

## **New Challenges, New Faces, New Logo**

If there's one thing I know: It's not business as usual around here anymore. In my almost 30 years in the Salinas Valley I've realized steady change has remained the only constant. Sustainability, a term we rarely heard five years ago, is now the issue we've turned into a major focus in 2008. National standards for sustainable growing, shipping and processing are being vetted by a non-profit academy that has the potential to define the term for us all.

A small working group made up of local industry representatives is regularly meeting here at Grower-Shipper and reviewing a draft of national sustainable agricultural practice standards and becoming actively engaged in this discussion now, in its early stages. These standards present a great opportunity for our industry to become a part of this national movement, to illustrate to buyers and consumers our philanthropic spirit and environmental stewardship. However, in their current form these standards would be impossible for almost every (organic and conventional) grower in our valley to participate in and still remain economically viable. While I don't know exactly how this conversation will play out, I can promise you we'll be at the table.

Keeping up on ever-changing issues and informing our members is the keystone function of the Grower-Shipper Association. To help us achieve the communications and outreach goals set forth by our Board of Directors we have hired a part-time Communications and Outreach Manager, Abby Taylor-Silva. Ms. Silva is the Executive Director of Ag Against Hunger and will remain in that full-time role while spending approximately 10 hours a week focused on GSA projects.

I have known Abby for years and have worked with her closely on a variety of issues and projects. Her extensive experience in agriculture and exceptional communication skills will serve the Association well. We are lucky to have her on the GSA team!

Over the past year Abby worked with GSA staff and board members to create a Rapid Response and Action Program which serves as our crisis communications manual and assisted in the development of our new website, to be unveiled early this spring. With her help we plan to provide more value to our members in 2008 with quarterly newsletters and weekly updates on GSA activities and seminars. Abby will also be assisting us with committee activities and public relations efforts.

Embracing a fresh new perspective our board has also decided to delve into completely uncharted territory: a logo change. I know, I too was very attached to our 77 year-old cornucopia of abundance but I now understand that as we evolve to become more relevant and vital to our membership we needed a visual representation of this change.

As hard as I tried to make cardinal and gold the official colors of the Association (I am, after all, a proud alumnus of the University of Southern California) the Board, in its wisdom, went in another direction. This logo represents something different to everyone who's viewed it, but I'll share with you what I see in this gold, blue and green creation. I

see the never-ending importance of keeping Salinas Valley agriculture viable. I see fresh, pertinent ideas that move with the changing times yet stay true to our underlying values. I see increased communication and collaboration.

Each year we send out an issues survey that sets our work agenda for the year. This survey will be in your mailbox soon. Please take the time to seriously consider what you'd like to see us place on our work agenda for 2008. Think about what you want to know as we increase communication to members. I can tell you this much: we're not sitting on our laurels. This will be a year of numerous opportunities and challenges. We're meeting them head on and ready for the ride.