

## The Peaks & Valleys of Growing Avocados



Doug O'Hara

As every season winds down I find it useful to look back and reflect on the year and the events that shaped the season — good or bad. There are so many variables that affect our avocado season and I think it is important to explore each one of them and see how we, as an industry, can improve our future and continue to be successful.

In my mind, this year's high point was the increased demand for California avocados we experienced in February, directly after the Super Bowl. All of us industry veterans know that for the past 10 years or so picking before or directly after the Super Bowl was not a good economic practice because of the large amount of import fruit in inventories. This season, I was surprised and excited to see that packing houses needed the fruit because the retailers were asking for California avocados. Not only was I able to sell my fruit for a good price, but I was able to get fruit off the trees early and help with the coming bloom.

Why did this happen? More importantly, why did this happen when there was approximately 30 million pounds of import fruit in inventory? My first response is to say it's because our fruit is grown in California, but the real answer is our marketing. I have to commend Jan DeLyser and her team on their extraordinary ef-

forts this — and every — season. She took a focused approach by targeting key accounts that were loyal to us and it worked! It worked so well that at times there was not enough California fruit to meet the demand. This was definitely the case at the end of the season when some accounts were willing to pay a premium for California avocados. Again, we all should commend Jan and her team for their hard work and dedication.

Once again, there seemed to be more negative events during the season than positive. The first obvious challenge was the water situation. Minimal rain, continuing drought and water allocations have affected all of us in some manner. The growers that were lucky enough to have a reliable water supply saw their costs increase dramatically. Although Mother Nature always seems to throw us a curveball, as farmers we seem to muddle through. We all know the only solution is rain and lots of it. The upcoming anticipated El Niño won't be enough; we need years of adequate rainfall to replenish our dwindling supplies.

Another current and future challenge is the polyphagous shot hole borer (PSHB) that has been found in commercial avocado groves in San Diego County. We still do not know what the future holds concerning this pest, but I am confident that

CAC staff, the board and industry researchers will continue to monitor the situation and find ways to keep the PSHB population from increasing. On a positive note, the spread of PSHB has slowed significantly and cultural methods are being used in groves to help reduce existing populations. Keep your eyes open for email updates and articles in *From the Grove* and the GreenSheet for the most current PSHB news.

Let's switch gears and look ahead to the 2016 season. From what I see and hear, we should all enjoy a larger crop in 2016. The final crop estimate has not been released, but I have heard of estimates ranging between 350-450 million pounds. I have talked with many growers who say they expect 2016 to be the best crop since the 2013 season, and I personally agree. Also, because of the high demand for California Hass — and the possibility of an earlier than normal start to the season — I am confident we will enjoy good returns even with the larger crop. Jan and her marketing team are already working on next year's programs in anticipation of the large harvest and things look positive!

Finally, I want to mention El Niño. If you are like me, you read everything and anything regarding the El Niño predictions. I recently read that there is an 85 percent chance

of an El Niño weather pattern occurring during the fall of 2015 into the winter and spring of 2016. Not only is the entire avocado industry anxiously awaiting its arrival, so is the entire state of California. Let's prepare our groves by repairing and cleaning drainage and utilizing erosion mitigation measures.

I want to thank Tom Bellamore and his entire CAC staff for a great

season and for making this first-time Chairman's job so easy. It is difficult to understand how much these 13 people do for the growers, but as Chairman I see it first hand and it is amazing. Rest assured, they have and always will have, our best interests at heart and I personally appreciate it.

Let's all pray for rain and enjoy continued success with California avocados! 🥑

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*Bob Siemer   Jessica Hunter   Wayne Brydon   Gerardo Huerta*



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