



AGENDA

California Avocado Commission Governance Committee Meeting

Meeting Information

Date: February 18, 2026

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Hybrid Meeting

Physical Meeting Location:

United Water Conservation District

1701 N Lombard St

Oxnard, CA 93030

Web/Teleconference URL:

<https://californiaavocado.zoom.us/j/89021187443?pwd=LhBY25bHDtsiQkWSg6xEth0HametJ1.1>

Conference Call Number: (669) 900-6833

Meeting ID: 890 2118 7443

Passcode: 567080

Meeting materials will be posted online at least 24 hours prior to the meeting at:

<https://www.californiaavocadogrowers.com/commission/industry-calendar>

Committee Member Attendance

As of Friday, February 13, 2026, the following Committee members have advised the Commission they will participate in this meeting:

Robert Jackson, Chair

John Berns

Adam Frascioni

Ohannes Karaoghlanian

Charley Wolk

Time	Item
8:00 a.m.	1. Call to Order
	a. Roll Call/Quorum
	b. Introductions
	2. Opportunity for Public Comment
	Persons may address the Board on subjects within the jurisdiction of the Commission.
	3. Approval of Governance Committee minutes of January 13, 2026
	4. Trade Relief Measures

Time	Item
	5. Producer Definition
	6. Producer Eligibility to Serve and Vote
	7. Handler Seats on CAC Board
10:00 a.m.	8. Adjourn Meeting

Disclosures

Some agenda items may not be discussed prior to adjournment. Such items will be rescheduled for a subsequent meeting. All meetings of the Commission are open to the public and subject to the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act.

All agenda items are subject to discussion and possible action.

For information or a request regarding disability-related modification or accommodation for the meeting, please contact April Aymami at 949-341-1955 via email at aaymami@avocado.org. Such requests should be made at least 48 hours prior to the meeting.

This meeting schedule notice and agenda is available on the internet at <https://www.californiaavocadogrowers.com/commission/meeting-agendas-minutes> and <http://it.cdfa.ca.gov/igov/postings/detail.aspx?type=Notices>.

Contact April Aymami at aaymami@avocado.org or 949-341-1955 if you have any questions.

Summary Definition of Conflict of Interest

Members and alternates are responsible to determine whether they have a conflict of interest and whether to recuse themselves from discussion or vote during a meeting. The following Summary Definition of Conflict of Interest may be helpful.

A Commission *member or employee* has a conflict of interest in a decision of the Commission if it is reasonably foreseeable that the decision will have a material effect, financial or otherwise, on the member or employee or a member of his or her immediate family that is distinguishable from its effect on all persons subject to the Commission's jurisdiction.

No Commission member or employee shall make, or participate in making, any decision in which he or she knows or should know he or she has a conflict of interest.

No Commission member or employee shall, in any way, use his or her position to influence any decision in which he or she knows or should know he or she has a conflict of interest.

**CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION
GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES
January 13, 2026**

A meeting of the California Avocado Commission (CAC) Governance Committee was held on January 13, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. with the following people present:

MEMBERS PRESENT

Kurt Bantle
John Berns
Robert Jackson
Ohannes Karaoghlanian
Doug O'Hara

STAFF PRESENT

April Aymami
Ken Melban

GUESTS PRESENT

Wayne Brydon
Enrico Ferro
Gerardo Huerta
Jessica Hunter
Joanne Robles-Swanson
Duane Urquhart

OFFICIALLY PRESENT

Ben Kardokus, *CDFA*
George Soares, *Kahn, Soares & Conway*

Item #1 Call to Order

Roll Call/Quorum – Item 1.a.

Robert Jackson, CAC Governance Committee chair, called the meeting to order 10:03 a.m. and established a quorum.

Introductions – Item 1.b.

April Aymami, CAC director of industry affairs and operations, announced the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) representative, CAC legal counsel, CAC staff and known guests participating in the meeting.

Item # 2 Opportunity for Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Opening Remarks

Mr. Jackson commented that the goal of this first meeting of the Governance Committee was to identify issues that can be addressed by CAC. He stated this would be a difficult transition year in the U.S. market with a flood of imports and that CAC's primary objective is to support California growers.

Ken Melban, CAC president, stated that in 2024 the Governance Committee took up similar topics, but that it was good for the new committee to discuss again. He noted that the Governance Committee can make recommendations to the CAC Board, who will ultimately decide what action is taken. Mr. Melban stated in 2024 the CAC Board had approved some changes recommended by the Governance Committee, but not all. He asked George Soares, CAC legal counsel, to provide an overview of the approved changes that resulted in statutory changes to the CAC law.

Mr. Soares reported on the technical, non-substantive changes to the CAC law that took effect January 1, 2026, which included:

- Clarification of ex-officio members as non-voting members of the Commission
- Providing same liability protection of members to alternates

- Language adding to powers and duties section to allow CAC to handle additional issues that may arise
- Revised assessment rate language to clarify that the rate can be set as a fixed rate per pound, or percent of value
- Revised language in termination section allowing excess funds to remain in the avocado industry and not given to the State

A Committee member asked which items considered by the 2024 Committee were not passed by the CAC Board. Mr. Melban reported that the Board did not approve removal of the handler seats on the Board, and the recommendation to change the law to allow the CAC Board to increase the grower exemption threshold by a two-thirds vote (instead of requiring a change to the CAC law).

Item # 3.a Definition of a Producer

The Committee discussed the definition of a producer, and a request was made for CAC's legal counsel and CDFA to provide their interpretation of "causing to be produced" and "financial interests," along with any case law regarding the same.

Mr. Soares commented that he was not certain if there was case law but would look into it. Regarding the question of "causing to be produced" he noted that this was discussed over 40 years ago when the Commission was created, and the founders of CAC decided on language that would allow for agents, employees or representatives of producers the ability to serve on their behalf.

It was commented that current interpretation of the definition of producer allows farm managers to serve as producers under the "causing to be produced" phrase, which needed to be discussed further by the Committee. In addition, it was suggested that the Committee review the idea of requiring producers to disclose the amount of interests in outside California production, with the goal of Board members representing those with a vested interest in the California industry and seeing California growers succeed.

Item # 3.b CAC Board Handler Seats

Mr. Melban stated the topic of handlers serving on the CAC Board had been an ongoing conversation for 15+ years. He noted in 2017 the CAC Board approved reducing the number of handler member seats from four to two, and in 2024 considered the Governance Committee's recommendation to make handler members non-voting ex-officio members, which ultimately did not have unanimous consensus and was not approved.

There was consensus from the Committee that the perspective of handlers on the CAC Board was invaluable, but that the offshore interests of handlers raise questions as to whether handlers should continue to hold seats as voting members of the Board. A request was made of Mr. Soares and CDFA to provide examples of board composition for other commodities and whether they have non-assessment paying handler members serve.

Mr. Soares commented that there were many examples with a variety of approaches and that not one size fits all. He encouraged the Committee to look at the California avocado industry and what Board composition is best suited to fit its needs.

Item # 3.c USMCA and Tariff Options

Mr. Jackson provided an overview of the timeline regarding the USMCA negotiations, emphasizing the importance of CAC's advocacy in this area and the Committee's need to focus on strong viable recommendations to the CAC Board.

The Committee discussed possible trade remedies to assist California growers, including subsidies for water and/or production costs. There was also discussion regarding the \$1 billion allocated by USDA for specialty crop assistance and the need to lobby the government to increase specialty crop allocations.

Mr. Melban reported that the CAC Board had taken action to submit comments on the USMCA renegotiation, calling for tariff rate quotas in an effort to develop a market management system for all of the U.S. He noted that this action came at the recommendation of CAC's trade legal counsel as the best path forward, but that likely nothing would be settled on USMCA prior to November 2026. Mr. Melban stated that at this time the Commission had formally lodged their requests and CAC would need to wait to hear from the government about those requests. He cautioned that the idea of the Committee or Board taking any new or different action was not advisable until a response is received on the initial requests.

Regarding the \$1 billion specialty crop allocation, Mr. Melban commented that CAC is involved in the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance, which advocates strongly for the increased support for specialty crop programs.

Item # 3.d Inspection of Imported Avocados

Mr. Jackson stated that concerns had been raised by industry members that avocados being imported as Hass did not have the same genetic makeup as the Hass variety authorized for import. He noted that it was possibly over ambitious to assume CAC could manage controlling this issue but asked for suggestions of what could be done.

It was suggested that CAC could assist in facilitating a conversation between Gray Martin and the appropriate government bodies to educate on this issue, as well as research state inspection requirements.

There was a request to ask CDFA if they were able to conduct varietal inspection of avocados, and if so, what the cost would be. It was noted that type of inspection could be outside of CDFA's statutory authority.

Item # 3.e Other Business

It was reiterated by the Committee member that the handlers serving on the CAC Board continue to provide valuable input and that if CAC were to remove their vote (voice), they may no longer be interested in serving as non-voting members.

The Committee discussed the definition of a producer again, specifically focused on the "cause to be produced" language. Ben Kardokus with CDFA commented that the Department does see farm managers serving on boards and Commissions throughout the state. It was suggested that the Committee should focus to redefine the term "producer," to which comments were made that the current producer definition is fine, but that the current interpretation of "cause to be produced" should be reviewed and tied to a direct ownership interest. Mr. Soares noted that if the Commission was going to make changes to the CAC law, the process would need to begin in the first quarter of the year.

California Avocado Commission
Governance Committee Meeting Minutes
January 13, 2026

A Committee member asked for an update on the grievances filed with CAC. Mr. Melban noted that concerns had been raised regarding the legitimacy of the grower list and requested an audit of the grower list.

Adjourn Meeting

Mr. Jackson stated that the Committee would meet again in four to six weeks and that he would see if CAC's trade legal counsel could participate. In addition, CAC would obtain an opinion from Kahn, Soares and Conway regarding the interpretation of "cause to be produced" and ask CDFA to provide examples of the makeup of other boards or commodity programs in California.

Mr. Jackson adjourned the meeting at 11:41 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

April Aymami, CAC Director of Industry Affairs and Operations

EXHIBITS ATTACHED TO THE PERMANENT COPY OF THESE MINUTES

None