

## AVOCADOS IN THAILAND

### Harold E. Wahlberg

*Is Agriculturist Emeritus, University of California, recently returned from a special assignment in Thailand under the auspices of the State Department in cooperation with the Thai Ministry of Agriculture.*

Thailand (formerly Siam) is a tropical country situated in Southeast Asia between latitudes 6 deg. N. and 20 deg. N. If transposed to the same latitudes on the American continent, it would occupy the area between Bogotá, Colombia in South America to Mexico City in North America. Bangkok, the capitol of Thailand, would approximate the latitude of Guatemala City.

The climate of Thailand is of the monsoon type, very wet throughout the year in the south portion on the Molay Peninsula, and tapering off to a drier climate in the north, with seven or eight months of rainfall and four to five months of dry season. The rainfall in the south averages 120 inches per year and in the north about 56 inches.

The annual mean temperature is 82 deg. F. This compares to 62 deg. in Orange County, California. The range is from 95 deg. in the summer months to 45 degrees in the winter. Humidity ranges from 45 to 90 percent, depending on the season and location. Except in the higher elevations of four to six thousand feet on the mountain ranges bordering Burma and Laos there are no winter temperatures as we experience in California. Therefore, no deciduous fruits that require chilling temperatures for dormancy are grown.

### AVOCADOS VERY SCARCE

To my surprise, very few avocado trees were seen or grown in Thailand, although soil and climatic conditions were favorable for the West Indian variety.

My work with the Ministry of Agriculture, the Agricultural Experiment Stations and schools of Agriculture took me to all parts of the kingdom. I was on the lookout for plantings and made inquiries in all my travels throughout the land and the scores of farms and orchards visited.

Thailand is naturally adapted to all tropical fruits and crops. Here we find extensive plantings of coconuts, bananas, rubber, papayas, sugar palms, sugar cane, mangoes, tobacco and citrus fruits. On a smaller scale are plantings of mangosteens, rambutan, pineapples, durian, kapok, cassava, tea, coffee and various spices. Rice is, of course, the most important and extensively grown agricultural crop. It represents about 80 percent of the agricultural income of the country and supplies a considerable surplus for export.

## **AVOCADOS NOT FAVORED**

Upon inquiry at many sources, I was told that the people didn't care for avocados. They preferred their papayas, mangoes, pineapples, bananas, mangosteens, durian and citrus fruits. It is my opinion, however, that they could learn to enjoy avocados if given some promotion and encouragement by the agricultural and food authorities.

Experimental avocado trees have been set out by two government stations. I found that the Korhung Station near Songkhla in southern Thailand had planted a block of 50 trees about ten years ago. The nursery trees had been imported from the Philippines. Twenty trees were still growing when I inspected the planting last January. They were the West Indian type. Records did not show what varieties had been planted. No fruit was on the trees at the time. They had borne a fair crop the year before, according to the orchard manager.

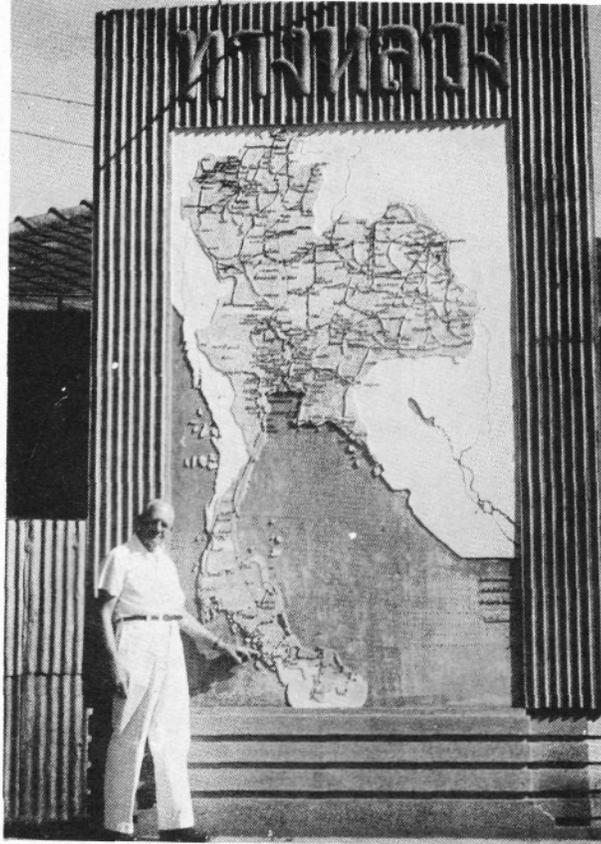
The trees were large for their age. The soil is sandy loam here with a p H of 5. The rainfall is 120 inches with even distribution throughout the year. No explanation was obtainable about the thirty trees missing in this block during the ten years. It could have been neglect or improper care.

In central Thailand, near the village of Petchaboon, about 200 miles north of Bangkok, I was taken to the largest citrus planting in that country. It had 30,000 trees, mostly tangerines, mandarins and limes. The owner, Nai Kunwang, learned of my interest in avocados, as well as the citrus industry, and took me to his small experimental planting of three avocado trees brought in three years ago from California. He was surprised to find two of the trees dead. One was labeled Emerald (Mex.), and the other Regina (Hybrid). The third tree, labeled Fuerte (Hybrid), was fairly vigorous in appearance. I predict poor, if any, production when it comes of bearing age. The climate here is not favorable for this variety in my opinion. However, I have asked Mr. Kunwang to keep me posted on future behavior.

Another interesting observation was made near the village of Nan in northern Thailand about 450 miles north of Bangkok. On the place of Rev. Larry Judd, Presbyterian Agricultural Missionary in that area is growing a large West Indian avocado tree, estimated at 25 years of age.

It is reported to be a seedling planted by an earlier missionary. It has borne a few fruits at times, but very erratic. The soil is sandy loam and acid with p H of 5.5. Rainfall here averages 56 inches annually, usually occurring from April to December.

The Bangkok Mai Experiment Station, located across the Chao Phya River and 10 miles east of Bangkok, is currently testing the response of West Indian seedlings and budded trees. In this area, the soil is gumbo and definitely acid. Time will tell if avocados will bear sufficiently to consider them a possible addition to the great variety of tropical fruits now popular on the local markets.



*The author points to location of the Korhung Experiment Station near Songkhla in southern Thailand, where he found twenty West Indian avocado trees. The plot was planted ten years ago. Fruiting has been very erratic. This is in the heart of the rubber plantations.*