

Production Research: New Direction

John S. Shepherd

Director Emeritus, California Avocado Society, and Research Controller of its Production Research Advisory Committee.

(A report presented at the annual meeting of the California Avocado Society, September 28, 1985.)

Avocado growers have invested many hundreds of thousands of dollars in production related research, over the years, through the California Avocado Society, through the California Avocado Advisory Board / California Avocado Commission's Production Research Advisory Committee, through Calavo Growers of California and other handlers, and as taxpayers.

Since the 1940s, the principal linkage of the industry and its major research agency — the University of California at Riverside — has been through an industry "Avocado Production Research Advisory Committee" of *selected* representatives of grower *organizations*, handlers, and *non-growers* with research interests.

That committee was useful and effective. However, the rank and file of the industry — the growers who ultimately footed the bill ~ had little input, little opportunity to participate in research programming, and limited opportunity *to* know what was going on.

The creation of a semi-autonomous Production Research Advisory Committee of the California Avocado Advisory Board, some years ago, improved the situation. Through that committee, and its successor P.R.A.C. of the Commission, grower input was sharpened — but still without *general* participation.

And there were some stresses in the relationship, because the Advisory Board (and the Commission) were created with *market development* objectives, not *production* objectives.

A wise move was made by the Commission last fall to place in the hands of the California Avocado Society — a *research- and education-oriented* organization — the responsibility of;

—analyzing and prioritizing research needs,

—locating *cost effective, results producing* research institutions and personnel,

—monitoring the progress of funded research programs.

For the past year, the Society has been largely concerned with *monitoring*, since the program for 1984-85 was inherited. Now, we are broadening the Society's research role.

The first step was to get more growers involved in the process — and that was the primary purpose of yesterday's session of this annual meeting. We wished to expose to every avocado grower who cares to know: what is going on, what is planned by

researchers, and what it will cost.

There were about 110 persons in attendance of yesterday's session. Many were growers who had not ever attended the meetings of the old industry Avocado Production Research Advisory Committee customarily held at Riverside. We hope their numbers will increase at future California Avocado Society meetings.

Those of you who attended yesterday's presentations learned something, I'll wager. And *you took part!*

Looking ahead, I want to share with you something of my personal philosophy concerning production research.

I believe we must determine first, what are the production problems that stand in the way of profitable avocado growing?

We should determine next, what knowledge is needed by growers to deal with those problems?

Then we should determine, how do these problems inter-relate (if they do) and how do the solutions inter-relate (if they do)? This is the "holistic" approach the CAS/PRAC believes ought to be emphasized in future research.

Next we should determine, who can best conduct the necessary research — best in terms of quality, best in terms of cost-effectiveness, best in terms of results?

And then we should determine, how much are growers willing to spend to finance the research they want, how much can they *afford* to spend, and how much *must* they spend — or lose the war?

The CAS/PRAC has been wrestling with these questions in meetings yesterday afternoon and this morning. Its next move is to present its findings and conclusions to the Society's board of directors, and thereafter to propose to the California Avocado Commission a carefully-considered, prioritized program of production research worthy of growers' financial support.

If the CAS/PRAC has read yesterday's signals correctly, growers do favor a sound production research program. They want results, and they are willing to pay a reasonable price to get them. Production research, however, is no longer "automatically funded" by the Commission's assessments. It has to prove its merit, and that is where your participation becomes essential. Please make sure that your representative on the Commission knows how *you* feel.