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Growers Outlook - 2010 and beyond



When we were asked to submit some thoughts for inclusion in the current yearbook issue, it occurred to us that a “look back” over the past fifty years might be a good starting point. During this time the avocado industry has seen significant change. The ‘Hass’ variety has become the world standard. Shipping and handling procedures have become more consistent and coupled with the “controlled ripening” being perfected by many of our shippers; a more predictable high quality product is being offered in the Produce Departments of our favorite grocery stores. The avocado is becoming a staple and its contribution to a healthy diet and a productive lifestyle continues to be revealed. Consumption has kept up with the increase in production and the full maturation of the market has yet to be seen. In short, as avocado growers, we are in a very enviable position. This success has been due to the contribution and work of many.

Not only has the avocado industry grown significantly, so has the cultural support to make this happen. Looking back, perhaps the most significant event was the introduction of PVC pipe and associated products like hose and sprinklers. This made it easier for avocado production to climb the hillsides and open up new growing areas. Research, although extensive in a historical view, has be-

come more focused and with new tools and techniques, is more relevant to daily cultural decisions. The explosion of access to computer databases has allowed research and information dissemination to be readily attainable and synergistic in encouraging the betterment of the industry. In preparing this paper, we know that we have been privileged to be ranchers during the Golden Era for avocado production.

The next fifty years will be interesting and challenging in order to match the progress of the last fifty years. Resource utilization will need to be more efficient, production more consistent, and attention to profitability more focused. The fact that we will be growing a food product that is a wonder as to healthfulness and with a consumption level yet to be realized should give encouragement to the successful resolution to coming challenges. We have some significant ones on the horizon.

- Reaching the consistent production which our trees are capable of requires a better understanding of the factors controlling alternate bearing, tree efficiency, fruit size, and healthy root system.
- Effective cultural practices are continuing to be refined as new research reveals better methods. We need to be aware of the new progress in this area.
- The continuing health issues confronting the Apiary Industry makes it more difficult and costly to achieve adequate pollination.
- Root Rot is still a problem that demands vigilance even though we have made great strides in addressing its effects both with new rootstocks and chemical treatment.
- We need to still be on the lookout for better rootstocks and scion varieties with characteristics superior to the ones now in commercial production.
- Laurel Wilt is one of a series of invasive pests and diseases that never seems to end. Effective inspection and increased vigilance of the rapid shipment of products in the new “Global Economy” has to be a government priority. The linkage between a healthy pest free industry, and the politicized debate over market access is troublesome, with the grower and associated industry put at risk. Pest exclusion has to be given greater attention.
- Our regulatory environment is slow to respond to the needs of rapidly combating a new pest or disease. The cost of material registration and other regulatory compliance requirements put some growers, like those of us in California, at a disadvantage

when other countries allow the use of materials such as Plant Growth Regulators that we may never be allowed to use here, yet their fruit is sold next to ours in the market.

- Assuring that our product meets expected food safety standards is the current focus of the California Avocado Commission as it develops Commodity Specific Good Agricultural Practices guidelines.

The success in growing the Avocado Industry to this point can be summarized in one word-cooperation. As growers, we have encouraged and directed effective research along with significant funding to our mutual advantage. This is a formula that has and will pass the test of time. As the saying on one of our major packer/shipper tally sheets said: "Coming together is a beginning, staying together is progress". We are honored to be a part of this yearbook and look forward to our industry's progress.

Dan and Link

**Dan (photo right) and his wife Susan Pinkerton are third generation Californians. Their family consists of a daughter Catherine, with a Master's in Clinical Social Work from the University of Chicago, and her husband Travis, a recent graduate from Washington University Medical School who is now in his Emergency Medicine Residency. A son Doug is a Captain in the Marine Corps, and flies the AH-1W Super Cobra. They started their farming enterprise with six acres of brush covered hillside which now comprises over 100 acres of Avocado and lemon production in the Santa Paula area of Ventura County. Their new focus is Grandson Oakley Paul (named after his Great Grandfathers) who at just nine months old was eating his first avocado, fresh from the ranch.*

***J. Link Leavens (photo left) is a 4th generation Ventura County, California farmer that manages 1,200 acres of avocados, lemons and wine grapes in Ventura and Monterey Counties for his family partnership. He has been active in leadership in various groups for the last 38 years since graduating from Cal-Poly, Pomona and Cal-Lutheran MBA programs. He has 4 grown children and 5 grandchildren. He currently serves on the California State Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Committee and is a Vice-Chairman with Calavo Growers Inc.*