



PCA Profile: Krista Tavares

By CAPCA Staff

Krista Tavares graduated from the University of California, Davis with a Bachelor's degree in Crop Science and Management, a minor in Spanish in 2009 and obtained a Masters in Agricultural Education in 2014. She obtained her PCA license in 2010 and also holds a QAL. Some of the major crops she consults in are: Almonds, Pistachios, Citrus, Grapes, Tomatoes, Onion, Garlic, Lettuce, Cucurbits, Cotton, and Stone Fruit throughout Fresno county. With over 350 crops grown in the region, Krista has consulted on the majority of them in some way in the last eleven years! Krista specializes in Almonds, Pistachios and Citrus crops, and Phytophthora management. She is passionate about educating people about agriculture in any context and loves to network within the industry to help people connect to meet their goals.

Prior to her current position, Krista worked as an In-house PCA with S&J Ranch (now Wonderful Citrus) for three years, and then two years as High School Ag Teacher in Esparto & Firebaugh. Now she works for Syngenta as the Fresno County Sales Representative, a position she's had for the last 7 years. She talks about her job as being to educate growers and PCAs on how to use Syngenta products in the right way, at the right time, for the right pest as well as help them solve problems they are having with difficult to control pests. "I absolutely love what I do – it is the perfect use of my education and agronomic skills."

Talking about how she became a PCA, Krista says "I was born and raised in the middle of the city of Los Angeles, right by LAX airport, by a fire chief and a real estate agent. I am one of the few that came from a suburban upbringing to be part of this incredible industry. Although we have become increasingly removed from our food production, there are more and more people entering agriculture with no family background in it." She says gardening was her introduction and what hooked her into agriculture. Krista recalls: "As a 13-year-old, I planted my first garden and immediately fell in love with figuring out how to grow things, the thrill of learning from each season, and improving upon it the next. My most memorable experience was when I proudly served my first homegrown steamed broccoli – with a side





of loopers by accident! Oh how we all screamed, but I thought it was so cool how camouflaged they had been – insects are amazing!” After the Plant Science unit in her AP Biology class, she was hooked and asked her college career counselor for a job that would allow her to work part-time outdoors in the field, and part-time indoors (because, Krista admits, “I love paperwork and would have made a *killer* executive assistant.”) Her counselor advised becoming a PCA, “And I never looked back,” Krista says. “This career has been the best decision of my life. It even led me to my *other* best decision: my husband, Adam. Being a PCA allows me to work outside, help people, play a small part in feeding the world, challenges my critical thinking skills on a daily basis, puts my scientific training to use, and allows me to work with incredible professionals who are true experts in their fields.”

Asked how she describes her job to those outside the industry, Krista says, “Coming from Los Angeles, there are many people and many family members in my world who have zero ties to Agriculture. When I explain what a PCA is, I tell them that we are like Plant Doctors. It is our role to assess a crop’s health by looking at the whole picture, and then make recommendations

for how to optimize growth and yield in order to create the safest, cleanest, healthiest crop possible for the consumer. I also like to explain how we are blessed with an incredible toolkit that we can use to do this, from releasing beneficial pests, to adjusting cultural practices, to utilizing pesticides that have evolved to be incredibly site-specific, in many cases, to target very limited pest spectrums.”

Looking back on the experiences that have helped her to be successful today, Krista sees how all of it has been beneficial, but one thing she credits with making her a better PCA is her training to become a teacher. “Although I am not officially an educator anymore, learning how people learn, how to communicate so people listen and how to increase retention of information helps me in my profession: when I am doing outreach for CAPCA or within CAPCA, and when I am helping support the next generation of agriculturalists. My teacher training really allows me to come at presentations with a different viewpoint and group of skills than many in the industry, and I truly believe it helps me be more successful in communicating my messages, whatever the context.”



Krista says the biggest highlights of being a PCA have been twofold: Helping play a role in a crop coming to a successful harvest, and supporting the next generation of PCAs. She says, “Knowing that all the nights I ran wind machines in the citrus all night long for 40 nights straight kept the fruit from freezing, seeing less than 1% NOW packouts come off the almonds and pistachios because we timed our sprays correctly & worked with our spray crews to get best application practices in place with the best chemistries for the job, checking citrus bin counts and seeing no scale, thrips damage or black mold, watching almond orchards with phytophthora rebound after years of yield drop off and so much more! It is empowering to know that my expertise in pests can help growers maximize their ROI.” Additionally Krista recalls how much advice, mentorship and support she received as a young PCA with zero ag background. Now, it’s a big highlight for her to do her best to support as many up and coming PCAs as possible. She regularly speaks in FFA classes, helps teach and judge FFA teams, and has students interested in the profession ride along with her. She’s helped coordinate Fresno State students sponsored by the local Fresno-Madera CAPCA Chapter attend the CAPCA Annual Conference, facilitating connecting them to exceptional PCAs in the industry to learn from. Krista shares, “Through a wonderful opportunity from CAPCA, I was able to support the Student Networking events and help college students start with their best foot forward in networking, interviewing and resume writing. [W]ith young scouts and PCAs starting out as trainees in the field, I sincerely enjoy training them on the Syngenta portfolio, new diseases or crops they are unfamiliar with, by putting on field days and giving them guidance on how to succeed in the industry.”

Some of the moments that have made her most proud were as an In-house PCA and being part of a strong team that helped farm a successful crop from start to finish. “As a Manufacturing rep, I am proud to be a part of bringing new tools to PCAs and growers that help solve their pest issues with new technology, specialized chemistries and excellent educational training. I am also super proud to be part of bringing the Student Networking Event to life. I think the most rewarding wins are when I am recognized as an agronomically strong representative who makes best recommendation possible for the situation.”

Sharing about why she became a CAPCA member, Krista acknowledges, “I became a CAPCA member initially to get help tracking my hours as a new PCA who had no idea what I was doing.” “But,” she says, “over the years I have discovered that CAPCA has so much to offer PCAs in every stage of their career. As a new PCA the CAPCA team and website have incredible resources for jobs, license prep, continuing

education and networking opportunities.” Krista has served in multiple roles in her local chapter as well as with CAPCA at the state level: she was the Fresno-Madera Chapter Secretary from 2014-2019, and has been the Vice President since 2020. “I enjoy helping with the local chapter in order to support the local PCAs’ CE needs, to help decide how the Chapter can support the community through scholarships and donations, and to learn what is going on with the County and DPR on a monthly basis.” Looking back and considering what involvement with CAPCA has to offer PCAs, Krista says: “I would encourage all PCAs to get involved with CAPCA, even if it is in some small way. From providing feedback on CE they want to see, to attending a chapter meeting, or to speaking to their local community about what PCAs do to raise awareness for our profession. CAPCA does FAR more than just track your hours, and much of the Association’s success rests on PCAs who choose to volunteer their time to keep our organization successful. It is imperative that we continue to hold our profession and professionalism to the highest standard, and that is getting harder to do with the many obstacles we face. Tools are being taken out of our toolkits; global companies are dictating what we can do on the farm with very little scientific knowledge to back it up, and there is fear about food safety. If we [PCAs] do not speak up, our livelihoods will cease to exist. I encourage all PCAs to ask their local chapter how they can get involved. Pick something you are passionate about (government relations, mentoring young PCAs, speaking to the community about what you do) and start there. If we all give back in a small way, we will continue to strengthen this industry.”

Krista is committed to agriculture, as well as the work CAPCA is doing to foster the next generation of PCAs. “I support CAPCA because I feel it is imperative to tell our story as PCAs in this ever-changing world of misconceptions and misunderstanding about how our food is grown. I am also heavily involved in helping the next generation of students be prepared to become PCAs because I feel strongly that if we can get students interested in agriculture in high school or before, as I was, we will be able to draw incredible talent and keep a steady influx of students to maintain the extremely strong level of professionalism that we have in this industry.”

Outside of work and involvement with CAPCA, Krista says, “I have two beautiful daughters Brooke (5) and Madison (2) who keep my husband Adam and I very busy & highly entertained at all times!” Her husband Adam Tavares is also a PCA and Sales Rep for AMVAC, from Fresno to Bakersfield. She notes, “I am extremely fortunate to share this career path with him as we make each other stronger advocates for the Industry, more knowledgeable when we put our crop skills together and great resources for each other.” Her other favorite hobbies include cross stitching, knitting, ballroom dancing, line dancing, gardening, reading and spending time making memories with her family. ■

In a recent interview, Krista shared some of her best advice for women interested in a career in Ag:

*“Don’t think of yourself as a ‘Woman in Agriculture.’ Think of yourself as a **Professional** in Agriculture.’ Never be intimidated because this is a male-dominated industry. It has been amazing in the last 10 years to go from being one of about 2% in the room, to easily 10-15%! As women, we have some very different skill sets we can bring to the table that help the Industry, so capitalize on that!”*

“If anyone is interested in agriculture, my advice is to find ways to get hands-on experience working in the fields so you can begin to grow your knowledge base and understand what growers go through every single day to bring that commodity to market. No matter if you want to be in marketing, sales, boots on the ground, or technical support, knowing what it takes to grow or raise that commodity will allow you to better understand what the ‘Real World’ is like, and how to best help your customers. The classes are an important foundation, but working in the field you will learn even more to build on that basic understanding.”

“Use your network! Get to know other female PCAs. In 2019, I decided to pull together all the female PCAs from different parts of the Industry who I knew in the Central Valley to give us a casual time to get to know each other better. We have had a dinner, done a craft night, and a cooking class. It has been a great chance to build our network. If you want to be a part of our next gathering, let me know!”

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