From the Grove

Winter 2025/26

The Latest News from the California Avocado Industry

THE TOP FIVE CALIFORNIA AVOCADO RECIPES FROM 2025

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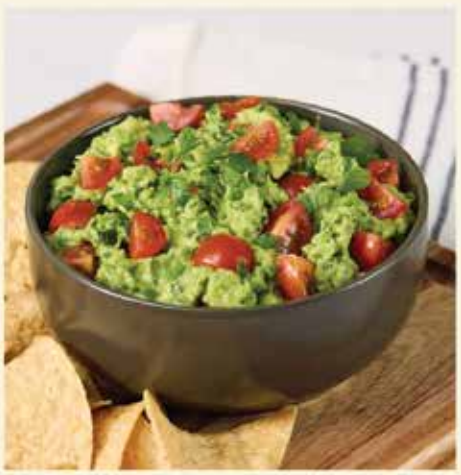

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Avocado Lace Bug Update
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From the **Grove**

Volume 15, Number 4

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Winter 2025/26

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Message from the President

By Ken Melban
President

Ken Melban

Tariff-Rate Quotas, Marketing and Budgeting

As California growers prepare to begin their 2026 harvest, import prices are averaging below $1.00 per pound. Not ideal market conditions to enter. From 2023 to 2025, U.S. avocado consumption increased 6.4%, from 2.912 billion pounds to 3.098 billion pounds (Hass Avocado Board), an annual average growth of 3.2%.

In 2025 California produced 330 million pounds, representing 10.7% of total U.S. demand. Our reality: California's market share makes it difficult for us to drive market pricing; we just don't have the volume. However, California has succeeded in securing a price differential above market price, averaging 8-10% in the last few years.

U.S. market pressure is intensifying as production levels in Mexico and Peru are increasing and new countries like Colombia have entered the U.S. market. Global production is outpacing global demand, and the U.S. market is no longer experiencing double digit annual growth.

In November the California Avocado Commission submitted formal comments to the United States Trade Representative (USTR) on the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) review calling for the Trump Administration to establish a Tariff-Rate Quota (TRQ) on avocados entering the United States. A TRQ is a two-tiered tariff system that allows a specific quantity of a product to enter a country at a low "in-quota" tariff rate, but subjects imports exceeding that quantity to a much higher "out-of-quota" tariff — effectively balancing market access with protection for domestic industries.

CAC President Ken Melban testifying in Washington, D.C., concerning the USMCA.

California avocado growers are not alone as other specialty crop producers are also calling on the Administration to establish market management systems in their sector.

The Commission's marketing strategy highlights California avocados as the premium avocado choice based on sustainable growing practices, ethical sourcing and locally grown for exceptional quality and freshness. Our core market is the West Coast, and no other country can compete with our proximity to market.

The Commission's 2025-26 budget of $13.2 million includes three marketing categories: 1) consumer ($4.6 million); 2) retail ($2.8 million); and 3) foodservice ($650K). Newly elected Chair Rachael Laenen has appointed a marketing committee, which will begin meeting in February to review the Commission's current marketing

funding allocations. The Commission will be keeping an eye on "how we can best utilize grower funds to secure California avocado shelf-space with our target customers during our season while driving a price return for growers above offshore grower pricing."

Questions like "Is consumer awareness critical?" and "Should more funding be allocated to retail buyers?" will be thoroughly assessed. There are very few absolute answers in marketing. However, be assured these conversations will drive Commission decisions and will involve key partners, including packers and the Commission's retail marketing directors who interface with our buyers regularly.

In December, I joined one of the Commission's retail marketing directors in meetings with two prominent customers. I thanked them for supporting California growers during the 2025 season and talked about ways in which we can enhance our relationship.

While consumer awareness and preference for California avocados is important, it is of the utmost importance that we ensure our fruit is available at our targeted key trade partners' stores when our fruit is in season. When our consumers show up at their preferred retailer, they need to find California avocados on the shelves. If not, we will have missed a critically important opportunity.

I can't predict what our process will yield, but it is clear to me that relationships with retailers and packers remain a critical factor in the success of California avocado growers. The Commission will double-down on our efforts to further develop these relationships and foster their commitment to market California avocados.

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 16, 2026:** Ballots will be mailed to eligible commercial producers
- **March 18, 2026:** 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
- 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

Chair's Report

By Rachael Laenen
Board of Directors Chair

Get Involved... We're Better Together

Rachael Laenen

I, like many of you, did not follow a straight or narrow path to get where I am today. Although my family had been growing avocados for more than 100 years — and had been farming for even longer than that — I was adamant I would *not* be a farmer and I would *not* be living in California. This was fueled by a childhood in which I spent a lot of time in Europe because my dad had a career outside of farming that took him beyond the United States. It became second nature for me to travel and explore — to leave home for long periods of time and then settle back into life on the ranch — a lifestyle I favored throughout my 14-year career in F1 racing.

But over time, it became harder and harder to say goodbye to family and our grove. When I was at home, I spent countless hours with my dad talking about what my role could be when I finally, firmly planted roots in California again. I didn't want to get the job because I was the boss' daughter — I wanted to earn the position because I could bring value to the operation and contribute something worthwhile. When I finally moved home and started working on the ranch, I experienced in quick succession a roller coaster of challenges — the Thomas Fire, the birth of my son and a health scare that threatened to turn everything upside down. Fast forward five years later — here I am, a proud 6th generation farmer and 4th generation avocado grower, walking the groves learning from my dad and teaching my son. Those are the very best of days.

As much as I have worked to bring value to my family's farm, I've also tried very hard to find a place in our industry where I can make a difference and a positive impact. Right now, that "place" happens to be a seat at the California Avocado Commission's leadership table. The most valuable lesson about leadership I have learned came as a member of Class 54 of the California Ag Leadership program and that is you *don't have to be at the head of the table to be leading*. There is a role for all of us in advocating for California avocados — particularly now. I know times are difficult for growers — with rising input costs and volatile returns it is challenging to remain economically sustainable. And an increasingly volatile climate, changing global inspection processes and the uncertainty of USMCA negotiations weigh heavily on all of us. With obstacles this large, the most powerful thing we can do is face them together and speak with one voice leaning on the strength of our numbers and our commitment to grow the best fruit on the planet. No matter where you farm, the size of your operation or how you manage your groves, we all should be able to unite on issues that impact the viability and sustainability of our industry.

So, I encourage each of you to remember that just because you are not on the board or sitting on a committee does not mean you don't have a role to play. Stay involved and stay abreast of the issues by following the Commission's updates. Take every opportunity to mix with other farmers, community leaders and government representatives and *tell our story*. So many people are so far removed from what farming means and who we are that we need to take advantage of any chance we have to share our experiences, how deeply we care for the land and how important it is to us to produce safe and healthy avocados.

As your new Chair, I am committed to listening to our grower base and I want to make the best, informed decisions I can when I am in the boardroom, and you can play an active role in that.

Ultimately, what I love about being a grower is that no day is ever the same. There is so much that is outside of our control and so much we have yet to learn about growing avocados. It's both a challenge and an opportunity. The same can be said for our industry. If each of us can commit, in some manner, to getting involved and capitalizing on the strength of our numbers and our commitment to the land and our fruit, together we can learn how to more effectively grow our avocados, advocate for our industry and face uncertainty with strength and unity.

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Marketing Executive Notes

By Terry Splane
Vice President of Marketing

Terry Splane

CAC 2026 Advertising Campaign Evolves to Feature California Avocado Growers

The California Avocado Commission has a decades-long, award-winning legacy promoting locally grown, premium California avocados — building and differentiating a brand that inspires robust preference and loyalty among targeted consumers.

Across the years, the Commission has evolved its marketing campaigns to match the ever-evolving consumer landscape. Beginning in 2024, CAC's consumer marketing agency of record, Curious Plot, developed *"What's Inside"* — a new creative campaign that highlighted the origin of California avocados with a prominent visual cue showing the outline of the state. Grove and appetizing food imagery was paired with messaging focused on the care California avocado growers take to bring the premium, locally grown fruit to market. During the past two years we maniacally focused on differentiating the California origin of the fruit. The campaign results show deepened consumer engagement and stronger California Avocados brand premium positioning.

Dan Pinkerton and his daughter Catherine Keeling

Today, more than ever, consumers have an increasing desire for authentic, transparent connections with local producers and are drawn to real stories illustrating the care and commitment of growers who produce the food they eat. Thus, in 2026 the campaign will evolve using the *"Voice of the Grower"* to showcase California avocado groves and growers who will share their experiences in their own unique voices. This campaign evolution will invite consumers to meet some of the very growers who produce California avocados with personal and emotionally engaging creative that builds trust and grants transparency.

The new ads will have an authentic, friendly and playful feel — highlighting the approachable spirit of the California avocado culture. Growers — Jason Cole, Andy Lyall, Warren Lyall, Catherine Keeling and Dan Pinkerton — will share real stories in conversational ways that feel genuine and relatable, building a human connection between grower and consumer that

Warren Lyall and his son Andy Lyall

enhances memorability and resonates emotionally with consumers who seek to feel a personal connection to where their food comes from. By spotlighting the passion, expertise and sustainability practices of California avocado growers, the campaign is designed to strengthen consumers' desire to seek out and purchase California avocados in season.

CAC will continue its multi-channel media approach through broadcast, digital and social platforms. Building upon the strong foundation and impressive results of the past couple of years, communications will continue to include the graphic look of prior campaigns, appealing and appetizing imagery of the fruit in close-ups and mouth-watering dishes, the iconic State of California outline and the tagline, "The Best Avocados Have California in Them."

By bringing California avocado growers to the forefront as friendly, authentic storytellers the campaign will embrace a new energy and freshness that showcases what makes California avocados so special and the people behind the grove-to-table process. Ultimately, the goal is to deepen consumer trust, celebrate California avocados' roots in premium quality, sustainability and freshness, and strengthen the emotional connection that defines the California avocado experience.

Jason Cole

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

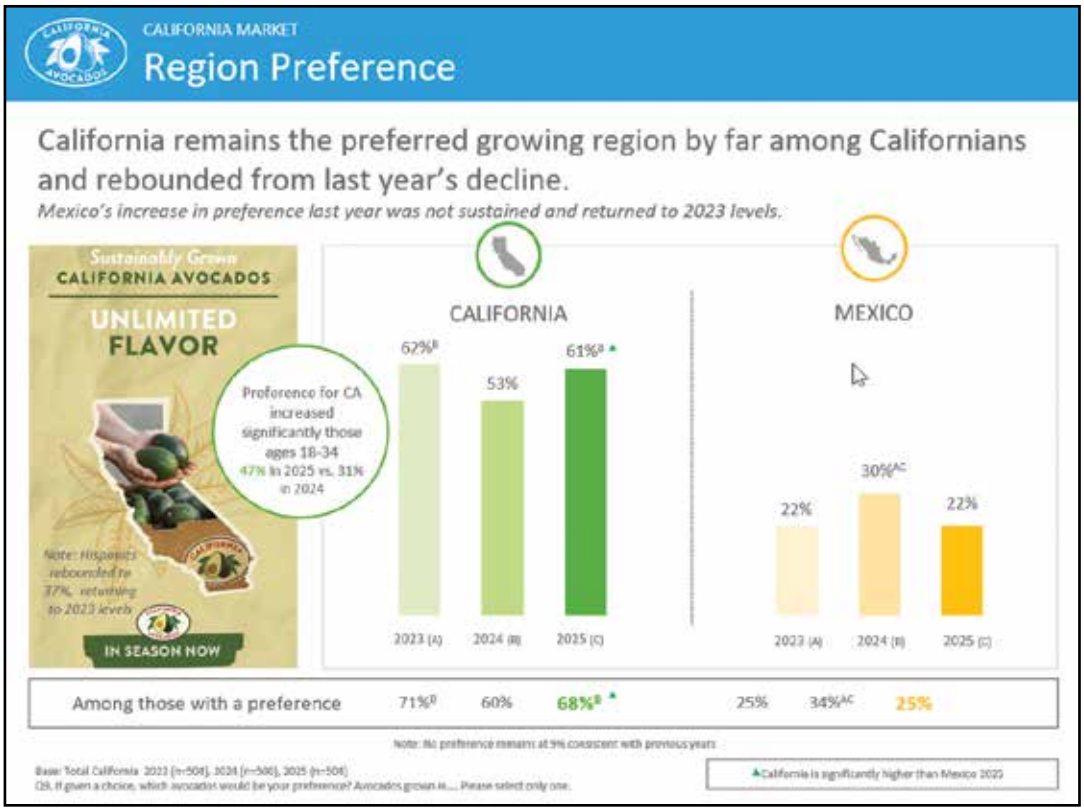
2025 Consumer Tracking Study Shows Improvement in Key Metrics

Building brand loyalty and purchases of California avocados at a premium price is a key objective of the California Avocado Commission. To do that, a tracking study is conducted annually to better understand consumer behavior and attitudes and help determine how best to communicate with targeted consumers. The results of the 2025 California Avocado Tracking Study show marked improvement in a variety of key metrics and provide insights about what avocado shoppers' interests and preferences are.

The 2025 California Avocado Tracking Study was fielded in July and August 2025, with results presented to the CAC Board of Directors in the fall. Online interviews took place with 1,403 avocado shoppers from California, individual states in the West (Arizona, Colorado, Oregon, Utah, Washington) and in the Central, South and Northeast Regions. Data from each of these states and regions, as well as a projection to the total United States, is available and was studied by the CAC marketing team. This article focuses on key learnings from the California market where the majority of California avocados are purchased.

Tracking Study Highlights for the California Market

Preference for California avocados improved. California remains the preferred growing region by far among Californian avocado shoppers. With reduced marketing investment in 2024, preference for California had declined. However, following increased investment in 2025, California preference rebounded to 61% compared to 22% preference for avocados from Mexico and less for other regions. Preference for California avocados also increased among ages 18 to 24, fulfilling a CAC objective from the business plan. Hispanic Californians continue to prefer avocados from Mexico, but to a lesser degree than in 2024 at 45%; 37% of Hispanic Californians now prefer California avocados.

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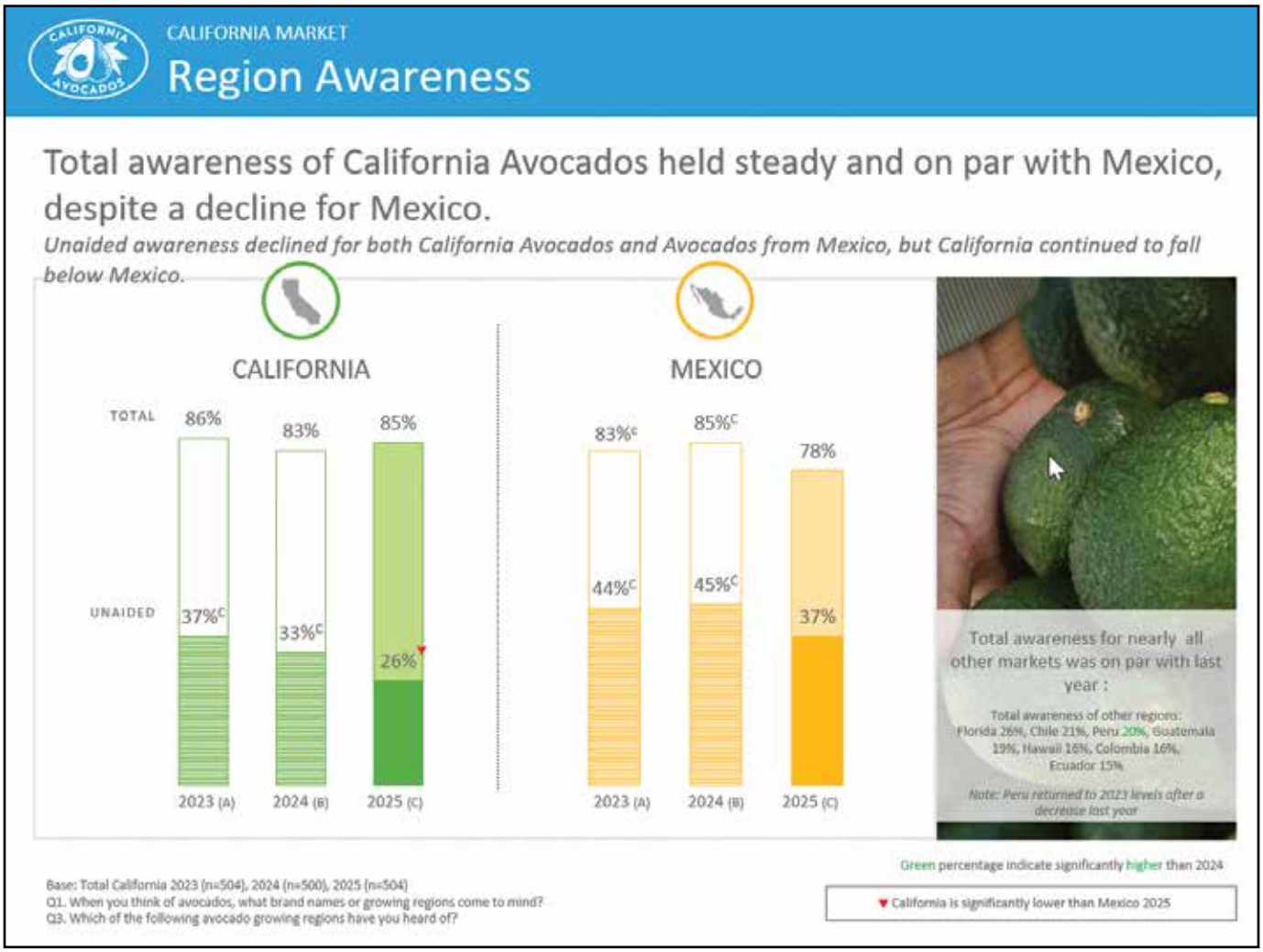
Awareness of California avocados held steady. Total region awareness of California avocados — measured by asking consumers directly if they are aware of California avocados — continues to be strong and on par with awareness of avocados from Mexico. Total awareness of California is higher among ages 25 and older at 86%, and awareness improved among the younger age group of 18 to 24, increasing from 64% in 2024 to 77% in 2025. Unaided awareness for California — measured first by asking consumers what brands or origins of avocados they are aware of — declined and is significantly below Mexico, despite a decline for Mexico too.

The study also measures awareness of advertising for avocados. In 2025, total ad awareness for California avocados remained steady and on par with Mexico. Mexico experienced a decline in top-of-mind awareness, returning to 2023 levels. However, top-of-mind ad awareness for California continues to be below Mexico. On the positive side, more than half of respondents said they had been seeing or hearing a lot of advertising or buzz for California avocados — which is about the same as for Mexico's advertising — despite Avocados from Mexico having a significantly larger marketing budget than CAC.

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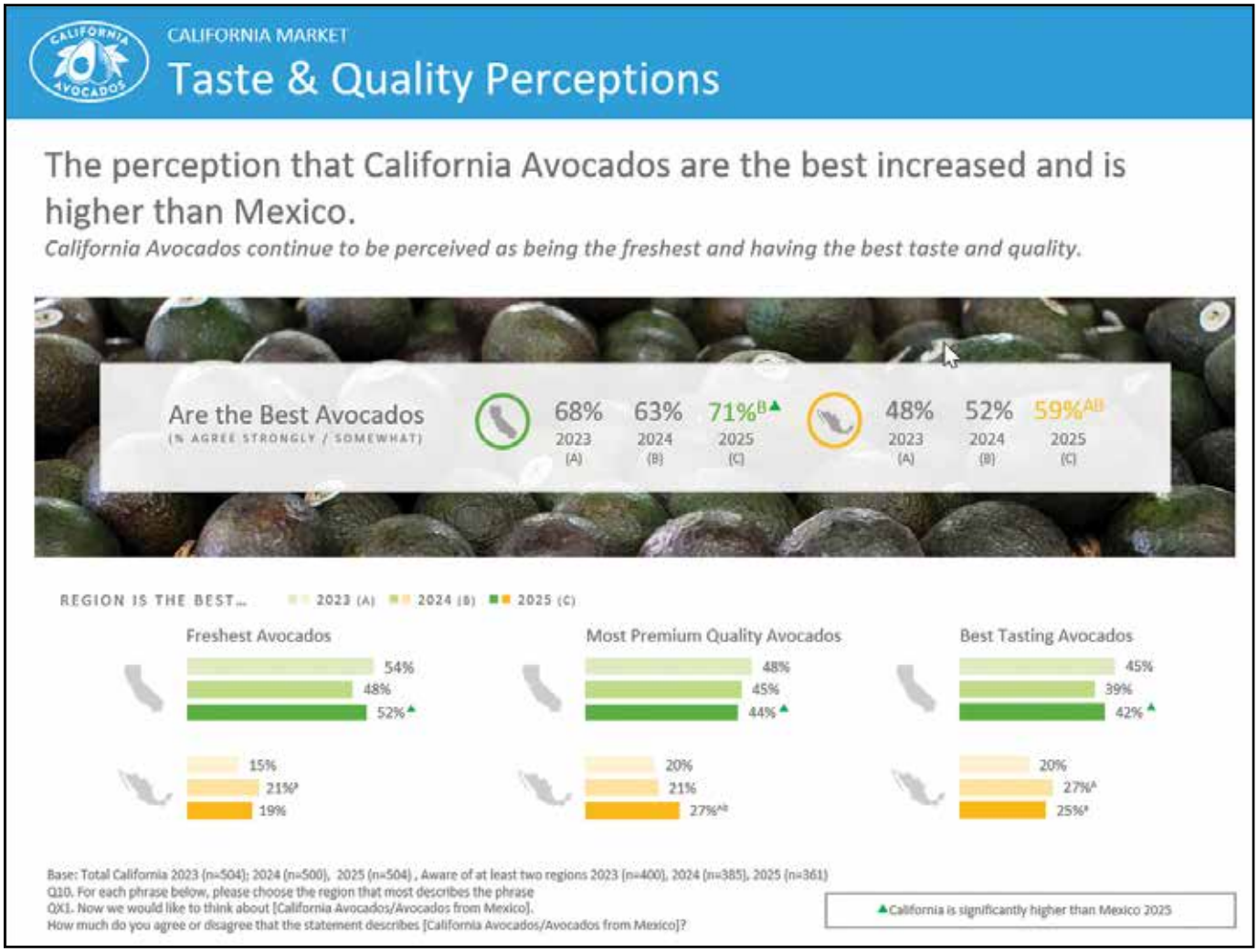
Very positive perceptions about California avocados continue. California avocados are perceived as the best on all quality, taste and safety measures surveyed. In California as well as the Western region, California avocados continue to exceed Mexico and all other origins on positive product perceptions. Particularly notable was a significant increase in those who said California avocados are the best avocados, up from 63% in 2024 to 71% in 2025.



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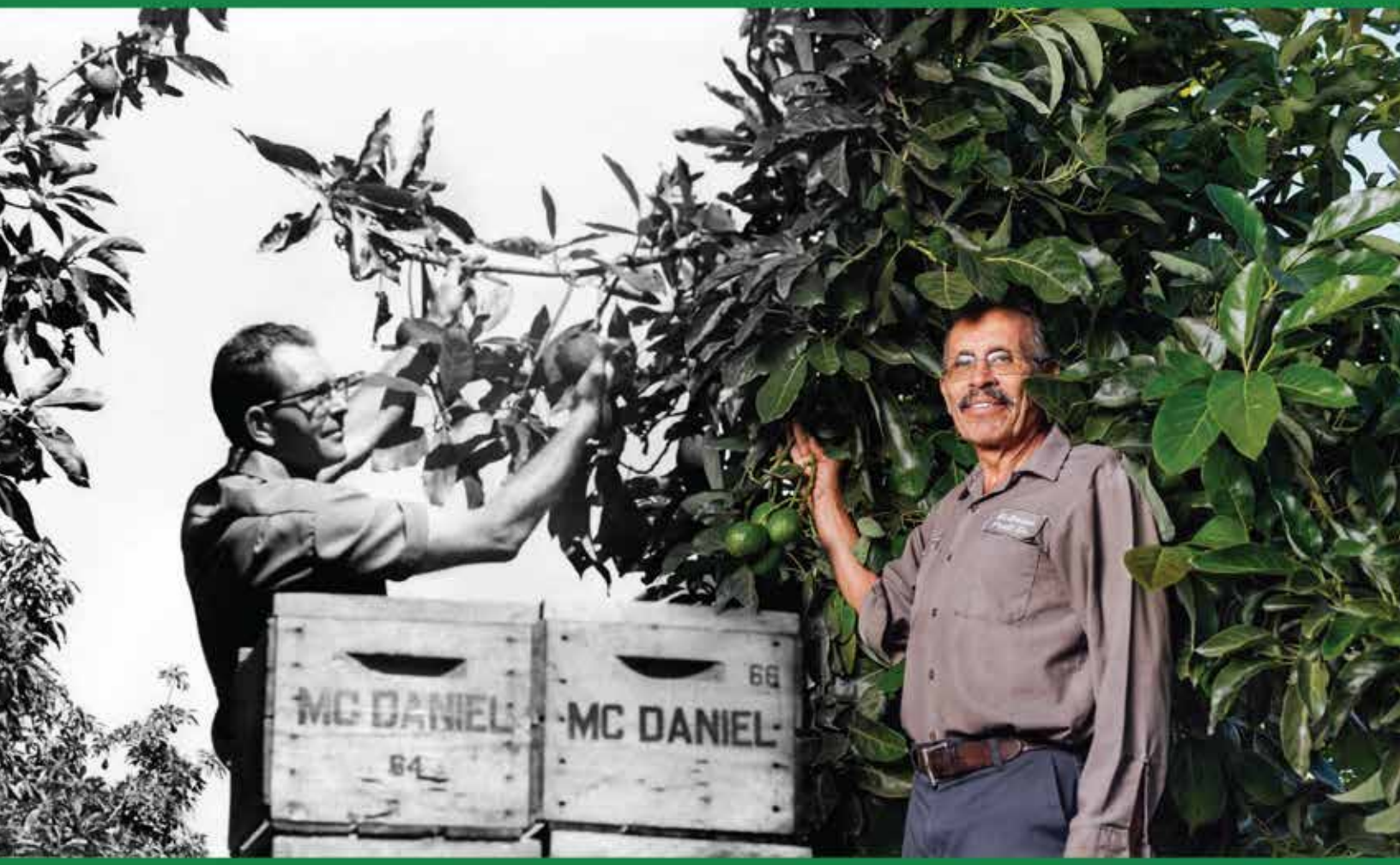

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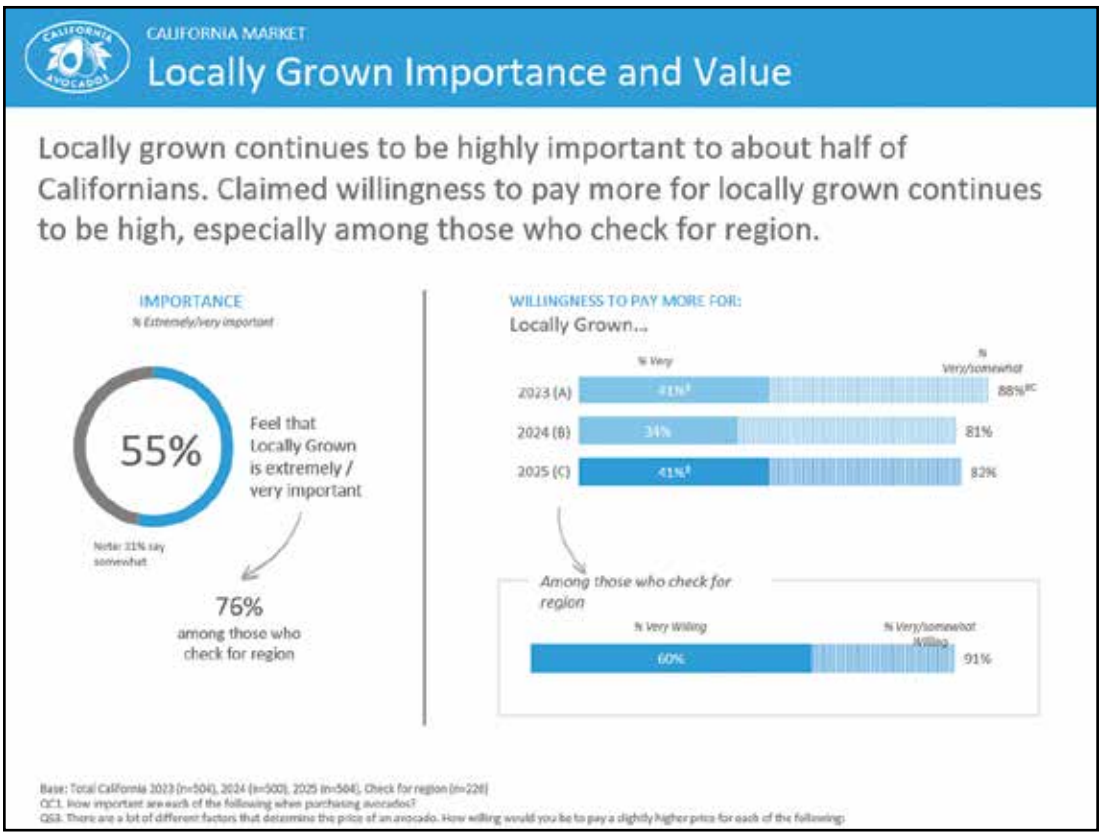
Consumers say they are willing to pay more for attributes that align with California avocados. "Grown in California" and "locally grown" continue to be important to avocado shoppers and are viewed as worth paying more for. This is especially true for consumers ages 25 and up and those who check for origin when shopping for avocados. There also continues to be a high willingness to pay for avocados grown with sustainable farming practices at 80%. Similarly, 79% say they are willing to pay more for ethically sourced avocados.



The tracking study shows that CAC's key messages about sustainability and ethical sourcing align with consumer values, with 86% being at least somewhat interested in learning more. All surveyed sustainability associations with California avocados are strong, and about half of these values increased versus the prior year.

Ethically sourced related ratings for avocados from Mexico improved versus 2024, but California avocados continue to be viewed as more ethically sourced than avocados from Mexico at 67% versus 55%.

How is the research used? The tracking study provides a wealth of information that helps the marketing team direct consumer communications. The Commission shares key information with handlers and customers, including fact-based sales points for retailers and foodservice operators. For example, highlights from past tracking studies were used to show handlers the value of prominently featuring the California origin on labels and packaging, as was manifested in 2025 on multiple handlers' avocado bags. CAC also utilizes key data from the study to encourage retailers to carry California avocados in season and feature the brand on shelf and in displays, as well as to help build a sales story for foodservice to carry and promote California avocados in season.

The tracking study also is used to measure marketing progress against specified goals; the Commission set objectives and performance measures in the 2024-25 annual business plan, some of which were measured by the tracking study results and reported to the Board of Directors.

Production Research:

Focus on Applied Research to Address High Priorities

By Tim Spann, PhD
Spann Ag Research & Consulting

Starting in 2024, under the direction of California Avocado Commission Production Research Chair Danny Klittich, the PRC began a process of developing and ranking a list of research priorities. This process resulted in a call for proposals that was sent out to the world avocado research community in late 2024. The final list contained 41 topics, with 19 being ranked high priority in the categories of cultural management, irrigation, pest management and agricultural chemical product research.

In response to the call for proposals, 22 concept proposals were received and reviewed by the PRC in January 2025. Of those, 12 researchers were asked to submit full proposals for further review by the PRC. Ultimately, the PRC recommended nine proposals for funding and the board approved eight of those projects.

Pest & Disease Management

Four approved projects fall into the broad category of pest and disease management. The first of these projects establishes a pesticide resistance monitoring program for avocado thrips. Growers have been managing avocado thrips since the late 1990s, and for many the pesticide of choice is abamectin. However, the continued reliance on one pesticide can lead to the development of resistance (see "Pesticide Resistance Issues Facing California Avocado" Fall 2025 *From the Grove*) and some pest control advisors and growers have reported abamectin treatment failures, increasing the concern that resistance is building in thrips populations. Dr. Hamutahl Cohen, entomology advisor for Ventura County, will lead the efforts to develop screening protocols for thrips populations from groves with varying pesticide use history to determine the extent of resistance development and help develop protocols for resistance management.

Dr. Fatemeh Khodadadi, assistant professor of extension in the Microbiology and Plant Pathology Department at UC Riverside, is leading a project on avocado branch canker. ABC, previously referred to as Dothiorella canker, is a ubiquitous disease caused by a large group of fungal pathogens in the Botryosphaeriaceae family. These pathogens exist worldwide and cause diseases on numerous crops. In recent years, they have become more problematic as they are broadly considered opportunistic pathogens. That is, as plants are weakened by other problems — for example, phytophthora, salinity or heatwaves — fungal pathogens can gain a foothold and cause disease. Previous CAC-funded work with Dr. Themis Michailides documented the diversity of Botryosphaeriaceae fungi affecting avocados and conducted some initial fungicide screening efforts. Dr. Khodadadi's project will expand on this previous work, screening fungicides both in the lab and in the field, as well as looking at how factors such as irrigation practices and salinity affect the establishment and severity of ABC.

Drs. Jim Adaskaveg and Patricia Manosalva will be working on Phytophthora management. Avocados are primarily affected by two Phytophthora species, *P. cinnamomi* and *P. mengei* (aka., *P. citricola*). The latter causes trunk canker on avocados and can be controlled by keeping sprinklers from wetting the trunks of avocado trees. The former is an aggressive soil-borne pathogen that causes avocado root rot. For decades, avocado growers worldwide have relied upon phosphorous acid applications to control root rot. Phosphorous acid works best when applied as a trunk injection, but this method is time consuming and expensive, and if done incorrectly can cause severe injury to the tree. Thus, many growers apply it through the irrigation system. As described above for thrips, the continued reliance on one chemical can lead to pathogen resistance. Recently, mefenoxam (Orondis®) came to market and is extremely effective at controlling avocado root

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rot; however, there is fear that growers will become reliant on this new chemistry putting resistance pressure on it. To address these concerns, Drs. Adaskaveg and Manosalva will be screening *Phytophthora cinnamomi* populations from throughout California for resistance to currently registered fungicides and conduct fungicide efficacy trials under commercial conditions to determine the best protocols to maximize chemical protection and reduce the emergence of *Phytophthora cinnamomi* resistant populations.

The last entomology related project is being conducted by Cal Poly Pomona graduate student Carson Loudermelt. Carson will be conducting a survey of avocado groves to identify the species of pollinator insects that are responsible for pollination in avocados. Additionally, Carson will evaluate how different features of orchards — such as weed species populations and proximity to native habitat or other natural areas — influence pollinator diversity and abundance in the orchard.

Irrigation Management

Two funded projects fall under the heading of irrigation management. The first, conducted by Dr. Ali Montazar, builds on his recently completed project determining avocado crop water use under varying conditions and establishing seasonally variable crop coefficients for avocados in California (see "Hass Avocado Crop Water Use: An Analysis for California Production Systems" Spring 2025 *From the Grove*). In this new project, Dr. Montazar will evaluate the effects of various irrigation management strategies on avocado yield and quality, and quantify water use efficiency enhancement following improved irrigation management practices.

In a related project, Andre Biscaro, irrigation advisor for Ventura County, will explore alternatives to the California Irrigation Management Information System (CIMIS) — which has become increasingly less reliable in recent years — for calculating irrigation requirements. An advantage of the CIMIS network is that the stations are standardized, with each station being the same and situated within a 4-acre well-watered grass area, ensuring the data they generate are accurate. However, many stations within the CIMIS network are not functioning and the network does not have stations in many avocado growing areas. Biscaro will attempt to determine how large a grass area around a station is required for accurate, reliable readings and work to develop a network of these stations that can be linked to the avocado irrigation calculator tool he recently developed. Essentially, Biscaro is trying to develop a "crowd sourced" reliable weather station network that can enhance or even replace CIMIS.

Cultural Management

The final two funded projects fall under the heading of cultural management. The first relates to soil salinity and is being led by PhD student Jesse Landesman. She is working under the direction of Dr. Jennifer King at UC Santa Barbara. Landesman's background is in soil chemistry, and her goal is to understand how the various soil types throughout the California avocado growing region influence salinity risks. She intends to accomplish this by working with growers to collect historical water quality and yield data and coupling this with soil chemistry data. The goal is to better understand which soils are at the greatest risk of salinization based on their chemistry and irrigation water quality so that growers can be given better information on how to manage salinity on different soil types.

The final funded project is with Dr. Lauren Garner at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo. Dr. Garner has been managing one of the avocado rootstock breeding trial sites on the Cal Poly campus. Funding was not continued for the broader avocado rootstock breeding project led by Dr. Patricia Manosalva. This project was initiated six years ago with the goal of generating the required data to release UC-developed avocado rootstocks. To date, no rootstocks from that project have moved toward release despite repeated promises. However, the PRC saw value in maintaining the trial site at Cal Poly SLO due to its unique location relative to the other sites and the potential for additional projects to be developed there in the future.

Other Projects

Several other projects were also funded in the past couple of years and are ongoing. These include a project by Dr. Mary Lu Arpaia to investigate the efficacy of artificial pollination systems. A couple of companies have developed artificial pollination systems in recent years and are actively marketing these to growers. However, no independent data exist to support or refute these companies' claims about their systems.

Dr. Mark Hoddle has two projects currently funded by CAC. These include pest exploration in Guatemala to better understand what avocado pests, specifically fruit feeding pests, exist there so that the pest risk analysis can be as complete as possible for allowing Guatemalan fruit to enter the U.S. market. This project builds on initial pest survey work in Guatemala that Dr. Hoddle conducted nearly 20 years ago. The other project funded with Dr. Hoddle is to develop a commercial production method for the pheromone of the avocado seed weevil and field test the pheromone in Mexico. This project will help with early detection of this pest should it ever enter California and also will be valuable in the survey work in Guatemala.

By *April Aymami*
Director of Industry Affairs and Operations

2025 CAC General Election Results

On December 8, 2025, the California Department of Food and Agriculture released the final vote tally of the recently concluded 2025 CAC General Election. The election was conducted using a ranked voting method. Candidates receiving the highest number of first choice votes were offered the first choice of the available seats (member or alternate). Of the remaining candidates, the individual receiving the highest number of combined first and second choice votes was offered the remaining seat.

The newly elected CAC board members and alternates were seated at the CAC Board meeting on December 11, 2025, and executive officers for the new fiscal year were elected at that time. Below is a summary of the election results.

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Alternate: Enrico Ferro

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Member: Tina Wolferd
Alternate: Kurt Bantle

District 3
Member: John Berns
Alternate: Doug O'Hara

District 4
Member: Stephen Sheldon
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Member: Daryn Miller
Alternate: Adam Franscioni

Handlers
Member: Danny Klittich, *Mission Produce*
Alternate: *Vacant Seat*

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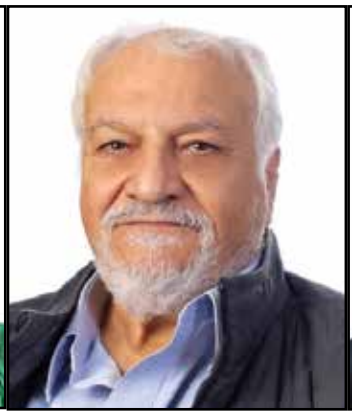

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There currently are three vacancies on the CAC Board for District 4 (alternate), District 5 (member) and Handler (alternate) seats. Vacancy announcements with information on how interested parties can apply will be mailed and posted on the grower website, CaliforniaAvocadoGrowers.com.

The Top Five Recipes from 2025

The Top Five California Avocado Recipes from 2025

At the end of 2025, the California Avocado Commission's website blog and consumer email newsletter featured the most engaging California avocado recipes of the year. The most popular recipes included a simple guacamole, a nutritious salad, savory seafood, a viral recipe trend and homemade ice cream, all showcasing locally grown, sustainably farmed California avocados.

You can scan the QR code above to check out the top five recipes for the year. The first, *Quick and Easy Guac*, garnered 21,000 page views — the most page views on CaliforniaAvocado.com during peak season. With simply California avocados and four other ingredients, fans can whip up a tasty guacamole in minutes. The *California Avocado Superfood Salad* is another quick and easy recipe, and it features six different "superfoods." Originally created for retailer programs, video content of this superfood salad developed during a 2025 grove shoot garnered more than 7,000 views on Instagram. *SoCal Ceviche*, a delicious blend of marinated shrimp with cucumber, red onions and ethically sourced California avocados, also was a top performer with more than 9,000 pin clicks and 800 saves on Pinterest. A dessert recipe made it into the top five too. A sweet, fresh, summertime snack, *California Avocado Coconut Ice Cream* is made with just six ingredients. It was featured in the June blog as part of a recipe roundup to celebrate California Avocado Month.

CAC's top performing recipe in 2025, by far, was *California Avocado Cucumber Salad with Feta*. This light and refreshing recipe was posted in July and went viral on TikTok with more than 3.5 million views!

California Avocado Cucumber Salad with Feta

Bursting with flavor, this viral California Avocado Cucumber Salad with Feta is the perfect side dish or light lunch. Crisp cucumbers, creamy California avocados and feta cheese come together with fresh parsley and a zesty homemade dressing that has just the right amount of kick.

Serves: 4
Time: 15 minutes

Ingredients

- 8 mini Persian cucumbers, sliced
- 2 ripe, Fresh California Avocados, seeded, peeled and cubed
- 1 cup cubed or crumbled feta cheese
- 1/4 cup roughly chopped Italian flat-leaf parsley
- 2 Tbsp. roughly chopped fresh mint
- 2 Tbsp. extra virgin olive oil
- 1 Tbsp. red wine vinegar
- 1 clove garlic, minced
- 1/2 tsp. red chili flakes
- 1/4 tsp. sea salt
- 1/8 tsp. freshly ground black pepper, or to taste
- 1 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice, or to taste

Instructions

1. In a bowl or jar, layer the cucumber, California Avocado, feta cheese, parsley and mint.
2. In a separate small bowl, whisk together the olive oil, vinegar, garlic, chili flakes, salt and pepper until combined.
3. Pour the dressing over the salad, then shake or toss gently to mix.
4. Drizzle lemon juice over each serving and enjoy!

California avocado growers: *you can make a difference in 2026 by contributing one or more of your recipes for use in Commission programs. Please call 949.341.1955 or advise one of the CAC staff if you have a California avocado recipe to share.*

Figure 1. An adult avocado lace bug shown on a penny for scale. Photo credit: Mike Lewis, UC Riverside.

Avocado Lace Bug Update

By Tim Spann, PhD
Spann Ag Research & Consulting

The avocado lace bug (ALB; *Pseudacysta perseae*) was first described in 1908 from specimens collected in Florida and was originally believed to be native to Florida. In Florida, the Caribbean and eastern Mexico, damage from ALB can be quite severe. So naturally, when ALB was first discovered on backyard avocado trees – primarily Bacon or Bacon-like cultivars – near Chula Vista and National City in southern San Diego County in 2004 there was concern that similar damage would occur in California. That didn't happen – that is until recently.

A Jekyll and Hyde Pest

In 2004, the California Avocado Commission funded Dr. Mark Hoddle to conduct foreign exploration in ALB's presumed native range (Florida, the Caribbean and eastern Mexico) with the goals of determining where the population in California came from through DNA analysis and to determine if egg parasitoids could be found for potential use in a biological control program. Through direct collecting and samples being provided by other researchers, ALB specimens were examined from Florida, the Caribbean, throughout

Mexico, Central America, Texas and South America.

Results of these DNA analyses determined that the ALB population in California had most likely originated from the state of Nayarit on Mexico's west coast, not from Florida or the Caribbean. This DNA work also revealed that ALB likely was not native to Florida, the Caribbean and eastern Mexico as presumed, but also was invasive in these areas. It is most likely native to western Mexico where ALB population genetic diversity is high. Additionally, no specialist natural enemies or egg parasitoids were found, dashing hopes for a biological control program.

In 2017, the ALB situation in California changed dramatically. After more than a decade of hanging out in backyards in southern San Diego County, ALB started to appear in commercial Hass avocado groves in northern San Diego County and Riverside County. By 2019, the pest was found on backyard trees in Los Angeles County, and Hawaii also was invaded. In 2022 and 2023, infestations were found in commercial groves in Orange and Santa Barbara counties, respectively. So, what changed with ALB?

CAC once again turned to Mark Hoddle who went back to the DNA. Samples of ALB from the newly infested commercial groves did *not* match the population that had existed in southern San Diego County since 2004. Rather, these new infestations matched populations in Florida and the Caribbean. These two populations, the original one from western Mexico and the new one from Florida/Caribbean, are dramatically different in their behavior, with the latter being much more aggressive in its propensity for infesting Hass avocados.

Avocado Lace Bug Biology

ALB adults and nymphs have specialized piercing-sucking mouth parts that allow them to extract sap from the underside of avocado leaves. This feeding results in necrotic islands — chlorotic areas that turn into brown, dead lesions — on the upper leaf surface. Heavy feeding damage can result in leaf loss that may lead to sunburn damage to fruit.

Adult ALB are about 2mm (<0.1in) long with blackish-brown bodies covered by yellowish wings and appearing quite flat. Their life cycle is between 21 and 42 days from egg to adult, depending on temperature, and there are four instars (developmental stages) before adulthood. Nymphs (immature stages) are ovoid, reddish-brown to black, with spines around the edges. Eggs are often laid in loose rows and are covered in tar-like fecal matter to protect the eggs from desiccation.

Paloma Dadlani, an M.S. student in Mark Hoddle's lab who was partially funded by CAC, conducted detailed temperature studies on ALB development and survivorship. These studies were conducted in temperature cabinets that were programmed to simulate six fluctuating temperature profiles that averaged 15, 20, 25, 30, 32 and 35°C (i.e., 59, 68, 77, 86, 90 and 95°F) over a 24-hour period. These cycles were developed based on historical weather data to represent various ALB-infested areas of southern California.

Data from these studies indicate that the optimal temperature range for reproduction and instar development is 25-32°C (77-90°F). The minimum temperature for ALB development is about 9-10°C (48-50°F). The upper lethal temperature range is 34-39°C (93-102°F). This is supported by field observations of ALB where the pest appears more problematic in coastal areas (e.g., Oceanside and Carpinteria) than inland areas (e.g., Bonsall). Inland areas experience higher summer temperatures that may cause populations to crash due to heat stress.

Figure 2. An avocado leaf showing adult, juvenile avocado lace bugs and eggs.

Figure 3. Large-scale defoliation caused by an extreme infestation of avocado lace bug in a grove in Carpinteria, Santa Barbara County.

Figure 4. Avocado leaves showing the classic necrotic islands symptoms of avocado lace bug feeding damage.

Table 1. Pesticides currently registered for use in California on avocados for the control of lace bugs.

Active Ingredient	Example Product[1]	IRAC Class[2]	Organic	Comments[3]
Imidacloprid	Admire	4A	No	Chemigation only effective on young trees; apply foliarly on mature trees
Piperonyl butoxide, Pyrethrins	Evergreen EC 60-6	3A	No	
Permethrin	Pounce 25WP	3	No	
Azadirachtin, Pyrethrins	Azera	UN/3A	Yes	
Beauvaria bassiana	BotaniGuard	UNF	Yes	Works best in humid climates; unlikely to be effective in California
Zetacypermethrin	Mustang	3A	No	
Fenpropathrin	Danitol	3	No	Broad-spectrum, very disruptive to beneficials; probably best used in winter
Geraniol, peppermint oil, cotton seed oil, rosemary oil	Furious	N/A	Yes	
Zetacypermethrin/ Avermectin	Gladiator	3/6	No	
Pyrethrins	Pyganic	3A	Yes	Broad-spectrum, likely to disrupt beneficials

[1]Trade names are given only as examples of products that contain the listed active ingredient(s) and do not represent recommendations for specific products.

[2]The Insecticide Resistance Action Committee classifies pesticides based on their mode of action to aid in insecticide resistance management. Repeated applications of insecticides from the same class leads to resistance.

[3]The comments provided are based on grower and/or pest control advisor experiences that have been shared with the author.

Avocado Lace Bug Management

As with all invasive pests, management practices lag behind pest spread and we are learning a lot from pest control advisors and growers who are actively trying to manage ALB. Several insecticides are currently registered for use on avocados against avocado lace bug (Table 1). Unfortunately, most of these pesticides are from the same class, making resistance management difficult (see "Pesticide Resistance Issues Facing California Avocado", Fall 2025 *From the Grove* for more information on resistance management).

Imidacloprid (Admire®) has not performed well on mature trees when applied as a soil drench but may work well on younger trees (4-5 years old at most). Foliar sprays on mature trees have resulted in moderate control. The label rate for imidacloprid on avocados is 10.5 – 14 fluid ounces/acre, with 14 fluid ounces being the maximum amount allowed per year. Thus, if trying imidacloprid for ALB control, it's advisable to use the 14 fluid ounce rate for maximum efficacy.

Fenpropathrin (Danitol®) is effective at controlling ALB but is very disruptive to natural enemies and other beneficial insects. For this reason, fenpropathrin may be best suited for use during the winter to minimize impacts on beneficials.

Spirotetramat (Movento®) is not specifically labeled for use against lace bug on avocado. However, California Department of Food and Agriculture rules allow PCAs to write recommendations for use of products against non-labeled pests if the product is registered for use on the crop. Spirotetramat has provided good control of ALB. Given that spirotetramat is in a different insecticide class than most of the other available products, and it can be applied two to three times per year depending on the application rate, it is likely a good option to use in rotation with other insecticides.

Organic options are more limited and may be less effective at controlling ALB. Products containing *Beauvaria bassiana*, an insect-killing fungus, are likely to be ineffective since these products generally do best in high humidity climates. Azadirachtin has not produced very good results to date. Pyrethrins (Pyganic®) are likely to be effective but, like fenpropathrin, can be disruptive to biological control. Some horticultural oils are available for use under organic certification but often can only be used when other control measures have failed. Kaolin clay products (Surround®) are effective at smothering ALB, but growers should talk with their handlers before using them to be sure packing houses have brushes on their packing lines to adequately remove the material during the packing process. Growers should always check with their organic certifier before using any product to make sure its use will not jeopardize their certification.

Since ALB lives on the underside of leaves, they are difficult to control even with the most efficacious insecticides. Coverage is extremely important and is likely best achieved with high spray volumes applied from the ground. It is unlikely aerial applications of any product will prove effective at controlling ALB especially if canopies are tall and interlaced. To this end, canopy management is going to be critical for managing ALB. Infestations and damage in high density plantings or hedge rows are often much more severe than in more traditional spacings. Growers should prune their trees to allow good spray penetration.

In situations where severe infestation has occurred and leaf loss is significant, extra nitrogen applications may be warranted to push new growth to replace lost leaves.

Table 2. Insecticides currently registered for use in California on avocado but not specifically labeled for control of lace bugs, and pesticides not currently registered for use in California on avocado but may be useful in the lace bug management.

Active Ingredient	Example Product[1]	IRAC Class[2]	Organic	Comments
Registered for use on avocado				
Flupyradifurone	Sivanto Prime	4D	No	Registrant supports adding lace bug to the label with E/CS[3] data
Spirotetramat	Movento	23	No	Registrant supports adding lace bug to the label with E/CS data
Fenazaquin	Magister SC	21A	No	Registrant supports adding lace bug to the label with E/CS data
Spinosad	Entrust	5	Yes	Registrant will consider supporting registration after reviewing preliminary efficacy data
Chlorantraniliprole	Altacor	28	No	Registrant supports adding lace bug to the label with E/CS data
Not currently registered for use on avocados				
Flonicamid	Beleaf 50 SG	29	No	Registrant supports adding avocado and lace bug to the label if efficacy data support its use
Afidopyropen	Sefina Inscalis	9D	No	Entering IR-4 trials in 2026; if successful, a registration package will be submitted to EPA in 2-3 years
Isocycloseram	Plinazolin	30	No	Registrant is supportive of adding avocado and lace bug to the label, but this chemical has many downsides that may make registration in California difficult (see article text for more details)

[1]Trade names are given only as examples of products that contain the listed active ingredient(s) and do not represent recommendations for specific products.

[2]The Insecticide Resistance Action Committee classifies pesticides based on their mode of action to aid in insecticide resistance management. Repeated applications of insecticides from the same class leads to resistance.

[3]Efficacy and crop safety data

What's On the Horizon?

Developing effective management tools for ALB was a high priority topic for CAC's Production Research Committee. To fulfill this priority, CAC worked with staff at the IR-4 Project to begin the process of getting more insecticide products registered for use against ALB. The IR-4 Project (Interregional project 4) is a federally funded program designed to help specialty crop industries address pest management concerns since the crop protection industry typically focuses their efforts on major crops (corn, soybean, cotton), leaving specialty crops (fruits and vegetables, ornamental crops) with fewer tools to effectively manage pests. IR-4 is a competitive program and specialty crop industries must submit proposals that are reviewed and ranked regionally and then nationally. If proposals are accepted into the program, IR-4 will coordinate and pay for the necessary trials to get a new insecticide registered.

In 2025, CAC submitted proposals for eight different insecticides as well as a proposal for an integrated solutions (IS) project. IS projects screen multiple insecticides for efficacy against a specific target pest and then move effective products into the registration pipeline. Typically, only two or three IS projects are selected annually and the ones selected in 2025 have all been put on hold due to funding shortfalls.

Discussions with the IR-4 entomologists led to the selection of the eight products submitted (Table 2). Of these, five products are already registered for use on avocados in California, but not specifically for ALB. The manufacturers of all of these, except spinosad, support adding ALB to the label if efficacy and crop safety data are provided to them. The manufacturer of spinosad will not support the addition of ALB to the label until they review preliminary efficacy data. CAC's PRC will discuss the best way to generate this efficacy data.

The remaining three products are not registered for use on avocados. Of these unregistered products, afidopyropen (Sefina Inscalis®) was selected to move forward into the IR-4 program. Afidopyropen is the first product in a new insecticide class (9A) and is derived from a compound produced by *Penicillium coprobium*. We were, in part, successful in getting this product into the IR-4 program because its use on avocados to control ALB was also supported by Florida, Puerto Rico, and Hawaii. Trial work will begin in 2026, and, if everything goes smoothly, a registration packet will be submitted to EPA in 2-3 years. At that time, CAC will ask the manufacturer to request a concurrent review by the California Department of Pesticide Regulation.

Flunicamid (Beleaf 50 SG) is another unregistered product. The manufacturer is supportive of completing the necessary work to register this product if efficacy data show that it is effective against ALB.

The final product, isocycloseram, is a brand-new chemistry that is being brought to market by Syngenta. Syngenta has indicated it is supportive of adding avocado and ALB to the label if preliminary efficacy data can be provided. However, this product belongs to the class of chemicals commonly known as PFAS — forever chemicals. That makes it questionable whether it could ever receive CDPR approval. Additionally, it is a broad-spectrum insecticide so it would be harmful to beneficials, will have a bee restriction, aerial applications will be prohibited (except for corn, cotton, soybean and potato), and a spray drift buffer will be required for all applications.

The PRC will continue to discuss ALB and how CAC's limited resources can best be used to address this critical issue. In the meantime, growers should work closely with their PCAs to monitor ALB populations and take proactive corrective measures before populations get out of control.

By Tim Linden

California Crop Poised for Strong Spring Movement

California avocado handlers are expecting another strong season with close to 350 million pounds of production, with marketing experts counting on solid late spring/early summer demand to move the crop.

"For budgeting purposes, the California Avocado Commission has estimated the crop at around 325 million pounds," said Peter Shore, Calavo Growers Inc.'s Vice President of Product Management. "From our perspective, we think the crop will be closer to 350-360 million pounds."

He further noted that the most likely timing of the picking and marketing of the 2026 California crop will be in the April/May/June time frame. But Shore said that, in all likelihood, there will be some fruit marketed before that and well into the fall. "They are still harvesting fruit from the 2025 season," he said on December 23.

Shore noted that every grower has their own unique situation, which results in a wide range of harvest timing. But he stood by his prediction that late spring into summer will most likely be the sweet spot in 2026.

Informing that opinion is the current marketing dynamics and the projected size of Mexico's export crop for its 2025/26 season, which officially began on July 1, 2025 and will last until June 30, 2026. "APEAM (Mexico's avocado grower association) has estimated an export crop of 2.5 billion pounds, which would be close to an all-time record," Shore said.

He added that the production and selling of the current Mexican crop is ahead of schedule with export volumes to the United States averaging between 55-60 million pounds each week throughout the fall. That level of volume has kept FOB prices on the low end of the spectrum, but it is also helping Mexico significantly reduce its available supply going into the typically heavy winter/spring marketing period. January is often the most voluminous month for shipments from Mexico in the runup to the "Big Game" weekend (February 7-8, 2026). Cinco de Mayo (May 5) is the spring promotional period that typically garners the most sales.

Shore expects most California growers to wait until April to start picking in anticipation of stronger pricing. He did note that the release date for California growers to pick 48s and larger was set for December 28, only a few days after this conversation was held. "But I don't think we will see very much fruit until late February at the earliest," he said, observing that there are always some growers that pick early for cultural reasons.

In past seasons, such as last year, a very strong market in January and February also led to early picking. "Because of the current pricing situation, I don't think we will see that happen this year," he added.

On this particular late December day, it was raining in Ventura County as well as in other California avocado producing regions, which Shore said was very good for the fruit. "Rain is good; we welcome it right now," he said. "It helps with sizing. We have received some good rain while the temperatures have been mild and warm…that's good for the fruit."

Shore is anticipating a typical size curve for 2026 with the crop peaking on 48s and 60s, the most popular sizes for the majority of U.S. retailers.

The Calavo executive also expressed optimism about other weather conditions that bode well for growers. "As of yet, we have had no Santa Ana wind events, nor have we had any freezes," he said, while reminding that wind events and freezing temperatures can still potentially impact the size of the crop through February.

Shore also said the world avocado marketing situation looks like it could help California growers in 2026. Europe has had a strong market, which has given Colombian avocado growers a home for their fruit this fall and winter. "The market has been better in Europe

(than the United States) so Colombia has sent very little fruit here."

Peru has long considered Europe to be its top market as it is the leading avocado supplier for that continent. If the European market remains strong through the spring, one would expect Peru to capitalize on that situation as its fruit matures in mid-to-late spring.

Returning his attention to California, Shore said growers remain bullish on the Golden State's ability to compete as the acreage continues to increase with new plantings. Shore revealed that the state's total avocado acreage now tops 55,000 acres with more than 3,500 acres identified as "young trees".

John Dmytriw, vice president of business development for Index Fresh, also is very optimistic about the future for the California avocado grower. "California avocados are the Porsche of the category," he quipped, noting that there will be a strong market for the state's production whenever growers are ready to pick. He added that there is a very strong demand from retailers who want to start selling California avocados as soon as they can and stick with the crop as long as they can each year, also noting that some 2025 avocados were still being sold as he talked on the second day of 2026.

"I expect that there will be some growers who begin harvesting after the Super Bowl and the volume will continue to increase through March and April," he said.

Dmytriw noted that both marketing conditions and labor availability will enter into the equation. He recalled that in 2025, the FOB market for avocados was very strong through the first quarter of the calendar year. "As a point of comparison, at this time last year (January), 32s, 36s and 40s were selling for $60 to $70. Today, they are only $23-$28."

The Index Fresh executive added that the decline in the FOB price began after week 13 in 2025 and continued for the rest of the year. "I have never witnessed such a long, continuous, steady decline in my career," he remarked, adding that the market has plateaued and he does expect the FOB price to start to climb again.

He said the retail price on avocados is reflecting the low FOB price and movement is very good with a lot of promotions. Dmytriw believes this will produce big sales numbers throughout January and into February, leading to a more favorable situation when some California fruit enters the market. "Instead of a retail of $2.99 and $3.99 (per avocado), which is not in the budget of many shoppers, we are seeing lower prices and good movement. That should bring more consumers back into buying avocados," he said.

"At Index we are fairly aligned with the industry's forecast for California fruit," he said. "We expect about 350 million pounds of Hass with about 10-12 million pounds of GEMs and 10-12 million pounds of Lamb Hass."

Dmytriw noted that the strong rainfall in December and continuing into January bodes well for the fruit. "It should impact the size of the fruit and give us considerable volume of large fruit to sell this year," he said. "We believe there will be a lot more 48s and larger. The rain is also giving us a good, clean crop."

He reiterated that California avocados have a cache that avocados from other points of origins do not have. While Dmytriw expects exporters of avocados from both Peru and Colombia to continue to increase their volumes to the U.S. market, he doesn't believe they can deliver the quality and taste that California growers can achieve. "At Index, we are pretty enthusiastic about the future for California growers," he said. "It is why we continue to invest in our growers with seminars to help them increase yields and improve their cultural practices. We believe one day soon, we will again see 400-500-million-pound crops from California."

Gahl Crane, sales manager at Eco Farms Avocados, Temecula, CA, had the advantage of weighing in on the current avocado marketing situation after the holidays. "Right now, we are seeing a bit of an upward trend," he said on January 5. "We hope that it's going to continue to go higher and we'll see good pricing in the spring."

A rising January market wasn't totally unexpected as the holiday season reduces the number of picking days in Mexico, which naturally reduces the overall volume coming in from south of the border. Nonetheless, Crane said it is a positive sign and combined with increased promotions and all of the potential party events in the new year, it could signal more than just a temporary strengthening of the avocado market. January also brings a renewed interest in healthy eating, which also tends to give avocados a consumption boost.

Like the other handlers interviewed, Crane expects California avocados to be marketed heavily from early spring through mid-summer. But he did note that each grower has his or her unique circumstances that inform their own go-to-market timing. And in the same vein, each season also has its own factors that come into play.

As a case in point, Crane noted that the 2025 California avocado season was quite different than most. A strong early market led to a lot more fruit being picked during the first quarter of the calendar year than is usually the case. Yet, California also sent more fruit to market in the last month of the year than has occurred in many years.

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