

Jeff Oberman Uniquely Qualified to Lead CAC

By Tim Linden

Produce industry veteran Jeff Oberman has been engaged with all aspects of the produce supply chain in his 25-year career, leaving him uniquely qualified to serve as the new California Avocado Commission president. He started his new position on October 10.

“We are very pleased that Jeff Oberman has accepted the position of California Avocado Commission president,” said Rob Grether, chair of the Commission Board of Directors. “Jeff’s broad network, non-profit association leadership and fresh produce business experience, including an end-to-end understanding of the needs of growers, handlers, distributors, foodservice operators and retail customers makes him exceptionally well-suited to lead the California Avocado Commission.”

Oberman told *From the Grove* he is “honored to be joining a team with such a great culture.” In his 25 years in the industry, he has crossed paths with many members of the California avocado industry, including growers, handlers and the CAC staff. “Having the opportunity to take the helm and build on the California Avocado Commission’s well-deserved reputation for innovative marketing and grower advocacy is exciting. Like most agricultural producers, California avocado growers face a host of ever-changing challenges, and I look forward to steering the Commission in support of long-term grower success.”

He added that avocados have clearly been one of the top growth drivers in the produce industry for the past decade. “I see my mission as helping to continue that growth while representing California growers and working to maximize their returns.”

Oberman was born and raised in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where his father was a professor of pathology at the University of Michigan and well known for his work with breast cancer and AIDS research. Though Oberman bleeds Michigan blue, he graduated from the University of Missouri at Columbia with a degree in political science and economic geography.

He began his post-college career working for the Chicago Cubs but soon found a position with the National Institute of Health; his first foray into the regulatory environment.

In 1997, he joined United Fresh in Washington, D.C. to help

the organization create and launch a new trade show. For 21 years, Oberman worked for the produce trade association in successively more responsible roles. He always had the desire to move to the Golden State, which he did in 2001, to engage with the association’s membership. In fact, for more than half his tenure at United Fresh he served as vice president, trade relations.

Oberman has extensive experience in trade association leadership, strategic planning, and management of customer and government agency relations. He notes that he was serving the association in the Salinas Valley when the spinach crisis hit in 2006, giving him a firsthand look at crisis management and dealing with an unprecedented industry challenge.

In 2018, he left United Fresh and joined PRO*ACT, a leading foodservice supplier. For the past several years he has served as vice president of sales – business development, with an emphasis on building the company’s retail business. That became a chief driver of growth for PRO*ACT when the pandemic hit in the spring of 2020. He noted that connection as a buyer and seller of produce completed his personal journey to learn all aspects of the produce business, literally from boots on the ground in the field to working very closely with retailers both at United Fresh and with PRO*ACT.

In describing his own skill set, Oberman emphasizes his advocacy work with United Fresh, the real-life supply chain knowledge he gained at PRO*ACT, and the familiarity with all aspects of the fresh produce industry that was forged through countless hours of talking to association members and working to solve their individual issues.

Over the years, Oberman has received numerous accolades and awards including being named to *Produce Business* magazine’s “40 under Forty” list in 2005 and to *The Packer’s* “25 Profiles in Leadership” in 2017. He also served for two terms on the Board of Directors of the Fresh Produce & Floral Council.

Jeff has another close tie to the industry as his wife, Kyla Oberman, is the marketing director of California Giant Berry Farms. The couple, who have two children – 7-year-old Harper Rose and 3-year-old Hudson Austen – have already launched a family debate as to which commodity has the faster growth curve: avocados or berries. 🍓