

No Two Years Are Ever the Same

Hello and Happy New Year to you! Time flies, so it is time yet again to put together another message from the chairman. This past fall I was honored to represent California avocado growers at the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fresh Summit. During the course of the show, I was part of a conversation regarding the avocado business with a group of folks that included Jan DeLyser, vice president marketing for the California Avocado Commission (CAC). Jan related that earlier in her career, when she was considering a move to the Commission, she was told by a trusted mentor to do it. Jan was told that the avocado industry was vibrant, exciting and no two years were ever the same. Jan agreed after her years of service with the Commission that, indeed, some years were similar but no two have ever been the same.

I have the same sentiment regarding the avocado industry. Last year at this time, I was sitting in my office enjoying the peaceful sounds of a Sunday rainfall. We had already accumulated enough rain to stop irrigating, but we were looking at a very small avocado crop. Contrast that with this year: we have not yet had enough rain to measure, at least here at my place in Carpinteria. The trees look great, and we have so much fruit that branches are breaking. In 2017, we finished harvest in July. If history is any guide, I probably won't be getting started picking in 2018 UNTIL July.

The big news in all of this however, is that 2017 was a record year for California avocados. In 2017, we re-

corded the highest average price per pound ever. Of course, there are a number of factors that contributed to this perfect storm for us. The first was that basic law of economics: supply and demand. We simply did not have enough fruit to supply the folks who wanted our great California avocados. The shortfall in our crop and the high demand for our fruit drove prices to record highs. The second important factor is that none of the handlers of California fruit blinked. They held the line and protected the value of our crop. They deserve our thanks and our encouragement to do the same in the upcoming year. The third important factor was the retailers. In the face of high prices for California fruit and adequate supplies of fruit from offshore, they could have very easily thumbed their nose at California and purchased cheaper supplies elsewhere. But they didn't. Lastly, the consumers who value the quality and taste of our fruit continued to purchase at record high prices. The consumers also deserve our gratitude.

Here are my thoughts on what the events of the past mean. Based on the past, we know that consumers and retailers are willing and able to pay a higher price for our fruit. We do not want to kill the goose that lays the golden eggs, but this is a step in the right direction to maintaining our sustainability as an industry. As I stated earlier, by encouraging the handlers, hopefully we can keep the higher floor price in place. Work with your handler to make sure you do not oversupply the market while you are harvesting. Secondly, it means that the hard work by our award-winning,



Rick Shade

dedicated marketing team is paying off. We could not have held the line on price in the face of low-priced offshore fruit if we did not have a well thought-out and properly-executed marketing program.

None of this would happen without the skilled application and use of our talented staff on our behalf. Our staff members continue to win awards and recognition for their innovative thinking and hard work. Every year, the PMA hosts a reception called "The Top 40 under 40" awards, showcasing 40 bright stars in the produce marketing world under the age of 40. Some years ago, I had the great pleasure of attending the ceremony when CAC's own Dave Cruz was honored. This year I was pleased to be able to attend the ceremony when a second CAC staff member was recognized. This time around the honoree was April Aymami of our Industry Affairs Department. I'm in awe of the talents that these two have, and am amazed at how well they perform under pressure. I rest easy knowing that we have such talented people watching out for our business.

As we look forward to another year let's consider these paraphrased thoughts by former President of the United States Dwight Eisenhower: "Farming looks mighty easy when your picking pole is a pencil, and you're a thousand miles from the orchard." 🍌