

Research Is Important to the Avocado Industry

Dorothy Wood

President of the California Avocado Society

Many factors are changing the way we do business in the avocado industry in California. These factors include increasing water costs and uncertain water availability, urban encroachment on agricultural areas, changes in land use and other government regulations, and changes in consumer demand for quality products. Many of these issues affect not only the avocado industry, but agriculture in general.

While there will always be factors affecting business decisions, some of these issues can be addressed with scientifically-based solutions. For example, increased salinity in our water is causing changes in the yield from our groves. We are seeing a decrease in the populations of natural pollinators such as feral honey bees, which help to pollinate our fruit. Integrated Pest Management practices are becoming increasingly more important with the infestation of pests such as the perseas mite. In the past, research has effectively found solutions to similar problems. There is good reason to believe that research can help find cost effective ways to deal with many of our current business problems.

As an industry, we need to continually evaluate areas where additional knowledge is needed, and focus on the areas that address the agricultural needs and conditions in California. Take water, for example. As water costs increase, water availability becomes uncertain, and agricultural water quality continues to decline, we need to focus on how to more efficiently use the resources we have either through improved irrigation systems, better techniques for water application, or other changes that will result in increased water efficiency. We need to do more research on rootstocks that may be better adapted to drier soils and the water quality in California. Research is a critical component of the continual process of looking for better varieties for our soil and climate conditions.

New varieties are also a key in looking for methods to increase the yield through the use of different varieties for cross-pollination. Along with new varieties is a need for better understanding on how pollinators such as honeybees perform the function of pollination. Research is providing us with needed information in order to make informed, cost-effective business decisions on cultural practices for our groves.

Very rarely have significant advances happened overnight with the discovery of a new idea. More commonly, previous ideas are continually improved upon through the use of research. By using well thought-out and managed research to provide answers on "how to build a better avocado," we have one less problem to deal with in this changing environment.

The importance of research is that it is a proven business tool when used wisely to

continually improve and fine tune any product. As agriculture increasingly turns into a global agribusiness, California growers need cost effective tools we can use in order to make better business decisions.