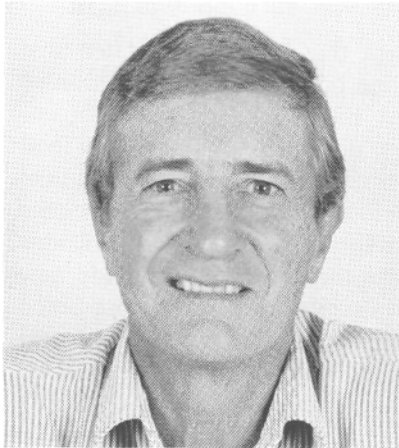


Report from Australia

Donald W. Lavers

Director-at-large, California Avocado Society; director, Australian Avocado Growers Federation; secretary, Atherton Tableland Avocado Growers Association. Avocado Growers Federation; secretary, Atherton Tableland Avocado Growers Association.



Greetings.

1992 was another year of moderate production for avocados in Australia. With an estimated turn-off of 22,000 tonnes, production was similar to that of the last couple of years, but well down on the peak crop of 1989. It is interesting to note recent trends in production. After heavy plantings in the early 'eighties, production rose 10% to 15% yearly to reach over 32,000 tonnes in 1989 before declining 30%. During the last three years, production in some parts of the diffuse growing area increased dramatically; but a number of factors has kept the overall figure down.

Escalating costs and a hard economic climate have forced some growers to withdraw water or to graze cattle on their blocks. Suburban spread or concern over spray drift has seen a lot of orchard land converted to real estate. Tough weather conditions—*e. g.*, fires in West Australia, heat wave conditions in the Murray River basin in the south of the continent, and storms in southeast Queensland—have contributed to reduced turn-off. So, although there were years when the market seemed to be approaching saturation—and this was usually winter, when demand tends to fall off—we have not yet experienced the production blow-out that some people predicted would test the quality of our production and the effectiveness of our planning.

Planning

Planning continues to be a major part of Australian Avocado Growers Federation (AAGF) activities. The Strategic Plan and the Research and Development Plan, both of which were developed in 1991, have been refined, and aspects have been emphasized that will sustain industry objectives aimed at improving marketability and marketing strategies, improving

grower viability, and in streamlining organization and funding to facilitate research, communication, and the exchange of information.

A number of research projects and other innovations expected to assist the progress of the industry down the road it wants to go are worthy of special mention. These are:

- **Total Management System.** When the industry indicated that communication and technical exchange need upgrading to improve orchard management efficiency, Alex Banks and a number of co-workers presented a research project designed to develop a Total Management System for avocado production. Existing technical information, data, and agribusiness will be developed into a package which will cater for the variable conditions under which avocados are grown and marketed and will have the capacity to include new and improved knowledge as it becomes available. It will be presented to growers through publications, computer software, and video tapes, and will be accessed via self-help, group extension, and consultants.

Extension officers will work with groups of growers known as Regional Production Groups, throughout all growing areas, to assemble the information, to put it in readily usable form, and to train growers to access it. It is believed that this program will have a far reaching effect in improving orchard management and marketing skills.

- **Biological Control of Anthracnose.** With high priority given in the AAGF's industry plan to the need to reduce chemical dependence, Lindy Coates and co-workers have commenced a research project to develop a biological method of controlling anthracnose, the skin disease that causes fruit wastage and increases cost of production in 95 % of Australia's growing area. This project is of special interest, since it is the first occasion an Australian research has been expanded to meet the needs of the New Zealand industry and has been jointly funded by both industries.

- **Two excellent books** from the Queensland Department of Primary Industries publishing section were released to the avocado industry at Conference 92. They are:

Growing Avocados in Queensland, by *Alex Banks* and **Protect Your Avocados**, by *Roger Broadley*

Both are valuable reference books for growers, horticulturists, and students; and, although they refer primarily to the industry in Queensland, the information they contain will find application worldwide, particularly in those areas whose growing conditions resemble those of eastern Australia. The pack of two books is available from QDPI Publications, GPO Box 46, Brisbane, Australia, A 4001, at a cost of A\$ 33 plus postage.

- **Heart Foundation** ix. Some time ago, the Australian Heart Foundation indicated that its tick of approval would be available for use by Australia's fruit and vegetable industries. The AAGF has now become a sub-lessee with authority to use the Heart Foundation ^ in all promotion and advertising during the 1993 season. The industry has always tried to stress the excellent nutritional qualities of the avocado in its promotion; but there has always been the lurking concern, mainly kept alive by ill-informed doctors and dietitians, that the high fat content is detrimental. We believe that the use of this ^ from such an authoritative source will emphasize the nutritional message where it helps most, and may even encourage some doctors to update the advice they give.

Conference 92

Another fine AAGF Conference was held at Conrad-Jupiters on Queensland's Gold Coast in September. Those attending spent three days in the Conference Hall participating in papers and discussion on technical and industry matters and one day on a bus tour to Tamborine in the Gold Coast hinterland to view tree injection techniques, practical root rot control, and IPM; and at Duranbah, just south of the state border, to experience topworking techniques and a tree pruning method to rejuvenate overcrowded orchards.

We were extremely pleased to welcome as speakers at the Conference, distinguished visitors Bob Bergh and Len Francis, who informed and entertained us and contributed to further strengthening the bonds of friendship that have developed between the California industry and our own.

As keynote speaker and special guest, Bob Bergh and his delightful wife, Gwen, were given a day's rest among the crocodiles on the Daintree River in north Queensland while they shrugged off their jet lag before they were given a tour of all the growing regions from Atherton through south Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, to the sand dune country of West Australia, with a conference speaking engagement wedged somewhere in the middle. Bob and Gwen looked only mildly shell-shocked when they were reluctantly released from their masses of new friends and allowed to fly home.

Incidentally, we will have another great program to offer at the next Conference, which will be in mid-year 1994, and we are catering for an increased number of international visitors. If you would like to extend your program to climb Ayre's Rock, see the Barrier Reef, and meet Bob's crocodiles, we will have a pre- or post-Conference tour to suit your needs.