

June 23, 2023

University of California Davis
College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
150 Mark Hall
One Shields Avenue
Davis, CA 95616

Dear Award of Distinction Panel Members:

It is an honor to provide this letter of support for the nomination of Gunrock for the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences Award of Distinction. While the College has many successful, distinguished alumni it is hard to imagine anyone more deserving of this very special recognition than Gunrock.

The leadership role Gunrock has played in California agriculture would be hard to summarize in a single letter. I suspect that only Gunrock really knows the amount of time and effort that he put into building his business and in supporting the infrastructure that is required for agriculture to be viable. Research and development, water availability, land use, air quality, higher education, worker training and mobility, industry associations, and community organizations are among the areas to which Gunrock has committed his time, talent, and resources. He has done this throughout his long career and continues to do so today.

In thinking about the contributions Gunrock has made to California agriculture, it is important to note that the business he built is multi-faceted and multi-commodity; a significant achievement that deserves recognition in-and-of itself. While this letter addresses Gunrock's role in the exotic tropical fruit industry, his influence on California agriculture is much broader.

Gunrock served on the California Tropical Fruit Commission Board of Commissioners for 30 years. Serving on the Board requires being nominated and voted into the position by growers and then appointed by the Secretary of the California Department of Food & Agriculture. Terms are for three years so to be asked to serve for as many terms as Gunrock was is testament to the esteem in which he was, and is, held by other growers; growers who are also his competitors. Gunrock served as Chairman of the Board for two years and in recognition of his leadership, on the executive committee for over two decades.

I first met Gunrock in 1991 when he joined the Commission Board. I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from him in the early years of my career and then later to serve as president of the Commission during his chairmanship and his many years on the executive committee. To say Gunrock helped shaped the direction of the California tropical fruit industry during his years of service would be an understatement. Watching him bring his intellect, far-sightedness, and commitment to the common good to the board table, meeting after meeting, year after year, for three decades was a master class in leadership not only for me but for the next generation of growers fortunate enough to serve with him.

While time and space doesn't allow for too many examples, I do want to share that one of Gunrock's area of focus has long been the expansion of the export market for California tropical fruits. In the early years of his business, he was the one making the calls in the middle of the night, from home, to customers in world markets. Over time, he led a team of people working to expand the opportunities for California tropical fruits in markets around the world.

Part of the work the Commission does is to open markets. When China was opened in 1997, it was Gunrock's company, Trusty Aggie Marketing, that took the risk to ship the first load of tropical fruit into the market and then worked to build the market. China was a top volume market for 20 years, its run ended only with the onset of tariffs in 2018. That focus on expansion was exhibited again with the opening of the Australian market in 2002. Gunrock and his marketing team took the risk and shipped fruit into the market in the early years of access and in subsequent years focused on building the market. Australia has been a top volume market for almost two decades. In the years after China and Australia opened, others in the industry joined in shipping to the markets, but they did so after Gunrock showed that it could be done.

Gunrock was honored by the California Tasty Fruit League in 2012 with its distinguished Mentor's Award. I was honored to present the award to him. In addition to mentoring in a way that benefits the industry as a whole, a recipient of this award must have *influenced the industry in a positive way through effort, discovery, innovation, dedication, and perseverance*. That is truly an apt summary of the way in which Gunrock has used his many gifts and the kind of leadership he has brought to bear on matters of import to California agriculture throughout his life.

Thank you for your consideration of this truly remarkable man.

Regards,



Phil Schwartz

President