

Annexure N: Avocado harvesting critical guidelines

BEST PRACTICES - AVOCADO HARVESTING

Quality starts on the farm - therefore these practices are to be strictly adhered to:

Maturity testing

Avocado fruits are mature before picking, but not yet ripe/ready to eat. They must be ripened off the tree. The ripening process takes from a few days to a week, depending upon the degree of maturity, storage temperature and variety. Fruit maturity tests should be carried out before picking.

Picking

Avocados should be picked by hand using ladders and picking poles. Selective picking is essential during the early season. Certain cultivars may have more than one set during a particular season, and these may be at different maturity stages at the time of picking. Less mature (later) sets are generally more susceptible to chilling injury, while more mature (earlier) sets are more likely to soften and to develop grey pulp during storage.

The following principles apply when picking:

- Avoid picking during wet weather, as fruit are more susceptible to skin damage and fungal infection.
- Fruit must never be left in the sun after picking.
- If pedicels are present, the length must not exceed 10 mm.
- No anthracnose infected or visibly diseased fruit should be delivered to the packhouse.
- Remove fruit destined for oil/guacamole before taking it to the packhouse.
- Early season fruit or fruit picked after rain is more susceptible to bruising and lenticel damage.
- Handle lugs/bins with care to prevent bruising.
- Pickers should be trained in basic hygiene and fruit handling.
- Wilted fruit are not to be picked. [Ideally orchards should be irrigated] 2 days before harvest to ensure soil moisture content of -15 to -30 kPa at time of harvest)
- Dropped fruit, or fruit from the orchard floor should not be placed with fruit for local/export markets. This fruit should be placed in separate bins.
- It is recommended that avocados are transported to the packhouse under at least 80% shade cloth
- Every effort should be made to pack/pre-cool the fruit within 12 hours after picking.

Hygiene

- Fingernails should be kept short and clean.
- Cuts and other wounds must be covered.
- Handwashing before the harvest procedure begins and after any break is compulsory. Hands must be washed after each toilet visit.

- Use soap to wash hands.

Delivery to the packhouse

- Picking containers must be transported carefully to the packhouse because the skin of freshly picked fruit is susceptible to impact and vibration damage.
- Cover loads to minimise heating of fruit, to prevent sunburn and to prevent dust from entering the picking containers.
- Avoid excessive delays between picking and delivery to the packhouse.

Handling in the packhouse

- On arrival at the packhouse, place field containers (crates or bins) under cover to prevent sunburn of the fruit and build-up of field heat.
- An assessment of fruit quality on arrival will alert the grading staff to any likely defect. The quality and maturity assessments can be recorded on a delivery assessment sheet along with the number of field containers received.
- Cooling before packing may be necessary if delays are excessive.

General:

- Report any contact of bodily fluid with fruit and put contaminated fruit aside so that it can be destroyed.
- Look out for any form of sabotage and theft.
- Do not transport fruit to the pack house with soil.
- Keep detailed records of each harvest (i.e. block numbers, picking teams, dates, delivery notes).