

Ever Vigilant

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The two-story, concrete building on Dyer Road in Santa Ana where the California Avocado Commission is located looks unassuming enough, but how many of you realize that it houses one of the most sophisticated radar systems in the country? The radar is the heart and soul of the Commission's nationally recognized Issues Management Program.

Launched in 1990 by CAC President Mark Affleck, the radar has been scanning round-the-clock for any and all issues which affect you, the grower, and your business. And just like the flight control system at LAX, with each new day there are more and more blips on the screen. Think of a pattern of concentric circles. Several of the issues we're tracking are dead center on the screen — so important to the industry that if we look away for an instant, we invite disaster. There is no better example than USDA's Mexican avocado proposal. Farther out, in the next ring of circles, are other critical issues, like water, exotic pests and food safety. Being ever-vigilant, however, means more than just watching the radar screen. It means being ready and able to respond early, while there is still time to shape the issue...still time to win.

CAC's radar system is designed to anticipate, identify and RESPOND EARLY to issues that impact the industry in order to positively influence their outcome. By seizing the initiative, developing a response capability, and acting early, you can win on issues, even when the odds are steep, and that's exactly what CAC has done.

Consider agricultural water pricing. CAC's original vision to work with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California (MWD) to obtain rate relief for growers resulted in the Interim Agricultural Water Program, but we didn't stop there. By acting early (we began work on a long-term program immediately after securing the interim agreement) and partnering with MWD, we were able to get the program extended. That victory is worth \$95 million to Southern California agriculture over the next five years.

Acting early has kept the Commission out ahead and in control of other pivotal issues, like grower competitiveness and value, nutrition and exotic pests. The results? Winning. In an increasingly competitive market, winning is delivering innovative marketing and promotional programs which, in 1995-96, returned a crop value of \$222 million to growers. In a world of mixed messages about which foods to eat, winning is getting The New York Times to tout that "the healthful benefits of avocados are irrefutable." In the unpredictable realm of politics and trade, winning is keeping Mexican avocado pests out of California's avocado groves. And in the face of natural disasters, winning is getting a federal crop insurance pilot program for avocados.

Like the planes taking off and landing at LAX, most issues dance across and then

disappear from the avocado radar screen. Others, like Mexico, seem to circle forever. So what's on the radar screen now? Here are a few examples. Since the appearance of a new avocado thrips in June, the Commission has been working hard to gather the facts about this pest and identify control methods which growers can use. There is more work to be done on water issues as well; water wheeling, the Bay-Delta process, and localized challenges like the agricultural water rates in Santa Barbara are good examples. We're also tracking the new Food Quality Protection Act which will dictate how minor use pesticides are regulated, and we're taking a close look at our production research program, to make sure it delivers results you can use in the field, to keep you on the leading edge of new information and technology.

Common to all of these efforts is our drive to innovate, create value and transform the business early, so that we are ready to meet new challenges — in the grove or in the marketplace — head on to come out on top. It's the kind of leadership you have come to expect from the Commission. So the next time you drive through Santa Ana, listen for the hum emanating from the Commission offices. It's the sound of our radar, ever-vigilant, ever-ready, scanning the issues horizon with your interests and your future always foremost in mind.