



From left to right: Tasha Boerner Horvath, assemblymember; Ken Melban, CAC; Robert Rivas, Assembly Ag Committee Chairman; Jason Mraz, avocado grower/musician.

# Commission Highlights Environmental Contributions of California Avocado Groves

By Ken Melban  
Vice President of Industry Affairs

Over the last few months California Avocado Commission staff has forged new opportunities to promote the environmental benefits California's avocado groves provide. These efforts began in November 2020, when the Commission hosted Assemblyman Robert Rivas at Jason Mraz's Oceanside avocado grove. Rivas had just been named chair of the Assembly Agriculture Committee in September and was conducting a state-wide agriculture tour. During Chair-

man Rivas' visit, which lasted nearly two hours, Commission representatives highlighted the tremendous value California avocado groves provide to California by protecting the environment, enhancing the economy, and improving communities.

During the visit we also discussed the challenges California avocado growers face, from increased regulatory costs to foreign competition. Chairman Rivas prepared a thorough report entitled 2020 Agriculture Tour (Califor-

niaAvocadoGrowers.com/sites/default/files/RRivas\_AgricultureTour\_FinalReport.pdf), and in the opening he states: "My goal was to meet with stakeholders across the state and gather perspectives on the needs of California's diverse and productive agriculture industry, which has been seriously impacted by the effects of COVID-19 and recent wildfires. Findings gathered from the tour will help to inform public policy reforms in upcoming legislative sessions to aid recovery, combat the ongoing effects of



Robert Rivas, Assembly Ag Committee Chairman and Jason Mraz, avocado grower/musician.

climate change, and maintain California's agricultural leadership."

Timing is a big part of life, and just ahead of the grove visit, the Netflix documentary, "Kiss the Ground" (KTG), was released, which includes Jason Mraz. KTG focuses on regenerative farming and looks at the negative impacts of tilling and the release of carbon back into the environment. Regenerative farming, in part, focuses on practices that maintain and create healthy soils, thereby sequestering carbon. We had encouraged Chairman Rivas to watch KTG ahead of our grove visit, which he did, and we were able to use that as a springboard to discuss the compelling uniqueness of commercial avocado groves. We highlighted areas like carbon sequestration, the industry's no-tilling of soil, natural leaf litter that creates healthy soils with significant microbial activity that helps sequester carbon, and the reduction in urban sprawl, among other benefits.

We also, strategically, tied in Governor Newsom's key initiative of "Resilience to Climate Change," which was launched just ahead of our grove visit. We advocated the importance for our industry to be recognized and incentivized for the existing contributions California avocado groves provide to a healthy climate. During the visit, the idea of an avocado pilot program was birthed, and the Commission has been working with Chairman Rivas to develop a pilot program intended to preserve and expand ecosystem benefits resulting from avocado production practices including carbon sequestration, fire suppression, air quality, open space, erosion control and groundwater recharge.

Chairman Rivas is considering including the program in "The Food, Farm, and Economic Recovery Bond."

These efforts also may prove useful in the future with the current administration, which is considering plans for the United States Department of Agriculture to develop farm-oriented proposals to address climate change.

Finally, because of the initial grove visit, Chairman Rivas invited the Commission to participate in an Assembly Informational Hearing on Environmental Farming in February. Jason Mraz graciously agreed to provide testimony and was an amazing ambassador for our industry. He carried our industry's message well ([CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com/sites/default/files/Mraz-testimony-2-10-21.pdf](https://CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com/sites/default/files/Mraz-testimony-2-10-21.pdf)). As Chairman Rivas indicated privately during the hearing, "He's [Jason] got members engaged...in a good way."

Chairman Rivas' use of the word "engaged" really ties it all together. The Commission is involved, often behind the scenes, to remain engaged with decision makers who impact growers' businesses. Our goal is always to affect policy, so the outcomes benefit our growers. To be candid, most often the



Jason Mraz testifies for Assembly environmental farming hearing.

odds are stacked against us, as these types of efforts are difficult and come with no guarantees. But rest assured, we will continue to advocate strongly for the California avocado industry, regardless of our chances for success. 🥑