

ASK THE AGRONOMIST

Gerado Adulante is a leading agronomist with over 25 years of experience working with global avocado producers located in USA, Chile, Peru, Brazil, Mexico and the Dominican Republic. Adulante serves as consultative advisor to Index Fresh's avocado partners and is industry collaborator passionate about cultivating best practices and efficient production. Adulante participates across the California avocado industry, providing education in conjunction with the California Avocado Society and California Avocado Commission.

We sat down with Gerado this spring to learn about what is happening with the California crop and how he is working with growers to prepare for the future.

THANKS GERARDO FOR YOUR TIME AND INSIGHTS!

To learn more about how you can enhance your avocado culture and growing strategies reach out to Gerardo at galdunate@indexfresh.com to schedule a call or plan a visit.

Q: HOW ARE YOU PARTNERING WITH LOCAL CALIFORNIA GROWERS IN 2024 AND HOW IS THIS YEAR'S CROP UNIQUE?

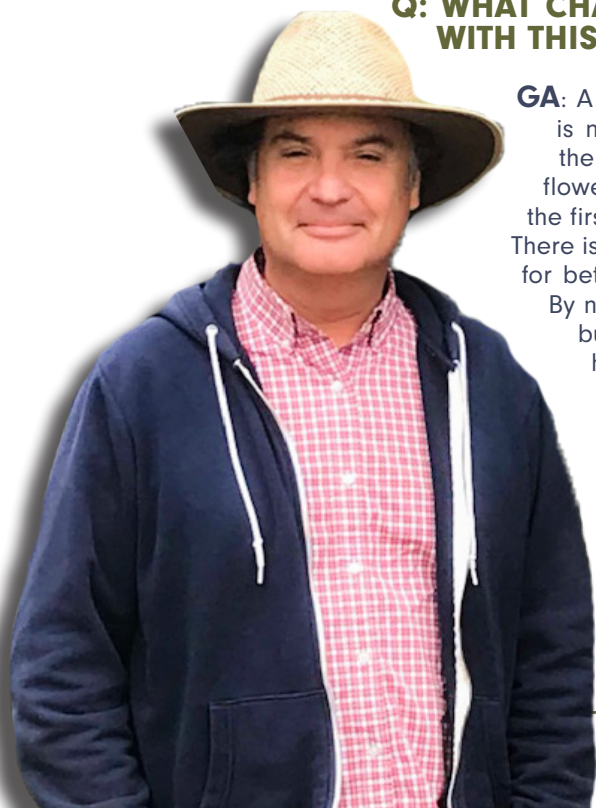
GA: I've had the pleasure of working closely with California growers as a consultant with Index Fresh for the past 6+ years and spend about 15 - 20 weeks in California during critical time periods throughout the season. I am wrapping up my Spring visit now, which typically spans from March thru April. I will be returning for a stint this Summer and another this Fall during key culture events.

I characterize this spring visit as full of decisions, decisions, decisions! March through April is when we make the foundational plans for the rest of the year. We plan irrigation, fertilization, pollination, harvest and pruning execution. All these strategies work in tandem and the decisions not only impact this season's crop, but ultimately pave the way to equipping the crops and farm teams with the best chance for success in the year to come.

The past winter and this spring have been unseasonably cold and wet. This leaves us in a bit of a waiting game of when to harvest, when to apply fertilizers and how to best leverage irrigation in this unusually humid atmosphere. There are some similarities between the last two winters (both relatively cold and wet). How the climate was managed in the past year translates to how the trees are behaving this season. We're taking all these factors into consideration, keeping a close eye on the temperature, and making plans that will be implemented over the next 9 months.

Q: WHAT CHALLENGES ARE YOU SEEING CALIFORNIA GROWERS FACE WITH THIS YEAR'S CROP?

GA: A big challenge this year is 'the overlap'. The waiting game I mentioned before is necessary this season but creates an overlap between the initial harvest and the second flowering. Ideally, we have clean breaks between first harvest, second flowering and second harvest. What we see now is that we are waiting longer for the first harvest due to weather and the second flowering is simultaneously underway. There is a notion with some growers that they can skip the first harvest, perhaps to wait for better market conditions or other reasons and capitalize on the second harvest. By not harvesting you're not only gambling that the market will drive a higher price, but also that the tree will not be stressed by the delay. I understand the desire to harvest around the market, nevertheless, what I have seen is that it's not worth it, you end up doing more damage to the trees by not harvesting. Maybe not immediately, but the practice takes its toll on the plant. Spring is when these tough decisions need to be considered and made, which is why I spend a significant amount of time working with growers in these early months because it's very hard to course correct bad decisions in the Summer or Fall.



Q: WHAT ARE SOME WAYS YOU SEE GROWERS MITIGATING THESE CHALLENGES?

GA: I cannot emphasize enough the benefit of having a plan. From the time we make our first harvest the plants are using an incredible amount of energy. By having a smart harvesting plan for both the first and second harvests, we're going to limit the energy exertion which in turn will benefit the plant later in the season.

In addition to harvest, right now growers are also focused on 1. Irrigation 2. Fertilization and 3. Pollination. We're evaluating a similar question set and it varies grower by grower. *Where? When? How Much?* In the case of pollination, I've been working with beekeepers on the best location, how many hives per acre and when to implement their pollination plans. If growers do not have a beekeeper on staff, Index Fresh has bee specialists we work with across the different regions that can support growers who are newer to pollination culture.

If you've worked with me for some time, you've heard me talk about "Friendly Trees". Growers who are cultivating "Friendly Trees" have kept trees that are efficient for harvesting, spraying, and pruning. They may not be the biggest trees, but growers who have prioritized "Friendly Trees" are getting in front of many challenges.

Q: WHAT WAYS ARE YOU HELPING GROWERS PLAN FOR THE FUTURE?

GA: I am really inspired by how now more than ever I see proactive growers who are seeking out new tools and cultivation strategies to improve their business. Not only are they curious about what different methods are available but they are not afraid to implement something new to their process.

One area of focus that really points to the future is partnering with growers to implement simple but effective record keeping that allows us to report on behaviors, track trends and evaluate results. This can look as simple as noting how much nitrate fertilizer was used, when, and where. Come next season this information can provide insights around the yield and what were the contributing factors. It's not just a matter of yield, it's also a cost reduction tool. We have reports that help track expenditures (inputs, labor, etc.) and over time we can analyze what was spent and where we can be more cost efficient. It does take discipline, that said, we've really honed in on a tool set that is easy to use and analyze.

Q: WHEN WILL YOU BE BACK IN CALIFORNIA THIS YEAR AND WHAT WILL YOU BE FOCUSED ON DURING YOUR NEXT TRIP?

GA: I will be back in California for the month of July and into early August. This trip will be focused on tactics to help the trees recuperate after the second harvest. This recovery period is critical to the plant health and 2025 season performance. Alongside our growers we evaluate what we can do to promote the recuperation of the trees. Fertilizer, irrigation and pruning strategies all contribute to the recuperation of the trees. Without the critical resources the trees will either not flower or flower very little come February - March 2025. Our strategies are circular, and each season is key to the next. 