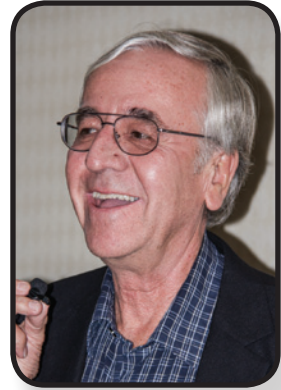


California Avocado Society

2012 Award of Honor

Gary S. Bender
Fallbrook, California



Award Presented
By Dr. Mary Lu Arpaia

It is a pleasure and honor to have been asked to present this year's Award of Honor. I have known the recipient for close to 29 years beginning when I was asked to serve on the search committee for his position. He made an immediate impression on the committee and to make a short story even shorter he was selected for the Farm Advisor position, succeeding Don Gustafson. Those of you in the audience who knew Don know that to replace Don was a monumental challenge since he had cast a long shadow during his career. Our recipient was up for the task and when the time comes for him to hang up his Farm Advisor hat, Dr. Gary Bender will have cast his own shadow across the history of the San Diego avocado industry, not only for his achievements but for the reason his fellow advisor Ben Faber wrote me, "Gary has been the tallest farm advisor in the San Diego office, forever".

Gary has been interested in agriculture for a long time, and is a native of Riverside, California. He completed his undergraduate studies in Biological Sciences at UC Irvine in 1971. He then worked in the Dept. of Plant Pathology at UCR as a research associate while simultane-

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ously completing his Master's degree in Plant Pathology in 1975. It was during this time he met his wife Patty who he tells me convinced him to pursue his Master's degree. Following this period, he worked as an assistant plant pathologist for the Orange County Dept. of Agriculture for several years. A stint as a biologist for the Riverside County Dept. of Agriculture followed. Soon thereafter he decided to pursue a PhD, which he did under the guidance of Dr. John Menge at UCR by working on dry root rot of citrus. Gary completed his PhD in 1985 just as he began his career as a Farm Advisor for subtropical horticulture in San Diego County.

Subtropical horticulture is a broad term, and besides avocados, this also meant responsibility for all tree crops grown in San Diego County. I am always amazed when Gary tells me this even includes Christmas trees! So while we are honoring him today for his achievements and service to the avocado industry, he has also had parallel careers in citrus, litchis, blueberries, pitahayas, macadamias, cherimoyas, grapes, Christmas trees etc. etc.; quite an achievement! He told me once that he was responsible for over 3000 growers of these various crops in San Diego County.

But back to avocados; Gary has been a tireless worker dedicated to the growers of San Diego County. He has never been shy to wade into controversy and has always provided his thoughtful insights into topics of importance to the avocado grower. One thing that has impressed me about Gary over the years is his open-mindedness. He may take a stand on a topic but rather than being entrenched in his viewpoints he is willing to change as evidence may show that adjustment is needed. To me, this is a valuable trait that has benefited all California avocado growers. He has dedicated himself to conducting applied research and demonstration projects on avocado. He conducted one of the first worldwide studies on the use of reclaimed water for avocados, and this project has been cited by many examining the potential for the use of reclaimed water. He convinced the Stehly family in Valley Center to host his many pruning trials and salinity rootstock trials. He recently received funding from the California Avocado Commission (CAC) to examine high density planting of avocados. He has tirelessly given tours to growers,

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regulators, and other scientists all in the effort to extend information and expand our knowledge base.

He is probably one of the best extension educators that I know. He is recognized for his affable manner and humble personality. He has organized many avocado short courses for the growers of San Diego and Riverside Counties. After many years of teaching through UC Riverside Extension he moved to Mira Costa College and continues to teach several very popular courses there. This in the evening after working all day as an advisor! Gary has also had another active career associated with the Cooperative Extension Service, that involving 4H. Shortly after moving to Fallbrook, thinking that his boys needed to have some practical experience on the half acre “Bender Farm”, they got into sheep and goats. He has stayed with the goats as an advisor and has been a goat judge at the Del Mar Fair for over 20 years. Gary Bender has certainly not let the grass grow under his feet in a long productive career and certainly is a worthy recipient of the California Avocado Society Award of Honor for 2012.