

By Tim Linden

## 2024 Crop Produces Surprising Volume; 2025 Should Surpass It

**B**y virtually all accounts, 2024 was a stellar year for most California avocado growers as volume surpassed pre-season estimates by about 50% and the average grove price was also better than expected. And topping off that good news is the fact that the trees are currently carrying the makings of an excellent crop into the fall with veteran observers noting that a 400-million-pound crop is certainly within reach.

Peter Shore, vice president of production management for Calavo Growers Inc., Santa Paula, CA, told *From the Grove* in late July that the fruit is on the trees to hit that lofty number. He did add that there are about six months of outside factors to contend with – including wind, heat and rain, or lack thereof – that can greatly alter that reality. In fact, when looking at the 2024 crop and how it far surpassed the October 2023 pre-season estimate, Shore reminded me that estimating the crop so far in advance is more of a guess than anything else. It certainly is not the result of a perfect scientific equation. Rather it is based on the collective observations of hundreds of growers spread across many miles looking at thousands of acres.

The Calavo executive indicated the weather factors cannot be under-

estimated as they can greatly increase the size of a crop as they did in 2024, or reduce it as has happened many times before.

He did note that the increased volume in 2024 was extremely beneficial for California growers as a very good field price accompanied that volume for

much of the season. Prices were above average when picking began in earnest in early spring and they were still very good in June, at which point more than 215 million pounds had been harvested and sent to market.

Shore did report that the market was at a very high level in June, buoyed



by excellent demand and a suspension of shipments from Mexico to the U.S. market for about a week because of a security incident with U.S. Department of Agriculture packinghouse inspection staff. “We have come off of that very high market we experienced in June and now we are expecting some stability in the market as we move through the summer crop,” he said in late July, adding that both California and Peru have hit their peak weeks and will see volume taper off significantly moving into August.

Keith Barnard, senior vice president of global sourcing, Mission Produce Inc., Oxnard, CA, agreed that California’s 2024 volume was a pleasant surprise, which beat the company’s expectations. “We saw a plentiful fruit set out of Ventura County, and orchards across the state responded positively to the above normal rainfall from the past two winters,” he said. “For this reason, California volumes have been strong and steady this summer, and our California pack house has been hitting record volumes. The eating quality of our California avocados this year has been top notch.”

Mission Produce is well-positioned in Ventura County, close to many of the company’s growers, with a state-of-the-art forward distribution center, where it has the capacity to pack up to 1.2 million pounds of avocados a day.

In reviewing 2024, Barnard noted that the California crop estimate was updated three times during the season, with the most current number revealing that the final packout number will surpass 315 million pounds, 50% more than the 208 million pound initially forecast.

Barnard explained that the abundant rains and favorable temperatures in the state allowed the California fruit to grow larger and heavier than in the

last couple of seasons. “Additionally, some growers in Ventura County experienced unexpected and unprecedented yields in their orchards, which was difficult to predict early on,” he said. “Lastly, the state encountered next to no freeze damage and only moderate wind damage compared to a typical growing season.”

Because of the larger crop and a decrease in volume from Peru due to weather issues, Mission was able to expand its sales of California fruit this season. Barnard said Peru is typically a marketing focus for Mission during the summer months, but this year “we pivoted to increasingly focus on California as a premier origin for summer supply. We’ve highlighted California as a key origin as part of our diversified sourcing strategy.”

He added that new to the marketing mix for 2024 was the GEM variety, which Mission marketed as a new, California-grown variety known for its buttery, creamy flavor profile.

“California avocados are marketed throughout the U.S., especially on the West Coast, in addition to Canada, China, Korea, Japan, and Hong Kong,” said Barnard. “We offer California avocados in both bags and bulk as part of our customer-specific ripening programs.”

He revealed that the avocado category overall has seen growth across bagged avocados, which doubled from 2019 to 2023, growing at an annualized rate of 19%.

Barnard added that Mission uses California avocados across its entire packaged avocado product portfolio, including conventional and organic fruit, and several other bagged options. “Bags are an easy, grab-and-go solution that brings value to shoppers,” he said.

Also commenting on the 2024 California avocado season was Keith Blanchard, California field manager

for Index Fresh Inc., Bloomington, CA. “2024 was a good season for California avocado growers. Both price and volume were better than expected,” he said.

Blanchard noted the discrepancy in the crop estimate from pre-season to final total and offered that when groves outperform the norm, it is difficult to predict fruit volume, as there is a tendency to underestimate.

“The crop was significantly larger than expected in Ventura County. Typically, when we see crops in excess of 20,000 pounds per acre, these crops tend to be challenging to estimate,” he said. “Heat, wind events, and other environmental conditions that are out of growers’ control are difficult to predict. Growers’ past experiences with the negative impacts of such conditions create understandable hesitations in predicting excessive swings in supply. We find extremely high estimates can seem unbelievable even to the most experienced growers and often the tendency is to estimate conservatively.”

He also indicated that the suspension of shipments from Mexico had a positive impact on the season’s ultimate volume. “The Mexico supply shutdown that started in mid-June created an immediate increase in California avocado demand,” Blanchard said. “The larger crop allowed us to market California avocados to fill this unexpected gap. In addition, the larger crop allowed us to extend our programs a few weeks longer than expected.”

He added that Index Fresh saw a significant increase in bagged orders, which helped expand the company’s distribution of California avocados.

Turning his attention toward the 2025 crop, Blanchard agreed that the optimism appears to be warranted. “The 2025 crop is looking very strong,” he said. “This crop will provide for more promotional opportunities at retail and allow us to extend the program longer.” 🍷