

# Grower Profile



## Avocado Production

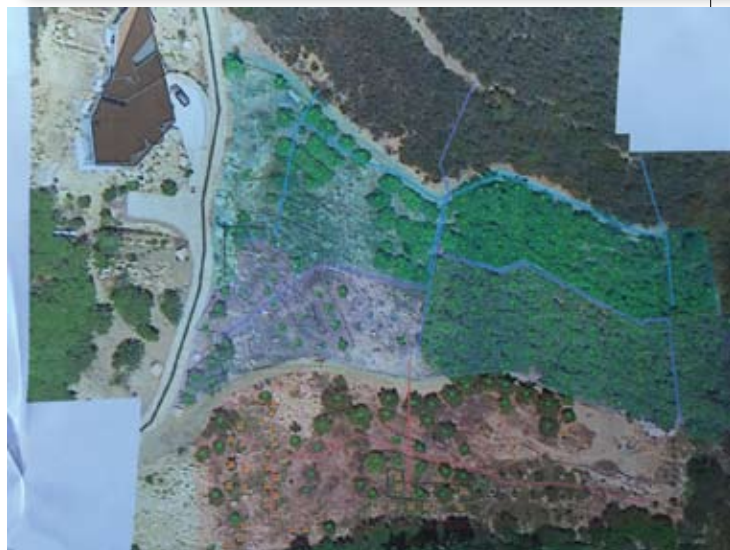
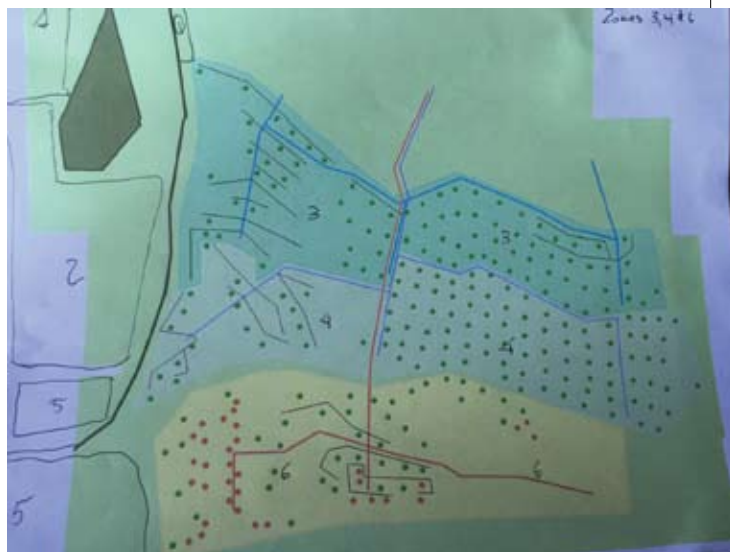
### A Labor of Love

By Tim Linden

**M**aura Lundy's involvement in the California avocado business took a circuitous route from Italy through Kansas, Oregon, London, and even Saudi Arabia, before she joined the industry as a hands-on grower.

Today, the 72-year-old Lundy is heavily involved in her crop of 600 trees and lovingly babies them as she would her own kids. In fact, her long-term succession plan involves turning her Toro Canyon Road hilltop ranch over to her kids, especially her opera singing son, who will take care of the trees and his mother once she can no longer do so, though she doesn't expect that will be any time soon. This year, she is extremely giddy about avocado production as she had her best year in a long time with her trees producing more than 24,000 pounds of commercial organic production. "And I also gave away a couple thousand pounds to the rescue mission and food bank. I am so excited about how my trees did this year," she notes.

Lundy's journey began in Italy, which is where she grew up. In 1968, she came to the United States to visit her sister during the student strikes in her native country. In her 20s, she enrolled in the architectural school summer program at the University of Kansas (KU) and ended up staying, marrying a professor and receiving a degree in Environmental Design from the School of Architecture at KU in 1972. Maura moved with her husband to Oregon and they settled into life there for a while. They also moved to other locales and she became involved in a couple different lines of work. She developed a love for the financial world and fashioned a career in that field for some time, including managing the business affairs of her stepfather, which eventually led her to California and avocados.



Her mother and stepfather moved from Italy to South America and eventually ended up in Santa Barbara County. Maura began vacationing in the California community and fell in love with the region, especially Montecito. Family circumstances, including her own divorce, altered her path. In 1998, she bought a 14-acre parcel of land on Toro Canyon Road above Montecito. "For a historical perspective, the first oil well in Santa Barbara County was at the top of Toro Canyon Road, and I have found traces of the old Chinese workers' camps while hiking at the top of my property," she said, adding that "Roy Rogers used to own many acres on this mountainside where my farm is."

Her parcel included 900 avocado trees, which were initially cared for by a neighbor. But because her mom was in the area, Maura began spending more and more time in Santa Barbara and then moved there. Eventually, with her architectural background coming to the forefront, she set about the task of designing and building a house on the property. "That was quite an ordeal," she said. It took more than four years to progress from the permitting process to the finished product."

"In 2012, I moved into my home and started managing my own grove," she said. The grove now consists of 600-700 trees, which have been transitioned to organic production. Lundy said the grove is planted on a very steep hill, so she must use ropes to stay upright as she tends to the various cultural practices. It gets very hot on the hilltop so the use of fabric and mulch – installed by Lundy – helps cut down on the water use. She marvels at the ingenuity in planting the grove initially, noting that the very steep terrain and heavy clay soil surely presented a challenge.

While it may be hot in her steep hillside grove, Lundy does have a relatively new well so "water is not an issue." This distinguishes her grove from that of her close neighbors. Several nearby groves have fallen by the wayside precisely because of lack of water. Using Google maps, she created six watering zones and today waters each zone twice a week for three hours at a time. Initially, she was watering each zone once a week for a 12-hour time period, but trial and error have allowed her to cut the watering in half and still get very good results.

She calls "labor" her biggest challenges as the steepness of the hill and the small size of her grove make it difficult to find people willing to pick the avocados. Currently, Lundy very much enjoys the work but knows that is not going to last forever. Already, she hires an outside worker to come in every once in a while with a weed whacker in hand to knock down that unwelcome growth.

She said her top-of-the-hill perch is also a magnet for all kinds of wild life including bears, which have wreaked havoc on some beehives that were being stored on her ranch by a neighbor.

In the past, when she had more trees and was produc-



ing conventional fruit, Lundy's ranch produced as much as 55,000 pounds of avocados in a year. She was very happy with this year's output but knows next year is going to be a different story. Her trees have not set much of a crop for 2017.

Lundy said her avocado knowledge is self-taught as she read many technical articles penned by California researchers, as well as some from Israel.

Though she loves her avocado trees and has clearly enjoyed a career that has taken several turns, painting is her passion and she happily shares some of her work via the internet. "Most of my works range from 11 to 16 feet in width and 6 to 18 feet in height and they are all works in progress, even after they hang from the ceiling."

Lundy herself appears to be a work in progress as well. In setting up a time to discuss her avocado avocation, she noted her full schedule, including an afternoon swim in the ocean every day. 🥑