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CAC Calls for USDA to Take Control of Mexico Avocado Inspections

As reported in previous issues of *From the Grove*, the California Avocado Commission is calling on the United States Department of Agriculture to restore USDA inspections of avocados in Mexico for export to the United States to the long-standing agreed upon program requirements.

Background

In 1997 the USDA, in coordination with the Commission, negotiated an agreement with Mexico that allowed the importation of avocados into the United States, subject to specific conditions.

The conditions included Mexico adhering to pest inspection requirements administered by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service including (1) USDA employees inspecting avocado orchards in Mexico where avocados are to be harvested for shipment to the United States, and (2) subsequently inspecting these avocados at packing facilities located in Mexico prior to shipment to the United States. All expenses related to the inspections are paid by the Mexican avocado industry.

For nearly 30 years — beginning with President Clinton and then Presidents Bush, Obama and Trump during his first term — USDA strictly enforced this agreement which has effectively prevented extremely harmful pests (e.g.

seed and stem weevils) from crossing into the United States and eventually infesting California avocado orchards and production.

All of that abruptly changed in late 2024 when APHIS unilaterally turned over all avocado orchard inspections to Mexico because the cartel endangered the safety of USDA personnel. In turn, this action led to increased numbers of weevils and other pests being detected in Mexico packing facilities, increasing the likelihood that some will cross the border and begin their irreversible damage to the California avocado industry (see figure 1).

The Commission's multiple calls for the Biden administration to reverse this decision were unsuccessful.

To Date

On February 14, 2025, the day after the Senate confirmed Brooke Rollins as USDA Secretary, the Commission sent a letter asking her to "... immediately re-establish the inspection systems originally agreed to before irreversible harm is done, and that safeguards be implemented to protect the USDA employees in question."

Then on February 28, 2025, the Commission hosted a grove meeting

Figure 1



*Infested fruit in Mexico packing facilities. From January 1, 2024 to October 16, 2024, USDA reported 0 pest finds in Mexico packing facilities. From October 17, 2024 to March 11, 2025, USDA reported 155 pest finds in Mexico packing facilities. USDA identified 141 as *Macrocopturus aguacatae* (avocado stem weevil); 3 *Conotrachelus perseae* (avocado seed weevil); 1 *Tortricidae* (leafroller moth); 1 *Blastobasidae* (moth); 9 *Eupelmus* (wasp)*



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Industry members meet with Congressman Darrell Issa.

with Congress member Darrell Issa (R-CA 48th District) representing East County, San Diego and the Temecula Valley. He heard growers' concerns firsthand, agreed that the program should be fully restored and committed to help the industry.

In early March, I traveled to Washington D.C. and met with Rep. Issa again. During our meeting, he agreed to be the lead on a Congressional letter to Secretary Rollins (sent March 25, 2025) which stated, in part, that "America retreated in the face of cartel threats, and as a result, almost immediately following this change, greater number of destructive weevils were detected at packing facilities..."

Joining Rep. Issa in signing the letter were Congress members Ken Calvert (R-CA 41st District) representing Riverside County; Doug LaMalfa (R-CA 1st District) representing Sutter County and eight counties up to the Oregon border; David Valadao (R-CA 22nd District) representing parts of Kings, Tulare and Kern Counties; and Young Kim (R-CA 40th District) representing parts of Orange, San Bernadino and Riverside Counties.

I also met with Glenn "GT"

Thompson (R-PA), Chair, House Committee on Agriculture. Rep. Thompson agreed with our position and said he would be talking with Secretary Rollins. He also offered the thought that the Mexican military could be responsible for protecting the inspectors.

Additional meetings to convey the urgency of the situation were held with Congress members Julia Brownley (D-CA 26th District) representing Ventura County and Salud Carbajal (D-24th District) representing Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo Counties; the chief of staff for USDA's Marketing and Regulatory Programs; and the deputy administrator of APHIS plant protection and quarantine.

On March 26, 2025, I talked with Senator Boozman (R-AR) Chair, Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee. He said repeatedly "you all are on the right side of this" and committed to speak with Secretary Rollins on our request. The Chair also said that although Secretary Rollins has been confirmed, she needs support in dealing with a multitude of issues, and he is working in the Senate to confirm her deputy secretary and eight undersecretaries.



The industry members who attended a grove meeting with Rep. Darrell Issa in San Diego County on February 28.



Chairman Thompson, House Committee on Agriculture with Ken Melban.

Request

The Commission's request of President Trump and USDA Secretary Rollins is simple and straightforward. Respectfully, reverse this reckless decision by the Biden administration that has put California's 3,000 avocado growers and \$1.5 billion avocado industry in harm's way, and adopt safeguards to protect USDA inspectors from threats and possible action by the cartel.

Our Message is Clear and Direct

Eighty-five to ninety percent of the total U.S. consumer demand for avocados is supplied by Mexico. We are not opposed to free trade, but trade should not create risk to American farmers. Exporting avocados into the U.S. is a privilege. If the agreed upon inspection requirements cannot be maintained due to safety concerns for USDA inspectors, then that privilege must be suspended. American farmers must be protected. America first! 🥑



Robert Jackson (far left), Commission Board member, shares our inspection concerns with Congressman Issa.