



AJ Cresswell

AJ CRESSWELL, THE PIONEER OF AVOCADO EXPORTS

AJ Cresswell pioneered the exports of sub-tropical fruits in South Africa. He, together with Prof Kotzé, played a major role in the formation of the Avocado Growers Association. Although he formed an export company which later became the well-known Koolkat Co, he remained an idealist and seldom did it for monetary gains. As representative for the Southern Lowveld Farmers' Union, he served on the Transvaal and SA Agricultural Unions' Fruit and Vegetable Committee for many years where he used every ounce of his influence to get refrigerated railway trucks for the export of avocados. He succeeded in this and today exporters pick the fruit of Mr Cresswells labours during the sixties.

In a letter to Prof Kotzé, Mr Cresswell wrote as follows on 21 December 1981:-

"I first got involved with exporting In 1923 when I left the Agricultural Department to take over the Brits Citrus Export Co-op., at De Wildt."

"In 1924 I joined a private company exporting oranges from Rustenburg, Brits, Pretoria North and the Northern Transvaal doing approximately 150 000 of the large wooden boxes annually.

"In 1929 I joined HL Hall and Sons and later became a director of that firm. Apart from citrus we also exported avocados, litchis and mangoes and so it was about this time that I first became involved in avocado exports. At this time exporting was difficult as there was no air service and no refrigerated rail trucks. Ice trucks were used and everything was sea freighted with mixed results.

"In 1959, after a visit to the UK and Europe on behalf of HL Hall and Sons, I reported ".it is obvious that avocados have a good potential providing we can land them in a good condition. Much will have to be done to improve our transport."

"On the 21st October, 1963, I formed the company Ken Perrett (Pty) Ltd., to undertake the export of uncontrolled fruits and vegetables from South Africa. Initially exports were chiefly avocados from West End Citrus Co-operative Co. Ltd., Westfalia Estates, Tzaneen Citrus Co-op., Co., Ltd., and growers such as Bob Rottcher, Fred Kuhne and Dr. Kirk-Cohen from the Louis Trichardt area.

"In 1967 I visited Dr JM Kotzé, then general manager of Westfalia, and It was in his office that the idea of forming an Association for avocado exporters was born. It was decided to call a meeting and this took place at Westfalia on 27th November 1967, at which meeting The Avocado Growers Association was formed. I was the convenor of this meeting and our first chairman was Dr JM Kotzé with myself as secretary. This Association later became SAAGA."