

An Extraordinary Year



John Lamb

The avocado season is winding down with most of the fruit out of the north or far north at this point. To say it has been an interesting year is an understatement of vast proportions. All things considered, the year has turned out to be much better than I would have believed back in March when the pandemic started. Even now, sporting events are being cancelled, restaurants are serving meals outside and schools are looking at hybrid schedules or not opening at all.

For all the turmoil, it is mind boggling that this could be one of the highest crop value years ever, as Tom Bellamore, our California Avocado Commission (CAC) President, has pointed out in his column. We are all very fortunate to grow a crop that has such value in the marketplace. When I see total avocado consumption at more than 50 million pounds per week almost year-round at the values they are commanding, it is an impressive feat. California farmers are always under considerable pressure from the regulatory agencies, water, labor and certainly weather. It is amazing that we not only keep our heads above water, but hopefully profit as well.

The Avocado Commission starts looking into next year at our August meeting, trying to make educated guesses at the crop size and pricing so we can come to some kind of budget

for next year. At this point, we are anticipating a smaller crop, with a higher per pound value. Last year, we were able to drop the assessment from the prior years, and I hope we can do so again. CAC will have ample reserves and they are probably higher than we really need. I will be advocating for a lower assessment rate for the 2020-21 season. It

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seems a bit early to estimate the crop to me; after the recent heat I am seeing a lot of drop, but mostly on trees that were loaded. When I see that type of drop, I always have to remember to look up into the tree to see that there is almost always more fruit there than the tree could hold anyway.

This will be my final column for *From the Grove*, as I will be termed out of the board seat for the next fiscal year, beginning in November. When I became an alternate in 2005, the board was still under the prior regime. Needless to say, there were some uncomfortable

moments when things changed. Tom Bellamore has been the right person at the right time and, in my opinion, has done an extraordinary job as CEO of the Commission. He has assembled a top notch staff and they work very well as a team. Jan DeLyser is, of course, the consummate professional and has kept the California avocado marketing program the envy of the produce world. I thank Tom and Jan and the entire CAC staff for making my job much easier. It is great to have that kind of support. After 15 years I will miss the people and the industry involvement, but not the drive to Irvine.

I would encourage you to get involved with the Commission if you have the time, or even if you don't, make the time. When I ran for the alternate seat, I thought it would be a good opportunity to learn more about the industry and maybe gain knowledge to make our business more successful. It has certainly been all that and more. Board members have a great deal of industry exposure that you would never get by staying at home. Getting to know many of the important people in the industry has been a real honor. Certainly, there are challenges along the way, but overall it has been a most rewarding experience. Our industry needs good people to represent it; please consider becoming part of the team. See you around the grove! 🥑