

The Chilean Avocado Industry

Rodrigo Barros and Luis Sanchez

AGRICOM, Agustinas 1291, 3 Piso Of. C., Santiago, Chile

Avocados were first introduced into Chile during the 1850's into private orchards mainly in the area of Quillota and Peumo (Rosemberg, 1990). Between 1930 and 1932, varieties such as Nabal, Queen, Duke, Ryan, and Mexicola were also introduced. In 1943, Roger Magdhal successfully imported 'Hass' which today comprises the majority of avocados exported from Chile (Rosenberg, 1990).

Avocados have been grown commercially over the last 50 years for the local market. Their export in significant volumes started only in 1985. This was the birth of an avocado industry oriented towards international markets.

Geographical Distribution of Avocados in Chile

Chilean avocados are grown in the Central Valley, mainly between the cities of Petorca and Rancagua. The climate in this area, located between 32°S and 34°S, is characterized as mediterranean, with an average yearly rainfall in Santiago of 37.34 cm (14.7 inches) and an average temperature of 14.17C (57.5F). The rainy season is concentrated during the winter months (May through August). In this area, there is generally a dry season of 7 to 8 months duration starting in September (Errazuriz-Korner, 1987).

Avocado plantations are primarily located along inland valleys, where frosts are rare thanks to the marine influence, with 51% of the orchards concentrated between the cities of La Ligua and Quillota in the east-west valleys formed by the La Ligua and Aconcagua Rivers.

Production Overview

Avocados represent only 5% of the total area planted with fruit orchards in Chile. Table 1 presents the production volumes and planted acreage for the last few years. The annual increase in new plantations has been encouraged by the high returns obtained from exports.

Varieties Grown

The Hass variety represents 35% of the total Chilean crop (Tables 2 and 3). This percentage should increase in the near future since most new plantations are of this variety.

Avocados in the Local Market

Avocados enjoy high popularity in Chile and it has never been necessary to promote their consumption. So far, the only marketing strategy that was ever put into practice involved preconditioning avocados and resulted in a roughly 30% increase in sales at the supermarket level.

Avocados are regularly consumed in Chilean homes. The most typical forms are in sandwiches, salads, dips, seafood garnishes, and as a spread to substitute for butter.

Average avocado consumption stands at about 3 kg per person. However, this figure has dropped during recent years to around 2.4 kg due to the fact that 30% of total production has been diverted to the export market. Avocados are only consumed in the fresh state in Chile as there has been no processing industry for avocados. The marketing channels for avocado include chain stores (50%), wholesalers (40%) and food services (10%).

Export Marketing Programs

Chilean avocado exports commenced in 1985 and have always been geared towards the United States market. Presently, approximately one third of Chile's total production is exported with 90% of the exports being 'Hass' (Table 4). Avocados have not historically been promoted in the United States, but a marketing campaign is planned for the very near future. Chilean avocado exports are expected to increase about 50% over the course of the next six years.

The cornerstone of success, for any export system, is that all parties involved (i.e., growers, packers, exporters and receivers) must cooperate as a professional team and coordinate efforts in order to avoid potential errors.

For example, the cold chain must never be interrupted. Fruit must be precooled as soon as possible after harvest. Once it has been packed in strong and well-ventilated cardboard boxes, it is maintained in refrigerated chambers until subsequent transport to reefer trucks to the loading port. Modern, fast, fully palletized charter vessels are employed for transportation to the overseas end markets. Throughout this cooling and transfer sequence, it is extremely important to limit the environmental changes to which the fruit is exposed. Tight coordination by all members of the team mentioned above is essential.

Chile's modern packing, cooling and transportation network is well-poised to cope with the high demand and quality requirements of the international marketplace.

The Future

The avocado industry should be oriented towards a worldwide market with regard to production and consumption. As global free trade will be a reality in the near future, new

borders will open and each producing country should be prepared with a modern worldwide marketing strategy. The Chilean industry will be the first one prepared to meet the big challenge that free trade will present when the United States opens the border for Mexican avocados. In order to compete, everyone will have to be more efficient regarding production and marketing. Chile shall direct its efforts towards new international markets such as Europe, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East, while maintaining its market share within the United States. We are convinced that joint efforts with a view towards increasing worldwide per capita consumption of fresh and processed avocados is a must.

Literature Cited

- Rosemberg, G. 1990. The Chilean avocado industry: Production and perspectives. International course on production, postharvest and marketing of avocados. F.A.O., Vina del Mar, Chile.
- Errazuriz-Korner, A.M. 1987. Manual de Geografia de Chile (Manual of Chilean Geography) Andres Bello, Santiago, Chile.

Table 1. Total area planted in and production of avocados (1984-1990) ^z

Year	Area (ha)	Production v (kg x 10 ⁻⁶)	Yield (kg/ha)
1984	7,400	31.50	4,256
1985	7,605	29.80	3,918
1986	7,705	35.00	4,543
1987	7,940	32.00	4,030
1988	8,154	28.00	3,434
1989	8,195	39.00	4,759
1990*	8,647	37.58	4,346

^z D.E.P./Minagri based on data provided by Ciren-Corfo.

^y Rosenberg (1990).

^x Estimated.

Table 2. Avocado cultivars grown in Chile^z.

Cultivar	Area (ha)	% of Area
Hass	3,037	35
Fuerte	2,210	26
Bacon	1,190	14
Others	2,209	25
Total	8,646	100

^z AGRICOM Ltda., 1991

Table 3. Current avocado production by cultivars with its harvest season^z.

Cultivar	Production (kg x 10 ⁻⁶)	Season
Hass	15.04	September to April
Bacon	6.01	July to September
Fuerte	5.01	June to October
Zutano	4.04	July to August
Others	7.02	April to September
Total	37.12	

^z AGRICOM Ltda., 1991

Table 4. Actual and projected exports of Chilean avocados^{z,y}.

Year	Exports (kg x 10 ⁻⁶)	% increase or (% decrease) from previous year
Actual exports		
1986	3.54	—
1987	0.09	(97.46)
1988	4.63	5,044
1989	3.58	(29.33)
1990	11.52	222
Projected exports		
1991	12.79	11.02
1992	13.97	9.23
1993	15.47	10.74
1994	16.96	9.63
1995	18.46	8.84
1996	18.96	2.71
1997	20.00	5.49

^z Actual figures from Prochile-Odepa.

^y Projected figures are for 'Hass' only and are from AGRICOM Ltda.