

From the **Grove**

The Latest News from the California Avocado Industry

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Grower Profile

28

Chris Sayer
Saticoy, CA



From the Grove

Volume 10, Number 4

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Building the Brand



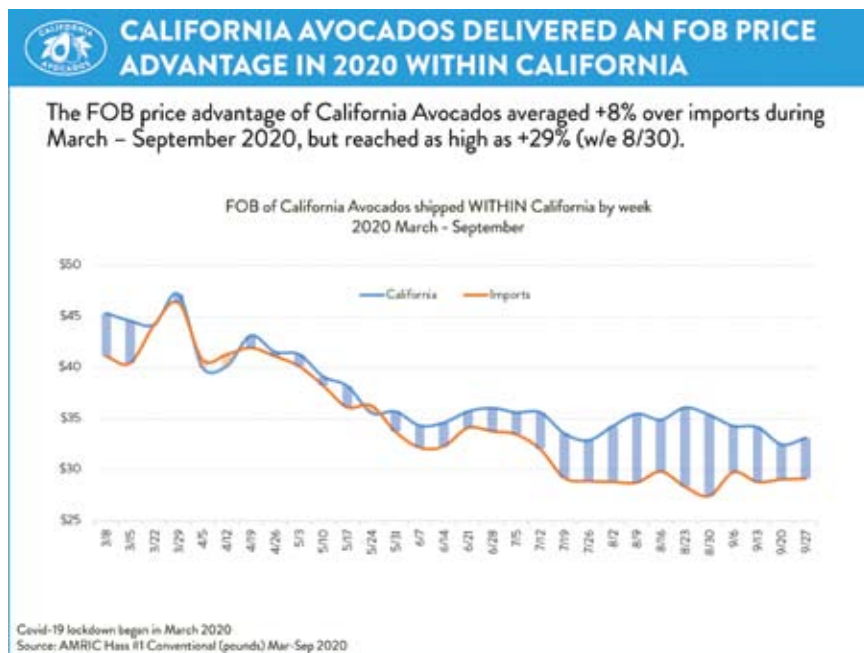
Tom Bellamore

The year 2020 has surely claimed its place in the annals of history and will forever be set apart from all others. Looking back, and as marketplace participants our inclination is to reflect on how the COVID-19 pandemic altered consumer behavior, including our own, and how the California Avocado Commission's marketing programs adjusted to near-term societal shifts engendered by fears, economic uncertainty and concern for the future. Full detail on the Commission's efforts to sustain our California Avocados brand under these dire conditions appears throughout this issue, where you'll read about social media challenges, foodservice promotions that occurred despite the enormous stress-test the sector was undergoing, and how retailers made the best of a wholly unpredictable spring. You also will read about the high notes in an otherwise bleak year, among them the evolution of CAC's consumer advertising campaign and the launch of the California avocado "merch shop."

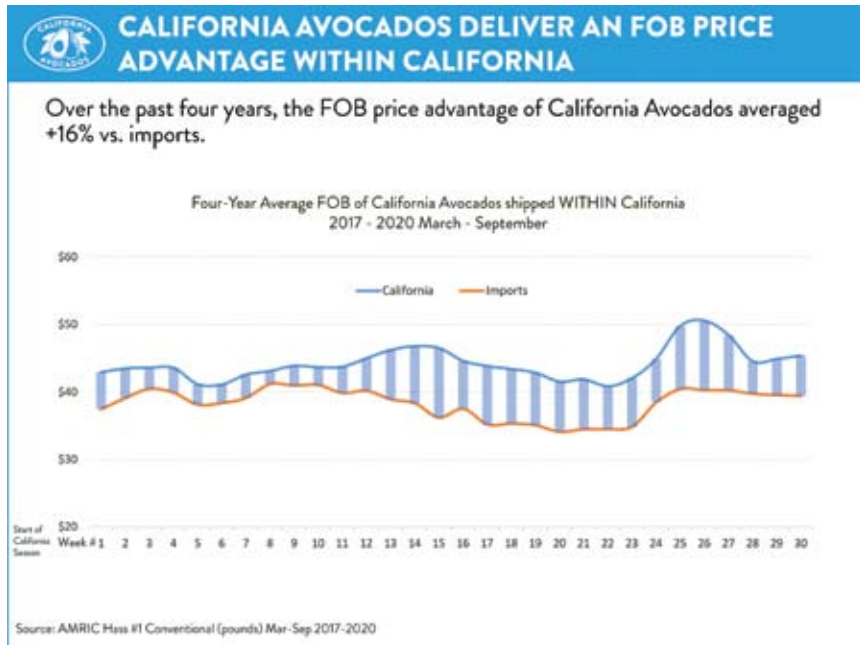
As different as 2020 has been, however, it does not change the fundamental question we (and growers) ask ourselves every year: *Are we still on course, strategically?* With-

out wanting to sound callous, in that regard, 2020 must be judged by the same standards as any other year. Industry leaders and marketers focus on incremental forward progress and tough as 2020 might have been, it is but one aberration on the broader continuum of brand-building over time.

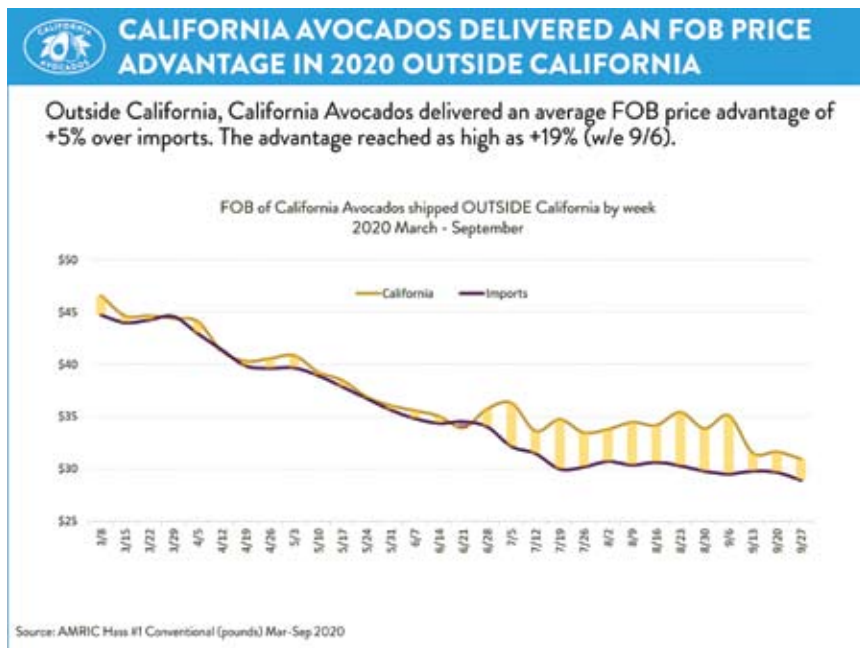
Two indicators are particularly illustrative of the kinds of measures we use to gauge our progress year over year. Recalling that the cornerstone of our strategy is premium positioning, one example of performance can be found in what we refer to as "ribbon graphs," which plot the average FOB lug price that California avocados and imports fetched across the California season, both in markets in which CAC conducts the majority of its advertising and promotional activity and those across the country where we do not.



This year, the price differential was a respectable 8%, to the advantage of California.



When taking the past four years into account, California avocados delivered a healthy 16% price advantage.

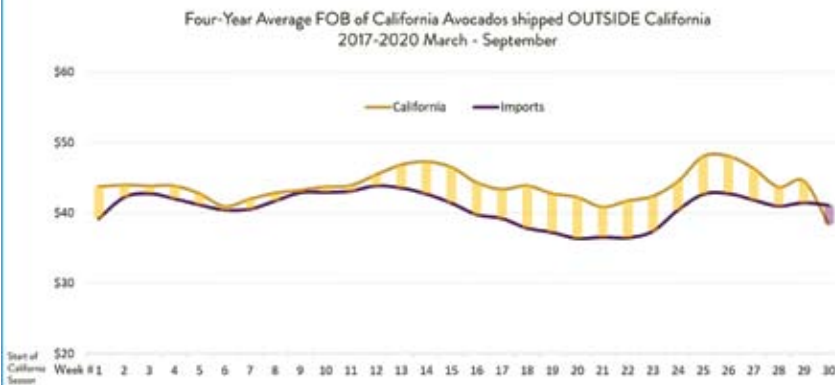


Outside of California the differential was still present, though diminished, suggesting that marketing or an absence thereof, makes a difference.



CALIFORNIA AVOCADOS DELIVER AN FOB PRICE ADVANTAGE OUTSIDE CALIFORNIA

Over the past four years, FOB price advantage of California Avocados averaged +8% vs. imports outside California.



Source: AMRIC Hass #1 Conventional (pounds) Mar-Sep 2017-2020

of mind than geography, and it is heartening to find increased knowledge about, and appreciation of, the advantages of California avocados firmly situating itself outside our state borders; this can only help future sales. A look at comparative retail prices is useful too. It's no surprise the average selling price for a size 48 Hass avocado was \$1.11 at retail across the U.S. during the 2020 season from March through August, somewhat lower than the \$1.30 received from April to September 2019, leaving one to wonder what might have been had the season been able to maintain the head of steam it had in February 2020 prior to the onset of the pandemic.

Confirmation that our strategy remains on track despite the year's upheaval can be found in every corner of the tracking study

This is clearly what we would consider the view from 30,000 feet. Closer to the ground, but still at an elevated level when making comparisons across multiple years, are the results of the Commission's tracking research, which surveys consumers in western and non-western markets annually about the collective effects of the Commission's marketing communications, in all its various forms. The study looks at how that messaging lands on certain consumer targets, demographically speaking, and on "premium Californians" i.e., those with similar characteristics who purchase more frequently and adhere to defined attitudinal requirements. This latter group fuels California avocado sales like no other and is the focus of much of our marketing attention.

The tracking study probes a wide number of measures through an online survey instrument administered soon after the primary thrust of the Commission's marketing effort concludes in the fall. It looks at a comprehensive range of categories—purchase dynamics, awareness, perceptions and preferences, the importance of "California" in branding, and seasonality—comparing responses by source of origin and to responses given when the same questions were posed in prior years. The 2020 study also included a special section on COVID-19 impacts. Emerging from the data is a good picture of how consumer attitudes and behavior change over time, and how our brand is performing.

It seems appropriate to pause here and consider that 77% of the 2020 crop, by volume, was sold in the Pacific region, predominantly Arizona, California, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington, and how some of these states have experienced an influx of new residents with a California mindset. Premium Californians are defined more by a state

and consumer responses to those questions most important to the continued success of the California Avocados brand. Survey respondents in California clearly demonstrated that the differentiators we use to distinguish California avocados from the competition—freshness, taste, reliability—are of paramount importance to them when selecting avocados at retail. Better still, they acknowledge California avocados to be of "premium quality" and "worth paying more for" even though more expensive than fruit from other origins. The study also revealed that most (65%) of the consumers surveyed continued to consistently buy avocados throughout the pandemic, and 18% bought more, largely because they perceived the fruit to be "satisfying" (48% of respondents) and "healthy" (47%).

The 2020 season "Dashboard", referenced elsewhere in this issue and available on the Commission's website, is worth a close look by any grower interested in the detail underlying our analysis of how the season progressed. We know that everyone's individual measure of how the season has gone is based upon their own personal circumstances and the returns received when their fruit was harvested. A brand-building strategy, however, must be driven by the industry as a whole and while every effort is made to ensure the benefits are far-reaching across the grower base, our real progress as a marketing organization representing a diverse group of private enterprises can only be measured in the aggregate. Bad as things were in 2020, and though it may not feel like it, the industry once again took a solid step forward, building on the promise the California Avocados brand proudly brings to our core customers. 🥑

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It's a Brand New Year ...Thankfully



Rob Grether

Happy New Year! Have we ever collectively looked forward to a new year more than we have in 2020? Have we ever looked forward to a new year for the better part of nine months? In most years, it takes me a few weeks to correctly write the new year on checks or contracts. I don't think it will be a problem this January—like everyone, I am ready.

Of course, I appreciate that a new year does not mean a new reality. We are not out of the woods yet and the drive to normalcy will take time, and may come in fits and starts. I am hopeful that an expeditious vaccine rollout can be coupled with effective but measured regulations that allow businesses to reopen and ramp up with confidence. We may be deep into our 2021 season before restrictions are lifted on in-person dining in western states, and, per a McKinsey study, it may take up to four years for the foodservice industry to fully recover. Nevertheless, I am optimistic for our future as California avocado growers because I am confident in the support we will receive from the California Avocado Commission in this challenging year and in the presumably more normal years to follow.

My confidence in CAC is built on four pillars: the staff, the marketing, the board and the growers. Over the past nine months, the staff has been out of sight, but in no way out of touch. Like most office-based businesses, the staff has been largely working remotely, and starting with the Annual Meetings in March, all grower meetings and trade events were canceled or moved online. Through it all, the staff never missed a beat. The marketing team overhauled the campaign messaging to respond to consumer interest in food safety, modified foodservice promotions to drive takeout sales and shifted much of our outdoor advertising to digital platforms. With an average tenure at the Commission of 16 years, this team plans thoroughly, executes decisively and pivots when necessary. In my nine years serving the Commission, first as an alternate and for the last three as a member, I have also seen firsthand the staff's steadfast commitment to creating value for California's commercial growers—the return on our significant investment.

This year's marketing program will build on the campaign launched last year: *the best avocados have Califor-*

nia in them. New artists, new graphics, new digital ads, new outdoor murals—same rigor, same measurable objectives. The creative component of CAC's marketing effort is consistently focused, attractive and engaging, but I would advocate that it's the work done behind the scenes to identify trends, target key shoppers, complement retail promotions and develop long-term brand loyalty that should most excite California's avocado growers. The CAC marketing team and its ad agency, the MullenLowe Group, are highly focused not only on targeting the right consumers, but also doing so through the most cost-effective channels. As our latest consumer tracking study shows, there is significant consumer demand for healthy, safe and locally grown produce. Our product meets these criteria; CAC's marketing program will promote and reinforce it.

I am humbled and honored to be the new chairman of your board of directors. The newly seated board is a group of highly talented and committed individuals with a diverse set of backgrounds and professional expertise. Each member of the Executive Committee has been a CAC grower representative for at least four years, and each

has served on the Executive Committee before. We welcome Rachael Laenen and Andrew Prechtl as new members with backgrounds in marketing and finance, respectively, and we are indebted to the numerous growers, handlers and agronomists who have volunteered to serve on the Finance Committee and Production Research Committee, bringing their expertise to the review of critical and technical issues. This board, and I especially, are very grateful for the many years and excellent leadership John Lamb, Ed McFadden and Charley Wolk gave to this organization as members and as chairmen. Each has made an indelible mark on the high standards and constructive culture of governance of the Commission, and your board is committed to building on this foundation.

The fourth and final pillar that underwrites my confidence in the California Avocado Commission is of course

you, its growers. Not because of the avocados you grow (or the assessments you pay), but because you are engaged, collaborative and generous. CAC depends on your engagement directly and through your handlers: grower surveys and crop estimates directly impact the timing and reach of the marketing campaign. Through close collaboration with growers, CAC can more quickly identify and tackle emerging issues and promote best practices. Most of all, CAC will continue to deliver on its mission to support California growers because the growers will continue to generously support CAC with their time as volunteers, stories of their heritage in marketing materials, their crop in production trials, and their patience to weather challenging periods and pursue durable strategies. I'm looking forward to working with you to make this a great year. Here's to 2021! 🥑

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Board of Directors

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Member/Jessica Hunter-**Secretary**
Member/ Ryan Rochefort-**Vice Chairman**
Alternate/Michael Perricone

District 2

Member/John Cornell
Member/Ohannes Karaoghlanian
Alternate/Vacant Seat

District 3

Member/John Lloyd-Butler
Member/Robert Grether-**Chairman**
Alternate/Vacant Seat

District 4

Member/Rachael Laenen
Member/Jason Cole-**Treasurer**
Alternate/Doug O'Hara

District 5

Member/Andrew Prechtl
Member/Randy Douglas
Alternate/Daryn Miller

Handlers

Member/Gary Caloroso
Member/Peter Shore
Alternate/Connor Huser

Public Member

Daniella Malfitano

To contact a CAC representative, please visit:
CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com/Commission/your-representatives

By April Aymami
Industry Affairs Director

Results of the 2020 CAC General Election and Election of Board Officers

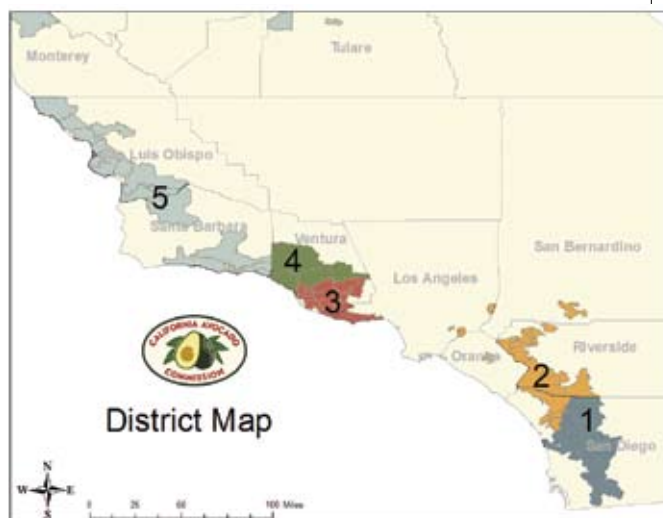
On November 19, 2020, the California Department of Food and Agriculture announced the results of the California Avocado Commission's recently concluded 2020 General Election and seated the new board members for commencement of the 2020-21 CAC fiscal year.

The CAC Board consists of 19 members and alternates, of which 15 are producers representing the five growing districts throughout California (10 members and five alternates), three are handlers representing operations that handle at least 1% of the California crop (two members and one alternate), and one public member who is appointed by the CDFA. Board members and alternates are elected for two-year terms, with half of the producer and handler member seats up for election annually. Alternate producer and alternate handler member seats are elected in odd years. For the 2020 General Election

one member was elected to each of the five districts, as well as the handler affiliation.

In the box below is a summary of the results of the 2020 CAC General Election. Elected members shall serve a two-year term (November 1, 2020 through October 31, 2022). A listing of the full Board of Directors can be found on Page 8. Please take note of who the current Commissioners are that represent your district. If you are unsure of which district your grove resides in, please contact the Commission or locate your city/zip code at CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com/commission/district-map.

In addition to CAC's annual election, each year the newly seated board



takes up the task of electing the Commission's Executive Committee at their November meeting. The individuals elected to serve as the Commission's Executive Committee for the term ending October 31, 2021 also are noted in the box below. 🥑

2020 CAC General Election Results

District 1 Member:
Jessica Hunter

District 2 Member:
John Cornell*

District 3 Member:
John Lloyd-Butler*

District 4 Member:
Rachael Kimball Laenen

District 5 Member:
Andrew Prechtl

Handler Member:
Gary Caloroso, Giumarra

2020-21 Executive Committee:

Chairman: Robert Grether
Vice Chair: Ryan Rochefort
Treasurer: Jason Cole
Secretary: Jessica Hunter

**With previous alternates assuming member seats in District 2 and District 3, there now exist vacancies for alternate seats in these two districts. These vacancies will be filled by a majority vote of the Board at an upcoming Commission Board meeting.*



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CAC Board Reduces Assessment Rate for the Second Year While Increasing Marketing Budget

By April Aymami
Industry Affairs Director

At the October 7, 2020 meeting, the California Avocado Commission Board of Directors took action to reduce the assessment rate for the upcoming 2020-21 fiscal year to 1.75% of the gross dollar value of fruit sold. The new assessment rate is effective from November 1, 2020 through October 31, 2021. The CAC Board and management are committed to prudently managing growers' assessment dollars, with the current rate reflecting a quarter percent reduction from the 2019-20 assessment rate of 2.00% and more than one-half a percent reduction from the 2018-19 assessment rate of 2.30%. During these past two years, despite the reduction in assessment rate, a larger percentage of the budget has been allocated toward marketing activities, with 2020-21 representing the highest allocation ever at more than 70% of the total budget.

As we have mentioned in prior issues of *From the Grove*, the job of approving an assessment rate and balanced budget is not an easy task. It requires the Board to analyze and evaluate numbers highly dependent on fairly uncertain factors - estimating the size of the crop that won't be harvested for at least four to five months in the future and projecting grower value that is susceptible to market volatility. This year proved even more daunting with the COVID-19 pandemic pushing into the new year. Up to the task at hand, the CAC Board reviewed various scenarios involving high and low crop sizes, as well as grower value and assessment rates. In a typical year, the Board would work to build a balanced budget, with expenditures matching projected revenue, however with a strong

ending reserve balance projected for 2019-20, the Board sought to draw down that reserve balance in 2020-21. Following this analysis, the CAC Board accepted management and the Finance Committee's recommendation to decrease the CAC assessment rate to 1.75%. The newly approved assessment rate would generate nearly \$14 million in revenue, based on a crop size of 325 million pounds and average value of \$1.25, and draw down reserves by 27%.

With these factors in place, the Board turned to management's proposed \$17.4 million budget and supporting business plan, examining the proposed programs and activities. The proposed, and subsequently approved, 2020-21 budget is comparable to the prior year in total dollars, however it increases the amount allocated to marketing activities, resulting in a marketing budget of \$12.2 million - 70% of the total budget. The remaining \$5 million of the budget is being allocated to industry affairs and production research, as well as administration - \$1.6 million and \$3.6 million, respectively. We thank the outgoing 2019-20 CAC Board, under the direction of Chairman John Lamb, for its work prudently managing grower funds and prioritizing spending.

Included here are just a few of the business plan highlights for the 2020-21 fiscal year. The complete business plan and budget can be reviewed online at the following locations:

Business Plan: CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com/commission/accountability-reports/business-plans.

Budget: CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com/commission/accountability-reports/finance.

CALIFORNIA AVOCADO GROWERS REFERENDUM VOTE

Every five years the California Department of Food and Agriculture holds a state-mandated referendum vote to provide growers with the opportunity to determine whether the California Avocado Commission will be re-approved and continue for the next five years. The referendum timeline is:

- **February 15, 2021:** Ballots will be mailed to eligible commercial producers
- **March 16, 2021:** Completed ballots must be postmarked and returned to CDFA for tallying

Eligible commercial producers not receiving a ballot should contact the CDFA Marketing Branch Staff at **916.900.5018**.

The California Avocado Commission exists to support California avocado growers and is governed by a Board of Directors comprised of their peers to ensure good stewardship of grower funds.

CAC FOCUSES ON FOSTERING GROWER VIABILITY BY:

- Building demand for California avocados at a price premium
- Differentiating California avocados to increase perceived value, preference and loyalty, to retain position as the most recognized, preferred and trusted avocado origin sold in the U.S.
- Developing strategic, targeted programs with retailers and foodservice operators
- Advocating for California avocado growers on issues such as water, trade and export
- Supporting production research and grower education



Business Plan Highlights 2020-21

The following initiatives have been developed with recognition that the pandemic, uncertain political situation and social upheaval may continue to influence the California avocado industry. Some events and activities will only occur if allowed by public health orders and with precautions taken to ensure safety. Some activities may take place virtually and backup plans have been developed as needed.

Marketing

- Showcase that *the best avocados have California in them* (through an extension of the 2019-20 integrated campaign), are locally grown with uncompromising dedication to quality and freshness and are available seasonally in select locations
- Implement California avocado marketing programs including media, email, online and social media market-

ing, grove tour video, California Avocado Month recipe contest and launch of California Avocado Summer Entertainment Drive-in Movie Series

- Leverage Food/Wellness/Lifestyle Brand Advocates, influencers, chef partners and fans to share “why California avocado” messages and recipe/nutrition content across digital and social platforms as well as other media as appropriate
- Create brand-safe opportunities to inject California avocados into hyper-relevant cultural moments and champion inclusivity and diversity in California avocado brand programs
- Consumer website maintenance, online recipe section optimization, user testing and data analytics plans to create a 2022 enhancement and optimization roadmap
- Conduct industry outreach with further development of LinkedIn channel, with attendance at and sponsorship of key industry events
- Conduct retail merchandising studies, including State of the Category Report and Shopper Preferences: Levels of Ripeness
- Disseminate California avocado trade messages with retail and foodservice advertising and public relations outreach
- Continue tiered-marketing approach by targeting retailer and foodservice operators who are willing to pay for premium California avocados and develop customized programs for supporting retailers including retail communications and dietitian programs; create customized menu concepts and promotions for existing and new targeted foodservice operations
- Host foodservice AvoTour showcasing the “California food experience” in groves and iconic restaurants
- Execute the California avocado merchandise shop business plan

Industry Affairs

- Monitor water availability, quality, conservation and pricing issues and represent industry stakeholder interests in discussions and legislative actions related to these topics; explore opportunities that would improve agricultural water supplies and efficiency agricultural programs
- Monitor regulatory, legislative and trade issues and advocate on behalf of growers concerning food safety/regulation, immigration reform, labor overtime laws, APHIS/ARS funding, conservation/water efficiency, free trade agreements and emerging and foreign market development, phytosanitary security and Section 18 emergency exemptions



- Provide growers with relevant information critical to their enterprise via digital and print publications, newsletters, food safety manuals, Pine Tree Ranch field meetings/seminars/workshops and grower forums
- Complete grower website upgrade and ADA compliance project
- Update Ecosystems benefits study and keep growers apprised of sustainability initiatives

Production Research

- Conduct assessment of the extent of Botryosphaeria branch canker and dieback in California avocado groves and conduct research to delineate the most aggressive species, timing of pathogenic infection, fungicide efficacy and factors influencing expression of the disease
- Run field trials in Mexico to study potential pheromone blends to attract avocado seed and stem feeding weevils, evaluate trap design and placement, and identify natural enemies
- Expand opportunities for micropropagation of California avocados
- Test herbicide safety and efficacy in bearing avocado groves, and share findings via industry articles and Pine Tree Ranch field day
- Conduct trials to test the efficacy of wind screens to reduce GEM avocado scarring
- Establish commercial-scale field testing of advanced rootstock selections 🥑

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California Avocado Growers Make Significant Mark on State's Economy

Billions in Economic Output, Millions in Labor Income and Indirect Business Taxes, and Tens of Thousands of Jobs

A new series of reports from the Tootelian Company, commissioned by the California Avocado Commission, demonstrate the significant role California avocado growers and handlers play in strengthening the state's economy. A total of nine reports — one measuring the statewide economic impact and the others examining impacts within specific avocado-producing counties — were completed. Each of the studies examines the increased business activity created by growing and bringing avocados to market, the jobs created across various sectors of the economy, the income generated by employees of the industry and indirect business taxes generated.

Grower Expenditures

According to *The Economic Impact of Avocado Growers and Handlers in the State of California*, California avocado growers' annual expenditures for conventional production are estimated to be just over \$681 million, which equates to nearly \$1.9 million per day. These expenditures represent the costs associated with, among others, growing and harvesting avocados on bearing acreage, developing non-bearing acreage, and moving avocados from field to market. The researchers estimated that grower cost per acre in production is \$13,912 and \$12,156 per acre for land under development.

The subsequent projections discussed in this article are based on the annual expenditures noted above.

Business Activity and Jobs Generated by California Avocado Growers

Researchers determined California avocado growers' annual economic impact based on the overall output (or business activity) growers generate, the jobs they create, the labor income produced, and the indirect business taxes that result from increased business activity caused by avocado growers.

According to the report, California avocado growers are projected to generate nearly \$1.4 billion of overall business activity annually in California — nearly \$3.8 million each day of the year. Nearly half of this impact (49.7%) is generated by growers' direct spending, while the remainder is the result of increased business activity fed by growers' spending.

As a result of spending by California avocado growers, an additional 12,700 jobs will be created on an annual basis. Of this number, approximately 59% of those jobs will be the result of growers' business operations, with the rest generated by their spending in other economic sectors.

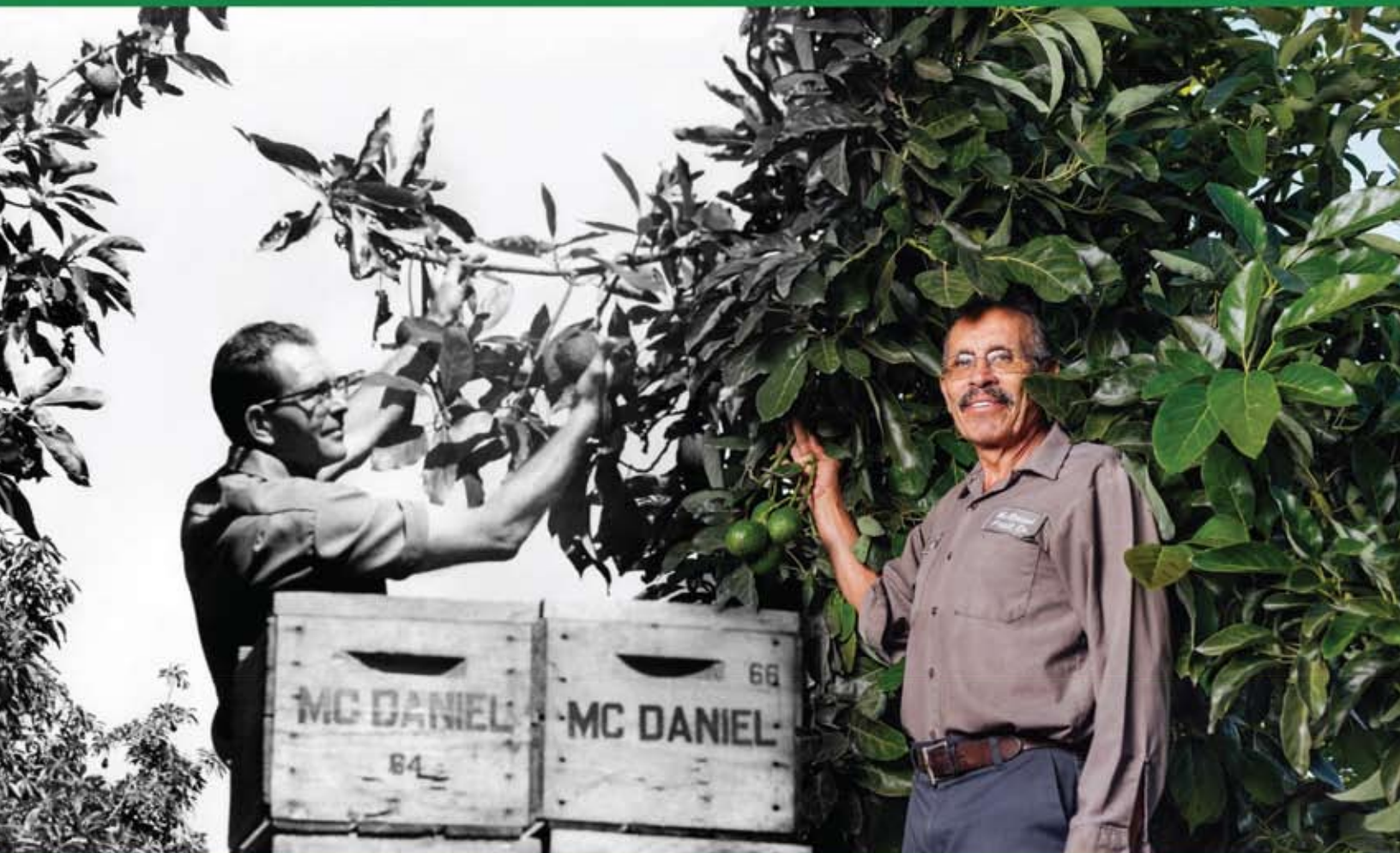
Labor Income

California avocado growers will generate more than \$581.8 million per year (or \$1.6 million every day) in labor income that is diffused throughout the state as households spend this income on a variety of goods and services. Utilizing consumer expenditure patterns from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the report estimates that the majority of this labor income will be diffused as follows: more than \$158 million for housing-related expenses, nearly \$73 million for transportation/vehicles, about \$62 million for food and \$34 million for healthcare. The remainder is projected to be spent on apparel/services, entertainment, cash contributions, education, gifts of goods/services, and personal care products/services.

Indirect Business Taxes

Another \$35.5 million in additional indirect business taxes will be created annually in the state due to the increased business activity generated by California avocado growers. These tax dollars are equivalent to nearly \$97,400 each day that can be used to help fund various state programs that benefit California communities.

The reports' authors obtained State Funds budgets from



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CALIFORNIA AVOCADO HANDLER STATEWIDE ECONOMIC IMPACT*

EXPENDITURES: \$ 85.4 million
 ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 155.2 million
 JOBS: 1,825
 LABOR INCOME: \$ 84.9 million
 INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 5.3 million

*Data represents activities associated only with California avocados.

CALIFORNIA AVOCADO GROWER IMPACT BY COUNTY

Data presented below represent annual projected California avocado grower economic impact.

VENTURA COUNTY GROWER EXPENDITURES: \$ 171.2 million ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 311.5 million JOBS: 3,955 LABOR INCOME: \$ 159.6 million INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 8.7 million	SAN LUIS OBISPO COUNTY GROWER EXPENDITURES: \$ 29 million ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 45.1 million JOBS: 400 LABOR INCOME: \$ 15.1 million INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 1.1 million
SAN DIEGO COUNTY GROWER EXPENDITURES: \$ 250.4 million ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 402.2 million JOBS: 7,350 LABOR INCOME: \$ 168 million INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 10.1 million	RIVERSIDE COUNTY GROWER EXPENDITURES: \$ 49.8 million ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 82.4 million JOBS: 1,025 LABOR INCOME: \$ 33.1 million INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 2.1 million
ORANGE, SAN BERNARDINO & LOS ANGELES COUNTIES GROWER EXPENDITURES: \$ 17 million ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 29.7 million JOBS: 340 LABOR INCOME: \$ 10.5 million INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 709,500	TULARE, FRESNO & KERN COUNTIES GROWER EXPENDITURES: \$ 1.1 million ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 1.8 million JOBS: 16 LABOR INCOME: \$ 737,500 INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 45,700
MONTEREY COUNTY GROWER EXPENDITURES: \$ 1.6 million ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 2.8 million JOBS: 30 LABOR INCOME: \$ 1.5 million INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 75,800	SANTA BARBARA COUNTY GROWER EXPENDITURES: \$ 56.9 million ECONOMIC ACTIVITY: \$ 102 million JOBS: 1,215 LABOR INCOME: \$ 56.1 million INDIRECT BUSINESS TAXES: \$ 2.5 million

a variety of departments to illustrate how these indirect tax dollars generated by California avocado growers' spending could support various California operations. For example, these indirect business taxes could fund more than 231% of the Emergency Medical Services Authority budget, nearly 110% of the Arts Council budget, 49% of the Department of Aging, 47% of the Department of Rehabilitation, 37% of the Military Department or 28% of the Department of Conservation's budget.

Where California Avocado Growers Generate the Greatest Impact

While growers' spending clearly has a demonstrable impact on the economic vitality of the state, the authors also were able to identify those industries most impacted by this business activity.

The greatest economic impact would be experienced in the farming (\$815 million), professional services (\$153 million),

real estate (\$97 million), manufacturing (\$78 million), and retailing/food services (\$69 million) industries. Most jobs would be created in the farming, professional services, retailing/food services, health and real estate industries. The industries generating the most labor income would be farming, professional services, retailing/food service, health and wholesaling. And, finally, the most indirect business taxes would be produced in the retailing/food services, wholesaling, farming, real estate and professional services sectors.

Economic Impact Studies Available Online

The impact studies are available on the California avocado grower website at CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com/commission/accountability-reports/impact-reports. For more information on the specific impact California growers have on the counties in which they produce, interested parties are encouraged to view the eight county-specific analyses produced by the Tootelian Company. 🥑



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Highlights from “the best avocados have California in them” consumer advertising campaign, including the custom content illustrations from Eater.

Outstanding Marketing Accomplishments Despite Challenging Year

By all accounts, 2020 presented the California Avocado Commission’s marketing team with a series of challenges unlike any previously seen — a pandemic coupled with social upheaval that would alter consumer lifestyles and the business practices of retailers and foodservice chains. Nevertheless, it was a big year for California avocado marketing accomplishments, including the launch of a new advertising campaign, an overhaul of CaliforniaAvocado.com, successful retail and foodservice programs and the launch of a new online shop featuring merchandise that promotes the brand.

The Commission’s Year-End Dashboard and Top Marketing Accomplishments report chronicle the marketing team’s fiscal year achievements via a series of key performance indicators.

The Dashboard report was presented to the California Avocado Board of Directors at its November meeting and both the Dashboard and Top Marketing Accomplishments reports were shared with CAC’s Marketing Committee. Following is a summary of the Commission’s 2019-20 performance highlights from these reports.

Top Marketing Accomplishments

“The best avocados have California in them” advertising campaign — with its fun-loving California imagery — generated significant lifts in California avocado awareness. Creative executions also performed well with research participants who viewed the ads. This new campaign, combined with CAC’s marketing activities, led to big gains in unaided and aided

avoCADos

The best merch has
California Avocados on it.



The California avocado merchandise shop launched in September with items featuring the advertising campaign graphics.

brand awareness and rebounds in consumer perceptions of the premium fruit. CAC reported successful InstaPanel results (tested consumer reactions to creative), positive Nielsen results (compared consumer responses of those who viewed actual advertising to those who had not) and positive new insights and gains in consumer ratings according to the 2020 California Avocado Tracking Study.

As the pandemic spread across the nation, the lifestyles of Americans began to noticeably shift due to stay-at-home orders and restrictions placed on retailers and restaurants. The Commission successfully transitioned its media plans to engage with consumers where they were – at home. Hulu, a digital television platform, emerged as the Commission's best performing media site for California avocado awareness, favorability and purchase consideration.

CAC also decreased its participation on social media channels where negative conversations began to dominate the platform due to social upheaval. Instead, the Commission selected channels such as Pinterest and YouTube where users would welcome California avocado-branded posts sharing helpful information. YouTube, in particular, was a standout performer this year with a 60% increase in subscribers and 11.1 million video views – a 270% increase versus the prior year.

Blogger advocates supported CAC programs throughout the season, including this post for the California Avocado Summer at Home program.



Throughout the year, the Commission worked on creating an online California avocado merchandise shop, including developing the business model, designing the website and merchandise, sourcing the products and arranging for product fulfillment. The September launch of the California avocado merchandise shop (Shop.CaliforniaAvocado.com, see article page 48) generated a substantial amount of public relations buzz with a total of 45 million impressions, including an exclusive story in *Delish*. Prior to the launch, the Commission distributed a press release, conducted media outreach to local and national consumer publications and sent out an email blast to fans highlighting the collection of California avocado-inspired gear.

Dashboard Report Highlights

According to the Dashboard Report, the Commission garnered nearly 290 million consumer media impressions via its online, social media and offline advertising efforts. Highlights from these initiatives are summarized below.

- Outdoor advertising with billboards in Los Angeles and San Diego, as well as a BART train wrap in the Bay Area, generated more than 9 million impressions
- Audio advertising on the digital Spotify and Pandora music channels secured 2.8 million video views and 32 million impressions
- Digital brand advertising resulted in 153 million impressions and 89 million video views

- During stay-at-home directives in the early days of the pandemic, studio photography sessions were not possible; instead, CAC worked with the popular Eater recipe destination site and they created and featured six original California avocado recipes accompanied by beautiful custom illustrations
- Instagram influencers via Social Native showcased California-avocado inspired dishes paired with their own stunning photography
- Social-retail advertising was hyper-targeted for participating retailers and included store location data to direct drivers to grocery stores with California avocados (secured 9.3 million video views)
- Season-long advertising across top social platforms earned 5.5 million engagements and 24 million impressions

CAC consumer public relations activities in 2020 garnered 956.4 million impressions from media coverage secured with print, broadcast and online media outlets as well as retailer communications. The Commission did alter many of its public relations plans in light of stay-at-home orders, pivoting from in-person events to safe, contactless media events that continued momentum during the peak season. The PR team hosted various virtual media dinners in Los Angeles, Portland, Sacramento and Seattle for California Avocado Month and its Summer at Home program. These dinners included 57 top-tier media members and influencers, including representa-



Despite turmoil in the foodservice industry due to pandemic closures, California avocados were featured in 12 California and Pacific region restaurant chains.

AVO DOS

The Best Avocados Have **CA**lifornia In Them

There is a difference with California Avocados! That's why your shoppers anticipate the California season. From the consistent quality, freshness and homogenous taste, they want that delicious California Avocado satisfaction with every bite. It's a tradition of excellence to pass the plate with California Avocados—bringing family and friends together for nearly a century—especially during the American Summer Holidays.

Count on California and give your customers what they're asking for all season long.

For Commercial Marketing Systems
CaliforniaAvocado.com

The California Season is Almost Here!

AVO DOS

The Best Avocados Have **CA**lifornia In Them

There is a difference with California Avocados! That's why your shoppers anticipate the California season. From the consistent quality, freshness and homogenous taste, they want that delicious California Avocado satisfaction with every bite. It's a tradition of excellence to pass the plate with California Avocados—bringing family and friends together for nearly a century—especially during the American Summer Holidays.

Count on California and give your customers what they're asking for all season long.

For Commercial Marketing Systems
CaliforniaAvocado.com

The California Season is Almost Here!

Retail trade and foodservice advertising integrated the consumer campaign theme, including this two-page spread featuring a textured avocado that revealed a beautiful avocado half underneath.

tives from *Eat Seattle*, *Seattle Foodie Podcast* and *Willamette Week*. The Blogger Advocate program (see article page 46) continued and yielded more than 38 million impressions.

While many websites and brands saw steep drops to their unpaid traffic during the pandemic, visits to the Commission's recipe page grew 36% year over year. Popular recipes like

Fried Avocado Dippers showed 110% in growth from the previous year. As preserving and growing your own foods began trending in the U.S., the "How to Grow Your Own Avocado Tree" and "How to Freeze California Avocados" pages grew 76% and 125% respectively from last year. Overall, the consumer website had nearly 2.3 million visits, The Scoop blog

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California Avocado Grower
Scott Van Der Kar checking this year's
crop on his family-owned grove.



CALIFORNIA

- Scott Van Der Kar's family has been growing avocados in California for more than 50 years. The Van Der Kar's are one of more than 3,500 California Avocado growers who benefit from California's ideal climate and fertile soil that help to produce world-class avocados.
- The production practices he uses ensure he's a good neighbor to everyone. Like his fellow California Avocado growers, Scott's avocados are locally, responsibly and meticulously grown.
- California Avocados are picked at their peak from Spring through Summer, delivering tree to table freshness in just a few days. That's the California Avocado difference.



TASTES FROM CLOSE TO HOME



Retail activity includes this Save Mart ad featuring California avocado grower Scott Van Der Kar.

reported 707,000 visits and visitors spent 5% more time on its site. By investing in content creation early, CAC was able to drive traffic to the website and engage with consumers in a time of crisis.

The Commission also provided consumers with informative California avocado content and new recipes via six emails with an average of 28,000 successful deliveries and a 15% open rate.

Capitalizing on the trust consumers place in retail dietitians and bloggers, the Living Well Brand Advocates program secured 2.2 million impressions. Custom retail programs, including retail dietitian content, garnered 14.2 million digital and traditional media activations.

The Commission helped drive California avocado sales utilizing customized retail promotions with participating retailers. Those retailers included Albertsons/Vons/Pavilions, Bristol Farms, Costco, Gelson's, H.E.B., Hy-Vee, Kroger,

Mollie Stone's, Northwest Grocers, Organically Grown Company (PCC Markets, New Season Market, Newport Stores, Metropolitan Markets), Raley's/Bel Air/Nob Hill, Sam's Club, The Fresh Market and Walmart as well as export promotions in South Korea.

The Commission also assisted targeted food-service chain partners with facing the challenge of COVID protocols that eliminated or limited dine-in service. The programs encouraged diners to enjoy menu items featuring fresh California avocados. The marketing team secured eight new foodservice promotions at Erik's Delicafe, Ike's Love & Sandwiches, Islands Restaurants, Mixt, Norm's Restaurants, Sharky's Woodfired Mexican Grill, Super Duper Burger and Wahoo's Fish Taco. Del Taco, Flame Broiler, Habit Burger and Rubio's Coastal Grill — all returning chain partners — also ran California avocado promotions during the season. In addition the team contacted 70 chains, building relations for 2020-21 and beyond.

Digital and print advertising in the retail trade sector resulted in nearly 28.7 million impressions and an additional 2.4 million in the foodservice sector. Retail PR secured 9.9 million positive impressions, with foodservice impressions at 4.9 million — a 700% plus improvement upon the program goal.

The California Avocado Commission also expanded its LinkedIn audience with 526 new followers and an average of 32 new visitors per month. The top post for the season, which garnered nearly 31,000 impressions, showcased

a California avocado grower video. Overall, the social media channel had a 6% engagement rate — three times the average engagement rate of 2%.

Despite challenges presented by a pandemic and social unrest, the Commission successfully engaged with consumers by sharing information and messaging that was relevant and sensitive to their changing needs and circumstances. In a similar fashion, CAC adapted its customer promotions to help support retail and foodservice partners during a tumultuous time while simultaneously keeping California avocados top of mind throughout the season. The ability to successfully adjust plans and programs to the ever-shifting needs of targeted customers and consumers was due to a combination of factors. The team's rapid transition to remote work environments, successful adoption of new technologies and well-reasoned, nimble program pivots ensured the premium messaging of the California Avocados brand remained strong. 🥑

CAC Board Considers Section 201 Investigation

By Ken Melban
Vice President of Industry Affairs

On September 1, 2020, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, the Department of Agriculture, and the Department of Commerce released a report outlining several steps to be taken by the Trump Administration to address the harm being caused to U.S. growers due to increased imports of seasonal and perishable fruits and vegetables.

Among other actions, the Administration committed in its report to ask the U.S. International Trade Commission (ITC) to initiate an investigation under Section 201 of the Trade Act of 1974 (a “global safeguard investigation”) to determine the extent to which increased imports of blueberries have caused, or threaten to cause, serious injury to domestic blueberry growers.

The Administration issued its Section 201 request to the ITC on September 29, 2020. Once a Section 201 case begins, the ITC determines whether the covered product is being imported in such increased quantities as to be a substantial cause of serious injury, or threat of serious injury, to the U.S. industry producing the like or directly competitive product. If the ITC makes an affirmative injury determination, it recommends to the President specific forms of relief that would facilitate the domestic industry’s positive adjustment to import competition. The President makes the final decision on whether and how to provide relief.

Possible relief measures, which are only applicable for a temporary period, can include increased duties, tariff-rate quotas, or quantitative restrictions, among other actions. The President holds broad authority to implement a range of relief actions authorized under the law to alleviate or compensate for the injury.

The blueberry Section 201 action received significant press coverage and, understandably, drew interest from within the ranks of the California avocado industry. California avocado

farmers have faced significant market pressure as a result of large increases in U.S. avocado imports over the last 20 years.

For some time, California Avocado Commission staff has been engaged with the U.S. government officials on possible relief options for the California avocado industry. Staff has explored, among other options, the viability of an investigation under Section 201.

Section 201 investigations, which are not frequently launched, evaluate multiple factors to determine if the legal standard is met. An investigation typically examines the previous five years for which data are available and looks with care at import levels, the condition of the U.S. industry, and all factors that may be causing harm to the affected producers. To help it evaluate the level of harm being experienced by the domestic producers, the ITC sends out confidential questionnaires to the producing industry seeking information on several factors relevant to each producer’s financial condition.

The cost of litigating a Section 201 case is borne by the domestic industry. Legal and economic experts present arguments to the ITC to demonstrate that increased imports are a “substantial cause” of “serious injury” to the industry, and work with the industry to recommend appropriate relief.

CAC staff reported at the Commission’s November board meeting on this relief option, and a leading trade attorney laid out the many requirements of a Section 201 action at the board’s December meeting. After extensive discussion and consideration, on a split vote, the board determined not to move forward with forming a committee to pursue a Section 201 action. However, the board consented to President Tom Bellamore’s request to allow Commission staff to evaluate further the viability of such an action for the California avocado industry. 🍷

By Ken Melban
Vice President of Industry Affairs

CAC's Advocacy Efforts Result in Direct Benefit to Growers

The start of the 2020 California avocado season was very promising. Harvest began early with a projected crop of 370 million pounds. Through March, early season harvesting was almost 64 million pounds, or 17% of the season's total, and harvesting through April was nearly 117 million pounds, or 32% of the 2020 total crop. Pricing during the first four months of 2020 averaged \$1.25 per pound. The California avocado industry was primed for a strong year, barring any unforeseen catastrophes.

And then, the unforeseeable, COVID-19. As the coronavirus pandemic spread to the U.S., arriving in force as our season was gearing up, the impact was quickly felt by the California avocado industry. While fresh market sales stayed strong, California avocado foodservice sales plummeted due to mandatory restrictions on dining in restaurants. California Avocado Commission staff quickly, and strategically, adjusted our marketing plan as reported throughout this issue. Packers also worked diligently to redirect considerable volumes of California avocados intended for foodservice into retail and consumer home delivery markets. While market losses forced other commodities to leave produce in the fields, consumer demand for California avocados remained strong.

Cash Assistance: In response to the increasing negative economic impacts of COVID-19 on U.S. businesses and citizens, in March Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act. As part of the CARES Act, the U.S. Department of Agriculture announced the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program funding. The CFAP provided \$16 billion in direct support based on "actual losses for agricultural producers where prices and market supply chains

have been impacted." Unfortunately, because the California avocado industry had not suffered the 5% price loss threshold for the period covered (January 1, 2020 through April 30, 2020), avocado farmers were not eligible.

CAC staff immediately reached out to congressional members and USDA and administration staff, to sound the alarm that our industry needed relief too. **Our message was clear: new legislation must be introduced that will include cash relief for California avocado farmers.** Over the summer months the discussions intensified between CAC staff and key political influencers and decision makers. Ultimately, through CAC's advocacy efforts, in September funding for California avocado farmers was made available under the CFAP 2 act, which allotted \$14 billion for farmers. Under CFAP 2, California avocado farmers were eligible to receive an average of 10% of their 2019 gross sales value. Based on feedback from industry members quite a few California avocado farmers took advantage of the CFAP 2. The deadline to apply was December 11, 2020. The act provided direct cash payments, and hopefully all California avocado farmers took advantage of this funding.

Permanent Savings in San Diego County Water Rates: CAC staff first negotiated with the San Diego County Water Authority's Board of Directors and staff to create a Transitional Special Agricultural Water Rate program in 2008, when the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California began phasing out a similar program. Since that time, the TSAWR program continued with a series of extensions that were set to expire at the end of 2020. Through the TSAWR, the Water Authority has provided lower-cost water

to growers in exchange for lower reliability.

During the last year, CAC staff, in partnership with San Diego County Farm Bureau staff and San Diego County agricultural water agencies (Valley Center, Rainbow, Fallbrook, Yuima), continued to work with Water Authority officials to make the TSAWR permanent. In September 2020, the Water Authority board approved a Permanent Special Agricultural Water Rate structure that will continue to provide lower water rates for farmers in exchange for lower water supply reliability.

For more than a decade, CAC has successfully worked with Water Authority staff and board members to demonstrate the value of agriculture to the region and the benefits farming provides.

Under the PSAWR program, which will take effect January 1, 2021, the Water Authority will provide a wholesale rate savings for agricultural participants of \$474 per acre foot — a 27% savings. Actual savings at the retail level will vary among agencies based on their unique wholesale cost and retail rate structures.

Growers who transfer from the TSAWR or opt-in to the PSAWR will be exempt from fixed water storage and supply reliability charges in exchange for lower water supply reliability during water shortages or emergencies. One district general manager can recall only two instances since the inception of the TSAWR program in October 2008 when growers were forced to cut back their water use.

The Water Authority is working with its 24 member agencies to verify existing customers' eligibility for the new program. Farmers who are currently participating in the existing TSAWR program will be allowed to take part in the new PSAWR program while being screened for eligibility.

The parameters of the PSAWR program will be reevaluated in five years to determine water demands and supplies. If you are a customer within the Water Authority service area you should have received information from your water agency on how to remain in or opt-in to the PSAWR program. If you have not, contact your water agency soon to be certain you can take advantage of this cost-savings program. 🌱

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2021, a new year full of new hopes for our world, aspirations for our families and our businesses, and perhaps most importantly a renewed sense of partnership with our growers, employees, customers, and our industry. Del Rey remains committed to our extended grower family. Bringing people closer together is what we are all about.

CONTACT OUR FIELD REPRESENTATIVES TO LEARN MORE

Jessica Hunter, jessica@delreyavocado.com
Gerardo Huerta, gerardo@delreyavocado.com
Wayne Brydon, wayne@delreyavocado.com
Mario Martinez, mariola@delreyavocado.com
Frank Alegria, frank@delreyavocado.com
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Grower Profile



Sayer Returns to Ranch After Navy Career

By Tim Linden

Like his father before him, Chris Sayer made his mark in the “outside” world before returning to his geographic and farming roots to take up the family business as a Southern California grower.

“I grew up right where I am sitting now in Saticoy, CA,” he told *From the Grove* during a November interview. “My family has been farming in this area since the late 1880s. I am fifth generation.”

It was his great, great grandfather that started the tradition growing sugar beets, lima beans and walnuts. “He also owned the hardware store in town. His son got the hardware store and his daughter got the farm.”

Petty Ranch, as it is now called, has been in the family ever since. Sayer explains that his mother married into the family after she met the late Don Petty as the single mother of a very young Chris. Chris has adopted the family history as his own. “The farm came to our family through my grandmother,” he said.

While many generations have owned and worked the ranch, they have followed a similar path, which Sayer calls “sequential careers.”

“Dad was in the aerospace industry in the ‘60s before he came back to the farm in the early 1970s, when he was in his thirties,” said Chris, who was only about six at the time.

Sayer grew up in Saticoy, graduating from the local high school and then going off to college at prestigious Northwestern University in the Chicago area. He was a political science major with an international focus, but his first career was predetermined when he joined the Navy Reserve Officer Training Corp (R.O.T.C.) while in college. That secured him a great

education as well a spot in flight training school in Pensacola, FL, and an eight-year commitment in the Navy. Pensacola also is where he met his wife, Melissa.

At the Naval Air Station, Sayer was trained to fly the Lockheed P-3 Orion, which is an anti-submarine and maritime surveillance aircraft. He served in the Navy from 1988 to 1997, with his final tour of duty in Northern California, where he served as a Navy recruiter attempting to convince the professionals the Navy needs (doctors, dentists, lawyers) to join the service. That also led to his first post-service career as an executive recruiter in the technology-heavy world of Silicon Valley. “At the time, Melissa was a corporate lawyer and so we made the decision to have her career dictate where we live,” he said. “It was a case of playing our strongest hand.”

As the new millennium dawned, Melissa and Chris Sayer were working in the tech world in Silicon Valley, had two young sons and, very importantly, owned a house in that fast-appreciating market. “Before the bubble burst (the DotCom bubble), we were talking about relocating to Ventura County and getting back involved in the family farm.”

As the only son in the family, and knowing the career path his father had taken, the idea of running the ranch was always in the back of Sayer’s mind. In 2000, many factors aligned to make it a possibility, not the least of which was the growing equity the couple had in their Bay Area home. “Our two sons were each at the age where they were changing schools, and Dad was turning 65 which meant there was room for me in the operation. We talked about it a lot and finally determined that there were more reasons to leave than to stay.”

The Sayers sold their home in 2001 and used the proceeds

for a down-payment on a 20-acre ranch in Santa Paula. “Interestingly, the sale of our ranch was supposed to close on 9/11 2001,” he said, noting that the tragic events of that day held up the sale for another 10 days. “That date is a huge milestone in our lives.”

Once he settled in the area, Sayer spent the next couple of years being mentored by his father and Carlos Ortega, who served as foreman for Petty Ranch from 1972 until his death in 2018. He called Don Petty “a great dad and a great avocado grower.” Of Ortega, he said the grove manager was a wealth of information “who taught me so much about farming. Those two are with me every day.”

Though the family operation had included an avocado ranch in Carpinteria in the ‘70s and ‘80s, by the time Sayer came back the 52-acre Petty Ranch was almost entirely lemons. “They had two windrows of avocados, covering 1.25 acres, that served as a shelter for the lemons,” he recalls.

But some of those lemon trees were 50 years old and soon needed to be replaced. “We wanted to diversify and hedge our bets,” Sayer said.

Relying on the knowledge garnered from being in the avocado business before, the operators of Petty Ranch decided that the avocado was a good option. “Our first big planting was in 2006. We replaced a lemon block with a block of Hass. Those trees are now 14 years old and in peak production,” he said. “Several years later, we followed the same pattern and replaced another block of lemons with Lamb Hass. I have another 10-acre block that I soon have to make a decision on.”

Sayer said the ranch currently has a 60/40 split with lemons getting the lion’s share. He has been very involved in avocado research, including working with the California Avocado Commission on a four-acre rootstock trial. Both crops have done well for the family farming operation. “This year has been a weird one with avocados faring better than lemons during the pandemic,” he said.

A majority of lemon production is sold through foodservice outlets, so it is understandable that this has been a tough year with that sector suffering from pandemic-related shutdowns and capacity limitations. “This was also the first year our Lamb Hass produced at their full potential. Our Lamb Hass produced 20,000 pounds per acre and so even though prices were down, we did very well.”

Sayer added that he has added density to his Lamb Hass acreage with interplanted young trees, which will eventually mean 200 producing trees per acre. On the density scale, “we fall into the moderate density camp,” he said. “Potentially, we think that acreage can produce above 20,000 pounds per acre.”

Based on those numbers, Sayer appears to be leaning toward increasing his avocado acreage, but he is still working through the decision process. While he was focused on the Saticoy-

located Petty Ranch for this interview, he indicated that he is also making planting decisions for the 20-acre Santa Paula Sayer Ranch. “That ranch is a bit further inland and I am a bit worried about the weather. Twice in the last couple of years, we have experienced 120-degree temperatures.”

He said the young strong trees on that ranch have survived, but it does give him pause. He said the Petty Ranch is closer to the coast and did not register such high temperatures. The Petty Ranch is a very good piece of avocado land as it has ample water from the ranch’s own well. And the soil and microclimate allow the avocados to flourish with less irrigation than most groves need. “We have been able to keep them happy with only 1.25 acre feet per year,” he said.

Surveying his trees in late 2020, Sayer expects a good crop in 2021 though not as heavy as in 2020. He said his Lamb Hass had an on-year this past season while his Hass acreage had an off year. So, in total, he expects a solid year. “I think my Lamb Hass acreage will produce about 10,000 pounds per acre, and if that’s an off year, I’ll take it.”

Last year, on the fifth anniversary of his father’s death and several months after Mr. Ortega passed away, Sayer reflected on his agricultural path in a blog he writes (SaticoyRoots Weblog), further solidifying the decision to return to the ranch almost two decades before. “Today, we completed a major replant in our orchard,” he wrote. “Hundreds of young avocado trees are now rooted to the ground, standing proud in the spots they will occupy for the next three, four, or maybe five decades. It has been an exciting project, a plan that was put in motion 12 years ago as Dad and I tried to make sense of the future ahead of us.”

He continued: “Today that work is finished. And I find myself feeling...what? Somber? Reflective? Aware of my own mortality? Planting an orchard is a time of new beginnings. And yet it can also be an act of finality. I will spend the rest of my career planting trees, and this block of avocados that we completed today will outlive me. It will be part of the legacy that I leave to my family and to this land.”

Sayer’s two sisters are partners in Petty Ranch but Sayer



Chris Sayer



runs the operations with the help of a full-time employee and labor crews when needed for harvesting, planting and pruning. Melissa has her own corporate law practice, and his two sons have careers of their own that they are passionate about. But at 30 and 24, neither have yet reached the age where Chris and his dad chose to come back to the ranch.

Sayer is convinced that if either does choose that path, there will be a vibrant agricultural community to join. He likes to tell the story of his grandfather adding four adjacent acres to the family holdings in the 1950s. "My grandfather did a little horse-trading to get those acres because they had railroad frontage. As anyone would have told you in the mid-1950s, ag was on the way out in this area, but frontage land on the railroad would be very valuable."

The railroad tracks are still there and about once a week, Sayer is reminded of that story as that is how often they are used. "People are always forecasting the end of agriculture in California, but year after year, we continue to thrive. I don't know how, but history suggests that we will continue to muddle through and deal with the many challenges including more competition and regulations."

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Meet the Executive Committee Of the California Avocado Commission



The Grether Family

Chairman of the Board Rob Grether

Rob Grether is a fifth generation Ventura County farmer, the last three of which have been growing avocados in Somis. His grandfather, Bob, and father, John, first planted avocados in 1976. Now Rob and his brother, Ted, also are involved in the family farming operation, Grether Farming Company, which farms about 525 acres of avocados as well as both lemons and mandarins in the Las Posas Valley.

But Rob's path to the family business was not a straight line. After graduating from high school in Ojai, he moved on

to Tulane University, where he studied economics. Armed with his bachelor's degree, he did come back to California to work in production agriculture, first with Dulcinea Farms and then The Wonderful Company. Grether then went on to business school at Duke University, where he earned his graduate degree. With his educational background and work experience to call upon, he moved into management consulting for The WestMark Group, which specializes in strategic planning and agricultural financing. He spent the next eight years moving around the state with stops in both Los Angeles and San Francisco and consulting for many different ag companies and doing some work for Grether Farming Company.

In 2019, he joined the family operation on a full-time basis, but he said that move was not a foregone conclusion. "My dad never put pressure on

me to join the family business," Rob said, adding that he did tire of the travel and the nature of working on relatively short term projects, which, by definition, required you to move on to another company at the conclusion of each gig.

He's now back on the home front as vice president of the company, handling finance, capital projects and industry relations. Rob and Victoria Grether have two sons, Jack (7) and Emmett (4). Rob, 39, enjoys a number of active pursuits including skiing, cycling and running when the demands of raising a young family allow for it.

The Rochefort Family



Vice Chairman Ryan Rochefort

Like many of his colleagues in the avocado industry, Ryan Rochefort grew up in the shadow of packing houses and large groves. His Fallbrook upbringing was geographically similar to grower friends, yet he had no direct connection to agriculture. His story is truly the one the agricultural industry brags about, which is that hard work and an interest is all you really need to make it in this business.

“I didn’t really have any idea of what I wanted to do for a living,” Rochefort said. “I always had a green thumb and was interested in growing things and gardening. I sort of stumbled into this industry.”

After high school, he found a job with Sierra Pacific Farms, a grove management company in Temecula. “I started at the bottom digging ditches and laying irrigation pipe. They are a very good employer, so I stuck with them.”

Rochefort admits that in the early years, he didn’t look far off into the future and envision a career. But he continually took on more responsibility, enjoyed the industry and started

to recognize the opportunity as he moved up the ladder. Five years ago, he took over the lead role in Riverside and San Diego counties. Today, after more than 20 years with Sierra Pacific, he is vice president of agricultural operations.

He first joined CAC as a member of the Production Research Committee about six years ago and has since become a commission member, serving District 1. Ryan, 42, and his wife, Satig, have been married nine years and are the proud parents of eight-year-old Micah and six-year-old Grace.

While he is the first member of his family to pursue agriculture as a career, he sees sparks of interest in gardening from his children, just as he showed many years ago. He and Micah tend to the vegetables, while he works the flowers with Grace. “We have tried to grow just about everything,” he says. “We think of the backyard as a blank canvas and try to fill it in. I am still an avid gardener.”



The Cole Family

Treasurer Jason Cole

Jason Cole grew up in the avocado business as his grandparents – Lee and Jeanette Cole – planted the family’s first 40-acre ranch with avocados in 1969. Lee served as CEO and president of Calavo for many years, retiring in early 2020. He was a big influence on Jason’s career as the young Cole remembers that his grandfather would make him harvest bins

of fruit to earn spending money. "It was harsh work and I decided I wanted to be on the business side of the industry," Jason quipped.

But after interning at Calavo while in college, he decided that the business side wasn't as exciting as being involved in the growing end. Jason, who is 35, initially took science classes at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and thought about a career as a pediatrician. Eventually, he crafted a major combining many different agricultural classes, including communications, engineering and agronomy.

He and his brother, Taylor, have followed his grandfather and father (Guy Cole) into the business. Over the past decade, they have helped the family ranch triple the size of its avocado holding through acquisitions and plantings and they now have 900 acres. They also grow lemons and have cattle on the ranch. Taylor runs the harvest crew and is involved in new orchard development, while Jason serves as the agronomist dealing with the soil and tree health of the ranch.

Jason and Lindsey Cole have a son, Jensen, who recently turned one. In his spare time, Jason is an active member of the local Rotary Club and also likes to fish, hunt quail and go scuba diving. He has been involved in CAC and CAC committees for the past half-dozen years.

Secretary Jessica Hunter

Jessica Hunter literally grew up on her grandfather's (Douglas Giddings) 120-acre avocado ranch in Bonsall. He had invested in Del Rey Avocado Company in 1969 and bought and planted the San Luis Rey Ranch in the 1970s. It was a perfect playground when Jessica was a kid in the 1980s.

After high school, she continued her education at the University of San Diego studying business administration. While in her senior year in college, Jessica secured an internship at Wells Fargo, put on a business suit and lasted two days in corporate America before she realized that was not the career she wanted. She loves the outdoors and having an independent work day. So she said, "I talked to my dad (Bob Siemer) and he told me there was an opportunity in our family business to help him manage the avocado groves he owned and buy avocados from other local farms

for the packing house." So Jessica joined the family business in the fall of 2002.

Siemer has always managed the grower end of the business and Hunter followed in his footsteps, initially working as a field buyer. Today as vice president of operations, she still manages the farms they own and works directly with growers. She loves working with growers on the production end of the business helping them achieve success. She is very proud of successfully converting the ranch's first block of avocados to organic production in 2004. They are leaders in organic production and utilizing sustainable farming practices is Jessica's passion.

Hunter said working with California growers to improve this sector of the avocado industry is her first love and primary focus on a day-to-day basis. She called the late CAC Commissioner Carol Steed a mentor and an inspiration and, in fact, took Ms. Steed's District 1 position when she tragically passed way too early in life.

Jessica and Matt Hunter have two grade school kids, Logan and Sarah, and spend lots of time with their immediate and extended families enjoying life. For fun, Jessica loves outdoor activities including scuba diving, working out and running. In fact, for her 40th birthday this past year, she ran her first half marathon. 🍌



The Hunter Family



The site design is created with a variety of screen sizes in mind, and it scales well across smartphones, tablets and desktop computers.



The Recipe section with implemented improvements.

Re-launched CaliforniaAvocado.com Provides Improved User Experience

The CaliforniaAvocado.com website, which serves as the content hub for all things related to California avocados, is one of the California Avocado Commission's most effective means of engaging consumers with the brand. It provides thousands of recipes for any dietary lifestyle, introduces fans to California avocado growers, shares preparation tips and nutrition information, and addresses consumers' questions and interests through entertaining content. Because the website plays such a crucial role, the Commission has routinely upgraded the site over the past two decades in line with emerging technologies. This year, however, with the website software approaching the end of its useful life and the software maker ending support, the Commission undertook a more substantial website upgrade— launching the newly optimized site on September 16, 2020.

Since the Commission first launched its consumer website, people have come to rely more heavily on digital content for inspiration, information and entertainment. When it comes to California avocados, they seek instant access to inspirational recipes, demonstration videos, informative blogs and nutritional information that suits their lifestyle — and they do so increasingly on mobile devices. This increasing penchant for new content served as the impetus for the Commission's year-long website upgrade. The redesigned site goals were to:

- streamline the browsing experience to ensure visitors could find the content they were looking for
- be more accessible on smaller mobile devices
- simplify the content management workflow on the back end of the site to ensure staff could more easily publish fresh content on a frequent basis

To reach these goals, the Commission chose to migrate all its content to the WordPress content management system. WordPress is a popular CMS solution that can be scaled and

adapted to future website needs and is recognized for its user-friendly interface that allows site administrators to easily redesign pages and upload content. WordPress also, importantly, provides a more mobile-friendly user interface — ensuring the website is properly resized for optimal viewing on mobile devices and the navigation menus are easy to access on smaller phones or tablets.

To enhance the user experience, the website team audited all its existing content and restructured its navigation menus to make them more intuitive. In addition, *The Scoop* blog — which used to live on a separate website — was integrated into the main site, a move that also will help improve the website's search engine rankings.

With the new CMS in place, the Commission can more efficiently and effectively deliver on the website's objective to increase California Avocados' perceived value, preference and loyalty with CAC's targets. The new site features a fresh, modern-looking digital design optimized for mobile devices that loads at least 30% faster than before, creating a positive user experience that should invite consumer engagement, increase site visits and positively impact the site's search engine optimization rankings on Google, the Commission's top referral source.

Another benefit of the WordPress CMS is that it is completely free to use, which will mean significant savings on operating costs for hosting and CMS software licensing. CAC staff also was trained to use the new CMS in the fourth quarter of 2020 and are expected to experience an improvement in the speed and quality of the daily content-editing workflow. The ease with which the new website content can be updated by CAC staff will benefit growers by saving Commission staff time while keeping CaliforniaAvocado.com fresh and engaging for fans and consumers. 🥑

Winter: Time to Prepare for the Year Ahead

Although avocado trees never go truly dormant, they do slow down in winter — a state known as quiescence — making it a good time to review the season that just ended and make some preparations for next year.

Irrigation

Hopefully, there will be some winter rains coming and the grove irrigation can be shut off for a little while. This is the perfect opportunity to perform necessary system maintenance and make sure the system is fully operational ahead of next summer. A good starting point is to check your system's distribution uniformity (DU). DU is a measure of how uniformly your system is applying water across each irrigation block. That is, if you have a microsprinkler system with eight gallon per hour

microsprinklers on each tree, how close to eight gallons per tree is your system putting out? Are some trees only getting four gallons while others are getting 12 gallons? Your local Natural Resources Conservation Service office offers DU testing for little or no cost. A DU of one means your system has perfectly uniform distribution (100% uniformity); anything less than one means your system has less than perfect uniformity. With a well-designed system and modern pressure compensating emitters you should be able to achieve a DU of 0.85 (85% uniformity) or better.

Aside from a DU test, there are many other things that easily can be checked to help improve your irrigation system. Does your system have the same brand and size (output) microsprinklers across an irrigation block? It is

not uncommon over time for systems to become a hodgepodge of sprinkler manufacturers and outputs as broken ones are changed and you don't have the exact replacement on hand. Winter is a good time to walk your system and make sure each block is consistent with the same brand of microsprinklers and the same output volume. Also, if your trees need a higher sprinkler output or larger spray pattern winter is the time to make those changes. Trying to make those adjustments mid-season or right before the first heatwave is a sure way to send your trees into shock.

This also is a good time to check all your system's valves — manual or automatic — to make sure they are all opening and closing smoothly and there are no leaks. Filters and pressure regulators are other components that can introduce large variation in a system's DU if they are not functioning properly. Filters should be thoroughly cleaned and pressure regulators checked to make sure they are doing their job. Any worn or non-functional parts should be replaced.

Fertilization

Every grower should have had a leaf tissue sample (or series of leaf tissue samples) taken in September-October for nutrient analysis. Now is the time to sit down with those reports, your historical yield data, and soil analyses, if you have them, and prepare a fertilizer plan for next year. If you don't feel con-





fidient in doing this yourself, you should consult with a reputable crop adviser or farm adviser.

In addition to needing to fertilize to support the growth and development of the crop you have on the tree, you also need to consider the crop that will be setting with bloom next spring. However, crop load isn't all there is to it. Plant nutrition (i.e., fertilization) supports plant health much the same way that good nutrition supports human health. Have your trees been damaged by fire or heatwaves? Do they suffer from phytophthora root rot? A good nutrition program will help fire or heat-injured trees recover and come back into production.

For an in-depth discussion of fertility management for tree health, please watch the recent video that was recorded at the California Avocado Commission's Pine Tree Ranch featuring a discussion between Dr. Danny Klittich, Doug O'Hara and myself (<https://bit.ly/2V2igvE>).

Harvesting and Pruning

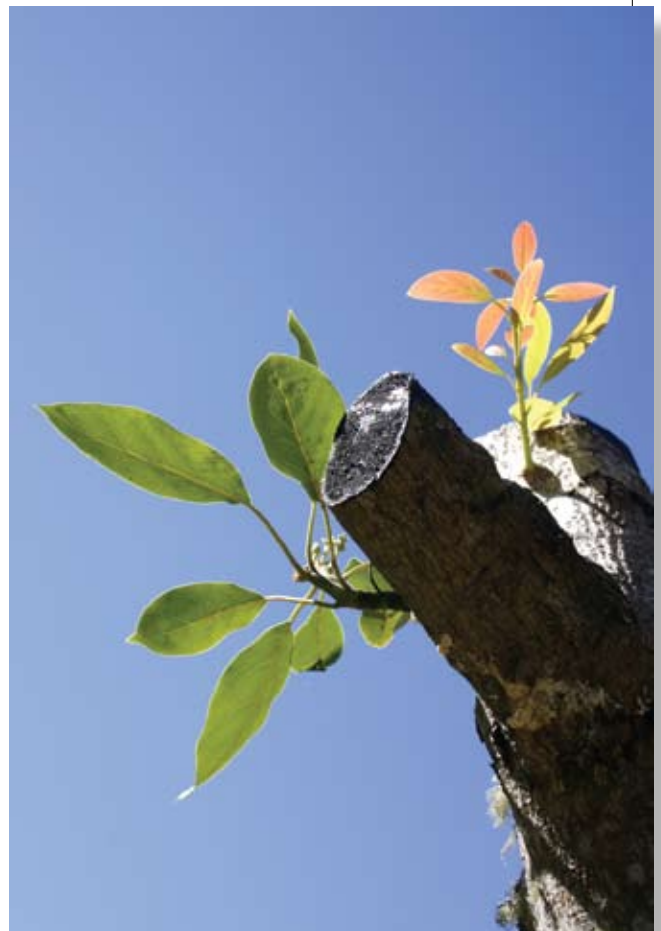
Harvesting and pruning are two activities in avocado production that aren't generally associated with winter.

However, winter is a good time to give some thought to both activities. Do you need to prune your trees next year? If so, then you may want to start thinking about which blocks need pruning and prioritize them for harvest early in the season. The growth produced following pruning may be capable of flowering and setting fruit the following spring if pruning is done early enough so the growth can mature physiologically and respond to environmental signals to produce flower buds. Typically, in California those environmental signals and the transition to flower bud development occur in August, so pruning done after June is unlikely to be mature enough to flower the following spring.

Harvesting strategy also can help you manage your trees' development. A large crop held late into the season will suppress

summer flush growth, reduce flowering potential for the following spring, and potentially throw trees into severe alternate bearing. Winter is a good time to assess your crop load and tentatively plan for a size pick to reduce crop load on heavily cropped trees. Similarly, light crop loads may be an indication that your canopy is not getting enough sunlight and some pruning is necessary to stimulate growth and let light into the canopy (see "Optimize Productivity by Pruning for Maximum Light" in the Spring 2019 *From the Grove*).

Lastly, remember the best laid plans often go awry so be prepared to make adjustments come spring and as the season progresses. If we have learned anything over the past couple of years, it's that Mother Nature is a really good curve ball pitcher. 🍊



Dr. Manosalva Awarded Grants for Rootstock Breeding and Organic Disease Management Projects

Dr. Patricia Manosalva, assistant professor of microbiology and plant pathology at the University of California, Riverside and director of the Avocado Rootstock Breeding Program, was recently awarded federal grant funds for two research projects of importance to the California avocado industry.

The first pertains to organic disease management. Organic food sales continue to expand across the United States, topping \$50 billion in sales in 2018, and according to the Organic Trade Association the total organic sales of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops now comprise more than 36% of organic sales. To assist organic growers in meeting consumer demand, the U.S. Department of Agriculture National Institute of Food and Agriculture awarded nearly \$2 million in grant funds to a team of 15 scientists for the “Plant Safety, Horticultural Benefits, and Disease Efficacy of Essential Oils for Use in Organically Grown Fruit Crops: From the Farm to the Consumer” project. Dr. Manosalva is one of the scientists who will work on this four-year project.

The project will:

- Evaluate the horticultural impact of using essential oils in managing disease
- Begin to test plant disease efficacy claims of essential oil products marketed for organic producers
- Evaluate organically certified plant essential oils on targeted pathogens
- Determine the efficacy of essential oils on fruit shelf life

The second project is entitled “Reducing Avocado Losses to Major Challenges by Improving Resistance Selection and Disease Management Using Next Generation Technologies.” The goal of this four-year project is to identify rootstocks and rootstock/scion combinations exhibiting resistance or tolerance to Phytophthora root rot and Laurel Wilt and then conduct field tests to assess the utility and performance of the cultivars. In addition, the researchers will develop and deploy new tools to improve disease management, generate avocado breeding platforms and conduct outreach to share their findings with growers and the industry at large.

The California Avocado Commission has invested over \$20 million in avocado scion and rootstock breeding efforts



Dr. Patricia Manosalva

over the past 40 years. Breeding is a slow process with no guarantees of success; also the outcomes potentially benefit avocado growers around the world. For these reasons, as well as to be able to allocate funds to other short-term applied research projects, the CAC Production Research Committee and Board of Directors decided several years ago to reduce the funding allocated to the breeding programs and encourage the University researchers to seek outside funding. It is because of CAC’s past and continued funding that this grant was possible as these grants require 100% matching funds from non-federal sources.

In addition to leveraging CAC’s current funding, Dr. Manosalva was able to utilize the in-kind support of the grower-cooperators who participate in these trials. Currently seven growers have planted large trials in Riverside, Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo Counties as part of these efforts, with other numerous small plot trials being planted as well. Dr. Manosalva is grateful for the ongoing support of the grower-cooperators in these trials and recognizes that her research program is dependent on their continued support. 🥑

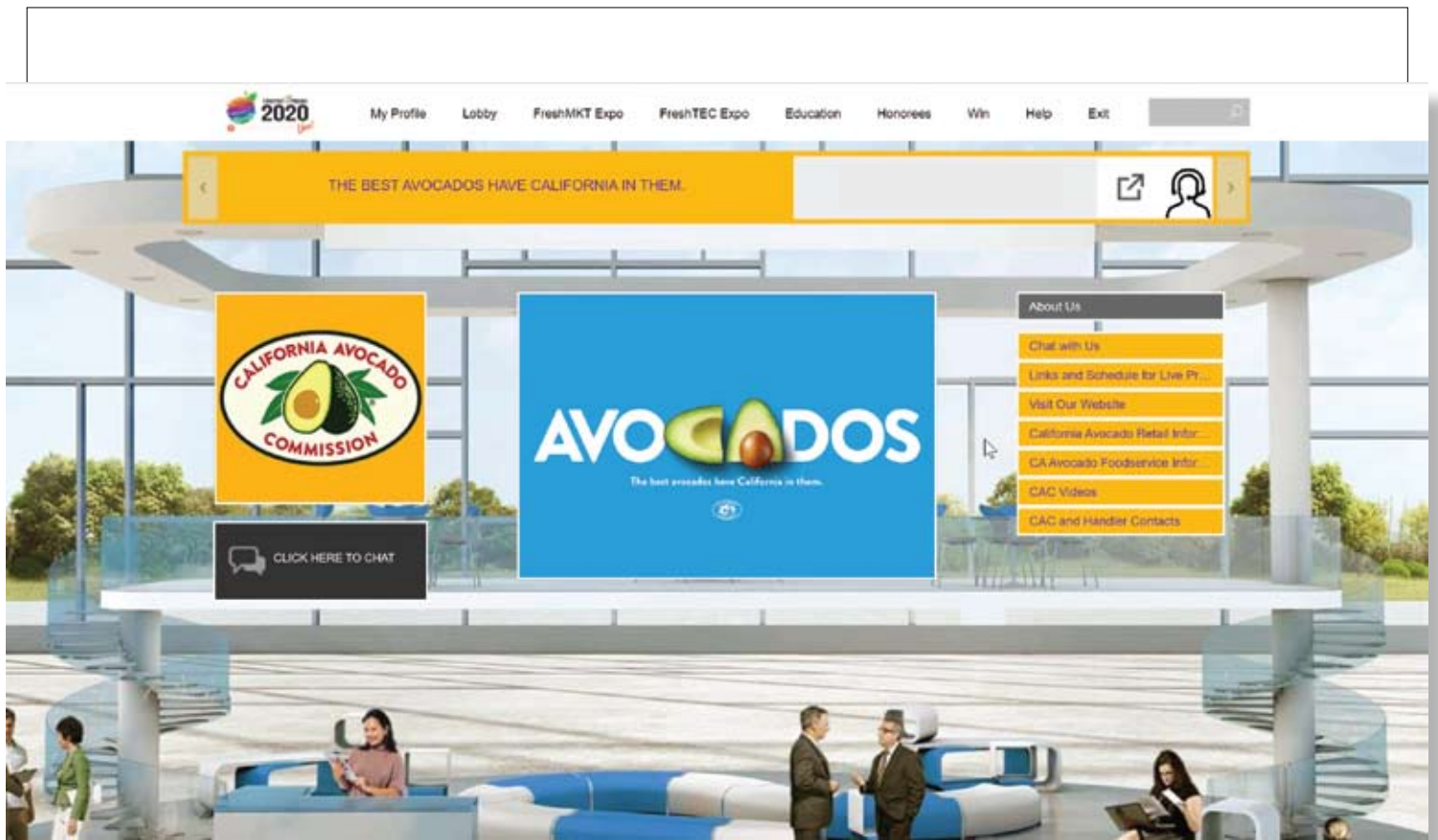
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The Commission's United Fresh 2020 virtual booth allowed visitors to view videos and download product and marketing information, chat with the CAC team or link to the website.

Industry Leaders Explore Challenges and Opportunities at Virtual Trade Shows

As a result of the pandemic, produce suppliers, food-service operators and retailers are facing unprecedented challenges. Normally, in-person trade shows and conventions would be an ideal venue for industry members to get together, share their expertise, brainstorm and collaboratively hash out solutions to systemic challenges. In light of the current pandemic and COVID-19 health regulations and recommendations, in-person events were not an option for most of this year. Instead, industry trade associations hosted online events utilizing the latest technologies to allow their members to exhibit and showcase their brands, engage with attendees and share valuable information.

Recognizing virtual trade shows would present both chal-

lenges and opportunities, the California Avocado Commission embraced the new format in a show of support for the Produce Marketing Association, United Fresh and the industry at large. CAC turned its attention to leveraging the online platforms to showcase the California Avocados brand, pique interest in the Commission's marketing programs and demonstrate leadership on a global stage. CAC virtually attended and sponsored three of the industry's most widely recognized events: United Fresh LIVE, PMA Foodservice: Delivered and PMA Fresh Summit.

Prior to the United Fresh Produce LIVE virtual trade show, which took place from June 15 – 19, the Commission issued a press release inviting industry members to join them for a series of four daily webinars where they could learn more

about the current California avocado crop, marketing support opportunities, research and nutrition information. CAC's bronze-level virtual booth sponsorship included tabs where visitors could view the Commission's latest advertising creative, download sell sheets and other non-confidential program materials, and view chef videos. One such video, featuring Chef Jason Hernandez, demonstrated how to elevate any dish to California cuisine with fresh California avocados. CAC staff also participated in a variety of virtual education sessions and workshops where they engaged with produce industry colleagues. For the Commission, the virtual trade show resulted in 964 unique booth visits during the event, 474 people tab views, 279 document views, 78 downloads of the documents to virtual briefcases and 150 video views. The platform remained online through September 1.

The five-day, late-July PMA Foodservice: Delivered virtual trade show was an opportunity for the Commission to help address the COVID-related challenges the foodservice industry is facing while inspiring them with unique California-avocado centric menu applications. The Commission's sponsor page provided tips on leveraging the benefits of California avocados on the menu and showcased the versatility of the fruit with

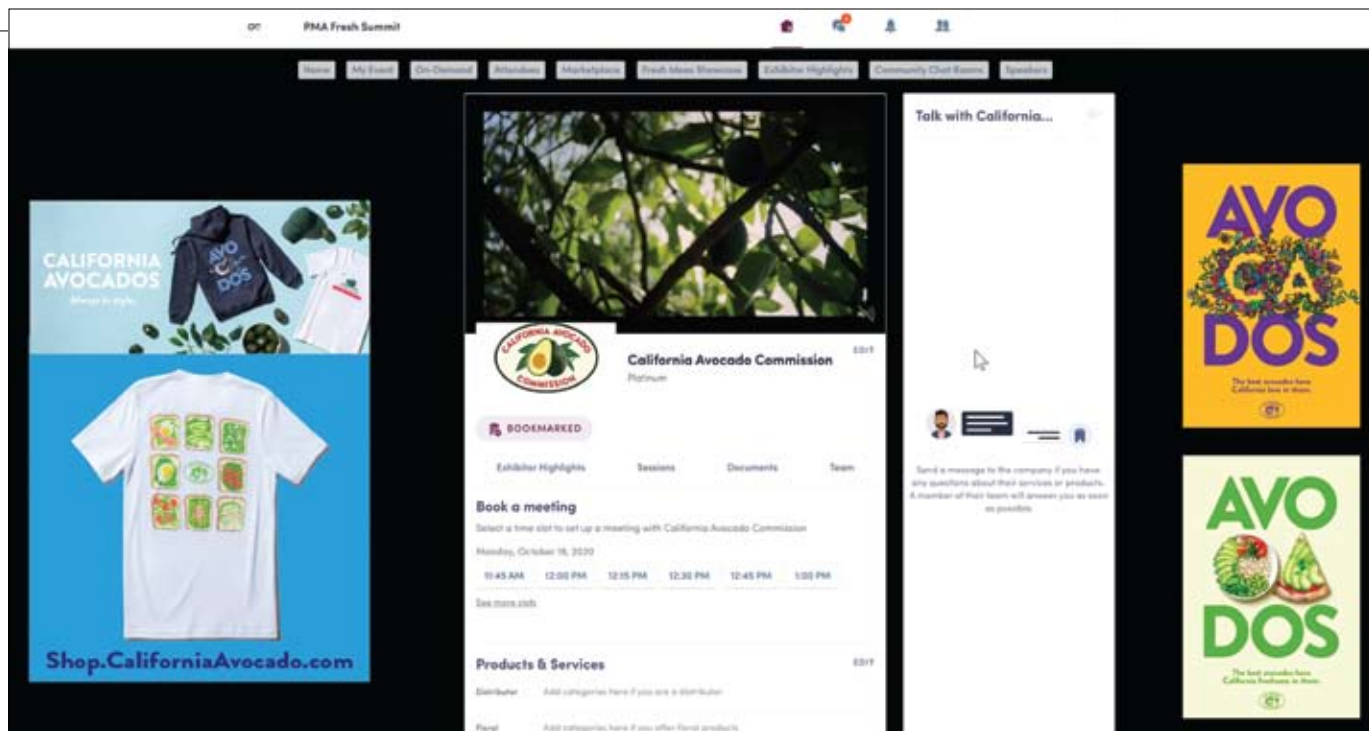
pre-recorded demonstration videos, including Chef Hernandez's presentation. The page also provided links to the CAC foodservice website and information on seasonality, ripening/handling, storing and preparing the fruit. To expand its reach, the Commission sponsored a page under the PMA "Operator Challenges" site that offered best practices for dealing with day-to-day operational challenges. The Commission's page received 2,138 total content interactions with an average visit of 2.34 minutes.

This learning-filled virtual foodservice event attracted just under 3,000 registered attendees — a substantial 66% increase above the average registrations secured by the traditional in-person conference held in Monterey, CA. Of this year's attendees, 113 were identified as qualified U.S.-based foodservice operators from high-volume independents (i.e., colleges/universities or hospitals) and chains. Because the virtual event provided complete contact information for the attendees, the Commission was able to promptly follow up with the 44 western-region representatives and provide them with menu promotion and ideation opportunities for 2021.

Prior to the October PMA Fresh Summit — which included a preview week for buyers, a preview week for attendees and

The screenshot shows a web interface for the California Avocado Commission's virtual foodservice event. The top navigation bar is green with the text "Solutions Sampling" and a "Live Stream" button. A left sidebar menu lists various navigation options. The main content area features the CAC logo, a video player showing a sliced avocado, and a text block describing the Commission's mission and services. Below the text are four buttons: "Seasonality", "Ripening", "Size-Yield", and "Tips Videos". A chat window is visible in the bottom right corner.

The Produce Marketing Association's virtual foodservice event allowed for visitors of CAC's solutions page to download information relevant to foodservice operators and the foodservice industry.



Visitors to the California Avocado Commission Marketplace viewed advertising and merchandise examples, could download helpful documents, watch videos and book meetings with the Commission team.

then the main three-day virtual event — the Commission promoted its participation via a trade press release that garnered more than a half million impressions, as well as LinkedIn posts and personal outreach. The event featured 31 speakers and 21 hours of educational content. Nearly 2,000 live viewers tuned in for the State of the Industry presentation by PMA CEO Cathy Burns.

The Commission achieved a high profile at the event. CAC Director Trade Affairs Angela Fraser served as co-chair of the Fresh Summit committee, greeting attendees at live online sessions and entertaining attendees with a vocal performance during a virtual reception. Jan DeLyser, CAC vice president marketing, spoke about both the 2020 and upcoming 2021 California avocado seasons during a Zoom-based presentation. In addition, CAC retail marketing directors Carolyn Becker and Dave Anderson hosted an “Evolving Opportunities with Avocado Promotions” presentation. CAC staff also held 13 virtual meetings with select customers, trade media and potential marketing partners. The California Avocado Commission “marketplace”, which was like a virtual trade show booth, was visited by important customers including Albertsons/Safeway, Costco, Gelson’s, Hannaford, Lunds & Byerlys, PF Chang’s China Bistro, Sysco, Topco, Tops and Walmart. The event secured 821 views of CAC’s profile and 661 Sponsored Product Demo Views, including by major retailers. As a sponsor, the Commission secured prominent listings on PMA advertising for the event and showcased a California Avocado-branded video during the general session.

Overall, PMA Fresh Summit garnered nearly 60,000 visits

to its virtual marketplace, nearly 18,000 visits to the Fresh Ideas Showcase and more than 61,000 video views. Nearly 6,800 participants took part in live and on-demand sessions and more than 80,000 messages and 40,000 connection requests were sent throughout the virtual event, which remained live through November 13.

Admittedly, in-person trade shows provide more planned and impromptu opportunities to interact with contacts. One-on-one engagement at all three virtual trade shows did present its own challenges, as participation in live meeting platforms was low. However, the Commission was able to leverage available opportunities at these virtual events to secure new contacts and reconnect with valued partners. In addition, CAC’s participation demonstrated strong support for the industry during a particularly challenging time and kept the brand front-and-center for a global audience of retailers and foodservice operators, distributors, produce and floral industry exhibitors, handlers, media, dietitians, educators, students and chefs. By maintaining its commitment to the industry, the Commission also ensured it retained its earned-point status for future PMA in-person trade shows, thereby retaining prominent placement and considerations in the years to come. “Participating in virtual produce trade shows in 2020 doesn’t compare to the engagement with customers and industry colleagues in person at live events, but they provided opportunities for visibility, reminders of in-season California avocado availability, interaction and learning for our team at relatively low cost,” concludes DeLyser. 🥑

Proactive IPM of the Big Avocado Seed Weevil, *Heilipus lauri* (Coleoptera: Curculionidae)



Aeration chambers in quarantine set up to capture *H. lauri* aggregation pheromones.

Avocados, an iconic specialty crop grown in California, are native to parts of México, and Central and South America, where associated native insect biodiversity is high. In contrast, the biodiversity of the arthropod fauna associated with avocados in California is low, consisting primarily of about four invasive pest species of insects (red banded whitefly, avocado thrips, and avocado lace bug) and mites (persea mite) that primarily feed on leaves (Hoddle 2006).

Currently, California-grown avocados are free from specialist fruit feeding pests such as seed feeding weevils (e.g., *Heilipus lauri*) and moths (e.g., *Stenoma catenifer*). Establishment of these fruit feeding pests in California would cause significant disruption and threaten the long term economic viabil-

ity of this industry (Hoddle 2006). The avocado seed moth, *S. catenifer*, was the subject of a proactive Integrated Pest Management project sponsored by the California Avocado Commission. This multi-year project, run primarily in Guatemala and Peru, resulted in identification of this moth's sex pheromone, optimization of its field use (Hoddle et al. 2011), and development of natural enemy inventories and life table quantification of their impacts (Hoddle and Hoddle 2008; 2012). Similar work is needed for the big avocado seed weevil, *Heilipus lauri*. This weevil is an avocado specialist native to México and it is considered to be one of the most damaging pests associated with cultivated avocados (e.g., Hass and Fuerte) in Mexico and Colombia where it is an invasive pest (Caicedo et al. 2010; Castañeda-

Vildózola, et al. 2017; Luna et al. 2017; Vallejo et al. 2014). Around 60% of Hass fruit have been reported as being damaged by *H. lauri* in unmanaged orchards in Morelos, México (Medina 2005), while in Colombia, damage levels in managed Hass orchards average 4-8% (Caicedo et al. 2010).

Adult *H. lauri* feed on leaves and young stems but don't reproduce on these structures. Female seed feeding weevils lay eggs inside holes they drill into fruit using their long beak-like snout or rostrum. Larvae that hatch from eggs bore through the fruit pulp to the seed. Upon reaching the seed, larvae burrow into the seed to feed causing significant internal damage. Mature weevil larvae pupate in the damaged seed then later emerge as adult weevils. Internal feeding by larvae damages fruit, making



Aeration chamber with adult male and female *H. lauri* and immature avocado fruit that are supplied as food.

Initiating a Proactive IPM Program Targeting *Heilipus lauri*

To get ahead of a potentially serious problem, a “Proactive IPM” project was initiated targeting *H. lauri* in advance of its possible accidental introduction into California. Funding for this project came from the California Department of Food and Agriculture’s Office of Environmental Farming and Innovation and the California Avocado Commission. This project is a collaborative effort with Dr. Armado Equihua-Martínez and Dr. Edith Estrada-Venegas from Colegio de Posgraduados, Posgrado en Fitosanidad, Entomología y Acarología, in Montecillo, Texcoco, in México

The Proactive IPM project has the following objectives:

- 1) Identify the putative aggregation pheromone of *H. lauri* so it can be used in monitoring and control programs.
- 2) Survey *H. lauri* eggs, larvae, and pupae in México for natural enemies that could potentially be used in a future biocontrol program should this pest establish in California.
- 3) Quantify the distances adult male and female weevils can fly using flight mills. These data could be very useful for establishing monitoring or quarantine boundaries should *H. lauri* be detected in California.

In February 2020, field collections of *H. lauri* were made in México with Dr. Equihua-Martínez and Dr. Estrada-Venegas, and their Ph.D. student, Valentina Diaz-Grisales. Adult weevils were returned to the Insectary and Quarantine Facility at UC Riverside under USDA-APHIS permit and used for experiments to address the objectives above. This work is ongoing and further updates will be provided as research is completed. 🍷

it unmarketable, and in some instances heavy damage causes fruit to drop prematurely. Chemical control is difficult because larvae are protected from insecticides within the fruit (Caicedo et al. 2010).

Consequently, *H. lauri* is listed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s

Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service as an avocado pest of high concern for countries that export avocado fruit (i.e., Hass) to the USA from areas where avocados and *H. lauri* is native (e.g., México) or invasive (e.g., Colombia).



(A) Adult female *Heilipus lauri* attached to flight mill. (B) Close up of female weevil attached to the flight mill harness which tethers the weevil to the rotor arm of the flight mill. (C) Adult male weevil attached to the flight mill harness with elytra and wings spread in preparation for flight. When weevils commence flight they fly in circles around the pivot point. A lap top computer records distances flown, flight velocity, and periodicity of flight. These flight data can be compared between male and female weevils, young vs. old weevils, virgin vs. mated weevils.

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Blogger Advocates Continue to Inspire and Educate Consumers

California avocado consumers often search for recipes, meal inspiration and ideas on various social media channels. This year, the California Avocado Commission partnered with third-party blogger advocates and influencers who have a high following on their blog and social media channels. By doing this, the Commission extended audience reach, drove awareness of California avocados and encouraged consumer purchasing decisions throughout the entire season.

From March through September of the 2019-20 season, the Blogger Advocate Program resulted in successful partnerships with six bloggers who highlight health, wellness and lifestyle topics on their channels, and seven additional bloggers to spark inspiration and further amplify awareness amongst both existing and potential California avocado consumers during the peak season. These Blogger Advocates were carefully vetted and chosen due to their compelling storytelling capabilities, beautiful photography, loyal social media following and existing love for the California Avocados brand, making them the perfect partners to weave California avocados into their content in a natural way.

This year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CAC strategically pivoted to different themes throughout the season, as originally planned programs could no longer be implemented. For example, the Commission swapped the theme “Summer Games” for “Grilling Greatness in July”, due to the international summer games being postponed to 2021. CAC also changed “Picnic Must-Have’s and Must-Do’s” to “California Lifestyle” in August, due to social distancing measures and to pair perfectly with CAC’s overarching theme, “the best avocados have California in them.” In addition to the blog

posts, the recipe photography and subsequent messaging was syndicated throughout the advocates’ social channels on Facebook, Instagram and Pinterest. These posts provided a timely call-to-action to grab California avocados while they were in season and also at their peak availability, showcased the importance and benefits of purchasing California avocados, and drove traffic to CAC’s social channels and website. Throughout the season, CAC hand-selected the best recipes from the bloggers to include on the Scoop Blog, which is now integrated into CaliforniaAvocado.com.

By leveraging bloggers’ social media channels – popular with consumers looking for new meal ideas – the Commission raised awareness of the premium quality of California avocados, promoted their use and highlighted their peak season and availability. In setting forth themes for each month throughout the partnership, the program naturally inserted California avocados into culturally relevant conversations among consumers, like cooking at home. It educated followers on the many uses of avocados through unique recipes and encouraged the purchase of California avocados.

As a result of the Blogger Advocate Program, the Commission earned more than 38 million impressions across blog and social media posts from March through September. CAC also secured valuable working relationships with bloggers and talent managers resulting in a positive outlook and partnership with the brand. Cara Cifelli of Cara’s Kitchen said, “Thank you so much for a great season! It was so much fun to work with the CAC team!” and from Jackie Segedin from CookIt Media on behalf of Haley Davis, Beth Brickey and Sarah Copeland, “We loved being part of this campaign and are excited for the 2021 season!” 🥑



Sarah Copeland of Edible Living shared a Grilled Corn, Tomato and Avocado Pasta Salad that makes a perfect, quick toss up dinner with fresh ingredients from the garden and delectable, creamy California avocados.



Haley Davis of Brewing Happiness got creative with a Healthy Hazelnut Chocolate Spread using California avocados as the secret ingredient.



Beth Brickey of Tasty Yummies shared Grilled Marinated Chicken Thighs with a California Avocado Basil Pesto sauce.



Alex Aldeborgh of Daisy Beet created a vibrant vegan and gluten free dish that's perfect for summer with her California Rainbow Rolls.

California Avocado Merchandise Shop Now Online



The Avocado State-ment “Dad” Hat is currently one of the top-performing products in the merchandise shop.

Fans of California avocados have a wide variety of reasons for loving the Golden State fruit. And now, thanks to the California Avocado Commission’s new online California avocado merchandise shop, they have a variety of ways to share their love of the fruit.

Launched on September 8, the California avocado merchandise shop includes, for example, sweatshirts and beach towels designed with “the best avocados have California in them” campaign creative, socks bedecked with the fruit, and California avocado-branded hats and stickers. This e-commerce platform provides the Commission with a new way to leverage brand advocates, influencers and fans who don — or use — the branded merchandise and often, in turn, share photos on social media of their favorite California avocado items.

Shop.CaliforniaAvocado.com was launched using Shopify, a subscription software service that creates e-commerce websites with a shopping cart solution and an easy-to-use management system for order processing, shipments and product management. Shopify easily integrates with popular social media platforms like Instagram and Facebook, making it easier to run, monitor and adapt social campaigns. Sales generated by the e-commerce site will be used to maintain and fund the site beyond its introductory year.

Cognizant of the pandemic, wildfires and current social and political climate, the Commission paused its broader social media initiatives in fiscal year 2019-20 and focused its merchandise shop promotions on carefully selected platforms that would protect the brand’s image. Initially the e-commerce site was directly promoted only on CAC’s website homepage, in the CAC consumer email newsletter and on Pinterest. Through October, CAC successfully delivered 180,964 emails supporting the shop with an open rate of 15%, meeting e-commerce industry standards. Pinterest pins generated 5,236 engagements and 467,152 impressions.

Advertising on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter started in mid-November. In addition, the Commission partnered with POPSUGAR on a Holiday Gift Guide custom-content piece in December to encourage California avocado fans to stock up on California avocado-themed gifts for the holidays.

The Commission also launched an influencer campaign on Instagram — a channel that showcases striking photography and is favored by CAC’s targeted Premium Californian consumers. In early October, 27 targeted influencers were sent a selection of California avocado merchandise. The influencers then demonstrated to their Instagram followers how they live the California lifestyle by showcasing their new California avocado gear with eye-catching snapshots. They encouraged



California avocados are always in style, especially when wearing the Dreamin' Hoodie or State Flag Tee!

their followers to embrace the California lifestyle and visit the California avocado merchandise shop. The influencers' posts generated 135,485 engagements along with an average engagement rate of 11%, well above the standard 1-2% benchmark.

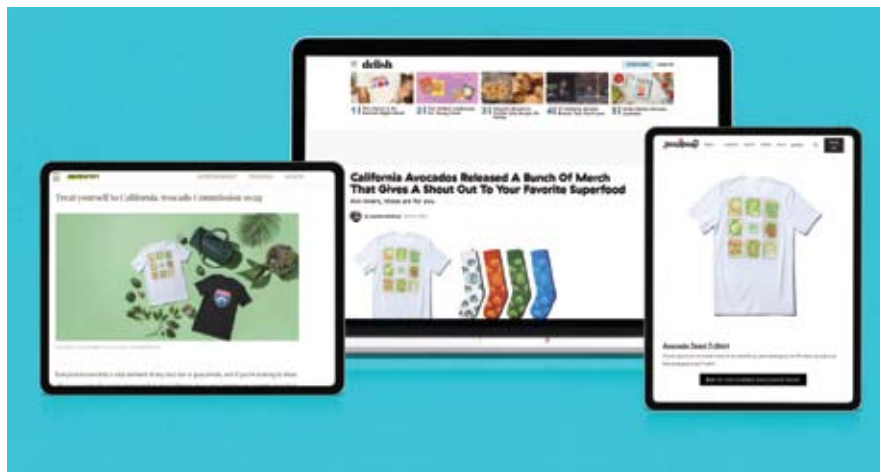
To drive awareness, buzz and traffic to the new shop, the Commission's public relations team issued a press release and conducted media outreach to both local and national consumer publications. Media members who expressed interest in the merchandise received a California avocado gift package. The California-inspired collection secured coverage in various lifestyle media outlets, including *Delish*, *Real Simple*, *Distractify*, *Scary Mommy* and the *Orange County Business Journal*. The public relations blitz garnered more than 45 million earned impressions.

In keeping with the fruit's homegrown (and American-made) value, all the California avocado merchandise items are made in the United States. To date, the top performing items are the Avocado State-ment Dad Hat, Avocado Forever Socks and the Avocado Toast T-shirt. Merchandise will be

refreshed next season based on sales data, emerging cultural trends and new items that align with advertising campaign creative. Additionally, CAC will team up with a new crop of influencers to showcase and promote the new merchandise across social channels. When this happens, it promotes both the merchandise and the California Avocados brand.

The Commission's merchandising shop sales target is eventually to achieve an average of at least 300 monthly orders with an average of 1.25 items per order. Through October the shop generated about \$8,000 in revenue with an average of 1.87 items per order.

Ultimately, the goal of the program is to generate broader awareness of and preference for California avocados, spur consumer loyalty and increase the fruit's perceived value by offering fans American-made, quality California avocado-branded products. The increased brand visibility provided by these products will ensure California avocados remain top of mind all year long. Growers can check out the site at shop.californiaavocado.com, @CA_Avocados on Instagram and the California Avocado Commission Facebook page. 🥑



Since the launch of the merchandise shop on September 8, the site and products have generated multiple positive press mentions.

By Tim Linden

California Could Have Strong Marketing Year in 2021

Expectations are that the 2021 California avocado crop will be in the 300-million-pound range, which should make for a strong marketing situation. The California Avocado Commission has revealed that the fall survey of handlers indicated a crop of about 317 million pounds, but that was before some wind events in December apparently took a minor toll.

"We think the wind this past week reduced the crop by about 5%," said Rob Wedin of Calavo Growers Inc., on Dec. 11. That would bring the crop down to about 300 million pounds or about 18% less volume than last year.

Wedin noted that the decrease from 2020 will allow handlers to be a bit more strategic about marketing the crop. "What we will be doing is trying to grow the California volume in the months when everyone does their best (in terms of price)."

The longtime sales veteran is anticipating that the vast majority of California fruit will be marketed in the four-month period spanning April through July with steady shipments each week during that period. He anticipated about half as much weekly volume in March with volume again tapering off in August. Though there will be some shipments on each end of the deal (January and February and again in September and October), Wedin believes that they will be minimal.

He added that Mexico has been

averaging more than 50 million pounds per week for the past few months and is expected to continue at that pace well into April, with a significant increase in volume in January. That means a lot of Mexican fruit will be taken out of the marketplace over the next four to five months. "We see demand improving as we get into April," he said, noting that there should also be an uptick in the FOB price in January, especially on 48s and larger fruit.

Wedin did say that the supply/demand curve will continue to be impacted by the coronavirus and the ability of foodservice operations to be fully open again.

Gahl Crane of Eco Farms concurred with the preliminary volume estimate of 315-320 million pounds, noting that winter and wind will have the final say with regard to the ultimate volume. "I'd say the marketing situation is going to be pretty good for California fruit. We think (FOB) prices will be significantly higher in January than they are right now (high \$20s)."

Eco Farms also expects to market the majority of its volume from April through July but Crane said the handler will have some fruit from January to October as growers will harvest their fruit throughout the season for various cultural reasons. But he does expect an earlier end to heavier volume because of the size of the crop, and growers being motivated to pick their fruit before high

temperatures and the California fire season begins.

Eco Farms has a fairly robust organic avocado crop and Crane said there will be more organic volume during the first half of the season. "The southern growing regions have a higher percentage of organics than the later regions, so in comparison, organics will be marketed earlier."

Doug Meyer of West Pak Avocado Inc. also agreed with a 2021 estimate of about 300 million pounds, which he believes will be marketed as early as February and as late as October. "Last year's crop went all the way through October and this year we think it is going to be fairly similar."

In discussing the timing of marketing fruit from the Golden State, he said, "California fruit always has a strong place in the market regardless of supply conditions from Mexico and Peru. There are retail and foodservice customers that look forward to the California season every year. They create a very strong demand for California fruit to support consumer demand in many key markets in the West and select markets in other regions of the country."

West Pak will attempt to capitalize on that demand as long as they can with their California Gold bag brand that gives tribute to the premium freshness and flavor of in-season California Hass avocados.

Commenting on the avocado market in December, he said it hasn't been this low in years and noted that consumers are reaping the benefits with very attractive retail pricing. "We are looking beyond the end of December and are expecting the market to remain relatively stable through early to mid-January."

He said the current low prices are helping to move lots of fruit through the market with multiple packs and sizes and ongoing promotions at retail. 🥑



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