

# Meet the Executive Committee Of the California Avocado Commission



The Grether Family

## Chairman of the Board Rob Grether

Rob Grether is a fifth generation Ventura County farmer, the last three of which have been growing avocados in Somis. His grandfather, Bob, and father, John, first planted avocados in 1976. Now Rob and his brother, Ted, also are involved in the family farming operation, Grether Farming Company, which farms about 525 acres of avocados as well as both lemons and mandarins in the Las Posas Valley.

But Rob's path to the family business was not a straight line. After graduating from high school in Ojai, he moved on

to Tulane University, where he studied economics. Armed with his bachelor's degree, he did come back to California to work in production agriculture, first with Dulcinea Farms and then The Wonderful Company. Grether then went on to business school at Duke University, where he earned his graduate degree. With his educational background and work experience to call upon, he moved into management consulting for The WestMark Group, which specializes in strategic planning and agricultural financing. He spent the next eight years moving around the state with stops in both Los Angeles and San Francisco and consulting for many different ag companies and doing some work for Grether Farming Company.

In 2019, he joined the family operation on a full-time basis, but he said that move was not a foregone conclusion. "My dad never put pressure on

me to join the family business," Rob said, adding that he did tire of the travel and the nature of working on relatively short term projects, which, by definition, required you to move on to another company at the conclusion of each gig.

He's now back on the home front as vice president of the company, handling finance, capital projects and industry relations. Rob and Victoria Grether have two sons, Jack (7) and Emmett (4). Rob, 39, enjoys a number of active pursuits including skiing, cycling and running when the demands of raising a young family allow for it.

*The Rochefort Family*



### **Vice Chairman Ryan Rochefort**

Like many of his colleagues in the avocado industry, Ryan Rochefort grew up in the shadow of packing houses and large groves. His Fallbrook upbringing was geographically similar to grower friends, yet he had no direct connection to agriculture. His story is truly the one the agricultural industry brags about, which is that hard work and an interest is all you really need to make it in this business.

“I didn’t really have any idea of what I wanted to do for a living,” Rochefort said. “I always had a green thumb and was interested in growing things and gardening. I sort of stumbled into this industry.”

After high school, he found a job with Sierra Pacific Farms, a grove management company in Temecula. “I started at the bottom digging ditches and laying irrigation pipe. They are a very good employer, so I stuck with them.”

Rochefort admits that in the early years, he didn’t look far off into the future and envision a career. But he continually took on more responsibility, enjoyed the industry and started

to recognize the opportunity as he moved up the ladder. Five years ago, he took over the lead role in Riverside and San Diego counties. Today, after more than 20 years with Sierra Pacific, he is vice president of agricultural operations.

He first joined CAC as a member of the Production Research Committee about six years ago and has since become a commission member, serving District 1. Ryan, 42, and his wife, Satig, have been married nine years and are the proud parents of eight-year-old Micah and six-year-old Grace.

While he is the first member of his family to pursue agriculture as a career, he sees sparks of interest in gardening from his children, just as he showed many years ago. He and Micah tend to the vegetables, while he works the flowers with Grace. “We have tried to grow just about everything,” he says. “We think of the backyard as a blank canvas and try to fill it in. I am still an avid gardener.”



*The Cole Family*

### **Treasurer Jason Cole**

Jason Cole grew up in the avocado business as his grandparents – Lee and Jeanette Cole – planted the family’s first 40-acre ranch with avocados in 1969. Lee served as CEO and president of Calavo for many years, retiring in early 2020. He was a big influence on Jason’s career as the young Cole remembers that his grandfather would make him harvest bins

of fruit to earn spending money. "It was harsh work and I decided I wanted to be on the business side of the industry," Jason quipped.

But after interning at Calavo while in college, he decided that the business side wasn't as exciting as being involved in the growing end. Jason, who is 35, initially took science classes at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo and thought about a career as a pediatrician. Eventually, he crafted a major combining many different agricultural classes, including communications, engineering and agronomy.

He and his brother, Taylor, have followed his grandfather and father (Guy Cole) into the business. Over the past decade, they have helped the family ranch triple the size of its avocado holding through acquisitions and plantings and they now have 900 acres. They also grow lemons and have cattle on the ranch. Taylor runs the harvest crew and is involved in new orchard development, while Jason serves as the agronomist dealing with the soil and tree health of the ranch.

Jason and Lindsey Cole have a son, Jensen, who recently turned one. In his spare time, Jason is an active member of the local Rotary Club and also likes to fish, hunt quail and go scuba diving. He has been involved in CAC and CAC committees for the past half-dozen years.

## Secretary Jessica Hunter

Jessica Hunter literally grew up on her grandfather's (Douglas Giddings) 120-acre avocado ranch in Bonsall. He had invested in Del Rey Avocado Company in 1969 and bought and planted the San Luis Rey Ranch in the 1970s. It was a perfect playground when Jessica was a kid in the 1980s.

After high school, she continued her education at the University of San Diego studying business administration. While in her senior year in college, Jessica secured an internship at Wells Fargo, put on a business suit and lasted two days in corporate America before she realized that was not the career she wanted. She loves the outdoors and having an independent work day. So she said, "I talked to my dad (Bob Siemer) and he told me there was an opportunity in our family business to help him manage the avocado groves he owned and buy avocados from other local farms

for the packing house." So Jessica joined the family business in the fall of 2002.

Siemer has always managed the grower end of the business and Hunter followed in his footsteps, initially working as a field buyer. Today as vice president of operations, she still manages the farms they own and works directly with growers. She loves working with growers on the production end of the business helping them achieve success. She is very proud of successfully converting the ranch's first block of avocados to organic production in 2004. They are leaders in organic production and utilizing sustainable farming practices is Jessica's passion.

Hunter said working with California growers to improve this sector of the avocado industry is her first love and primary focus on a day-to-day basis. She called the late CAC Commissioner Carol Steed a mentor and an inspiration and, in fact, took Ms. Steed's District 1 position when she tragically passed way too early in life.

Jessica and Matt Hunter have two grade school kids, Logan and Sarah, and spend lots of time with their immediate and extended families enjoying life. For fun, Jessica loves outdoor activities including scuba diving, working out and running. In fact, for her 40<sup>th</sup> birthday this past year, she ran her first half marathon. 🍌



The Hunter Family