

**Mexico's *Empresario* in Export Agriculture:**

**Examining the Avocado Industry of Michoacán**

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## Introduction

This paper examines the responses, strategies, and role of entrepreneurs in the avocado industry of Michoacán. For Michoacán, avocado now represents one of the most important export crops, in light of Mexico's recent entry into the U.S. market. In this export-oriented agricultural economy, local entrepreneurs, including both producers and packers, have displayed a dynamism, different forms of alliances, and reliance on informal contacts--organizational characteristics that appear to be more appropriate to a globalized market system. This paper draws on documentary research and ethnographic interviews conducted with regional *empresarios*, individuals identified as leaders in establishing the avocado industry, market contacts in Mexico, and international market contacts, both in Europe and in the United States. The analysis centers on the role of the entrepreneur, strategies and decision-making processes in dealing with the market, informal relations with regional contacts, and perspectives on the role of state authorities. This paper is based on on-going fieldwork; thus, any conclusions and/or interpretations are preliminary, requiring further study and analysis.<sup>1</sup>

In anthropology, research on entrepreneurship has been conducted within the arena of economic anthropology. Economic anthropologists have examined the critical role that entrepreneurs and brokers play in the operations of economic systems (Acheson 1985; Plattner 1984), but the contributions of this research have not been recognized generally within cultural anthropology. More recently, Alvarez's research on Chile exporters provides documentation on the complex relationship between economic behavior and strategies, on the one hand, and cultural ideology, on the other (Alvarez 1994 and 1998). This link between business operations and culture provides a deeper understanding of economic behavior in complex, volatile, and integrated

international market systems. Given the increasing globalization of national economic systems, economic anthropology can make an important contribution to a broader understanding of this relationship, thus providing a more complex and accurate picture of the nature of economic behavior in the global marketplace.

In contrast to anthropology's general avoidance of entrepreneurship and global marketplaces, scholars in management and organizational science have appropriated "culture," integrating the concept into research on cross-cultural business and management situations. In many cases, their definitions of culture refer to early anthropological definitions from the culture and personality school, emphasizing culture's ideological and normative aspects. This static and normative perspective then allows the management scholar to study and identify a cultural management "style" that is concrete, characterizes an entire industry within a culture, and comprises a limited number of defining characteristics. More recently, management scholars engaged in cross-cultural research have questioned these practices, arguing for a less positivist approach and for more attention to global perspectives (Boyacigiller and Adler 1991). In addition, non-U.S. management scholars are developing theories and perspectives on management and entrepreneurship, grounding their interpretations within the rich context of their own ethnographic knowledge. For Mexican organizational scholars, analyzing the relationship between Mexican culture and entrepreneurship, particularly with regards to leadership and the *empresario's* role, leads to a better understanding of the transformation currently being experienced in Mexican managerial culture (DelaCerde Gastélum and Núñez de la Peña 1996; Martinez and Dorfman, in press). In addition, Mexican scholars site their analysis of entrepreneurs within a cultural context, acknowledging the importance of culture in shaping managerial and economic behavior. In

Mexico, the *empresario* often comprises both a manager, someone involved in the daily operations, as well as an entrepreneur, the owner who assumes financial risk in developing a family and/or small business (Dela Cerda Gastélum and Núñez de la Peña 1996).

In Mexico's agricultural sector, scholars are reexamining the nature of organization and producers' relations with the market and the state. During the 1980s, new forms of productive organizations emerged, organized as economic associations and not restricted by territorial boundaries (Hernández 1992; Moguel 1992). By 1991 economic privatization and new agricultural policies opened the countryside to market forces (Cook, Middlebrook, and Horcasitas, eds. 1994). Scholars now document new groups, that cut across sectoral lines, and new alliances, spanning previously rigid political lines (Carton de Grammont 1995 and 1996), and the dynamic nature of shifting ideologies and strategies (Fox 1994; Stanford 1995). Given the transformation currently underway in Mexico's agricultural sector, it is more useful to shift the research focus from organizational structure to process, that is, by focusing on the role of individuals, such as *empresarios*, and their social relations of alliances and power within different commodity sectors.

This paper represents an initial attempt to characterize the nature of the *empresario* in the avocado industry of Michoacán. In so doing, I place the *empresarios* within their historical context; that is, I recognize the dynamic nature of entrepreneurship in this agricultural industry, reflecting changes in economic opportunities and the crop's expansion from 1950 to 1990. Furthermore, I also detail the linkages between other socio-political groups, such as the federal and state government, smallscale avocado producers, and the international market, in order to examine the responses of entrepreneurs to existing political and economic conditions that

structure the avocado industry. In so doing, I attempt a balance, recognizing a degree of autonomy by entrepreneurs as they establish alliances and implement economic strategies, while recognizing that their economic and political behavior takes place within the broader context of a complex socio-economic system.

### **The Avocado Industry in Michoacán: an Overview**

During prehistoric and historic periods, avocado represented an important fruit crop throughout most of Latin America, represented by a wide range of varieties. In Michoacán, archaeological evidence and oral tradition indicate that different avocado varieties were produced throughout the different climatological zones in the state.<sup>2</sup> Throughout the colonial and national periods, avocado in Michoacán represented one component of a diverse orchard production system; estimates are that in 1950, producers in the Uruapan area grew 14-20 different orchard fruits, including coffee, banana, oranges, and *juaquiniquiles*, as well as other locally known tropical fruits. In 1950, Uruapan, the major city in the temperate zone of Michoacán, had an estimated population of 25,000, depending economically on the export agricultural development of the neighboring tropical lowlands, the Valley of Apatzingán. Within the regional economy, wood production, along with the accompanying processing of resin and turpentine, represented the primary industry.

From 1950-1990, the introduction of improved avocado varieties, particularly Hass from California, and subsequent expansion of avocado production and commercial operations transformed the Uruapan region. The impact of this transformation has been dramatic. Seeing high domestic prices and export market potential for avocado, producers quickly expanded avocado orchards from 1,000 hectares in 1960 to 28,614 in 1980, to 57,490 hectares by 1990

(Cano Vega 1995:5), with estimates now at about 100,000 hectares. In 1973, Michoacán produced 27.21% of national production; by 1992, the state dominated with 86.49% of Mexican avocado production. Now Mexico is the world's leader in avocado production, with an estimated 900,000 tons/year; in essence, Michoacán produces 700,000-800,00 tons of avocado per year, 35-40% of world avocado production, concentrated within the municipalities of Uruapan, Peribán, Tacámbaro, and Zitácuaro (Cano Vega 1995). The avocado industry's expansion has supported a demographic explosion; in Uruapan, the major commercializing center, the population has grown from 45,727 people in 1960 to 187,623 by 1990 (Mora Camacho 1992).

In Michoacán, avocado comprises a complex ecological, economic and political structure. The varied topography of the temperate region of Michoacán produces a wide range of micro-climates, suitable for growing avocado almost year-round. The land tenure system is extremely heterogeneous, with an estimated 75% of the production area in private property and only 25% in the ejido or communal sector. The avocado industry's production profile is also quite heterogeneous. Of the estimated 6000 producers, only a handful of private producers have commercial operations and produce for the export market. Furthermore, orchard size varies greatly, ranging from small orchards of 1-5 hectares (both private and ejido producers) to large commercial operations of 500 hectares.

In 1982, Michoacán began to export avocado to Europe, and most recently, in 1997, the United States Department of Agriculture lifted the 1917 phytosanitary ban against Mexican avocados, allowing Michoacán entrepreneurs to export avocados to the northeastern U.S. for the first time in sixty years. Despite recent attention to the export market, 97% of avocado production continues to be marketed in Mexico, through central markets in Mexico City,

Guadalajara, and Monterrey. Commercialization of the product primarily occurs through a series of packinghouses situated in Uruapan. As of 1996, 70 packinghouses in this area were legally registered to pack avocado, as well as other fruits, for the national market. As with production, these packinghouses vary widely in operating scale and level of technology, extending from those with imported computer equipment to thatched operations with wooden tables. Since 1990, U.S. companies, such as Dole and Mission Produce, based in California, began to buy avocado, exporting in closed containers from U.S. ports to the European and Japanese markets. These importing companies market 85% of the export volume on a commission basis, while only 15% are marketed directly through packinghouses and/or companies based in Michoacan.

From 1950-1998, the rapid growth of this agricultural industry has been littered with the remnants of failed attempts to "organize" producers and packers (Stanford, in press). Local producers and packers pride themselves on their shared history of individualism, that they expanded production and markets through their own initiative, with private bank credit or self-financed, and without much state intervention or "organization." Local producers and other economic actors in the avocado industry openly have expressed skepticism towards Mexico's agrarian reform program and mistrust of the state's agenda in all development programs (Escalante Díaz 1989; Hernández Cervantes and Pesqueira Olea 1988). Intent on creating formal agricultural organizations, state complain about producers who fail to attend assemblies, only pay up their membership in order to market their fruit, and resist government phytosanitary campaigns to establish adequate pest control in the orchards. Of the estimated 6000 avocado producers in Michoacán, less than 50% belong to any formal organization; of that 50%, local informants acknowledge that participation often is limited to having their names on a piece of paper (Sánchez

Pérez 1991:48). Despite this recognized state of "disorganization," avocado *empresarios* have created, institutionalized, and expanded an agricultural industry that appears to be thriving despite Mexico's recent financial problems. Furthermore, the recent negotiation of the lifting of the phytosanitary ban and local efforts to comply with USDA regulations demonstrate their intention to survive in a global economy. The role of the *empresario* in this industry is based in historical establishment of avocado, changing throughout different periods reflecting different state policies and market conditions.

### **The Role of *Empresarios* in the Avocado Industry**

#### **Establishment of avocado production (1955-1965)**

In the early 1950s, several entrepreneurs, none from Michoacán, established nurseries of improved avocado varieties in Uruapan, bringing in budwood for the Fuerte variety from nurseries in Puebla. In 1957, these local nursery owners began to import Fuerte and Hass budwood from California, offering producers access to improved avocado varieties. Introducing improved varieties required that producers chop down existing *criollo* avocado orchards, grafting the buds of the improved varieties onto the existing *criollo* root stock. Producers also removed other fruit orchards, replacing them with improved avocado varieties, or expanded orchard land into existing forested land. In these cases, they first planted the native avocado variety, later grafting the improved varieties on the established trees. Initially, producers preferred the Fuerte variety, given that it was more commonly accepted by the Mexican consumer. By 1960, local producers recognized that the California Hass varieties produced better in the Michoacán climate, and many subsequently chopped down Fuerte orchards to regraft Hass budwood, expanding the domination of the Hass varieties (Gallardo, et.al. 1987).



The new varieties brought with them the need for new technology and technical innovation. When nursery owners and a small group of producers began to import Hass budwood from California, some local entrepreneurs and producers quickly developed sophisticated grafting skills. Once the existing *criollo* avocado trees were cut down, grafters used razor blades to slice exposed tree cores, inserting Hass buds into slits placed closely under the tree bark. At a local restaurant situated on the central plaza, the early pioneers met frequently, debating over the viability of different grafting methods and reporting on the percentage of successful takes with different experimental grafting methods. Furthermore, establishing new orchards required sophisticated knowledge of layout and design, irrigation procedures, soil requirements, pruning, and harvesting. Some technical assistance was available, from established commercial producers in Puebla or through California extension, but, in general, early pioneers contended that they themselves were the best information source. At the same time, sharing information and findings was accompanied by an underlying sense of competition. Early producers also have recalled that they sometimes were reticent to reveal commercial operations and that they even misled their fellow entrepreneurs with false information. As the success of avocados became apparent locally, producers were forced to protect new orchards. They recall the challenge of establishing new grafts and new orchards, hiring guards to protect orchards at night and theft of newly established Hass grafts.

By the middle 1960s, success of the first orchards began to attract other investors, particularly commercial producers and packers involved in the cotton, lime, and cantaloupe industry in the neighboring lowlands of the Valley of Apatzingán (Mendoza 1996:61). Some of the earliest avocado pioneers allege that two types of *empresarios* emerged during this period;

they distinguish between themselves, as the early producers, and later arrivals from the lowlands, categorized more as investors than producers. The pioneers claim that they were the ones who established the new varieties and that their primary concern was in production of a high quality orchard. In contrast, they allege that later investors often purchased already established orchards, reinvesting profits from other commercial agricultural activities, concerning themselves more with their orchard's commercialization than production quality.

Avocado's expansion in the Uruapan area was accompanied by new and expanded market contacts in major Mexican cities, primarily in Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. Continued commercial success of the new Hass varieties depended on convincing consumers that Hass was a good avocado, since Mexicans were not impressed initially with the skin's dark, rough texture and preferred the thinner skin, green varieties, such as the Fuerte. Wholesalers in the major markets preferred Hass since the fruit shipped better and moved to promote the new improved variety. In Uruapan, as local entrepreneurs and wealthier producers recognized the commercial opportunities, they moved to establish packinghouses, often little more than a shed with a tin roof and a pile of packing crates. Recognizing the gains to be made through marketing, some of the wealthier pioneer producers reinvested profits from orchard production in the establishment of machinery and mechanized packinghouses. By vertically integrating their production and commercialization operations during the early expansion years, these commercial producers established the economic base for surviving market fluctuations, particularly in the early 1980s when overproduction saturated the market and lowered real prices.

### **Institutionalization of the avocado industry (1970-1980)**

By the late 1960s, under the Echeverría administration, the Mexican government expanded state involvement in supporting commercial agriculture. Facing unrest and political crisis in the agrarian sector, the state directed agrarian policy and public investment towards the development of commercial crops. In 1961, the state had established the National Commission of Fruit Production (CONAFRUT), designed to develop programs of fruit production. In 1965, the Michoacán State Forest Commission began to produce nurseries of selected fruit trees in order to expand fruit production by offering free trees to ejidatarios in rural communities throughout the temperate and highland regions, often as part of reforestation programs (Mendoza 1996:60). Thus the state proposed to replicate the established success of commercial fruit production, particularly avocado, by extending similar commercial opportunities to agrarian reform beneficiaries.

Despite these efforts, peasant producers did not possess the technical knowledge nor the capital investment required to maintain the orchards. Government efforts to provide information, technical assistance, and financial support were channeled through CONAFRUT, reaching primarily medium and large producers, as well as packers. Credit also was available through the Fondo Instituido para el Redescuento Agrícola (FIRA), but in the case of avocado, organizations of private producers and packers were the groups who met the credit requirements. In 1970, the estimates were that 70% of Mexican fruit production was in the hands of private producers, who developed orchards with their own resources and who had better credit access. Beyond a small group of government programs, credit was available primarily through private commercial banks, and only producers and/or investors with collateral and established income sources met bank credit requirements. Other early producers claimed a mistrust of banks, preferring instead to

reinvest earnings from their first orchards to expand production or construct packinghouses.

Thus, even during periods of state intervention in commercial agriculture, the avocado industry remained a system in which entrepreneurs were required to invest personal capital, either through self-financing or bank credit. This requirement essentially eliminated any extensive participation by the ejido sector. In addition, those ejido communities that received avocado trees as part of state granting programs brought their fruit into production in the early 1980s, at a time when studies indicate that avocado's profitability declined rapidly (Mendoza 1996:87).

### **Entrance into the European market (1980-1990)**

As Mexico's economic growth slowed in the late 1970s and avocado production expanded, saturating the national market, avocado prices stagnated and production profitability declined (Mendoza 1996:126). New producers, particularly those with small orchards, faced increased production costs, little state support, and declining prices; many sold off their orchards during the 1980s, resulting in a further concentration of orchards among wealthier, commercial producers. Other small producers held on, maintaining their orchards without great capital investment, netting low yields, and marketing their produce with local packers who sold to the national market. Commercial producers who had established packinghouses in the 1970s, found themselves poised to survive, based on marketing large volumes of avocado in the national market through commission. Other entrepreneurs, including a small group of producers and packers, turned to the European market, viewing entry into the export market as a means to recoup the prices and profits of the previous decade.

In 1982, a small group of commercial producers and packers first sent consignment shipments to the European market. In Europe, 85% of the commerce of fruits and vegetables was

carried out through commission sales, whereby the European wholesaler would market Michoacán avocados through distribution centers, with all risks accruing to the Mexican exporter. Furthermore, different European countries assigned ad valorem taxes at different levels, reflecting the established quality of the fruit product and its acceptance within the Generalized System of Preferences of the then European Economic Council (EEC) (Paz Vega 1986b:26). The new exporters had minimal experience in international business and were ill-prepared to handle problems in the international transport of fruit to Europe (Cano Vega 1995:26). Export entrepreneurs faced challenges in maintaining fruit quality in post-harvest handling in the packinghouses, transporting the fruit within Mexico, and securing shipping transport that guaranteed the timely arrival of the fruit in the European market. In addition, as some recalled, Michoacán packers had learned early to mistrust their own compatriots in Mexico's national market, but they naively trusted European wholesalers. At severe costs, they learned quickly that selling by commission required sophisticated market knowledge and vigilance of the commission agents. The Michoacán *empresario* assumed great risks entering into the European export market. Placing the orchard and/or packinghouse as collateral to secure a bank loan, the local exporter depended desperately upon timely and full payment of exported avocado shipments to cover debts incurred. During the 1980s, some of the producer/packers who had survived the decline of national prices fell victim to the export market, as banks foreclosed on orchards and packinghouses to recoup unpaid loans.

Those export *empresarios* who survived began to develop sophisticated knowledge of infrastructural development, packing facilities, transportation services, and the politics and risks of international finance. As avocado exports expanded in Europe and Asia, particularly Japan,

Michoacán exporters turned their eyes towards the U.S. market. For Michoacán avocado producers, the U.S. phytosanitary ban on Mexican avocados represented a political ploy initiated by California avocado producers in defense of their market (Paz Vega 1986a). Producers initially hoped that NAFTA's passage would open the U.S. market to them, but the case of avocado points to increasing use of non-tariff barriers in an era of free trade and economic liberalism (Gutiérrez Samperio 1991). The Commission of Avocado in Michoacán maintained offices both in Uruapan and in Washington, D.C., lobbying for a reversal of the 1914 ruling that banned Mexican avocado imports. Lobbying efforts were reinforced by regional programs to eradicate the avocado seed weevil, coordinated by local producer organizations, the Ministry of Agriculture (SAGAR), *Sanidad Vegetal*, and the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales del Pacífico Sur (CEFAP), the regional branch of the national agricultural and forestry research system.

#### **Entrance into the U.S. market (1997-1998)**

Regional planning and cooperation among a large number of public and private organizations were required to eradicate the insect larvae of the avocado seed weevil and to meet USDA standards to declare certain areas "free zones" from quarantined insect pests. The coordination continued, working towards convincing U.S. technical experts of the producers' serious intent and discipline to maintain pest-free orchards. In 1997, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reversed the 1914 ruling that banned Mexican avocado imports. On January 31 the U.S. Animal and Plant Health Inspection Services (APHIS) approved a final rule to allow Hass avocados from Michoacán to be imported into 19 northeastern U.S. states from November through February, under the restrictions that growers meet phytosanitary requirements (USDA 1997). The USDA import guidelines established specific procedures, requiring that

Mexican avocado shipments be marked with stickers identifying the packing house and contained in sealed refrigerated vehicles in passing through U.S. border checkpoints. In addition, Michoacán growers were required to work with USDA inspectors in surveying orchards to detect pests, carrying out adequate field sanitation procedures, and inspecting packinghouses, among a whole series of restrictions (USDA/SAGAR 1997). In defending its decision, the USDA acknowledged that California and Florida producers might be economically impacted, but the agency contended that the benefits to U.S. consumers would outweigh U.S. producers' minimal losses.<sup>3</sup>

Satisfying the USDA requirements during the 1997-98 season required extensive coordination among different Mexican federal and state agencies, as well as among producers. Furthermore, the state of mistrust between U.S. inspectors, on the one hand, and Mexican inspectors and avocado producers/packers, on the other, required communication, collaboration, and verification in the orchards and packinghouses. In some cases, the procedures required that brigades, comprised of a team headed by one USDA inspectors and one Mexican inspectors, carry out coordinated inspections in order to guarantee compliance and build trust (SAGAR 1998). The results were successful. During the 1997-1998 season, Michoacán exported 5,000 tons to the northeastern United States with relative few complications in the field, packinghouse, or transport. The projections for the 1998-1999 season are to continue limited expansion, working primarily with those producers who registered for the 1997-1998 program. Facing a limited market and the threat of retaliation by California producers if there are phytosanitary problems, those *empresarios* involved in the program are hesitant to expand participation beyond their limited group. Outside the group, other interested *empresarios* continue pressing for further expansion of the program and inclusion of more producers.

## Conclusions

The preliminary nature of this research precludes substantive conclusions, but several issues merit further investigation, analysis, and interpretation. I briefly outline these themes, laying the basis for further discussion and study, without claiming the validity of any conclusions.

First, in contrast to the agenda of much social science research on Mexico's agrarian sector, the case of the avocado *empresario* never has represented nor proposes to represent a social experiment designed to promote a more equitable participation by rural producers in commercial agriculture. From its initial establishment, avocado has always been a crop that required significant investment, both in production and in commercialization. Those pioneers who entered into this entrepreneurial activity reinvested capital from other agricultural or forest enterprises, using profits from their orchards or securing credit to expand further their orchards or to establish commercial packing operations. In discussing avocado's benefits for the region, early producers refer to the expanded employment opportunities through working in packinghouses, orchards, or avocado-related industries, such as construction, but there is little mention of extending production and/or commercialization opportunities to small or medium producers. From the perspective of the avocado *empresario*, Mexico's social experiment in the countryside should have never occurred, and these issues are no longer relevant. Now, the challenge is to build an enterprise that can survive in the global market.

Second, the nature of the avocado *empresario* changed during different periods of the industry's history, reflecting both the entrepreneurs involved as well as external conditions, including levels of state support and international market opportunities. Clearly, research on the relationship between entrepreneurship and culture within a particular industry must examine



economic behavior and individual roles over time, in order to accurately capture the role of the entrepreneur in shaping the particular industry. The individuals who first pioneered avocado in Michoacán do not comprise the same group that expanded into the European market, nor does this group appear to be the same cohort poised to enter the U.S. market. The personal, financial, and political characteristics required to be a pioneer in an industry may not guarantee continued success as the economic system transforms, expanding and increasing in complexity.

Third, despite many producers' claims of independence and self-reliance, state support and political ties have been important factors in allowing the *empresario* to play an important role in shaping the development and the culture of the avocado agricultural industry. The Mexican government provided technical support and credit access to some degree, although not to the extent some producers would have preferred. However, the state's nonintervention perhaps had the greatest effect. In other commodities, such as cotton, tobacco, and sugar cane, for example, the state intervened heavily, extending participation to the agrarian reform sector through targeted subsidies, formal organizations, and controlled markets. In turn, in avocado, by not including the ejido sector, the state allowed *empresarios* to shape the direction and organization of the avocado industry. Thus, in the 1990s, with expansion of neoliberal policies and the opening of the Mexican economy, avocado entrepreneurs stand poised to expand into the global market, while smallscale producers remain marginalized, operating in an almost separate economic system, that of the national market.

Fourth, the range of behaviors along the dimension of individualism to formal organization throughout the industry's history have constructed some sort of culture of the *aguacatero*. The avocado industry is littered with the legacy of failed cooperative efforts, bankrupt *empresarios*,

and an ideology of mistrust among producers, packers, exporters, and state representatives. However, this ideology and behavioral patterns also have suited the interests of those *empresarios* who possess the financial resources, political savvy, market contacts, endurance, and luck to survive. Recognizing new export opportunities in the U.S., federal and state officials now redouble efforts to "organize" producers, contending that some sort of formal organization can regularize production and commercialization in such a way to deliver high quality export fruit and not saturate the U.S. market. Returning to the work of DelaCerde Gastélum and Núñez de la Peña 1996, I would suggest that Mexican agricultural entrepreneurs are experiencing a parallel transformation to that of Mexican managerial culture. The successful efforts to enter the U.S. market and comply with USDA phytosanitary requirements during the recent 1997-1998 season indicate the capacity of avocado *empresarios* to organize themselves in ways that are appropriate to the culture of the avocado industry. This form of organization possessed certain characteristics. First, it comprised a specific short-term goal. Second, it was limited and bounded in time. Third, only a small group of avocado *empresarios* participated, reducing the potential for dissension and noncompliance. Fourth, the efforts produced short-term economic benefits. Whether or not these successful efforts can be sustained remains to be seen.

With the entrance into the U.S. market, Michoacán exporters see a golden opportunity. Projections for future exports vary significantly, reflecting the optimism or skepticism of those interviewed (Maldonado 1997; Sierra Reyes 1997). Yet the nature of their participation remains unknown, reflecting uncertainty about the future of the industry, Mexico's economy, and U.S. avocado producers' intentions. In the summer of 1998, CALAVO, the California avocado producers' cooperative, constructed the largest regional avocado packinghouse in Uruapan.

Facing the second U.S. export season, Michoacán producers and packers continue to meet in the same restaurant on the plaza in Uruapan, discussing not the viability of different Hass grafts, but speculating on the ulterior motives of CALAVO.

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## Notes

1. This paper is based on on-going research conducted in Uruapan, Michoacán, with the support of a Fulbright-Hays Faculty Research Abroad award, from the U.S. Department of Education, and a Fulbright-García Robles award, from the J. William Fulbright Foreign Scholarship Board. I also acknowledge the support of Ing. Octaviano Lemus Leon, Director of the Facultad de Agrobiología, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolas de Hidalgo, for institutional support during the course of this project. Appreciation is also expressed to Ing. Jose Alvarez Silva, Director, and Ing. Jose de la Luz Sanchez Perez, Investigator, CEFAP, Uruapan, for assistance in establishing contacts, and Lic. Daniel Angel Sanchez Perez, for comments and suggestions. All interpretations and conclusions remain the responsibility of the author. These findings and interpretations are preliminary and, thus, will be subject to future development and revision.

2. The Mexican name for avocado, *aguacate*, comes from the Nahuatl word, *ahuacate*, or testicle, referring the way in which avocados hang from the tree. In Michoacán, the Purépecha word for avocado is *cupanda*. Throughout the state, the names of indigenous communities refer to the prehistoric production of avocados, as in, Copándaro, "place where there were many avocados," and Cupátaro, "where there were avocados" (Mendoza 1996).

3. California avocado producers had fought bitterly to either defeat or delay the ruling. In response, they launched a public campaign against the ruling, running newspaper ads that alleged high levels of pest infestations in Michoacan avocado orchards. On February 6, 1997, the California Avocado Commission announced that the growers' association would not legally challenge the USDA ruling, although they left open the possibility of future action. California growers expressed skepticism in APHIS' ability to oversee Mexican imports in the 19 states and to prevent fruit from being shipped into avocado-producing regions in the U.S. In addition, the California Avocado Commission publicly warned that they would monitor avocado imports and would file suit in U.S. courts if there was evidence of pest infestation. The newspaper of the U.S. produce industry, *The Packer*, has monitored the situation and California avocado producers' position during 1997 and 1998.