

Take Two: Everett M. Johnston

Death returned on December 31, 1984, to take another of this industry's thinning ranks of pioneer figures, Everett M. Johnston — just one day after the industry's loss of his long-time "cooperative" counterpart, Bill Cowan. Mr. Johnston's passing was unexpectedly abrupt; Everett and Virginia Johnston had returned just before Christmas from a trip to their property in Utah, and were looking forward to further travel when mortal illness overtook him.

As the owner-manager of the King Salad Avocado Company founded by him more than half a century ago, Mr. Johnston was the industry's "senior independent." A keen business man, he built his business into a major avocado marketing entity, attracting his supplies from a large and loyal grower constituency. A hard worker, dedicated to his chosen career, Everett Johnston was a "hands on" manager in every aspect of his business — from the development of his relationships with growers to the development of nationwide market outlets for his "King Salad" products. As his business prospered, Mr. Johnston became increasingly involved in the industry as a grower, as well as a handler, and developed a number of properties into avocado groves which he eventually sold.

Mr. Johnston was intimately involved in the functioning of the California Avocado Advisory Board created by the avocado marketing order (which he initially opposed, but later embraced) and the successor California Avocado Commission. As a member of both boards, and as chairman for several terms, his influence was effective in the development of programs that successfully broadened demand for California avocados throughout the country. In 1974, he was one of a three-man team whose exploration of the potential for avocado marketing in the Orient laid the foundation for the industry's expanding exploitation of that potential.

Mr. Johnston was for many years an influential member of the California Avocado Development Organization (CADO) of the industry's handlers, and served several terms as its president. He also held membership on various organizations of independent handlers created from time to time.

Mr. Johnston served, briefly, as a director of the California Avocado Society; but his greater contributions to the industry were channeled through other media. Recognition of them prompted the presentation to him in 1979 of the Society's award of honor for outstanding meritorious service to the industry.

Everett Johnston well exemplified the American entrepreneurial success story in which motivated dedication, hard work, and "salesmanship" are the elements of earned prosperity. His kind is rare, and his like may not quickly be seen again in this industry. That is a pity.

-J.S.S.