

# Chairman's Report



*Rob Grether*

'Tis the season to be grateful and the season to be hopeful. Certainly, we should strive to have a guacamole-bowl-half-full kind of outlook all year, but when the crop doesn't set or the rain doesn't fall or the wind blows too hard...or maybe you run out of chips, it can be easy to forget how blessed we are to be California avocado growers, packers and marketers. I know there are

easier professions, less complex industries, and investments that carry lower risk, but conversely there are few products as long-loved but also on-trend as avocados, and it's our California avocados topping the charts.

I am grateful for our product's market position, and grateful to everyone who has worked to build and protect our industry and worked to de-

velop and sustain our premium brand. Among the many individuals who work hardest for our success, this season I am particularly grateful to the California Avocado Commission's President and CEO, Tom Bellamore.

As many of you know, Tom has announced his plan to retire in early 2022. In November, the CAC Board engaged the executive search firm, Boy-





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den, to help it identify and recruit Tom's successor. The search process is under way and will really pick up steam after the holidays. While I hope the search is completed in a timely manner, it is not urgent as Tom will stay with us until his successor can start. As many of you know, Tom is humble and lowkey. As such, he doesn't want to be celebrated and probably isn't thrilled that I am calling attention to him now. He may feel like he has just been doing his job and doesn't deserve special recognition, but I think it is important for us all to recognize that our industry and our brand wouldn't be what they are today if not for Tom's leadership at CAC.

Tom joined the Commission in 1994 and has been its President since 2009. I had little exposure to the Commission prior to 2011 and so I have only really known the Commission as an organization run by Tom. I can distinctly remember the grower meeting in Santa Paula, the staff's focused presentation, and Tom's deft and thoughtful responses to challenging questions from growers. I approached Art Bliss in the parking lot about becoming an alternate and then somehow a decade passed. But I am so grateful that through those years, I had the opportunity to work with Tom first as an alternate, then as a director, on numerous committees and finally as Chairperson. Over the past decade—and presumably before—Tom led the Commission through numerous challenges without faltering, through significant growth in the global avocado industry, and through *huge* changes in marketing without falling behind or being too precariously out in front.

The President of the California Avocado Commission is responsible for developing the overarching strategy to support our industry's sustainability and prosperity. Tom has consistently delivered. Certainly, some years are challenging for many growers, and

many years are challenging for some growers, but over the long run, the strategies Tom helped develop and execute with his team, the Board, and other industry stakeholders have, but for a few exceptions, been highly successful. Per capita consumption of fresh avocados has skyrocketed during Tom's tenure as President. There were many factors that contributed to this growth, but I want to recognize that CAC's marketing was out ahead of foreign efforts and that even as California's market share shrunk, brand preference grew and the price premium held.

Despite Tom's enormous contribution to the organization, all will be fine when he finally hangs up his hat. CAC's staff is stable and professional, and Tom has successfully developed his Vice Presidents into exceptionally capable leaders who can continue to lead this organization. Most of California's growers and California's handlers are bullish about the future of the California avocado industry and are confident in CAC's ability to support this industry and serve their interests. In large part, this confidence is built on the leadership Tom has demonstrated during his tenure as CAC's President. I am hopeful for our future and know that while we will face new challenges, we will be able to do so from a strong foundation, with an outstanding team, with a valuable brand, and with enduring gratitude for Tom Bellamore. 🥑