

## It's a Brand New Year ...Thankfully



Rob Grether

**H**appy New Year! Have we ever collectively looked forward to a new year more than we have in 2020? Have we ever looked forward to a new year for the better part of nine months? In most years, it takes me a few weeks to correctly write the new year on checks or contracts. I don't think it will be a problem this January—like everyone, I am ready.

Of course, I appreciate that a new year does not mean a new reality. We are not out of the woods yet and the drive to normalcy will take time, and may come in fits and starts. I am hopeful that an expeditious vaccine rollout can be coupled with effective but measured regulations that allow businesses to reopen and ramp up with confidence. We may be deep into our 2021 season before restrictions are lifted on in-person dining in western states, and, per a McKinsey study, it may take up to four years for the foodservice industry to fully recover. Nevertheless, I am optimistic for our future as California avocado growers because I am confident in the support we will receive from the California Avocado Commission in this challenging year and in the presumably more normal years to follow.

My confidence in CAC is built on four pillars: the staff, the marketing, the board and the growers. Over the past nine months, the staff has been out of sight, but in no way out of touch. Like most office-based businesses, the staff has been largely working remotely, and starting with the Annual Meetings in March, all grower meetings and trade events were canceled or moved online. Through it all, the staff never missed a beat. The marketing team overhauled the campaign messaging to respond to consumer interest in food safety, modified foodservice promotions to drive takeout sales and shifted much of our outdoor advertising to digital platforms. With an average tenure at the Commission of 16 years, this team plans thoroughly, executes decisively and pivots when necessary. In my nine years serving the Commission, first as an alternate and for the last three as a member, I have also seen firsthand the staff's steadfast commitment to creating value for California's commercial growers—the return on our significant investment.

This year's marketing program will build on the campaign launched last year: *the best avocados have Califor-*

*nia in them.* New artists, new graphics, new digital ads, new outdoor murals—same rigor, same measurable objectives. The creative component of CAC's marketing effort is consistently focused, attractive and engaging, but I would advocate that it's the work done behind the scenes to identify trends, target key shoppers, complement retail promotions and develop long-term brand loyalty that should most excite California's avocado growers. The CAC marketing team and its ad agency, the MullenLowe Group, are highly focused not only on targeting the right consumers, but also doing so through the most cost-effective channels. As our latest consumer tracking study shows, there is significant consumer demand for healthy, safe and locally grown produce. Our product meets these criteria; CAC's marketing program will promote and reinforce it.

I am humbled and honored to be the new chairman of your board of directors. The newly seated board is a group of highly talented and committed individuals with a diverse set of backgrounds and professional expertise. Each member of the Executive Committee has been a CAC grower representative for at least four years, and each

has served on the Executive Committee before. We welcome Rachael Laenen and Andrew Prechtl as new members with backgrounds in marketing and finance, respectively, and we are indebted to the numerous growers, handlers and agronomists who have volunteered to serve on the Finance Committee and Production Research Committee, bringing their expertise to the review of critical and technical issues. This board, and I especially, are very grateful for the many years and excellent leadership John Lamb, Ed McFadden and Charley Wolk gave to this organization as members and as chairmen. Each has made an indelible mark on the high standards and constructive culture of governance of the Commission, and your board is committed to building on this foundation.

The fourth and final pillar that underwrites my confidence in the California Avocado Commission is of course

you, its growers. Not because of the avocados you grow (or the assessments you pay), but because you are engaged, collaborative and generous. CAC depends on your engagement directly and through your handlers: grower surveys and crop estimates directly impact the timing and reach of the marketing campaign. Through close collaboration with growers, CAC can more quickly identify and tackle emerging issues and promote best practices. Most of all, CAC will continue to deliver on its mission to support California growers because the growers will continue to generously support CAC with their time as volunteers, stories of their heritage in marketing materials, their crop in production trials, and their patience to weather challenging periods and pursue durable strategies. I'm looking forward to working with you to make this a great year. Here's to 2021! 🥑

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