

Fine-tuning the Commission's Work



Ken Melban

As of mid-July, the 2025 California avocado season is in full swing, with 250 million pounds harvested at an average price of \$1.65 per pound through May. That's nearly 75% of the California Avocado Commission's 340-million-pound crop projection, down about 9.5% from the original 375-million-pound pre-season estimate.

Both the pre-season estimate and annual crop survey are based on grower and packer surveys distributed twice a year. In recent years, grower participation has yielded response rates representing nearly 40% of total acreage, pretty impressive. A little research confirmed a 30–50% response rate is considered “good,” while anything above 50% is deemed “excellent.”

If you're among those who regularly participate in the Commission's surveys, thank you. Accurate forecasting of volume and timing information is helpful in guiding decision making for growers, packers and the Commission. So, if you haven't yet experienced the joy of completing a crop survey, we encourage you to give it a try next time. Your input is important.

In recent years, the Commission's Board and executive leadership have been conducting an organizational tune-up, evaluating every marketing and non-marketing activity to

determine return on investment and optimize use of resources. As part of this effort, the Commission restructured staff roles and responsibilities. The current staff size is eight, down from 12 in 2020, a 33% reduction.

We have fine-tuned our marketing program with greater focus on resource allocation across consumer marketing, retail trade and foodservice trade. Recently I joined the marketing staff and agencies for the 2025–26 marketing strategic planning meeting, which was a great opportunity to observe the process. Terry Splane, vice president of marketing, did a great job leading the discussion. It's clear the team has many creative ideas.

While marketing aims to increase grower returns through higher prices, the Commission's advocacy efforts often focus on reducing or preventing added costs for growers. For example, since 2024, the Commission has been calling for the U.S. Department of Agriculture to reinstate USDA-employed inspectors in Mexican avocado groves for the specific purpose of preventing the introduction of seed and/or stem weevils into California. If the pest invasion were to occur, treatments would be costly, if available, and possibly unaffordable. The harm could be irreversible.

In June, I held meetings in Washington D.C. with senior USDA officials.

The conversations were candid, and I can report with confidence that USDA has heard our concerns and recognizes our unwavering commitment to this issue. I also met with Congressional Members Darrell Issa, GT Thompson (Chair, House Committee on Agriculture), John Boozman (Chair, Senate Committee on Agriculture) and others.

Recently, I was invited to speak at the monthly meeting of the San Diego Council of Water Utilities, consisting of general managers and board members from local water agencies. The timing was significant, as the San Diego County Water Authority is considering discontinuing the Permanent Special Agricultural Water Rate (PSAWR). I emphasized the non-market benefits of avocado production such as carbon sequestration, greenspace preservation and wildfire mitigation, and stressed the importance of maintaining the PSAWR. The San Diego County Farm Bureau has taken the lead on this issue and done an excellent job rallying support.

As always, if you have questions or see a way the Commission can assist growers, please let me know (kmelban@avocado.org). 🍋