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GEM in 2022

Across the California avocado industry, and beyond, the buzz surrounding GEM avocado continues. Recently the California Avocado Commission hosted an industry wide webinar on GEM, including a discussion with participating handlers. In early December, board and staff leadership also spent time visiting with growers, and yes, there was quite a bit of GEM discussion.

Much of the talk focused on the future for GEM production in California, and how to build the market. Throughout the industry varying views on GEM exist. While some growers are bullish on the variety, others are opting for the “wait and see approach.” With average production levels running 40% greater than Hass in 2022, and 54% larger in 2021, and comparable pricing, it is easy to see why there is enthusiasm.

But, as with every new venture, questions persist. Will the market accept a new variety? What will production look like in 10, 15, 20 years? And what about pricing?



Recently Dr. Mary Lu Arpaia organized a UC Riverside GEM field day at the Lindcove Research & Extension Center in Tulare County, with over 50 farmers present. Interestingly, only a handful of attendees were current avocado growers. The remaining attendees were interested citrus and other tree crop growers — some with hundreds of acres.

The day also included a visit to a four-acre GEM grove, all under shade. The grower’s cost was roughly \$20,000 per acre for the shade infrastructure and screen. He is hoping to get at least five years for the screen, with an expected

\$5,000 per acre replacement cost. Having grown up in Michoacán he was determined to own his own grove! Quite the pioneer, and that day his grove garnered much attention.

The California GEM industry continues to make

advancements, doubling in volume from 2.5 million pounds in 2021 to nearly 5 million pounds in 2022. Early estimates for 2023 are 6 million pounds, but some believe it may be closer to 10 million pounds or more.

As volumes increase, the discussion has shifted to market strategies. With Hass production representing 94.5% of California’s total volume this year, how do we market GEM and not negatively impact Hass? And at the current low GEM volume, with multiple packers bidding for the fruit, how do we ensure successful programs for retailers?

The California avocado industry is embarking on this GEM journey together – willingly for many, and for others, a bit unwillingly. Nevertheless, the journey has begun. It is in our collective interests’ that we navigate GEM’s future prudently. The Commission will continue to provide information on GEM to ensure growers can make informed decisions. We also will look to foster discussion and debate throughout the industry. 🥑

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Comparison of 2021/2022 Hass & 2022 GEM production				
	2021		2022	
	Hass	GEM	Hass	GEM
Pounds:	254,362,795	2,499,939	256,083,487	4,995,433
Bearing Acres:	45,000	287	45,000	628
Average pounds per acre:	5,653	8,711	5,691	7,955
GEM average % yield above Hass:		54%		40%

Grower Engagement

As previously mentioned, in early December board leadership and staff visited multiple groves and talked with growers. The discussion at these visits centered on the future of the California Avocado Commission. A big part of the conversation focused on your marketing dollars and how to best utilize Commission resources to provide the best lift for California fruit. We also spent time learning about varying cultural practices in the industry. It was interesting to see growers implementing new practices, and in some instances really pushing the envelope in on-farm advancements. Areas like irrigation management, utilization of compost and spacing of new plantings were a few of the topics. Commission representatives heard from a broad representation of growers, who in total represented more than 10% of California's avocado production.

One common theme with the growers we visited is their commitment to continually reinvesting in their groves. These growers are bullish about the future of California's avocado production and firm in their belief that California has a distinct geographical advantage. No one can get to California's core market — California — before us!

As the Commission looks to conduct its strategic planning in 2023, input from the field —from the growers we represent — is crucial. We want to hear from you and welcome your ideas. Input can be provided to kmelban@avocado.org.

