *BED* to sleep on tonight because I have brought my own *BUNK* with me."

Mr. and Mrs. Avocado Grower, I hope you won't think my topic for this evening fits in too well with that bunk story, for actually The Last 30 Inches in the journey of your avocados from tree to consumer is the most important part of the trip. Perhaps it is natural for me to think so, at least, because in my work for the growers' association I am chiefly concerned with that last 30 inches.

Why is this short distance so important? Because, ladies and gentlemen, 30 inches is the length of the housewife's arm, and if she doesn't reach down and pick up your avocados from the retail produce stand, then all that has gone before was done for nothing. All your work in caring for your groves, in carefully harvesting your crop, in transporting it to your particular marketing outlet—all this is wasted, if your avocados do not complete the trip from tree to consumer's table. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link, and the chain of marketing procedure used to sell your avocados is no exception.

The cold fact of the matter is that the avocado does not sell itself.

A well defined and complete marketing plan is essential to success.

Let us for a moment review the first steps in a well-ordered marketing program.

Obviously, the first stage in the journey from tree to consumer is *to get the fruit to where the consumers are*. Sounds simple enough, doesn't it? But where are the consumers?

True, there are more than 150 million people in these United States, and granted they are all potential avocado users; but only a fraction of them have been educated to eat avocados.

This makes for a variable *demand* picture. This is the reason why in a large western city, 400 flats of avocados are consumed annually for every 1,000 of population, while in a well-known eastern city, only 10 flats per 1,000 persons are consumed.

The job, then, is to distribute the fruit to where the "*avocado-educated*" consumers are.

And further, to see to it that the fruit arrives there in top condition, certain employees in the growers' association deal exclusively with this distribution problem. That is their specific function, and it is a critical one requiring specialized experience, continual contact with weather conditions throughout the country, and so on; but that is another story. Let's get back to the stages in an avocado's journey to market leading up to The Last 30 Inches.

Arriving in the avocado-educated market, a wholesale house receives the fruit. This represents a very important link in the distribution chain. I have reference here to the *established* wholesalers who are in touch with many, many small retailers who would be impossible to reach otherwise. If your marketing agency maintains branches in other cities, the wholesaler would still be used to contact hundreds of small retailers, and the branch itself would devote its energies to the more profitable task of supplying the wholesalers and the large chain stores direct. The wholesaler's operation is a colorful story in itself, as many of you well know who have visited a produce market during the hours of early morning activity.

Now your fruit has been sent to those consuming areas where the housewife knows what they are.

In other words, it has been distributed in accordance with existing demand. No area is overloaded with fruit. Demand and supply are kept in balance so as to maintain the best possible price. But let us presume that the avocado industry is going to continue growing as I am sure you all know it will—what of the market then?

Since the avocado does not sell itself, how do we propose to create new demand for it?

To us here in southern California it seems almost impossible to think that there are people who don't even know what an avocado is.

Let me tell you of an illustrative incident that took place about a year ago in San Francisco Bay. One of our warships had just returned from a tour of duty in Korean waters. The enlisted men aboard had a considerable amount of money left in their own personal entertainment kitty, and they decided to spend it on a banquet. So, they made appropriate arrangements with their mess officer. When the time came to serve the meal, the mess officer was walking past the steam tables where the men were filling their trays, hoping to pick up whatever words of praise might come his way. He stopped short, however, at the sight of rows and rows of neat looking, brown, round nuts being served. Shocking as it may seem, these nuts were avocado seeds—all that remained of

several hundred flats of avocados from which the meat had all been pared away and discarded.

This is an extreme example, but it points up the need for the ever expanding effort carried on by the growers' association to educate more and more people to the use of the avocado. Upon the success of this effort depends the value of your groves, the profits you will make, and the general welfare of all avocado growers.

Now, the technique of consumer advertising is well known to all of you. You have seen it in newspaper ads, and TV commercials; you have heard its voice on radio. The printed word continues to be the main medium employed. Radio and TV are used sparingly and generally to reach a particular segment of consumers not reached by the newspaper run. Such might be the case in Mexican-speaking areas, where perhaps local Spanish speaking radio could be employed.

The budget for such demand-creating activity is naturally limited. We do not have the advertising fund of General Motors or the large soap companies. There are only so many growers to pay the bill.

Therefore, every effort is made by the cooperative association to secure free tie-in advertising from the retailers. Our success is measured by the thousands of dollars worth of space so obtained each year.

In essence, consumer advertising tells people *what* to buy; the retailers' advertising tells them *where* to buy it.

It has been said that *advertising* is the force that moves people toward goods.

Merchandising is the force that moves goods toward people.

Selling is the result of these two forces in combination.

Did you know that the advertising itself must be sold before your avocados can continue on their journey? During the past season, the sales representatives of Calavo put a great deal of effort into the selling of two large full-color American Weekly Sunday newspaper ads. Whom did they sell them to? To the wholesalers and retailers throughout the nation.

How did they do it? By pointing out to each individually—and I do mean one by one and two by two—by pointing out that these ads, each representing circulation to 9,300,000 families nationally, were actually *local advertising*—all *national* advertising is, after all, *local* advertising. For example, we were able to point out to the retail merchants of Fullerton that 36% of the local families would receive these ads, that 66% of the families in San Francisco would receive them. So would 82% of the families in Beverly Hills, 69% of the families in Escondido, 91% of the families in La Crescenta, and so on, throughout the whole of the United States in the territories radiating from our 33 branch offices.

How did we know we had these retailers sold? This was evidenced by the most phenomenal retail cooperation ever achieved by our organization. From Coast to Coast, retailers featured "Calavos." The result was the achievement of peak movement a full month ahead of last year; more fruit sold during the month than last year, despite a 20% *smaller* crop; and of course, at considerably higher prices.

These retailers were happy to cooperate because they could see a *profit* for *them*. Our advertising enabled them to sell more fruit at a regular markup, which meant higher profits. Then, too, the retailer has learned through our repetitious prodding that an avocado sale is a *plus* sale because the housewife who buys an avocado also buys lettuce, tomatoes, celery, and other salad items.

He has also learned that he must work on a reasonable profit margin. There is no key on the cash register marked "percentage". In today's competitive market, he thrives on volume, so his price must not be too high, or he will drive away his customers; or too low, so he loses his profit. Remember that the retailer is just as profit-minded as the grower—he sells avocados for one reason only—so he can make a profit. You grow them for the same reason. We must always keep in mind that Mr. Retailer will sell nuts and bolts or bean sprouts instead of avocados unless we work with him and help him and remind him that handling avocados is *profitable*.

Now your avocados are coming down the final stretch.

The consumer knows what your avocados are—consumer advertising has told Mrs. Housewife what to buy.

They have been distributed to the cities where demand has been created.

The wholesaler has them in stock.

The retailer knows he can make a profit on them, and so he too has them on his produce stand.

The retailer's tie-in advertising now tells Mrs. Housewife *where* to buy them.

But your avocados haven't completed their journey; remember the Last 30 Inches, the length of the housewife's arm. She hasn't picked up your avocados yet. The cash register still hasn't rung up the sale.

The next step is to remind the Housewife at *point of sale*.

Now just how important is this point of sale stimulation? Let me give you an example.

Let us say you are dressing hurriedly some morning, and you break your shoelace. So you tie a knot in it, thinking to yourself, "I must buy a new pair of shoelaces today." Off you go to work, and you pass several shoe stores; but your mind is occupied, and you don't happen to think of that broken lace.

Next day, you sit down for a shoe shine, and the bootblack says, "How about a new pair of laces, Mister?" He caught you at point of sale, didn't he; and he sells you the laces.

The same type of stimulation works to sell avocados, too.

Remember, however, that the retail markets of today are self-service style —there are no sales clerks to suggest an avocado salad. So we must employ a silent salesman.

This silent salesman is the *retail display*.

Such displays are constructed largely from materials at hand—old orange boxes and so on. They are built on the spot, in the back alley or the back room. Wrapped in bright decorating papers and adorned with suitable advertising material, they are hard to pass unnoticed, especially when located in the line of store traffic. They will often *double*

sales volume—sometimes *quadruple* it.

These displays tie in wherever possible with a seasonal theme, such as Christmas or Easter. Such a tie-in carries more punch to the housewife and also creates all-important interest on the part of the store personnel who must be depended upon to keep the display filled with properly set-up fruit.

The installation of traffic-stopping displays is an important and integral part of the cooperative growers' sales promotion campaign. We know that when the housewife sees a fine display of fruit, she buys. This is called an *impulse* sale. But one of the results of this type of selling is that the housewife wants a fruit to use in tonight's salad. So avocados must be available in soft condition, or the sale is lost.

This poses one of the great problems faced *by* the avocado merchandisers of today, and by the avocado industry, and that is—the education of retailers to display fruit in *ripe* condition.

They have a natural aversion to displaying ripe fruit because Mrs. Housewife has a habit of pinching the avocado instead of the cocoanut.

Actually, we know that sales go up as much as 50% where ripe fruit is displayed; and, amazingly enough, spoilage *decreases*. So again, it requires education to solve the problem—this time, education of top retail management.

Mr. and Mrs. Avocado Grower, there is more to this marketing business than meets the eye. I have tried to give you a closer look at a few of the links in the marketing chain. Don't ever forget the importance of that Last Thirty Inches. For though the housewife's arm isn't very long, if she doesn't choose to reach in your direction, that cash register won't jingle with avocado dollars.