

Foreword

Walking on the Wild Side

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The tropical and subtropical rainforests of Guatemala, Mexico and the West Indies are wild places with an abundance of plant and animal species.

This is where the avocado evolved and survived amongst fierce competition for sunlight and nutrients. Compared to other crops, avocados are relatively untouched by human hand and still have a wild, unknown side to them which poses a real challenge to our growers and researchers.

Our industry has come through four years of drought, and practically all the trees survived, albeit with a struggle and in many cases low yields per hectare. In August and September 1995 we witnessed one of the most impressive displays of avocado flowering and fruit set seen for a long time. Then came October with very high temperatures and windy, dry conditions. November and December arrived with the long-awaited rain, and every one heaved a sigh of relief, including the avocado trees, which started flushing very heavily. Again the fruit drop was something to see.

All in all, the avocado is not yet a totally predictable tree: alternate bearing, small fruit size, and reaction to heavy rain are just some of the problems likely to confound the growers' plans. A lot of information has been gained in the last ten years, however, and the research efforts of the industry continue to aim at maximizing yields of good quality fruit of marketable size. In order to get up to the yield potential of current genetic material, a whole range of management actions have to be carried out at the correct time — now is the time to read this yearbook, especially if you were unable to attend the symposium. There are growers out there getting yields of twenty tons per hectare, and most of them were at the symposium walking on the wild side and remembering what it is like to manage avocados in the wet conditions under which they evolved.