

## Report from Australia



### **Donald W. Lavers**

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Greetings. The weather was not kind to avocado growers in Australia during 1991. Some areas recorded an excessively wet January and February, followed by an uncharacteristic dry. Other areas had almost no wet, just a long dry so that the underground water on which crops depended for irrigation failed. The result was a low production year—crop estimated at 22,000 tonnes [48.4 million pounds]—which was well down on the 30,000 tonnes [66 million pounds] in the peak year 1989. So, while the weather was hard on some growers in reducing their crops, it was kind to others in yielding better prices than had been experienced in recent years.

There was a decline in demand for many horticultural products during a four-month period during the middle of the year, and this was believed to be one of the features of the far Teaching-recession that has been affecting Australia. The price fell sharply for many normally popular commodities, but avocados appeared to suffer little or no effect: demand remained vigorous and prices firm.

### **Future Planning**

A high level of industry planning took place during the year. An R & D Planning Workshop held in August and a Strategic Industry Planning Workshop held in September looked at the condition of the industry today; where it wants to go in the future; and how industry organization, research, and other factors could help it along this road. The workshops were jointly sponsored by the Australian Avocado Growers Federation (AAGF) and the two organizational bodies which have been developed by the Australian government to assist horticulture—the Australian Horticultural

Corporation (ARC) and the Horticultural Research and Development Corporation (HRDC). There was considerable technical input from state and commonwealth departments, particularly the Queensland DPI.

The workshops recognized the avocado as a unique food with proven health attributes and a good consumer image which gives it potential for wider usage and increased consumption. There are some large packing sheds, but the bulk of the fruit is supplied by small to medium grower-packers, resulting in small lines of product, a multitude of brands, and variation of quality which gives rise to some consumer dissatisfaction. Three packers in Queensland have inaugurated a Quality Assurance Scheme, and are pleased with the direction they have taken; but there is no national quality assurance program in place.

It was suggested that viability in the growing sector of the industry would be improved if orchards were streamlined to produce closer to their potential of 32 tonnes per Ha [about 28,000 pounds per acre]—it is now about 9 tonnes per Ha [8,000 pounds per acre], and at the same time maintaining or reducing cost of production. Efficiency could be improved through smaller trees; high density layouts; and predictable annual cropping, and by adopting technology that would reduce costs; reduce chemical dependence; improve water and fertilizer management; and improve farm recording, business methods, planning, and goal setting.

It was considered that research is already of a particularly high standard; but there is a vast body of available information that is not being utilized, thus indicating that technology transfer and communication need to be improved. Priorities were given to items of research that would help to step up efficiencies in all sectors of the industry. Also, the industry urgently needs a data base to improve access to existing information and technology and a Total Management Package to assist record keeping and management.

It was also suggested that there is a need to develop a national marketing philosophy and national promotion program along with improved statistics and crop forecasting techniques. At present, industry organization is financed by the states; and each state determines its own policy, which often interferes with the ability to think nationally. The workshops placed a high priority on the development of an effective national peak body to address these important issues and in preparing a strategy to encourage our 1,000 or so growers to become united within twenty marketing groups.

As with all planning exercises, there has been an abundance of words; but the consensus has been good, and we are experiencing the beginnings of the actions phase:

- A vision of the future has been established in the fields of Strategic Industry Planning and R & D, and this will determine the direction the industry will take over the next three to five years.
- The industry has joined HRDC, and growers are now paying a levy which will be supplemented by HRDC to fund national research, technology transfer, and technical communication.
- We have made application to join AHC, and at the time of writing this report are

asking AHC to strike a national levy to fund national marketing and promotion and assist with industry organization.

### **The Federation**

Robert Mosse, from Alstonville, New South Wales, was elected president of the AAGF in November when David Rankine retired at the completion of his term. Ross Richards, from Renmark, South Australia, continues as deputy president.

Robert Mosse trained as a barrister in South Africa and practiced as a solicitor in a town close to the family subtropical fruit orchard at Tzaneen, which he managed before it was sold and become part of Westfalia. On arrival in Australia, Robert developed his present avocado and macadamia orchard at Alstonville, and has been active in his state avocado association, as well as the Federation, for a number of years.

### **Conference 92**

The Federation's biennial conference will again be held at Conrad-Jupiter's Hotel Casino on Queensland's Gold Coast from September 29 to October 2, 1992. Bob Bergh will be the keynote speaker, and there will be papers and day tours to excite and inform industry people from overseas, as well as from Australia. Overseas visitors will be enthusiastically welcomed, and anybody who wishes to register or who requires information on the conference or the tours that could be undertaken at the same time to places like the barrier reef, rain forest resorts, the red heart, the west, wilderness areas, or big cities should contact AAGF Secretary Ross Boyle, RO. Box 19, Brisbane Markets, Q 1406, Australia. (Phone: 07.379 0228; FAX: 07. 379 9283).

### **In Memoriam**

The Australian avocado industry joins industry people throughout the world in paying tribute to David Croll, grower of renown of Bet Herut, Israel, who passed away late in the year. I met Dave when he attended the Australian Avocado Conference at Atherton, North Queensland, in 1984, after which I began to receive his frequent and informative letters—the Dave Croll letters—for which he became so well known among researchers and growers of subtropical fruit. I greatly treasure the friendship that developed, which I am proud to share with others in most producing countries of the world.

The Australian avocado industry will miss him. The world avocado industry will miss him—as will growers of other subtropical crops. We are saddened by his passing, but we all have been enriched through contact with this warm, generous, and vital person—a truly great ambassador for his country.