

## Rain Continues To Create Optimism



*Rick Shade*

It feels like just about a day and a half since I put my fingers to the keyboard to write my last column for “From the Grove”. As I write this column, rain is once again falling outside my office windows. Here in my little corner of paradise in Carpinteria, rains have been very nice and steady. We have not had to irrigate since just about Thanksgiving. By the time you read this near the beginning of spring, I hope we will still have not had to irrigate.

The good news for farmers around the state is that reservoirs are filling, creeks and rivers are running, and it appears that water deliveries for many will be near normal. It is unfortunate to note that Lake Cachuma, the reservoir for most of Santa Barbara County, has not yet begun to fill. Unless the lake does fill, growers in Santa Barbara County will still be facing extreme drought conditions when irrigation season begins. However, we are farmers, we are resilient and we will figure out a way to keep moving ahead.

One thing I can say for sure as chairman is that there is no shortage of meetings for me to attend. Because of the good rainfall situation, I was able to take the opportunity to attend two of the three food safety update meetings, the northern crop estimate meeting and

the California Avocado Commission (CAC) marketing committee meeting in the last couple of weeks. In my mind, the three topics actually tie together nicely.

One point that became very clear is how harvest labor and food safety certification are so closely knit. It seems one of the largest stumbling blocks to getting certified under the new, updated program is the availability of Good Harvesting Practices (GHP) certified harvest crews. Please know that here at the Commission we are working with the field staff for the handlers to urge as many labor contractors as possible to get certified. On our end, we are making materials available and will facilitate setting up training days as well. Making sure we have as many food safety-certified orchards as possible helps us maintain our premium position in the market place.

Through the dialogue at the crop estimating meetings, it became crystal clear that the California crop is going to be smaller than average in terms of overall poundage. With the plentiful winter rains we are finally receiving, I am confident the fruit is going to size up nicely. All of that being said, I cannot stress how strongly I believe that our fruit can command a great price in the

marketplace this year. In order to realize every penny's worth of value from our fruit, it is imperative that each grower communicates with and works closely with their handler to ensure an orderly flow of fruit to market. Neither under-supply nor oversupply will be helpful in maximizing our returns.

Strangely enough, the chairman of the California Avocado Commission attends the Marketing Committee as a guest. I was able to make a few comments during the public comment period, but there is just one that I think is important for you to be aware of: I challenged all of the handlers in the room to wring every penny's worth of value out of each piece of fruit that they sell. For us as California growers to survive in a short crop year, we need to maximize our income. Our fruit is too scarce and too dear to throw away to buyers who do not value California avocados.

Even though I am writing about this year, I can see trees out my window that are pushing bloom for the 2018 crop. This already makes me curious about what is to come. On that note, I will leave you with a quote from the great American philosopher Will Rogers that I read recently: “The farmer has to be an optimist or he wouldn't still be a farmer.” 🍌