

Meet Your 2024 Executive Committee

Like many of you reading this, the path that led to my serving as Chairman of the California Avocado Commission Board — and to my career in the California avocado industry — was a rambling one. Only now, looking back at the choices I made and the avenues I explored, do I fully appreciate the long-term vision of my grandfather Lee Cole and my father Guy's oft-repeated sentiment: "You won't get it until you're sitting in my seat."

As a husband, father of two young sons, volunteer and philanthropist who likes to "keep it local" — I acknowledge I am blessed to work alongside my brother Taylor and father as a third generation California avocado grower. And I am honored to serve as Chairman — to advocate on behalf of all growers and find a middle ground with legislators, constituents and industry members that helps build and secure the legacy of our premium crop for future generations.

Growing up, I loved being on the ranch. But at the age of 12 — spurred by having to lug around 80-pound bags of California avocados — I started dreaming of a career beyond the fence line of our land. I began my undergraduate career with the intent of becoming a pediatrician but as I dab-

bled in science courses at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, I eventually began to gain a firmer grasp of my family's business and appreciate its potential. This, and a desire to return to ranch life, led to my completing an Agricultural Science and Agricultural Business degree.

As the oldest grandchild, I always felt duty-bound to do what my parents and grandparents wanted me to do — so I sought the advice of my grandfather (the long-time CEO and president of Calavo) to see whether he thought the business side of the operation was a path I should pursue. He knew me all too well: No, he said, go back to the ranch. Frankly, it was a relief as I had tried a few desk jobs and dearly missed what felt natural to me: being out in the groves.

I returned to the ranch and within three years Taylor and I decided to act upon the hidden potential of our family's operation by launching a massive reinvestment plan that could support us and our extended families. Since 2011, we have quadrupled the size of our family ranch to 4,000 acres that produce lemons, avocados and cattle. True to my nature, I'm the lead shovel in the field alongside our irrigation and harvest crews and get to work alongside my brother and best friend. Just as Taylor and I used to do, our children



Chair Jason Cole

now roam and play in the groves together — a vision that is as rewarding and satisfying as a healthy fruit set and robust harvest. After all, like many of you, I am motivated to work hard, grow the best avocados possible and serve on the Commission to ensure my children can come back to farming on the family ranch if that's what they love to do.

I've served on the Commission's board, in a variety of positions, for more than a decade and have gained a wealth of knowledge about the challenges and opportunities of our industry while serving on the Governance, Finance and Production Research committees. As Chairman, I will use this experience to continue the positive, albeit challenging, change our Commission has experienced over the last few years. I am extremely excited about the Commission's new look and feel. Our team is streamlined and focused on doing all we can to promote California avocados for what they are: The World's Best! As we move forward, we plan on capitalizing on the momentum that has been building and will continue to make improvements that benefit the folks we represent — California growers.

Enough about me. Let me introduce you to the other members of our Executive Committee.



Vice Chair Rachael Laenen

Rachael Laenen hails from a storied California avocado family with more than 100 years' experience growing avocados and lemons, and it is this family legacy — and the people behind it — who fuel her ambitions. Now the mother of an 18-month-old, she noted, "I'm a temporary steward and involved in farming, but it is my responsibility and duty to make certain the ranch can be passed down to the seventh generation."

Although she treasures her family's history and accomplishments — her great-grandfather designed farm machinery and her grandmother is an acknowledged pioneer in the industry — Rachael grew up in England and Italy, not Ventura County. Her father Gordon Kimball, who was a Formula 1 mechanical design engineer, eventually returned to California but Rachael "didn't want to live in California or be in farming." Instead, she built an impressive career in F1 herself as the Head of Hospitality and Events for Mercedes AMG Petronas. Weary of globe-trotting, she decided to come home and spent two years discussing with her dad how she could contribute to the ranch. "I wanted to make sure I was adding value to the operation."

Six months after returning, her family's farm was devastated by the

Thomas Fire. "I was new to the operation and was having this amazing experience," she observed. "And then the fire hit. There was a steep learning curve, rebuilding a business from the ground up and replanting our acreage."

Rachael has overseen the ranch's food safety, OSHA and grant programs and in 2020 launched a business-to-consumer sales channel. Now as her father steps back from the business, she is preparing to take over the entire operation.

"Working with my dad is the best thing I could ever ask for," she stated. "He's an incredible mentor and wonderful farmer, advocate, strategist and innovator. One of the things I appreciate most is that he is open to exploring any idea, innovation or technology — it's really inspiring and motivating. What we are doing today is night and day different than five years ago and it's paying off. We're better farmers today but still have room to grow and can be even better tomorrow."

Rachael has served the Commission in a variety of roles, including on the Succession Planning Task Force and Marketing Committee, and was the California representative on the Hass Avocado Board where she participated in the Sustainability Task Force and their BOLD leadership program.

She happily admits that she, her husband, Andrew, and son, Eugene, spend most of their time on the ranch. She still enjoys travel and takes great joy from being creative with home-grown produce. Ultimately, "the most important thing is that we, as growers, are producing safe and healthy food for people and have the opportunity to be stewards of the land in a responsible manner. I take a lot of pride in that."



Treasurer Maureen Cottingham

As a child, Maureen Lamb Cottingham "definitely lived the ag lifestyle — walking the groves with my dad, sisters and brother and just having fun finding avocados" on the 1,000-acre Camlam Farms. Her upbringing, she observed, "instilled a special connection to the land in us. We grew up learning stewardship from our family." While she always had an interest in agriculture and pursued a degree in Agri-Business with a concentration in farm and ranch management, at the time Maureen didn't give serious consideration to returning to the ranch. As a senior at Cal Poly – San Luis Obispo she completed a fundraising project for The Wheelchair Foundation at Tolosa Winery and so began her 17-year career with Sonoma Valley Vintners & Growers Alliance, a marketing and educational trade organization.

Her family is celebrating the enterprise's 50th anniversary next year. "We are immensely proud to reach this major milestone. It's a testament to the hard work and unwavering commitment to best practices by everyone at Camlam Farms." It's that longevity — and commitment to the land — that motivated her and her husband to leave Sonoma and join the family business in Southern California (Camlam Farms takes its name from Camarillo, which

was named after her family, and Lamb, a nod to her lineage). Today she is a sixth-generation California avocado & citrus grower serving as assistant manager who — as she so aptly puts it — “is a sponge for information. As we prepare to transition to the next generation, I’m learning everything I can with an eye toward optimizing our practices and continuous improvement, something every farmer strives for.” She works side-by-side with her Uncles John, David and Bert, her father. “Farming is at the heart of our family, and I’m honored to continue our family’s rich agricultural heritage while continuing to build a legacy for the next generation.” And she’s proud to “follow in my grandfather and Uncle John’s footsteps with my service to the California Avocado Commission.” Like them, she has served with CAC in a variety of roles. She has invested time on the Marketing Committee, Finance Committee and now as Treasurer on the Executive Committee. “I have a deep understanding and knowledge about trade organizations like CAC and the important role they serve in our industry.” She added, “I’m excited to be a part of this valuable organization and the new chapter we are beginning.”

As for her free time? It looks a lot like her childhood — simply enjoying being on the ranch. “My husband Adam and I really enjoy being with our three children — Quincey (8), Cash (6) and Charlie (2) — on the ranch riding horses, hiking, barbecuing and gathering with our entire family.” She continued, “I’m so grateful to have grown up here and have the opportunity to live in Ventura County, and Sonoma, and raise our children in such incredible places.” When they’re not on the soccer or baseball fields with their children, they love to explore the Golden State with their kids who enjoy surfing nearly as much as exploring the groves.



Secretary Daryn Miller

Growing up on his family’s farm, Daryn Miller learned valuable lessons from his father, Jim, watching him navigate the challenges of growing, packaging and direct marketing Valenica oranges to retailers while managing a small-scale farm. When Daryn was in middle school, the family enterprise, which originated in 1978, planted six acres of hillside California avocados.

“My dad was keenly aware of the threat of citrus greening in Florida and had the foresight to diversify production on our farm,” Daryn noted.

By 2018, his dad had leased an additional 16 acres solely devoted to avocados. Today, that acreage is thriving in berm-planted rows serviced by a new irrigation system, a solar array, remote sensing and an automation system recently installed with the help of a SWEEP grant.

Prior to beginning his career in agriculture, Daryn served six years in the United States Marine Corps, primarily in the reserves serving at an artillery unit 5th Battalion, 14th Marines originally based in Pico Rivera, CA. While a potential long term military career was considered, he ultimately decided to follow his passion for agriculture, leading to him managing vineyards in southern Monterey County.

He completed a degree in Agribusiness with a minor in viticulture at Cal Poly SLO and currently concentrates his day-to-day efforts on vineyard management, agronomy and irrigation management.

He continues to be actively involved with the family’s farming operation, bouncing new farming strategies and cultural practice ideas off his father. As a certified crop consultant and pest control advisor, he has the opportunity to see diverse methods growers employ in their operations — fueling his interest in advancing agriculture through innovation. Gaining different perspectives — and learning from them — is something he grew to appreciate in college when he worked at the Mission avocado grove just north of campus under the direction of Gabe Felipe. “It was pretty cool to see California avocado production on a much bigger scale than my family’s operation,” he stated. “I learned so much by seeing how differently they managed production and what pruning techniques were being employed.”

Now in his second term as a California Avocado Commission Board member, and his first term as secretary, Daryn notes he is honored to be part of the California avocado industry and exploring ways to advance its productivity.

He has put roots down with his fiancée, Mary, and their one-year-old daughter, Penelope, who loves to dance in the groves while her dad plays guitar. He hits the links as often as he can and also enjoys archery and bow hunting on his family’s property. 🍌