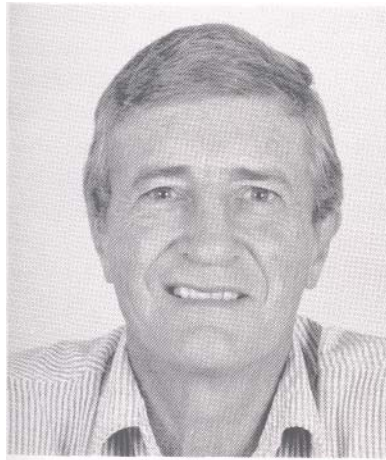


## Report from Australia

### Donald W. Lavers

*Director-at-large, California Avocado Society; chairman, Varieties Committee, Australian Avocado Growers Federation; secretary, Atherton Tableland Avocado Growers Association.*



### 1990 in Brief

Greetings. Avocado production for the year 1990 reached 32,000 metric tons, or 70 million pounds, which represents an increase of about 10 % on last year. Australian production is highly seasonal: low in summer, rising to a high in winter and spring, with low prices predominating during the winter. This year, however, prices remained firmer even though the peaking of fruit reaching the market in June and July seemed much the same as in previous years.

Promotion over the last couple of years has encouraged the use of avocados as a winter food, particularly as a fresh accompaniment to hot dishes, and this appears to be raising consumption at a much needed time.

We growers on the Atherton Tableland in North Queensland had a severe tropical cyclone looking us in the eye for almost a week prior to Christmas, followed by a month of the most astonishing rain. Winds here reached only 100 kph [about 60 mph], compared with 230 kph [about 140 mph] in Cairns 80 km away, and damage was much less than expected.

### Looking at the different varieties...

- **Hass** popularity continues to increase in Brisbane, Adelaide, and Perth; but in

Melbourne and, to some extent, Sydney, there is buyer resistance if green-skinned varieties are available at the same time.

- **Sharwil**, a quality eating variety, is losing popularity among growers in most areas because of erratic production.
- **Fuerte** is still numerous but is losing favor with growers. The sprawling growth and dense canopy of the tree and the thin skin of the fruit make this variety a liability to an industry trying to promote a high quality product. The industry is looking for an early- to mid-season green variety to replace Fuerte.
- **Shepard** popularity is increasing as volume on the market reaches substantial levels. This variety, produced in California by the late Stanley Shepard, prefers the warmer, northern part of the Australian producing area. It has a reputation as a reliable, high quality early-season fruit with high pest resistance and good consumer appeal.
- **Reed** is not a highly popular variety, but in South Australia and Victoria the quality is reasonable and it fills an important gap in the market.
- **Wurtz** is not a quality producer's dream, but is a fairly good late-season performer, and is highly sought in Melbourne in summer.
- **Gwen** is now controlled under Australian PVR legislation, and is currently being bulked up prior to its distribution by licensed nurseries.

### **Quality Management**

As a result of two separate market studies which showed that a high percentage of consumers had been dissatisfied with purchases of avocados, the industry decided to make 1990 a year to improve quality. Pertinent to the problem is the fact that the industry consists of numerous small growers competing with each other and with little motivation for change. In response to a very positive drive within the industry, including a carefully designed program during Conference 90, three of the larger packers have joined a Quality Assurance scheme which will cover fruit designed for both export and domestic markets.

In addition, a number of extension workers, notably Scott Ledger, Terry Campbell, and Alex Banks, have been demonstrating at regional group meetings and field days the cost to growers and to the industry of failing to improve quality. The climate is now set for change, and it is hoped that a substantial number of progressive grower-packers will join the three present sheds in a wider QA program in 1991.

### **Research Workshop**

The next research workshop, where technical workers and industry leaders meet to determine the industry's R & D program over the next five to seven years, falls due in July 1991. The industry has been active in preparing goals so that the workshop can define how research and extension can assist in their achievement.

In a preliminary discussion at Conference 90 to determine the road the industry should

take, delegates nominated goals that will:

- Improve product quality—safe with consumer appeal.
- Improve marketing—domestic and export.
- Encourage grower cooperation—develop marketing or packing groups.
- Lift production efficiency.

## **Conference 90**

Fast earning a reputation as a technical exchange of major significance, the Federation's biennial conference was held on Queensland's Gold Coast in July. Great praise goes to conference coordinator Ross Boyle and his enthusiastic organizing committee led by David Rankine, John Williams, and Alex Banks. A special bouquet goes to conference chairman Robert Mosse, who, at the end of three tightly packed days, looked only mildly shell shocked.

"Profit Through Quality" was adopted as the theme of the conference, and valuable contributions were made in the fields of marketing and industry organization by Mark Affleck, president, California Avocado Commission; John Dermody, managing director, Sydney Market Authority; and Margaret Thursby, advertising manager, COD Queensland.

An important paper was presented by cardiologist and researcher David Coulquhoun, who outlined the trial he conducted in which an avocado-enriched diet lowered serum cholesterol in subjects randomly selected, and more effectively than the American Heart Association Phase II diet (AHA) and unlike AHA did not decrease HDL levels. He noted that he had no trouble in encouraging his subjects to stay on the avocado-enriched diet during the three week period, but he did have palatability problems with the AHA.

Other significant papers were presented by:

- Tony Whiley: report on production, technical advances, and marketing in California, Florida, Canary Islands, and South Africa.
- Ken Pegg: trunk injection techniques in the treatment of root rot.
- Kevin Smith and M Tak: marketing research and a strategic marketing plan for the industry.
- Andrew Jessop: cold disinfestation against Queensland fruit fly.
- Roger Broadley: integrated crop protection.
- Geoff Waite: synthetic pyrethroids in an avocado IPM system.
- Lindy Coates: anthracnose, and the opportunities for biological control.

Hank Brokaw gave the conference a broad world flavor when he spoke during the dinner about the global industry and the need for producing countries to cooperate in their research. We in the Australian industry were most happy to welcome international celebrities of the standing of Hank Brokaw and Mark Affleck who were able to share their experiences with us.

## **Communication**

The Federation quarterly newsletter "Talking Avocados," under the stimulating editorship of horticultural consultant Marie Piccone, has greatly improved communication within the Australian industry and between us and our colleagues in other countries. It has a high standard of technical content, but includes grower topics and informal happenings around the industry. We already have a number of overseas correspondents, but we would welcome letters from industry people in all producing countries to keep us abreast of your activities and to let you know more about what is going on in Australia.

Subscriptions to "Talking Avocados" may be obtained by writing to the Secretary, AAGF Inc., P.O. Box 19 Brisbane Markets, Australia, 4106. Subscription is \$A18 per year (four editions) for overseas subscribers; (\$A12 for Australian subscribers). Checks or bank drafts should be made payable to AAGF National Newsletter.

## **The Federation**

Three additional members of industry were presented with the Federation's Award of Merit at Conference 90: Don Lavers, Peter Molenaar, and John Dexter.

The Australian avocado industry said a sad farewell during the year to one of its founding fathers, Jim Wilson, who died at his home in Buderim, South Queensland. During his 50 years association with the industry which were, in his own words, "strewn with a multitude of obstacles and dry gullies," Jim developed the first commercial avocado orchard in Australia, selected and named the variety Sharwil, and imported the varieties Shepard and Reed, as well as serving on industry committees for more years than most people can remember. Jim was the first recipient of the industry's Award of Merit in 1983. The curtain has now been finally drawn on a truly meritorious career.

Delegates to the Australian Avocado Growers Federation (AAGF) are as follows:

Secretary	Ross Boyle
President	David Rankine
Vice President	Ross Richards
Chairman, Varieties Committee	Don Lavers
Queensland:	Richard Armstrong, David Rankine, Don Lavers, Brian Capamagian, Charles Dimes
New South Wales:	Robert Mosse, Warren Meredith, Peter Molenaar, Keith Johnson
Victoria (Sunraysia):	Marion Matthews
South Australia:	Ross Richards
West Australia:	John Galatis