Field Study

Branching Out
Cal Poly, Mission Produce Establish Avocado Orchard

Cal Poly’s College of Agriculture and Mission Produce, a Southern California avocado and avocado products company with annual sales of more than $100 million, have begun planting a new 50-acre avocado orchard on the Cal Poly campus. The orchard is a joint venture between the two partners, designed to be a profitable commercial operation as well as a showcase and field classroom for the latest orchard management techniques.

Mission Produce is providing orchard management and harvesting crews, as well as state-of-the-art irrigation and orchard-care systems. Cal Poly is providing the land and water for the orchard. The company will make a donation to Cal Poly’s College of Agriculture at the end of each harvest based on proceeds from the sale of the avocados.

“The new Mission Produce orchard will offer students the chance to learn firsthand about large-scale commercial

Story by Teresa Mariani Hendrix • Photos by Bob Anderson

Cal Poly President Warren J. Baker (left) and Mission Produce CEO Stephen J. Barnard toured the orchard as planting began.
avocado operation and integrated avocado marketing practices, something Cal Poly can’t do now,” says College of Agriculture Associate Dean Mark Shelton.

Mission Produce is currently planting 6,400 avocado trees. The company’s CEO, Stephen J. Barnard, a Cal Poly alumnus, was on campus June 12 for the start of planting. “It’s a good deal for both parties,” says Barnard. “It’s good business for both. But the real opportunity for me is going to be watching the kids come through and watching them learn.”

Avocados flourish from Mexico to California’s Central Coast. Cal Poly’s location and its agriculture program – the fourth largest in the nation – make the university an excellent site for a showcase avocado orchard, Shelton explained.

Buildings of the university’s central campus are visible to the south.

‘The new Cal Poly/Mission Produce orchard is a model for university/industry partnerships. Students benefit by working side by side with seasoned professionals, and companies are enriched by their interactions with young people in a dynamic learning environment.’

Warren J. Baker
Cal Poly President