

## Facing Challenges But Moving Forward

This fall we have seen the implementation of the Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) program by Southern California Edison (SCE) and other power providers around the state. The protocol was developed by SCE to selectively turn off circuits at times of extremely high fire danger to prevent their equipment from causing wildfires. After the recent Thomas Fire and Woolsey Fire, as well as the numerous fires in Northern California purportedly caused by utility companies, they obviously believe this will reduce their potential liabilities for causing these fires.

In Ventura County, many of the agricultural areas were plunged into darkness on three occasions in October for at least two days at a time. Not only were personal lives sent into disarray due to trying to find ways to keep the lights on, prevent food from spoiling and folks scrambling to keep medical devices powered up, our farms and water districts were without power to pump wells and water delivery systems during times of extreme stress to our trees. Avocado growers and other agricultural interests have made a huge investment that requires a stable and consistent power supply. Most growers do not have water storage and even if they did, they do not have the very expensive generators required to power the pumps needed to deliver water during these critical periods. Furthermore, these were wind events of short duration. Had this been a two-week event,

as in the case of the Thomas Fire, what would have been the impact to our groves without water for two weeks?

On October 31, the Maria Fire erupted in Somis. It has been reported that Southern California Edison re-energizing lines after a PSPS may have been the cause. Talk about unintended consequences! Homes were lost and avocado orchards burned. Because the power was then turned off again, many people had no way of fighting the fire because there was no water pressure. The irony of the fact that the cause of the fire was the very policy designed to prevent fires is not lost on many.

Four days after the fire, we were honored to host Congresswoman Julia Brownley at a lunch on our ranch in Camarillo, along with several other California Avocado Commission (CAC) board members and interested growers. Also in attendance were staff members from the offices of California legislators Hannah-Beth Jackson, Jacqui Irwin and Monique Limón. The growers and CAC staff gave a very clear picture of the problems the PSPS protocol is presenting to California growers. In addition to the PSPS, we also spent considerable time discussing water, labor and the desire to pursue trade access to China, Thailand and India. Within a couple of weeks, Rep. Brownley had a sit-down meeting with the CEO of SCE; he at least was willing to have CAC board members, staff and affected growers meet with some of their management to



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discuss the effects of the policy. While it remains to be seen what, if anything, can be done to change the PSPS program, I would like to thank Rep. Brownley for her time and efforts on the industry's behalf.

After the fires, most of the avocado growing areas have had some nice rains and there seems to be more in the pipeline. There is an abundant crop and fruit is sizing rapidly. Your CAC staff is hard at work planning promotions for the coming year. At the November board meeting, we had a preview of the 2020 marketing program. It is very exciting to see the creative minds in our agencies put these programs together.

We had a very positive experience at the Produce Marketing Association (PMA) Fresh Summit this year. Angela Fraser and the CAC staff did a great job of manning our booth and making sure the right people were talked to. If you have never been to the PMA Fresh Summit show, you should try to make it the next time it is in California. It is amazing to see the variety of produce from around the world that makes it to our shores.

I look forward to serving you during my last term on the CAC board. There will no doubt be challenges ahead, but we look forward to meeting them with conviction and determination. May your winter be wet and your crops bountiful. 🍌