

## Focusing on Key Concerns



Jason Cole

**H**ello fellow growers! I hope this article finds you all doing well and in the middle of a fruitful harvest. The 2024 season is off to a much better start than last year. Price per pound is up significantly, the weather has been better and it is looking like all the districts are setting up nicely to produce a bumper crop for 2025, fingers crossed. While you have all been working hard farming, California Avocado Commission staff and directors have also been working hard as we adjust to the changes made last year and look forward to the future.

Recently CAC finished a round of annual meetings, starting in the south and finishing in district 5 in the north. I believe the meetings were a success and highlighted the changes CAC has been through in the last year with more of the focus on what CAC is working on now to help improve the industry for you, our grower stakeholders, in our areas of focus: Marketing, Production Research, Industry Affairs and Governance.

Marketing has seen some big changes over the last year with the hiring of Terry Splane as our new vice president and the signing of a new agency, Curious Plot. Our message is very focused: local sustainable avocados. We have also cut some of our categorical consumer marketing spend and seen an increase in point-of-sale merchandising

with this season's plan. Another change this year was the pausing of the Marketing Committee. This was done because the committee was beginning to seem redundant and ineffective. The exciting part is that your board will be discussing our marketing strategy and reimagining the Marketing Committee at our June board meeting.

Production Research has been an integral part of the Commission since its inception in 1976. This year we saw the departure of our long-standing chair Leo McGuire and the addition of Dr. Danny Klittich as our new chair. Danny brings a Ph.D. in entomology to the team along with very strong agronomic knowledge and a solid foundation in avocado nutrition and care. The PRC has already met this year and has put together a new list of potential research topics. The goal of these future research goals is very simple: best on-farm practices to maximize grower yields and, consequently, returns. The hope is that as we move forward more collaborative research with growers will take place in California avocado grove settings.

Industry Affairs is still led by Ken Melban and his team. This year they will work on the usual issues: water, legislation, trade, crop estimates and oversight of foreign fruit entering the market. Most importantly, this year there

has been a push to grant Guatemalan avocados entry into the United States. Ken and his team have been working diligently behind the scenes with U.S. Department of Agriculture officials to ensure that no risk of pests presents itself.

Our last committee is Governance. Governance has not previously been a standing committee, but this year it seemed appropriate to form a Governance Committee in order to look at CAC law and bylaws to see if any changes could be made to address grower concerns and desires for change within the Commission. The new committee was asked to dive into CAC laws and consider assessment as a flat rate versus percentage of gross, the packers' role in the Commission moving forward, the definition of a producer and the assessment exemption threshold. These are tough topics and invoke a lot of passionate opinions from our growers. I believe the committee — with its equal representation from all districts — will do a great job bringing a recommendation to the board for discussion and possible action in June.

That's a quick rundown of what the Commission is working on this year. I wish you all the best with harvest and cheers to a big crop for all in 2025! 🍌