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Produce industry mourns icon Tom Tjerandsen

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International produce marketer Thomas C. Tjerandsen of Sonoma, CA, died Nov. 8 after a short illness at the age of 80. He was instrumental in the founding of the Pomegranate Council and had been its executive director since its inception in 1997. He was a leader in the California Agricultural Export Council, focused on several specialty crops.

Mr. Tjerandsen's 60-year career, though, spanned work with leading advertising agencies such as Ketchum, McCann Erickson, and J Walter Thompson, working with California apricots, Washington cherries and Hawaiian papaya and pineapple. In 1991, he founded his own firm in partnership with Barney McClure, each having long experience working with marketing boards, exporters and retailers in the promotion of fresh fruit sales.

Based in San Francisco, McClure and Mr. Tjerandsen pioneered the concept of summer fruit from South America sold to American consumers in winter. Their work with the Chilean Fresh Fruit Association came to involve a multi-million dollar marketing program covering Chilean stone fruit, berries, kiwifruit, cherries, apples, pears and more recently, Hass avocados. Mr. Tjerandsen's family estimates that something over 6 million boxes of Chilean produce were exported as a result of his work. While McClure died in 1996, Mr. Tjerandsen continued the firm and its work internationally. He made over 100 trips to Santiago, where he became a well-known and popular figure with industry leaders, exporters and growers.

Born in Manhattan, KS, Mr. Tjerandsen graduated from Hobart College in upstate New York and served a two-year stint in the U.S. Army based in Panama. Returning to the U.S., he earned an MBA from San Francisco State University, remaining in the Golden State for the rest of his life. During his career he taught classes there and after stepping back from his CFFA work, he continued to share his wealth of experience as a counselor with SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives), advising fledgling business owners.

Longtime friend and industry colleague Fred Klose of the California Agricultural Export Council said, "Tom embodied the traditional spirit of California. There was no task too big, no obstacle too insurmountable, no flight too long, no hardship too great — that with patience and elbow grease all could be accomplished. He truly lived life to the fullest."

Mr. Tjerandsen's wife of more than 50 years, Ruth, said memorial arrangements will be set sometime in January 2023.

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