

AVOCADO PROSPECTS IN VENTURA COUNTY

Calvin C. Delphey

Farm Advisor and Director of Agricultural Extension in Ventura County.

The question has been asked many times, "What are the prospects for the avocado business in Ventura County?" Are we going to continue producing avocados, and will acreage be increased over the next several years?

My answer to the last question, in my opinion, is that a great avocado acreage can be anticipated. Avocados have done well in Ventura County and now that we have varieties that bear fairly consistent crops, we can anticipate more interest in this enterprise.

In checking over the acreage reports from the California Crop and Livestock Reporting Service, United States Department of Agriculture, I find that we are in fourth place at this time in total number of acres of avocados and, as of December 31, 1955, we had a total of 2188 acres planted. Of this total, 1354 were bearing and 834 were non-bearing. We are only behind Los Angeles and Orange Counties by approximately 600 acres. If planting continues at the rate it has in the last few years, it will only be a matter of time that we will be second only to San Diego County in acreage.

What has brought about all this change in economy in Ventura County? In the first place, we have found what varieties will do well in this county, produce fairly consistent crops, and bring a good average return to the producer. In the second place, we have climatic conditions in this county which are favorable to the production of avocados and where frost hazards are not as great as many places in California where avocados are grown. In the third place, we have excellent soils in the county on which to raise avocado trees. A high percentage of our orchards at this time are grown on deep valley fill, Yolo-type soils and, as such, are well drained and are very fertile. Some of the upland soils are being planted also. Of course, some of these must be managed properly to insure good, high-producing groves.

Chart I indicates the increase in acreage from 1942 through 1955. Chart II indicates total production of 40-pound field boxes from 1941 through 1955. Chart III indicates the price received per pound during that period of time.

In checking back through the record of 1926, the late Vincent F. Blanchard, Farm Advisor of Ventura County at that time, made a prediction that there were 20,000 acres of land available in Ventura County which could be used for avocado production. Very little interest was shown, however, in those early days, as many other crops were more profitable. One of the reasons, I believe, that avocados were not planted to any extent prior to 1945, was the fact that we did not have varieties which produced adequate crops. The old standby variety, the Fuerte, was planted in this county in early days, and did not produce good crops. Many other varieties were of mediocre quality, with poor

trade acceptance. Consequently, there was not much interest shown in planting these varieties.

A development of new varieties, such as the Hass, MacArthur, Rincon, Zutano and many others, has shown that these varieties will produce good crops, are fairly consistent in their bearing habits, and have brought good returns to the producers. The Hass, in particular, is well adapted for all areas of Ventura County where frost is not a hazard.

Some of the old varieties, such as the Dickinson, have been consistent bearers, but quality has been only fair. They have been superseded with some of the better varieties. In 1948, a survey was made of the avocado plantings in this county to determine what varieties we had, and to evaluate their bearing habits. At the same time, the Agricultural Extension Service established a number of variety trials to test newer varieties from other parts of California and to observe their behavior, so far as production, quality of fruit and time of harvesting was concerned. Information developed in this survey indicated that Ventura County was roughly divided into three distinct climatic zones. Varieties which did well on the coast did not do well in the interior, and those in the interior would not produce on the coast. We found that the Fuerte produced good crops only in a small area within the county. For coastal planting, the Hass, MacArthur, Rincon and Zutano of the newer varieties, and the Carlsbad and Anaheim of the older varieties were those recommended for planting. In addition to these varieties, the Edranol is recommended for the intermediate zone. In the interior zone, the Fuerte, as well as the Edranol, some of the thin-skins and Hass, where frost is not a hazard, were recommended for some of the sheltered locations. We believe that in the interior area, where frost and east winds are hazards during the winter months, the Mexican thin-skins may have a better place for survival than the Guatemalans and hybrids.

The 20,000 acres that were suggested by Mr. Blanchard in early days may never be planted entirely to avocados. Much of the land, at the present time, is in citrus or other crops. We do believe that there will be more than the 2200 acres. We may have 6 to 8 thousand acres of avocados in Ventura County when total planting is completed. We know we can grow the fruits here, and from the test plots we may find other varieties which show even greater promise for production.

Over 40 varieties of avocados are being tested in the nine test plots in the county. Several show promise, such as the Bacon, Mesa, Emerald and Corona. Some of these have already been planted on a commercial basis. In addition to the named varieties, we are testing out a great number of hybrid avocados developed by plant breeders at U.C.L.A. Some of these varieties are now in production and a few of them look promising. As time goes on, they will be tested more thoroughly and it is quite possible that some of them may become of commercial importance.

Mr. J. N. Thille at Santa Paula is testing a great number of seedlings from such varieties as the Hass, MacArthur, Edranol, Rincon and several others. Avocados are satisfactory as a profitable substitute for other crops where soil and climate are suitable!

In summary, the climate, soil, water and variety situation is con-conducive to the future development of the Avocado Industry in Ventura County.

As I mentioned before, there has been a great increase in acreage of avocados, particularly in the last ten years.

CHART I

Acres of Avocados in Ventura County
1941 - 1955 inclusive

Data for all charts was taken from reports of the Crop Reporting Service of the California Department of Agriculture and Ventura County Agricultural Commissioner. Last acreage indicated is of December 31, 1955.

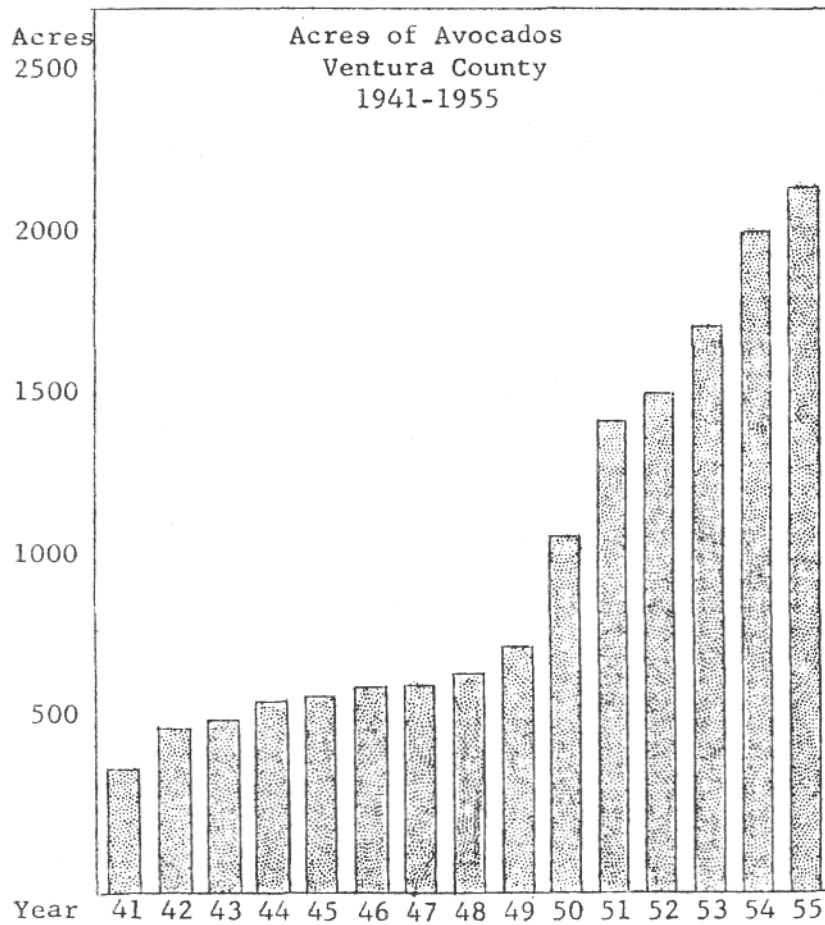


CHART II

Avocado Production
1941 - 1955

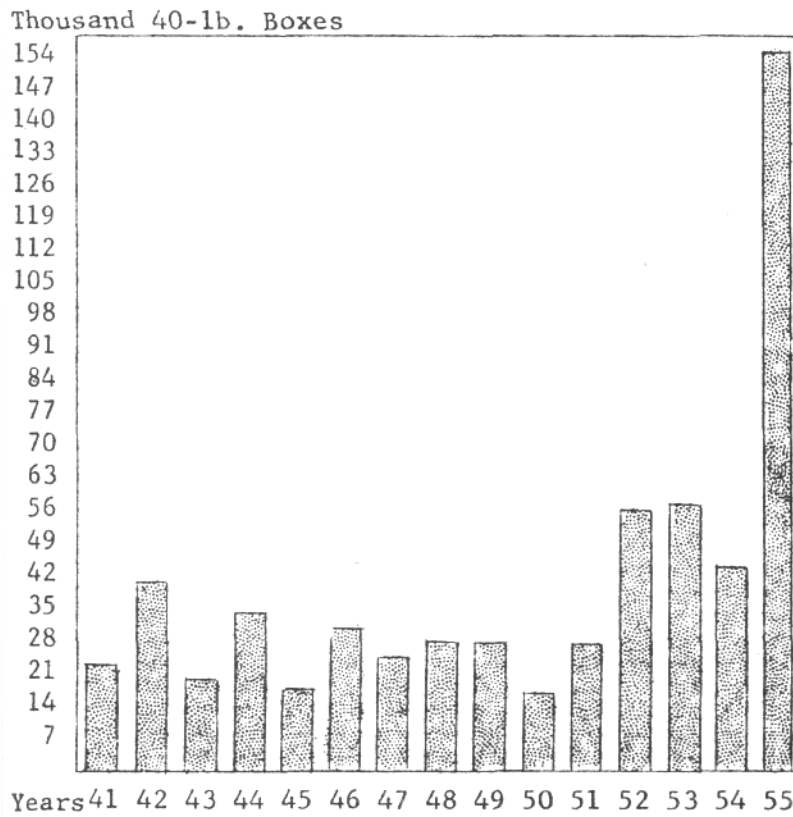


CHART III

