



Ed McFadden

Summer ~ California's Time to Shine

As I sat down to write this column my thoughts strayed to our crop year so far. What is an average year? There are none; it only happens on paper! Average is a summary of highs, lows and everything in between.

This season what appeared to be an early window of strong returns for large fruit in March that was expected to last for a couple of weeks is still going strong as I write this column in mid-August. Dismal returns for small sizes turned around dramatically in early July giving growers with fruit remaining on their trees unexpectedly good results. When I left California for a Montana fishing trip during the second week of July, some growers were talking about dropping 84s on the ground rather than sending them to handlers and 70s were bringing us around \$0.50 per pound or less. The CAC Marketing Advisory Committee (MAC) Chair Bob Lucy commented at the June meeting, "The market is awash in 70s" with no relief in sight. When I returned from my week of fly fishing, the small sizes had nearly dou-

bled in value. The lesson I learned was that I need to spend more time away fishing!

The turn-around was no accident. CAC President Tom Bellamore's team led by Vice President of Marketing Jan DeLyser shifted from high gear into overdrive and pushed the smaller sizes even harder, with results that helped all California growers during a challenging season. The summer season really is the time for California fruit to shine and thanks to the CAC team, it did just that.

We have been helped in other ways this season. After a cold winter and several early heat spells that caused unusually early fruit maturity, Mother Nature showed us her mellow side with one of the milder five weeks from early July to mid-August that we have seen in years. This allowed fruit to hold longer in our hotter regions and gave protected fruit a chance to add some precious weight. For many of us this was a blessing – labor shortages made a ramping up of harvest impossible. The fruit I have seen in many locations is holding much better than I would have

predicted in the late spring.

All in all, after a disappointing early start of the season for groves without size, a sweet end of the season for many, a great middle for some and an unexpectedly good start for others depending on your latitude or distance from the coast.

For much of the state it is time to shift our attention to the next season. As I write this column, I feel that I only have seven things to worry about: 1) August; 2) September; 3) October; 4) November; 5) December; 6) January; and 7) February. The time for Santa Anas, fire season, frost and winter storms is right around the corner. Hillside vegetation remains as dry as it has ever been for this time of year. Stay vigilant and hold onto your fruit, next year could be special if we have something to pick.

In closing, I would like express my appreciation to Jonathan Dixon for his efforts on behalf of our industry. As a board member and chair it was my privilege and pleasure to work with and support Dr. Dixon during his time at CAC. Thank you Jonathan – good on ya mate! 🥑