

Tropical Fruits

SMOOTH CAYENNE PINEAPPLE CULTURE AT PUNTA GORDA, FLA.

J. M. Weeks.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Some weeks ago I was requested to write an article on the above subject, and I asked the gentleman making the request whether or not he wanted a true history of the fruit as I know it here—the failures as well as the successes. “Oh,” he remarked, “you need not mention the failures.” The article was not written. I believe the stating of actual facts as nearly as we can give them, and the presenting, as nearly as we can, reasons for the successes and the failures in any business, to be better eventually for the State and the community, than painting everything “rosecolor,” thus finally creating discontent and disgust in the enthusiastic settler.

My experience in pineapple growing has been limited to the culture of the Smooth Cayenne variety, under sheds, near Punta Gorda during the past ten years.

Almost all the lands in and adjacent to Punta Gorda are adapted to the shed-

grown, fancy, Smooth Cayenne pineapple, but some are better than others. For instance, lands lying within one-half mile of Charlotte Harbor are better protected from cold than those farther away. Then some low lands which can be readily drained are better than the higher, lighter, more sandy soils, because they seem to contain more humus and the pineapple is a very gross feeder.

The country about Punta Gorda is nearly level, with a gradual slope from the interior to the shores of the bay, thus giving good drainage where ditched. Its natural growth is pine trees and palmettoes.

The first step for the prospective pineapple grower, after selecting and purchasing his land, is to have it cleared, or “grubbed.” This will cost him from \$30.00 to \$50.00 per acre, the price being governed by the amount of trees and palmettoes on the tract. Then it should be plowed and later harrowed fine. The first plowing will cost \$6.00 per acre, and

the harrowing from \$4.50 to \$5.00 per day.

The construction of the shed is next in order. Ten years ago when we could buy the best lumber for \$14.00 per thousand feet delivered, we used 1x3 inch slats, generally 16 feet long, for the partial covering, placing the three-inch slats three inches apart, thus making a half cover, and a protection from both heat and cold. These slats were placed north and south so that there would be alternately sunlight and shade over the plants and the fruit, as the sun makes its daily journey from east to west. They were placed on 1x8 inch by 16 ft. stringers, which rested on fat pine posts eight feet apart one way by fourteen or sixteen feet the other way. Those sheds then cost about \$600.00 per acre. The great advance in lumber, however, necessitates the construction of cheaper sheds, so we now place our posts fourteen by fourteen feet apart, using No. 10 galvanized wire instead of the heavy 1x8 stringers, No. 14 wire for cross supports and ordinary building, or plaster laths, woven with No. 16 wire, instead of the 1x3 slats for the cover. This shed can be constructed for about \$400.00 to \$450.00 per acre. It is about seven feet high, and protects the pineapple from both extremes of heat and cold, and conserves the moisture in dry seasons. This, together with proper fertilization and cultivation, produces pineapples so large, so juicy, so luscious, and so tender that one fruit will be sufficient for two meals for a large family and the pulp may, if desired, be separated from the peel and eaten with a silver spoon.

Next, the beds are made up and the

plants are set out. There are four kinds of plants, viz., suckers, slips, rattoons, and crowns. Of the four, suckers are best and crowns least desirable. I usually set plants eighteen by twenty-four inches apart, thus getting about ten thousand to the acre. Other growers set them at different distances, each to his own liking. Plants cost from \$25.00 to \$50.00 per thousand, according to whether they are or are not culled. As before stated the pineapple is a gross feeder. After having been set out the young plants should be fertilized immediately and afterwards at intervals of every six weeks, of course being frequently worked with the "scuffle" hoe. At least \$100.00 in fertilizer per acre should be given the plants to bring them to maturity.

Plants mature their fruit from fifteen to twenty-four months after having been set out, and the same plant, or rather, the plant and suckers thereon, will bear, if properly cared for, several crops. I have plants which were set out more than five years ago and which are still giving me good results. The richer the soil in which the young plants are set, the longer will the fruiting continue.

The pineapple has many diseases and the fruit many enemies. Thus, wilts (a fungus growth), root-knot, dieback, ants, and mealybugs are some of the principal enemies of the plant. It matters not which of these diseases attacks a plant the result is much the same, that is, the roots die and the plant languishes, getting what nourishment it can without roots. Six years ago we used to throw these plants in piles outside the pinery and burn them, to prevent, as we supposed,

the further spread of disease. Now, we simply pull them up; cut off the dead roots, strip them, put them back in a hole made by a posthole digger, throw a half-handful of fertilizer among their leaves and let them grow. About 75 per cent. of plants so treated do well. We fight the enemies of the fruit with poisons.

Results after all are the test of success, hence, we want to know what are the results of all this expenditure, labor, and waiting. If the land and plants be properly selected, if the plants be carefully and conscientiously fertilized and cultivated, and are thrifty, the first crop should be about four hundred crates per acre at an average price of about \$2.00 per crate. After crops will run about three hundred crates per acre. Of all the fancy varieties, the Smooth Cayenne is

most cultivated for market here, because it is smooth, while all other varieties with which I am acquainted are serrated; because its flavor is delicious; because its appearance is striking and tempting, and because it is a better shipper than most of the others. He who buys one real good Smooth Cayenne will want another.

I have used the word "failure" in connection with pineapple culture, and will say that any one who will not give labor, fertilizer, and close attention to the business had better not go into it. There have been failures in every section where the shed-grown Smooth Cayenne pineapple has been grown. Perhaps proportionately fewer in Punta Gorda than in some other sections. I believe the soil and conditions about Punta Gorda to be especially adapted to the growing of this fruit.

Miss Florence R. Harden.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen:

The excellent papers of Mr. Reasoner and Mr. E. V. Blackman, read before this Society last year, on tropical fruits, not only gave the names of a great many of the varieties that have been grown in Florida, but discussed many points of interest concerning the best known varieties.

This paper will, I fear, be rather rambling in style, and will merely touch upon a number of fruits and questions about them that will be intended to provoke much discussion. There is no doubt in my mind that tropical fruits should have

a more important place in this Society than they have ever yet had. The limited area in which these fruits will thrive, and the undeveloped condition of that portion of the State, together with the fact that most Americans have not become acquainted with even the existence of such fruits, partly accounts for this lack of interest. I should say lack of general interest for most of the information that I can find about tropical fruits has been written by men who either live in Florida, or have spent much time in studying her resources and problems. I do not know how we are to induce people to take a general interest in the pamphlets, bul-

letins and reports that have been written for us. The government has done its part to help the faithful ones to teach us all, but, alas! I do not think they are read as they ought to be. Perhaps, a more serious difficulty is, that the tropical fruits ripen in summer time when such a large per cent. of our educated people are out of the State.

It has been proven that a great many of the choice fruits may be shipped safely, long distances. I have several times had mangoes and avocados shipped to me when they had to make a three or four days' journey and they reached me in good condition and kept more than two weeks in an ordinary refrigerator, a few ripening each day.

A little of my experience in having a display of tropical fruits at the Michigan State Fair at Detroit, may be given here. There were more than thirty varieties in the collection. The weather was very hot in the Southern States through which they had to pass and yet the first shipment which was well packed arrived in fairly good condition and the fruits kept so well that I had a creditable display left at the end of ten days.

The keen interest the people took in these fruits was a constant surprise to me. Hundreds had never seen a grapefruit and the citrons, pawpaws, avocados, cermans, green cocoanuts, sapodillas, mammee apples, guavas, limes and many others aroused the keenest interest and many amusing questions.

Almost every minute some one would say: Do you eat them? All these things? This too? Others who had traveled in the tropics were full of intelligent ques-

tions about the country where these wonderful fruits grew. The taste for most of these fruits is supposed to be acquired, but I do not remember a single person who did not relish a fruit that I prepared for tasting. One great trouble is that often they are either under ripe or over ripe when first tried and of course that causes prejudice.

I can remember when few people in the western states knew the taste of pineapple, and the little green things were so sour that it is a wonder they got a hold on the people as soon as they did. I have a great many tropical fruits growing in my orchard and I find that most people like them at first taste, when they are just ripe.

Something is usually said about mangoes and avocados, and I would not take up your time with them, but I must say a little. The East Indian mangoes are certainly delicious, and salable, but, so far, they are such small producers for me that I think we need to know more about them. I have a large budded mulgoba, a beautiful tree, that is eight years old and it had the first blossoms this year and there are two fruits hanging on. Other trees seven years old have also the first bloom this year and only a few fruits. The Bennetts have done some better, but not well. They bloomed splendidly, but do not set much fruit. The Gordon did about the same.

Eight years ago, we secured four dozen mulgoba mangoes from Mr. Gale of Mangonia—large luscious fruits they were. We planted all the seed as an experiment. The seedling trees are large, vigorous and beautiful. They are very

different in appearance. This year a number of them are fruiting, and I am eager for them to ripen. The fruit on three of the trees is a dark rich purple, with green underneath. They look like they will be large—are the shape of the mulgoba, and I think they are going to be a month earlier than the budded trees. Part of the other trees have fruit shaped like No. 11, some having large fruit and abundant quantity, while others are thin, poor looking fruits and still others are rounder. I hope to have a more interesting report of them next year.

Dr. Gifford has some of the Philippine mangoes that he secured in Mexico that he hopes will do well here. The quality he says is as good as the best East Indian varieties, and they are heavy bearers.

Last year, Mr. Blackman reported that the Department of Agriculture at Washington had pronounced an avocado, originated by himself, and named the "Blackman" to be the best avocado yet tested, all points considered.

This year, I have the honor of making a similar report—as a fruit sent from my orchard and named "The Haden," in honor of Captain Haden, who planted the seed, was pronounced to have more good points than any yet tested. May the honor be shifted each year!

Unfortunately, I have had to leave the State in summer the past seven years, and have missed learning many valuable lessons.

I believe that there are possibilities of preserving, evaporating and otherwise treating these fruits, that would prolong their season.

One of my neighbors dried some of the fruits of the carissa and said it acted very much like dried apples when soaked in water.

The Carissa Grandiflora is one of the handsomest of our plants. The large white flowers are both beautiful and fragrant and the deep red fruit on the dark green foliage is especially attractive. The first is a good deal like a raspberry in flavor, and makes a nice sauce or jam.

The tamarind can be dried or put up in sugar or molasses, as the Bahamans do, and makes a pleasant drink when added to water, or they are nice used as a conserve. I find that almost every one who passes my tree stops to look for a few ripe tamarinds and they are eaten as rapidly as they ripen.

The sapodilla has been neglected, as it is a fine fruit and the tree is very ornamental. I find that the fruit makes one of the best sweet pickles I have ever made, I am going to try to dry them this year.

It takes the seedlings a long time to bear, and there is a saying among the Bahamans that he who plants a "dilly" tree will not live to see it fruit. This may account for its scarcity in the gardens as most people are very fond of the fruit, and the tree grows of itself, after it is started. It grows wild on the keys.

The sapota blanca is an unusually beautiful tree. Only a few weeks ago I said that I did not esteem the fruit of it highly but recently I have changed my mind. My tree is not in a good place and has very little attention, but I believe if it were well treated that we might grow to value it as they do in Mexico, where it is a great favorite.

The Surinam cherry is such a nice fruit—the tree and fruit are both beautiful. I hope that more people will plant them. Many prefer them to strawberries, and they are certainly much less trouble to grow. The Barbadoes cherry is said to be even superior to the Surinam cherry.

No paper on tropical fruits should fail to speak of the pawpaw (*Carica papaya*).

It is so delicious and so wholesome. The fondness for it grows upon one and it can be prepared in different ways for the table. If you are short of vegetables, a green papaw, stewed like squash and seasoned with salt, pepper and butter can not be told from squash. If you want an apple sauce, season it with lemon or

lime juice and add sugar. When ripe the favorite way is to eat them from the shell like a cantaloupe, but strangers like them better peeled, cut in cubes and seasoned with sugar and lime juice.

The Cocoa plum grows wild on the beaches and when one can get them they make a splendid substitute for the northern May cherry, if lime juice and sugar are added after they are stewed in water. The guava is so well known that I have not spoken of it although it is a very interesting fruit to me. Time would fail me, were I to try to tell of all the interesting fruits that we have in south Florida, so I desist.

Cocoanut Grove, Fla.