

Chairman's Report

Spring!

I'm looking out a window overlooking my grove in back of our house as I write this. I see young avocado trees starting their spring flush, bloom developing and can hear birds singing as they build their nests on a warm spring day. The only problem is that it is late February, and the warm weather started two months ago.

In the area where I farm, we had a late, dry and hot fall, shared the 10-day cold snap in early December with most of the state, then went straight into six weeks of hot, dry windy weather with almost no relief from our normal winter rains. The severe drought in California is entering its third year. Hopefully by the time this gets to print we will have at least a couple of inches of rain soaking into the leaf litter under our trees, but right now the long term outlook is harsh. The weeks of wind and single digit relative humidity have made tip burn a general condition in many groves. We have shut down our own irrigation sets just twice this winter and each time for only a few days. I met with my foremen at 6:15 this Sunday morning (Feb. 23) to review our current 24/7 irrigation schedule. Irrigation costs in our area are many times the average for this time of year.

The more I think about the current water crisis in California, the more pleased I am with the California Avocado Commission's (CAC) long-term policy of making water issues a high priority. We are fortunate to

have the long-time industry leadership of Charley Wolk heading our Water Committee. Under the direction of our President Tom Bellamore, CAC Director of Issues Management Ken Melban roams the halls of Washington, D.C., Sacramento, the Metropolitan Water District offices in Los Angeles and local water agencies to put our water concerns on the top of everyone's priority list. Thanks to Ken, I was able to represent CAC at a recent Water Resources Roundtable with our local Congresswoman Julia Brownley.

It is important that our elected officials understand that avocados are not at all like annual crops where you can decide to plant or fallow each year. For us, after a two-year wait for \$30 trees, we wait another four to five years to reach high production. Our industry is almost entirely irrigated with modern, efficient application technology that enables us to carefully place the right amount of water where it is needed with little waste. Every grove has a particular minimum amount of water that is required by the trees to sustain health, growth and crop volume. Any cut in water use can mean drastic changes in a grove. You will find some useful drought management strategies a little further on in this publication.

Tom, Charley, Ken and others have been working on grower issues related to imported water for years. This has been primarily a "southern" issue for California growers that has been supported by all growers



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throughout the state. It is certainly a twist to find that for now, the high-cost imported water appears to be in good supply, while the wells of many "northern" growers are dropping to critical levels. One way or another, the current water crisis is a problem for all California avocado growers.

The good news so far for this winter (if you can call it a winter) is that apart from the cold snap that did so much damage in the San Joaquin Valley, it has been a fairly mellow winter (so far) with regards to cold. I've been out fighting frost less than 10 nights this winter (so far) compared to 33 nights "out" last winter. There has been some frost damage in pockets but for the most part we have seen less damage than last year.

The best news is that if you have fruit on your trees this "off" year, it's going to be worth something special. Our average returns now are much better than this time last year. In fact, they are similar to the strong returns in the last quarter of our previous crop year. Talk to your handlers and make plans to maximize the value of each precious piece of your premium California fruit while balancing your harvest with the long-term cultural needs of your grove. Tom Bellamore, Jan Delyser and the entire CAC staff have been busy "setting the table" for us; it is time for us growers to get this season started. 🥑