

## The Best Laid Plans... Haven't Materialized

The California avocado season has definitely started differently than I had imagined. As I began putting together my harvest strategies last November, I forecasted a size pick in January to help alleviate unnecessary stress on the trees. At the time, it appeared we might have some good prices because of increased California avocado demand so I was comfortable harvesting at this time. Another concern was the impending, dreaded El Niño and the anticipated havoc it could bring to Southern California agriculture. I planned for large crews who would pick the fruit quickly in order to avoid any delays due to rain or muddy groves. What a great strategy! It gave me a longer season to get the entire crop off my groves and catch the high end of the market. Regretfully, we all know none of this came to fruition.

It seems to be the challenge of almost every California avocado season. It is getting harder and harder to predict external factors that affect our price, total volumes, ability to pick, etc. We get upset when the packers aren't quoting prices we deserve, or we see imported fruit in our grocery stores, instead of our fruit. Unfortunately many of these factors are out of our control. For example, in the period leading up to the Super Bowl there were over 55 million pounds per week of Mexican fruit available to consumers, in comparison to 2-3 million pounds of California fruit. How can I blame packers or retailers for selling imported

fruit? Demand for avocados exceeds what California growers can provide. This is reality and the situation is expected to get worse as the volume of imported fruit continues to increase. But I believe there is hope and there are factors we can control.

We must continue to support the California Avocado Commission (CAC) and its marketing team. We are becoming a minor player in the global avocado industry so it's important we maintain a strong marketing presence, constantly push our California brand and remain unique. Our competitors can outspend the California industry many times over so it is important that we target how and where money is spent. Jan DeLyser and her entire team have done an outstanding job meeting these goals in conjunction with our new advertising agency, and I believe we will continue to be a strong, unique presence in the marketplace.

Our assessments continue to help Jan and the marketing team reach these goals, but it also is imperative we provide enough fruit to supply our consumers' demands. The bottom line is this — without enough California fruit to supply retailers, it is impossible to compete globally. With costs endlessly rising, water under mandatory allocations (in most areas), labor more difficult to find and wages increasing, we are at a critical point. Over the last few years, a large percentage of acreage has gone out of production. We must maximize the production of existing acreage,



*Doug O'Hara*

so here are a few recommendations:

- **Irrigate correctly.** There is nothing worse than an under-irrigated avocado tree. Yes, water is expensive but to get the best results the correct irrigation must be applied.
- **Fertilize correctly.** The trees need to be fed the correct nutrients in order to grow and produce consistent crops. Growers should use the various resources available to help them manage this efficiently.
- **Prune!** Pruning is very important in helping increase the amount and size of fruit. It also can help reduce alternate bearing and help produce a more consistent crop.
- **Pick early and often in large crop years.** I know it is painful to pick fruit in a weak market but if you pick several times during the year your average returns should be good. This also will reduce the amount of stress on your trees and help with the next year's crop.

Are the above an answer to our prayers? No, just simple farming practices to help keep our industry strong and viable. As growers we must stop worrying about importers and handlers and instead focus on our accomplishments. I fully believe this starts with supporting all aspects of CAC. The rest will fall into place and lead to our continued success. 🥑