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5th Floor, Hunt Library  
Carnegie Mellon University  
4909 Frew Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15213-3890  
Contact: Archives  
Telephone: 412-268-2434  
Email: [huntinst@andrew.cmu.edu](mailto:huntinst@andrew.cmu.edu)  
Web site: [www.huntbotanical.org](http://www.huntbotanical.org)

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#### *About the Institute*

The Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation, a research division of Carnegie Mellon University, specializes in the history of botany and all aspects of plant science and serves the international scientific community through research and documentation. To this end, the Institute acquires and maintains authoritative collections of books, plant images, manuscripts, portraits and data files, and provides publications and other modes of information service. The Institute meets the reference needs of botanists, biologists, historians, conservationists, librarians, bibliographers and the public at large, especially those concerned with any aspect of the North American flora.

Hunt Institute was dedicated in 1961 as the Rachel McMasters Miller Hunt Botanical Library, an international center for bibliographical research and service in the interests of botany and horticulture, as well as a center for the study of all aspects of the history of the plant sciences. By 1971 the Library's activities had so diversified that the name was changed to Hunt Institute for Botanical Documentation. Growth in collections and research projects led to the establishment of four programmatic departments: Archives, Art, Bibliography and the Library.



THE ARISTOCRAT OF SALAD FRUITS

## CALAVO GROWERS OF CALIFORNIA

4803 EVERETT AVENUE

LOS ANGELES

CABLE ADDRESSES  
NEW YORK  
"CALEAST"

LOS ANGELES  
"CALAVO"

PHONE JEFFERSON 4291

Sept.  
1,  
1934.

Mr. Wilson Popenoe,  
United Fruit Company,  
Tela, Honduras.

Dear Wilson:

In case the news has not as yet percolated into Honduras, the new Cuban Reciprocity Treaty leaves us just where we were before, with avocados from Cuba remaining on the "duty-free" list. A so-called "restriction" was agreed to by Cuba, whereunder shipments of avocados will not be cleared from Cuban ports for American entry, except during the months of June, July, August and September, starting in 1935. Records for several years past indicate that comparatively little fruit reaches this country before June or after September.

Just what we will attempt to do about this situation is not known. Off-hand it looks as though we are licked, but we are still keeping at it.

By the way, recently questions have been put to us as to dietetic customs of the people in the tropics where the avocado is native, as to what proportion of their diet consists of this fruit, how they serve and eat it, and so on. Most of the literature on avocados contains general references along these lines, but nothing specific. I am wondering if you could give us, without having to go to too detailed or lengthy an explanation, some of your observations on this subject. Is there any scientific basis for attributing longevity of humans in the tropics to avocado diet, and if so, to what extent?

Naturally, we do not expect to use your reply as authority for a lot of fantastic health claims. We have taken a very "cagey" position as to health and dietetic claims the last few years, feeling that our data were in need of authoritative checking and rechecking before we made any statements along these lines.

Has the avocado ever been definitely traced to its absolute point of origin? From whence did the general family of avocado originally spread? How was this established, when, and by whom?

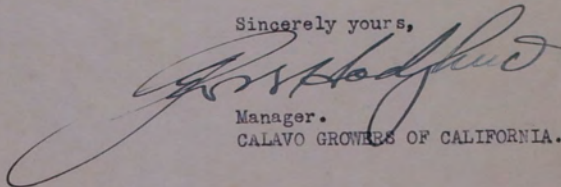
Mr. Wilson Popenoe,  
Tela, Honduras.  
September 1, 1934.  
Page No. 2

Also, is sun-blotch known in Central American countries, or anywhere besides California, so far as you know? What measures are employed for its control or eradication, and what success has attended these efforts?

Please don't go to any great amount of trouble in answering these questions, as the inquiry is prompted by academic interest rather than the necessity for specific data.

With kindest personal regards, I am

Sincerely yours,



Manager.  
CALAVO GROWERS OF CALIFORNIA.

Geo. B. Hodgkin  
AJS/s

AIR MAIL



CONFIRMING OUR ORIGINAL AIR MAIL ✓



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Manager.  
CALAVO GROWERS OF CALIFORNIA.

AIR MAIL

Tela, Honduras, 28 Sept 1934

Mr George B Hodgkin,  
California Avocado Association  
Los Angeles.

Dear George:

Yours of the first came on the last steamer. Might be glad to hear from you, as always; but I do not understand how anybody thought he was making a reciprocally profitable arrangement when he left the door open to Cuban avocados loaded on board ship at Habana during June, July, August and September. I don't see any reason why that won't keep Cuban avocados in the U S market pretty well toward the end of October. If you want to go into the business, we will run one of our refrigerated ships into Habana for you on September 29th, take her out of there on the 30th, cruise around through the Bahamas with your avocados at just the right temperature for fifteen days, and deliver your fruit to you at New York on October 20th in fine condition, and all perfectly legal. What do you say to that? Now, for goodness sake don't publish the above remarks, like you did my last letter about the Cuban business. Only two men will speak to me in Cuba now. However, the above remarks might be construed as giving them aid and comfort, I suppose; though of course they have figured this whole thing out already, and will probably work just about as above set forth.

But to come to more profitable subjects: I published a paper on the importance of the avocado as a foodstuff among the Guatemalan Indians, in the Journal of Heredity, way about about 1920. If you can get to a file of the magazine you will find it. There is also something on this subject in my Bulletin 945 (USDA) "The Avocado in Guatemala". It always seemed to me that the avocado is of greater importance as an article of diet among the Guatemalan Indians than elsewhere; though it is mighty important in parts of Mexico, and in Cuba, and in the region of Santa Marta, Colombia, and perhaps other places. I would guess that it makes up as much as 25% of the daily



intake, among some of the Guatemalan Indians, at certain times of year; and they eat it very simply, usually with nothing but a little salt. The Mexicans are strong on their guacamole, and the Guatemalans of the better classes very commonly serve you half an avocado with your soup; you are supposed to scoop out the meat, drop it in your soup, and eat it like croutons, only it is lots better, particularly in clear soups. A drop of dry sherry helps, too. The Cubans eat the avocado as a salad, with French dressing or the equivalent; and they also make guacamole, sometimes. In all this part of the world it is very rarely that you see the avocado "dolloped up" in any way; it doesn't need it.

I have never seen any indication that a diet of avocados contributed to longevity. People don't live too long down here as a rule. Guatemalan Indians beyond 60 years of age are mighty scarce. Don't assume that the avocado has anything to do with this, of course. The common viewpoint down here is that the avocado is a mighty pleasant, nourishing, and easily digested food, and that's about all there is to it. As I have written in one of the publications mentioned, the Guatemalan Indians think it improves the song of caged songbirds; you might try it on a couple of dozen chorus girls, most of whom would stand some improving. If I were going out for advertising, I would base it on the facts I have just stated: that the avocado is pleasant eating, very nourishing, and mighty easy on the inner workings. I have never seen any definite evidence that we can properly claim anything unusual for it as regards longevity or anything else.

Now as to the origin of the avocado: This is a pretty deep subject and one on which I am still far from clear, after twenty years of thinking it over. I have recently written a little paper on early history of the avocado, copy of which I enclose. I sent the original to Dr Coit, through my brother, suggesting that it might serve for the next Yearbook of the Association. You will note that the avocado was growing, at the time of the Conquest, from Mexico down to Venezuela and over to Peru, but it was not on any of the West Indian islands.

I have tried to find the wild prototypes of the cultivated forms which the Spaniards found growing in the gardens of the Indians. I don't think there is any doubt that the Mexican race has its origin in the wild trees which are abundant around the volcano Orizaba, and which occur southward, to my knowledge, as far as Guatemala. These wild trees appear to represent a perfectly good species and are certainly indigenous; and there is nothing different in the cultivated forms except the size of the fruit and other characteristics which one would expect to get from cultivation. I think we are safe in feeling that we know the history of the Mexican race, therefore.

But as regards the Guatemalan and West Indian, it is not so easy. In the highlands of Guatemala, at 7500 to 9000 feet, I have seen wild avocados which have every appearance of being indigenous, and which may well represent the wild prototype of the Guatemalan race. In fact I am almost willing to bet on this. But whether this same form represents the origin of the West Indian I doubt. Down back of Santa Marta, Colombia, the mountains are full of wild avocado trees, which are straight West Indians in every respect. For years I thought them to be escapes, but I have now seen so many of them that I begin to believe they may be truly indigenous. If so, this might very easily represent the prototype of the West Indian? But how to tie it up with the wild form in the mountains of Guatemala, which botanically cannot be differentiated, so far as I am aware? That is the question. Most probably they are nothing more than geographical forms of one and the same species.

There remains the wild avocado of Central America with fruit like that of the Guatemalan, - thick woody shell, - but anise-scented leaves. It doesn't tie up with either the Mexican or the Guatemalan race very well, but here again the botanists cannot make out that it is anything but Persea americana. the more I see of it, the more I feel that this wild form has nothing to do with the origin of our cultivated races.

So there you are; figure the rest out for yourself. I have been trying



for some years to find time to work up a monograph embodying all this and other "information" which I have garnered hither and yon in Latin America, and I still hope to do so. I thought as a started I would work up the little resumé of early history which I enclose, and publish this; then go ahead with the botanical and pre-historical part as fast as possible, and maybe in another two or three years I can whip the whole thing into shape. Every year I wait I seem to get some more information, and I suppose this would remain true for a couple of hundred years.

Finally, as regards sun blotch, I get off easy; for I don't know anything about this trouble have never seen anything down here which I thought to be the same as your sun blotch of California, and hope I never do. Be there.

Always faithfully yours,