

AVOCADO HISTORY AND USES IN ISRAEL

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In 1908 the first avocado trees were planted in former Palestine by French monks in the Latrun Monastery. In 1924, ten grafted avocado trees were imported from California (v. Fuerte and Dickinson) and planted at Mique Israel Agricultural School. They suffered from frost and extreme heat conditions and yielded the first fruits in 1927. In 1933 the number of trees reached 300 while additional 800 seedlings were being prepared in nurseries. Many different varieties were imported and tried : Fuerte, Dickinson, Duke, Taft, Collinson, Pueblo, Royal, Challenge, Miller, Spinks, Dutton, Lyon, Anaheim, Prince, Princess, Nabal and Ganter. Nowadays, (1997), the main varieties are Ettinger (2,000 hectares), Hass (2,000), Fuerte (1,400), Reed (500), Nabal (300), Ardith (400), Pinkerton (300) for a total of 7,000 hectares. 100 of these hectares are of less important varieties. In 1999 the total area planted to avocado dropped to 5,000 ha.

Most of the avocado produced in Israel is exported (mainly to France and Germany) and consumed as a fresh fruit. The annual consumption of avocado in Israel is now 5 kg per capita. The annual fruit production reaches 75,634 tons in 1996 and 71,696 in 1997, with 54% and 62% of export respectively. In 1998 the production dropped to 52,835 tons. According to FAO report Israel is among the top ten avocados producing countries following Mexico, Indonesia, USA, Dominican Rp., and Brazil. 50 percent of the avocado orchards are owned by kibutzim, communal and cooperative living settlements, the other 50 percent are owned by the private sector. Although avocado oil is unsaponifiable and contains Vitamin A and D that gives its special cosmetic and pharmaceutical value, only marginal amount of avocados is directed to oil production. The avocado oil production in Israel varies from 30 to 100 ton per year. Another marginal product is avocado spread.

With increased avocado planting area, the number of pest recorded is up as well. Some of them are local (native) pests adapted to a new host; others are new introduced insect pests. The list of pest prepared by Z. Avidov and I. Harpaz, in 1969, included 15 species mostly of minor economical importance. Recently the number of pests increased to 96 species with 9 species of economical importance. Until 1997 the avocado in Israel was under IPM control system based mainly on biological control.