

A glimpse of industry history continued ...

It was not until the heady days of the 1970s however, that avocados became widely grown enough for thoughts to turn to creating a formal industry structure. The decade saw the beginning of a period of experimentation with new crops and avocados were among the many subtropical fruits that found favour with orchardists, particularly in the Bay of Plenty.

By 1978 Te Puke grower Grahame Ross was keen to see this budding industry reach its potential. Having seen the success of the voluntary Kiwifruit Export Promotion Levy, he felt something similar could work for avocados.

Grahame called a meeting of Te Puke avocado growers in Walter Bayliss' packing shed on No. 3 Rd, Te Puke, seeking support for his ideas. In the May 1992 edition of *The Orchardist of New Zealand*, Pat Sale wrote that six growers attended this meeting.

"It was agreed in principle that this was a good idea, and Graeme (sic) proceeded to the stage of getting a specimen box with appropriate graphics produced," Pat writes. Pat worked for MAF as a Bay of Plenty advisory officer from 1971 to 1991 and was closely involved with the associations during this time. He was later appointed part-time research director for the AGA. He stepped down in 1994 and was replaced by Jonathan Cutting.

Meanwhile, over in Tauranga avocado growers Ralph Jefferson and Pat Rooney had been discussing a plan similar to Graeme's with Pat Sale and a few others. The two groups learnt of one another and decided to hold a joint meeting.

On October 25, 1979 the Bay of Plenty Exploratory Committee met at the Erinlea Lounge in Tauranga to 'explain

to growers developments in the avocado industry'. The meeting was chaired by Brian Earp and 210 people attended.

At this meeting Grahame spoke of how members of the Te Puke and Tauranga/Katikati fruitgrowers association avocado sub-committees had decided to work together to promote avocados on a national basis. He presented a standard box with a logo similar to that of the Californian industry. Growers using this box were asked to pay 25 cents per planted tree plus 25 cents per box.

Topics of the day included the lack of consumer knowledge about avocados, especially in New Zealand, and promotion possibilities such as creating pamphlets with information about how to buy, store, ripen and prepare avocados, along with recipes. Newspaper promotion was also discussed, as was the idea of having educators visit retailers. Fruit quality was an issue, with packing and grade standards on the agenda, along with indexing trees to check for the presence of Avocado Sun Blotch Viroid (ASBV). Australia was using ASBV as a reason to not allow New Zealand growers to export fruit into its markets.

Ralph Jefferson moved, seconded by the late Arthur Honeyfield, that an avocado promotion committee be formed comprising two representatives from Katikati, Tauranga, and Te Puke along with one person to represent the rest of New Zealand. The motion was passed unanimously and, as mentioned above, the first meeting of the NZAPC was held in February the following year.

The minutes of this meeting record the following committee members as present: Messrs (Allan) Boggiss and (Rendall) Henderson – Katikati; (Phil) Torr and (Grahame) Ross, Te Puke; (Derrek) Henriksen and (Ralph) Jefferson, Tauranga; and secretary (Don) Turner. Mr (David) Manton was absent. Representatives for Opotiki,

Gisborne or the rest of NZ had not yet been elected.

The group spent most of its first year focused on proving there were no trees in NZ affected by Avocado Sun Blotch Viroid, arranging a scientist to test trees. It succeeded in doing so and today Australia has developed into New Zealand's largest avocado export market. Fruit is also sent to Japan, America and South East Asia.

In 1982 the APA has the first recipe leaflets produced for including in trays of fruit sent to market. In 1984 Robyn McDonald was contracted to be the association's promotions officer to carry out in-store avocado demonstrations.

Around the same time a 30-minute film was made on avocados, which featured in the 'Fresh and Fancy Fare' series. Joint TV promotions with Watties were also made.

Ron Bailey took over from Grahame Ross as chairman of the APA in 1987 and continued in the role for 16 years. June Bronger took over as secretary in the same year, staying until 1998, by which time the HEA required secretarial work to be done out of Wellington.

Ron oversaw significant industry change. In 1989 the APA changed its name to the Avocado Growers' Association and at the same time the industry decided to come under the Horticultural Export Authority for its export sector.

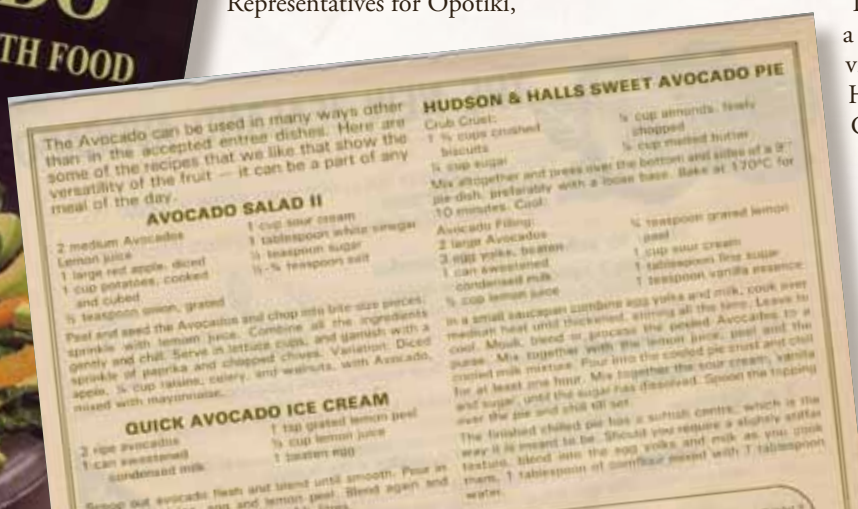
The health benefits of avocados became a focus of promotions and 'no cholesterol' stickers were introduced. 1991 saw a series of TV ads with information on how to use avocados.

The Avocado Export Council was incorporated in 1992 and in 1997 changed its name to the Avocado Industry Council.

John White spent two years as chairman from 2002-2004 before Hugh Moore was elected to the position.

In 2005 the AIC became a wholly owned subsidiary via the purchase of the Horticulture Export Council share.

Hugh resigned in 2007 and was replaced by current chairman John Schackenberg.



The AIC and AGA today

Today the AIC is contracted to supply the AGA's administrative services and acts as its commercial entity. It represents the interests of growers and exporters as required.

Under the HEA Act and the Export Marketing Strategy (EMS) the AIC collects a management fee from growers, packers and exporters to implement the EMS objectives – delivery of a quality product to customers in export markets. The EMS is reviewed by the AIC and approved by the HEA annually.

Currently the AGA has 1481 grower members representing 1564 orchards. The AIC employs a 10-strong team of technical and business support staff. Its new office has allowed for better laboratory facilities and more meeting space.

Promotion remains a major role for the AIC and in the 2007/08 year it spent \$250,000 on a promotion campaign developing the 'Beautiful Inside' generic campaign. It also carried out generic promotions in Australia. Research and development is also a key part of its business, along with keeping growers informed of industry developments.

Then and now – industry pioneers have their say



Ron Bailey –

On the reasons for starting a promotion association:

"It was an opportunity to develop the industry into an organisational body and get some structure. Prior to that it had been every man for himself, as it continued to be for some time at grower level.

"The crop was almost unknown to New Zealand consumers in early 80s and late 70s. Avocados were this strange fruit, or was it a vegetable? It was about getting people to taste avocado for the first time and getting supermarkets to do in-store tastings. It was very much a case of introducing a new crop. It was a very exciting time."



On the industry today:

"I think it's reached the next stage.

Exporters have utilised and created good export markets. Now we have bigger volumes and very high prices are hard to achieve. There are bigger and stronger commercial entities and packhouses are starting to flex their muscles.

"Quality has been a problem over the last few years. There's a huge opportunity to improve the quality of product to the consumer. We have moved big volumes without meeting quality objectives in every case."

"Biennial cropping is a major challenge. We probably haven't, as an industry, put enough investment into the production side."

On Grahame Ross:

"He had the belief that this whole bunch of avocado growers out there should become an industry. Grahame came from a background of structure and organising small growers into organised groups (he was involved in the Fruitgrowers Federation and the citrus industry), as had other growers that met in that pack shed that night.

"He was instrumental in pulling together meetings and took on the role of chairman. His contribution to the industry was to bring people together and start creating an organisation."

The AGA/AIC is planning a series of special Avoscene articles celebrating the 30 year anniversary of the founding of the Avocado Promotion Association in 2010. If you have any interesting stories, photos, meeting minutes, promotional material or news clippings from the past that you are willing to share, please contact Edwina. All material will be returned.

"When I took it on, I took it on the next couple of steps, with legislation and getting the industry on a more professional footing."

On June Bronger:

"June was a very organised lady. She understood people and had great people skills. She was able to sum up a situation and put a case very clearly. She was a feisty little lady that said exactly what she thought but did it in a way that didn't upset people. She was very popular with people. Grahame and I both worked very well with her. She was enthusiastic and passionate about promoting avocados as a new crop."

June Bronger –



On the early days of the industry:

"Everywhere you went there were roadside stalls in those days. It took a long while for the growers to be

educated – we had charts made to show when was the best time (to sell) in terms of ripeness."

"We had to introduce what a ripe avocado looks like and what you can use it for. At that time people still cooked them."

On her time as secretary:

"It was a really fun job and they were great people to work with – Grahame and Ron were great chairmen. It was a very positive time."

Other early avocado growers:

Tauranga's Peter Kent obtained a permit to import a range of grafted avocado varieties in 1947. He did not however go for a large planting like the Greys in Gisborne, instead focussing on propagation. His trees were the parent source of many trees planted in commercial orchards, particularly Fuerte and Zutano. Fuerte was the most widely planted variety in early years – Hass did not surpass it until the 1970s.

Derrick Henriksen is another early Tauranga grower who started developing his plantings in the early 1960s.

Well-known Katikati grower Arthur Honeyfield planted his first avocados at Kauri Point in 1968, obtained from Derrick and Rendall Henderson of Katikati. Rendall had started to experiment with growing avocados in the late 1950s.

Te Puke's Walter Bayliss had a Fuerte tree in his garden for many years and in 1963 he planted out 45 seedlings and grafted scions supplied by Len on to them. His one successful graft became a source of scions for himself and his neighbour Grahame Ross, who was having no luck getting seedlings to grow.

Alistair Brown and Tim Simcock of Oporiki both obtained seed from Len Grey in 1967, starting the Eastern Bay of Plenty region's avocado plantings.

On the industry today:

"I think it's marvellous now you can buy a pot of guacamole out of the freezer.

"In our day we didn't have anything to do with rejects – there was no oil or body products."

"I think the industry is quite a difficult one in respect of the crops being up and down. But I think growers are now much more committed to doing the right thing and putting the right fruit on the market."



Grahame Ross -

On the early days of the industry:

"Nobody really knew how to handle them (avocados). We put

together posters and notes, nutrition booklets, and mats with recipes on the back. We were trying to teach people what they could do with avocados and how to know when to eat them. That got very confusing because there were 10 different varieties and they all had different means of ripening."

"Guacamole is the best thing to break people in on avocados."

"We didn't know a great deal about

A glimpse of industry history

promotion. I went to a course at Riverside University in California for a week. The theme was 'from the ground to the market'... We met the CEO of the Californian association and they had a huge board room table. He spread all their promotional material out on it and said 'take what you want'. It sparked ideas off. I think we were successful for the limited finances we had."

On the industry today:

"The heart foundation tick (is great). People are becoming more conscious about food – how it's handled, where it comes from, and the quality."



Hugh Moore -

On the early days of the industry:

"We were a bit argumentative - that was the style of Katikati. We felt the (first) boxes were poor."

"I was a rebel. I challenged what they (the APA) were planning. I wanted something more like what they have now. I had it all written out and had the export council on it even before they did."

"At that point I wasn't overly keen on having individual product groups at national level because they had to pay and run everything themselves. Grahame Ross was opposed to the idea though. He didn't want other fruit growers poking into avocado business, which was what was happening with the citrus board. I never thought that there was a fear of that because we had our own sectors in Fruitgrowers. But I still supported the industry and went to all the meetings. You either chuck rocks at the chairman or support him."

"I think they were successful but I think we could have got more resources out of Fruitgrowers orchard levy funds. (If we had done it my way) we would have got to the same position where we are now, we just would've got there quicker."

On Ron Bailey:

"He was a very good stabiliser. He's quite a diplomatic guy. He sometimes knew things should be done but he was

very diplomatic about it. He wouldn't push the boundaries, where I would. He served the industry very well. He started some of the first offshore work with other groups – South Africa and Australia – and helped to build the first Australian/New Zealand joint conference. Ron saw the industry through from the early days, from kitchen tables to making it more professional. He saw it move to having Wellington secretarial services and hiring Jonathan Cutting as research manager."



David Grey -

On the early days:

"It was a wonderful industry in the early '80s. The money was absolutely phenomenal."

On the success of the avocado industry associations:

"It's hard to measure success. I was involved with Robyn McDonald (as chairman of the promotion subcommittee) who did a lot of promotional work far and wide. Robyn was an avocado enthusiast, which was a big help. It went a long way to getting the industry well known. I think it was successful but later promotion was neglected while research and politics went on."

On the industry today:

"Look at the number of trees in the ground that aren't fruiting yet and Australia's protectionist society. What happens when you're relying on one market?"

"There are also quality issues. I say to people 'Why are we still growing a variety that was registered in the 1930s? Can you think of any other industry that is?' I think Hass has a lot of problems growing in New Zealand, though industry leaders say export fruit is pretty much problem-free. But the local market – there's some appalling fruit. It's a major issue."

"Our favourite variety is Sharwil. It doesn't perform as well in production but if we could get some of the qualities of Sharwil into Hass, I reckon it would be the ultimate variety. But that's a 50 year project."

"It's got a lot more administration now, which is the part of the industry

continued ...

I didn't want to get involved in. But it was probably necessary. I think the administration is pretty sound."



Pat Sale –

On the early days of the industry:

"Grahame Ross and Ralph Jefferson had vision and foresight. They could see the

growing avocado scene would need some sort of coordination and planning if it wasn't going to be chaotic. It needed a body to represent the industry at Fruitgrower level and political level. They wanted to see a rational, sensible development that was grower controlled, (because) the growers are the ones with the main investment.

"It was very fortuitous that there was an industry body as when we started exporting to Australia in the early '80s Sun Blotch Viroid came up.

"Hugh Moore was really against the association in those days. He thought the APA should stick to promotion. But it has stood the industry in better stead than had it stuck to promotion."

"It was an exciting time being involved in the development (of the industry).

Like most pioneering things, there was a tremendous amount of enthusiasm. It was great working with enthusiasts like Grahame Ross, Ron Bailey, Norrie Lees, June Bronger and Jim Clark."

"I think the industry made a mistake at some point in the early '90s – they decided to spend their research budget on a wider range of things. I think they should have concentrated on the ripe rot problem. That was a major one as we were trying to develop markets. But it's history now."

On the industry today:

"The industry has come a long way. It's developed quite a good infrastructure. The seeds that were sown with the setting up of the APA have come to bear quite a bit of fruit. But it suffered somewhat with the pains of growth because of erratic cropping. We are growing on the edge of feasibility for a subtropical crop like avocados - that makes the growing pains more difficult.

"Developing markets with an erratic

crop is difficult because you develop a market and then next year, can't supply them. I think we are on the way (to getting more consistent cropping). This has been very exciting for me to see, even though I'm not directly involved."

On Grahame Ross and Ron Bailey:

"I think a lot of industry development goes down to those two. Both had their feet on the ground and were very good at conflict resolution. With a growing industry and people sitting round the table, tensions developed. Conflicts were managed without getting out of hand - other fruit industries didn't do that."

NEW ZEALAND Amazing Avocados

AVOCADO WITH SEAFOOD:
1 ripe avocado
Lemon juice
125gms (4oz) small prawns or shrimps

Sauce:
1/4 cup mayonnaise, 3 teaspoons tomato sauce, 1 teaspoon brandy, Pinch curry powder, Few drops lemon juice, 2 shallots

Cut avocado in half lengthwise, remove the stone and brush the surface with lemon juice. Arrange prawns (Shrimps) in each avocado half and spoon sauce over.

Combine mayonnaise, tomato sauce, brandy, curry powder, lemon juice and chopped shallots. Mix well.

SALADS
Avocados are delicious on their own when sprinkled with salt and pepper or can add that certain touch of class when sliced in either certain types of fruit salad as

There are three basic types of avocado pulp.

AVOCADO OPEN SANDWICHES
Avocados make perfect sandwich filling either sliced or mashed.

Sliced
For open sandwiches or crackers slices in lemon juice to retard the ripening of the avocado.

Combinations
Because avocado has a smooth texture it combines well with other ingredients in sandwiches. A variety of different breads or crispbreads can be used.

1. Spread the bread with cream cheese, with bean shoots and place avocado slices on top. Season with black pepper and mixed grain breads or crispbreads can be used.

2. Place tomato slices on toast and with avocado slices and garnish with fried bacon.

RIPENING AND STORAGE
Buy them hard – use them naturally by storing in fruit baskets at room temperature. Once they have ripened store them for several days in a refrigerator.

NEW ZEALAND AVOCADO

There are many varieties of Avocado throughout the world. In order of maturity throughout the season running from:

Zutano: A large pear-shaped fruit, green and thin skinned.

Fuerte: Also green skinned, pear shaped and quite large.

Hass: Medium to large fruit, with hard skin, black when ripe.

Hopkins: A hard fruit with dark green smooth skin.

Colour Photograph courtesy Auckland Star, Food Section.

AVOCADO: The Ultimate Health Food

AVOCADO NUTRITION: AVOCADOS provide only 300 calories (750k) per average half – an ideal substitute for higher calorie foods.

AVOCADOS contain no cholesterol, are high in fibre and are a good source of easily digested protein.

AVOCADOS are high in vitamins, minerals and trace elements containing quantities of carotene (Vitamin A), B complex vitamins, vitamin C, iron, potassium, phosphorus and magnesium.

AVOCADOS are an ideal food for infants, invalids, athletes and the elderly. They are easily digested, very nutritious and delicious.

SELECTING AVOCADOS:
To test ripeness, cradle in the palm of the hand and squeeze gently. Ripe avocados yield slightly to pressure. Hard avocados by storing at room temperature - or place in a paper bag with a banana or kiwi fruit. Once ripe, avocados can be stored in the refrigerator for several days. NEVER store unripe avocados in a refrigerator as this damages their delicate flesh.

AVOCADO PREPARATION:
1. Cut lengthwise into halves.
2. Twist gently to separate halves.
3. Stick a fork into the seed, lift out and discard.
4. To Peel: Place fruit on palm of hand, or a flat board, cut side down. Slip skin from stem end.
5. Slice lengthwise for fans, or long slices or crosswise for smaller slices or for spreading for toast.

AVOCADO SPINACH SALAD:
2 ripe avocados, peeled and sliced
1/2 cup olive oil
1 bunch spinach washed and dried
2 oranges
Freshly ground black pepper

Place avocados over spinach and onions in a large bowl. Add orange juice, olive oil, salt and pepper and toss. Cut other orange in half, squeeze juice over salad. Cut other orange in half, squeeze juice over salad. Just before serving. Serves 4. Illustrated over.

EASY AVOCADO HEALTH DRINK:
1 ripe avocado, peeled and chopped
1 cup orange juice
1/2 cup water

Place avocado and 1 cup orange juice in blender. Gradually add remaining orange juice. Serve immediately. Makes 4 cups. Serves 4.

AVOCADO ASIA: An exotic taste.
2 avocados
1 can (200g) lychees, drained
2 shallots, thinly sliced
1 cup strong black pepper
2 teaspoons soy sauce

Cut avocados in half lengthwise and remove stones. Place lychees in a bowl and toss with soy sauce. Slice lychees filling into avocado halves. Serve immediately. Makes 4 cups. Serves 4.

AVOCADO & SMOKED SALMON: A luxurious treat.
2 avocados, peeled and sliced
4 slices smoked salmon
1 cup olive oil
1/2 cup strong black pepper
2 teaspoons soy sauce

Slice croissants crosswise bearing a 'finger' of filling. Slice avocados and slice and pepper. Sprinkle remaining avocado slices with lemon juice, olive oil and smoked salmon in croissants. Sprinkle with black pepper. Croissants can be filled with avocado slices, cucumber slices, onion rings, sliced asparagus. Serves 4.