

Good Start to Season but We Need Rain!



John Lamb

The avocado market is off to a fast and positive start for the California avocado growers. As of this writing in mid-February, larger fruit are more than \$1.50 per pound. Growers that have size are eager to pick and get as much in the barn as possible while these prices hold up. It seems the normal Super Bowl hangover for avocados never occurred this year. Mexico backed off its shipments after sending massive amounts into the pipeline for the Big Game. Sizing seems to be key as small sizes are more prevalent. Now, if we could just get some more rain!

The California Avocado Commission (CAC) Annual Meetings are coming up in late March. I would encourage everyone to attend. The Commission team will be presenting the new marketing campaign for 2020. There are new and improved offerings in many formats to entice would-be avocado buyers to purchase California avocados. Our creative teams have been very busy in the off season and I am sure you will all benefit from their work. The CAC crew also will be available to update you on industry affairs, crop estimates and production research. The meetings will be held in Temecula, Ventura and San Luis Obispo so almost all growers will have a meeting nearby.

CAC Industry Affairs has been working with members of the California Legislature to see if anything can be done about minimizing the effects of the agricultural overtime laws, which are being implemented in California over the next couple of years. Depending on the size of your employment base, the laws are phased in for larger employers (more than 25 employees) in 2019 and will start to be phased in for smaller employers between 2020 and 2025, at which time anything over eight hours per day and forty hours per week will be subject to overtime rules. This will have significant impacts not only on the employers, but also the employees. Many employers now employ hourly workers nine hours a day, six days a week. The combination of the overtime and minimum wage increases will be a tough pill for many farmers to swallow. While pending legislation is potentially being introduced to alleviate some of the pain of the overtime rules, it has a long way to go before it becomes law. Please encourage your representatives to grant relief to agricultural employers trying to get through this difficult requirement.

CAC recently held workshops to discuss the concept of “sustainability”. If you are like me, you probably think

that means making a profit. The folks we sell avocados to have made sustainability a much larger issue to include environmental, economic and social development. After attending the workshop, I came away thinking this was not as invasive as I had thought, and that with the regulations we live with every day in California a great many of the requirements for sustainability are already being met. A handout from a buyer of avocados had questions relating to child labor, total fertilizer and pesticide usage, greenhouse gas emissions and labor rights. But after Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) requirements and their ever-tightening rules it is frustrating to think that there is one more thing we will have to endure that does not enhance our production or the value of our crop. I am inclined to think this sustainability process may be much more difficult for other avocado producing countries than the United States. Between the regulations in our state and federal laws and the food safety issues we are already working to be in compliance with, it should not be too much of an extra burden to show that California avocados are sustainable in every way. 🥑