

## Thoughts from My Grove

I am looking out my office window. We made it through a dry, windy spring and hot summer, and are starting to see a nice fall flush expanding on our dusty trees. So far we have no Santa Ana winds in the forecast, which is good news.

As we approach the end of our California avocado season it seems like a good time to look back and review the past year — and what a year it has been. The ongoing drought has been difficult for everyone, even those fortunate enough to have steady water supplies. Our trees miss the normal leaching from pure winter rains and it has been the dustiest summer I can remember. Hopes for a strong El Niño condition this winter have cooled somewhat. Hopefully we will receive at least normal rainfall in the coming winter months.

Early season hopes for sky-high returns were tempered by reality, but we still had good average dollars per pound. If you want to see some beautifully done marketing, check out the CAC grower website and view the videos in “A Look Behind the Label”. I want to go out and buy California avocados after I watch the videos — and I’m sitting in the middle of an avocado grove!

I’m also looking back at the three years I have served as Chair. I will term out before the November board meeting and hand over the reins to the next Chair. For me it has been a tumultuous, but rewarding, three-year run. Food safety continued to be an increasingly important part of the way we do business. Polyphagous Shot Hole Borer (PSHB) was discovered in Southern California and is gradually spreading outward toward

our major growing regions. The Pine Tree Ranch was leased by the Commission and has become a center for field trials and the presentation of CAC-funded research results.

Under the leadership of PRC Chair Shane Tucker our production research program continues to make sometimes difficult choices to match the challenging needs of the growers who fund it. I believe we now understand we cannot fund everything we would like and that there are urgent concerns that need to be dealt with immediately — sometimes at the cost of long-term programs that have value. Our current PSHB program is a good example of this. The research for this dangerous pest/disease complex must be done quickly but is expensive.

Three years ago we saw the start of the current drought, which has brought serious water concerns to all of California agriculture. The drought comes on top of the ongoing challenge of increasingly-expensive imported water, particularly in the south. Some of our fellow growers have been forced to stump or abandon beautiful, productive groves in heartbreaking moves to cut costs and in hope of future rain and replenished aquifers.

In spite of these challenges, we have also enjoyed strong returns and are seeing our production per acre gradually increase. The returns are surprisingly good when you consider how much the U.S. market for avocados has expanded during the past several decades.

Serving as your Chair has been eye opening. It is difficult to see and understand everything that President



*Ed McFadden*

Tom Bellamore and his staff do for us until you serve on the board and then serve the board as Chair. The CAC staff is the envy of the produce business and has been a pleasure for me to work with. To see the influence that a relatively small crop like California avocados has on the produce market is a tribute to Tom and the CAC staff, including his ace marketing team headed by Jan DeLyser.

The future looks bright, but challenging, for California avocados. We need to continue to produce consistently high quality, safe fruit. We do a great job but there are areas where we can improve: all of our groves need to be GAP certified to compete with most of our offshore suppliers. American buyers are starting to require GAP certification as a condition of buying our fruit.

We also have some undeniable advantages: our climate and soil allow skilled growers to produce great-tasting, nutrient-dense and inherently-safe fruit and we are located in the middle of a market that is a major target for growers around the world. I’m probably like you — I bring avocados from our groves to family, friends, business associates, doctors and dentists. People get excited when they see you coming in the door with a bag of beautiful, hand-grown California avocados. What a pleasure it is to share our favorite fruit with so many appreciative consumers. 🥑