

Farming 2000 — A Grower's Perspective

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As California agriculture speeds headlong towards the year 2000, the concept, or concern, that I most often address with avocado growers is how to position oneself to meet the cultural and marketing challenges we now face, as well as those yet to come.

My response, in its most simple terms, is that growers must become more educated and more personally involved in cultural, political, and marketing issues than ever before. The answer to "Why?" is simple in expression but more complicated to put into practice. An informed and educated grower has the tools to respond and act quickly when a real crisis occurs, where an uninformed (or uninterested) grower cannot. It is generally too late anyway, at that point, to effectively educate growers. Our water price-rebate and rationing issues are a great example. As late as mid-1995, there were many California avocado growers who still do not understand the "water price-rollback" issue, what its elements are, or why they should have adopted it. (Many still have not adopted it!) These same growers, however, make the loudest complaints about the price they pay for their water! This ignorance of the details of the issue, or apathy toward the program, is exactly why the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California *originally* ignored the avocado growers' cries for help. Were it not for the coordinated efforts of interested, informed, and involved members of our industry who made up the "Water Team" in 1993 and 1994, we'd all be paying much more for our water and still be on an interruptible status, without any additional assurances of reliability. Growers must be knowledgeable and ready to become involved and mobilized when crises arise, and ready to financially back efforts on their behalf to solve these situations.

I believe that due to the complex nature of feasibly growing commercial-size crops of avocados in high water-cost areas, growers will of necessity need to be more involved in their groves, or have the foresight to employ the services of a professional and proven farming company. One can no longer buy a grove, throw water at it, add a handful of fertilizer when the mood arises, and harvest bumper crops for profit. With water being over 70% of the cost of production in many areas (and rising), growers need to know the latest in irrigation technology, products, and schedules. Most do not, I've found. New types of sprinklers, for example, take much of the guesswork out of line pressures and proper distribution of water and increase efficiency of water usage and labor. Evapotranspiration schedules, tailored to specific grove needs, are big cost savers, when followed diligently. More than ever before, growers need to test the feasibility of drilling wells for either an alternative or supplementary water supply. Chemical bee attractants have helped immensely in setting fruit during blossom season. The list goes on.

Global political issues can form, change rapidly, and become implemented, often

unchallenged, without much fanfare or notice by our own government, for a variety of reasons. Often, these reasons do not address the welfare of this industry and are motivated by persons or interests far removed from avocados. Growers need to become and stay informed, get involved, and be united in purpose to avoid new or revised governmental regulations that impact their markets and investments. Disastrous changes to the longstanding Mexican avocado quarantine could have been implemented last year by our own government, were it not for the aggressive and informed enlightenment of scientific issues brought to bear by California Avocado Commission management and a few involved and mobilized growers on the USD A, elected representatives, and representatives of the scientific community. Even with all these efforts on the behalf of California's growers, the USDA may yet allow Mexico to market in specific areas of the U. S., proposing to monitor shipments to specific markets and the required phytosanitary protocol and certifications. Instead of mobilizing and uniting behind our industry's effort to educate and inform our trade representatives of the severe, devastating, and multifaceted impact of such a plan prematurely implemented, some growers are taking the attitude that it is inevitable anyway, so why fight it? Some are planning to "throw in the towel" and stop farming when, and if, our neighbors to the south are allowed to market within the U. S.. So much misinformation gets passed around from one uninformed grower to another, that it is difficult for growers who do take an interest to make an intelligent choice. With these "signals" being sent by our industry's distinct lack of unity and purpose among the growers, is it any wonder that our government is ready to trade away our quarantine? Growers *must* become and stay informed on issues of this magnitude and effect. They must form and support a united front. And they must be willing to step out in front and take responsibility for their industry.

It is my belief that if Mexican avocados are, in fact, allowed into our markets, we will have some chaotic times for a while, but the new marketing challenges presented to us will get our creative "juices" flowing, and the informed industry will adapt itself and overcome those challenges. We will all function differently, but I believe we will survive.

In summary, my belief is that anyone who fears disaster from the challenges we growers face over the next 10 years hasn't read the signals well. No business or industry remains the same forever. We must constantly challenge and test ourselves and rise above the issues that meet us head-on. Strategic planning, staying informed, taking risk, and being prepared to change are the strategies we must incorporate in our businesses to survive in the future. Are you ready and willing to step up to this challenge?