



AGENDA

California Avocado Commission Grievance Committee Meeting

Meeting Information

Date: February 27, 2026

Time: 8:00 a.m.

Location: Hybrid Meeting

Physical Meeting Location:
UC ANR South Coast Field Station
Conference Room
7601 Irvine Blvd.
Irvine, CA, 92618

Web/Teleconference URL:

<https://californiaavocado.zoom.us/j/81409623237?pwd=NYjIYPMdAojlxhxc0oohhZ759jLll4.1>

Conference Call Number: (669) 900-6833

Meeting ID: 814 0962 3237

Passcode: 610844

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 Thursday, February 26, 2026, the following Committee members have advised the Commission they will participate in this meeting:

John Haskett
Andy Sheaffer
Al Stehly

Time	Item
8:00 a.m.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Call to Order – Al Stehly, Grievance Committee Chair <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Roll Call/Quorum b. Introductions 2. Opportunity for Public Comment Persons may address the Committee on subjects within the jurisdiction of the Committee. 3. Approval of Grievance Committee minutes of January 22, 2026 4. Commence Hearing 5. Conclude Hearing

Time	Item
2:00 p.m.	6. Adjourn Meeting

Disclosures

All meetings of the Committee are open to the public and subject to the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act.

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

Committee members are responsible to determine whether they have a conflict of interest.

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

No Committee member shall make, or participate in making, any decision in which they know or should know they have a conflict of interest.

No Committee member shall, in any way, use their position to influence any decision in which they know or should know they have a conflict of interest.

**CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION
GRIEVANCE COMMITTEE MINUTES
January 22, 2026**

A meeting of the California Avocado Commission (CAC) Grievance Committee was held on January 22, 2026 at 10:00 a.m. with the following people present:

MEMBERS PRESENT

John Haskett
Andy Sheaffer
Al Stehly
Rachael Laenen, *CAC Chair Ex-officio*

STAFF PRESENT

April Aymami
Ken Melban

GUESTS PRESENT

Jennifer Bantle
Kurt Bantle
John Berns
Robert Jackson
Norm Kachuck
Ohannes Karaoghlanian
James Kovaly
Duane Urquhart
Tina Wolford

OFFICIALLY PRESENT

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

Item #1 Call to Order

Roll Call/Quorum – Item 1.a.

Al Stehly, CAC Grievance Committee chair, called the meeting to order 10:04 a.m. and established a quorum.

Introductions – Item 1.b.

Mr. Stehly introduced CAC staff and legal counsel participating in the meeting.

Item # 2 Opportunity for Public Comment

Duane Urquhart provided comments regarding the grievance process, noting that he had previously filed concerns with Commission representatives and staff that were acted on by CAC in an orderly fashion. He stated that it was an overall short and respectful process, and he doesn't understand why this current grievance is taking so long.

Item # 3 Approval of Grievance Committee minutes of December 19, 2025

Mr. Stehly asked for a motion to approve the Grievance Committee meeting minutes of December 19, 2025 as included in the meeting materials.

Motion:

***The Grievance Committee approves the December 19, 2025 meeting minutes as presented.
(Sheaffer/Haskett) MSC Unanimous*** **MOTION 26-1-22-1**

The *December 19, 2025 Meeting Minutes* are included in the December 2025 Grievance Committee Packet and are attached to the permanent copy of these Minutes and identified as EXHIBIT A, Item 3.

Item # 4 Grievance Investigation

Mr. Stehly provided an overview of where the Committee was in the grievance process and invited Mr. Kachuck to engage in discussion with the Committee on his grievance claims.

Grievance #1 – Producer eligibility, conflict of interest and recusal policy

Mr. Stehly asked Mr. Kachuck to identify which provisions of CAC law and policy his grievances were with and to provide his specific requests regarding the same.

Mr. Kachuck commented that his grievance was with the association of directors and their production of both domestic and imported fruit. He noted there were significant lapses in CAC to screen for operational

conflicts of interest. Mr. Kachuck stated this grievance was brought forward due to the recent recusal of CAC board members regarding the vote on tariffs.

Mr. Stehly asked George Soares, CAC legal counsel, to clarify the difference between an abstention vote and a Board member's recusal from a vote. Mr. Soares noted that an abstention vote is typically a result of a member feeling as if they do not have adequate information to vote, while a recusal from voting is when a member could have a conflict of interest that may result in personal benefit as a result of the vote. Mr. Stehly noted for the record that the members in question by Mr. Kachuck abstained from voting and did not recuse themselves from a vote.

Mr. Kachuck stated that there are factors limiting a member's ability to adequately represent California avocado growers. He noted personal and familial financial interests, including investment in stock, of avocado importers, should serve as factors in determining producer eligibility for CAC Board service and voting in elections. In addition, he stated that only growers with direct formal ownership and who pay assessments, should be considered eligible producers (not representatives thereof).

There was discussion among Committee members and Mr. Kachuck regarding investment in avocado importers, with Mr. Kachuck noting that a maximum investment threshold should be established. It was confirmed that Mr. Kachuck's position was that legitimate California producers, who also held interest in imports, would be deemed ineligible producers. In closing, Mr. Kachuck stated that CAC's violation is unmanaged conflicts of interest.

Grievance #2 – Indemnification from personal liability for payment of legal fees

Mr. Stehly stated that CAC, at the recommendation of their insurance broker, maintains Directors & Officers liability insurance, as well as Employment Practices liability insurance. He asked Mr. Kachuck to clarify this grievance and clearly state the relief he is seeking.

Mr. Kachuck stated his concern was that assessment dollars could be used to defend individuals who have lied and committed malfeasance against CAC.

Grievance #3 – Validation of producer voter eligibility and independent audit of election process

Mr. Stehly provided an overview of the process by which CAC receives grower lists from the handlers and CDFA's management of the CAC election process. He asked Mr. Kachuck what more he would have CAC do, including feasibility, benefit and expense.

Mr. Kachuck stated that the current definition of a producer fails to ensure that voting is being conducted by official assessment paying producers. He requested that a third-party develop a procedure for identifying the proper voter base and that the third-party would audit the existing grower list against these procedures.

There was discussion regarding the CAC ballots which include a self-certification of eligibility to vote, and the grower data received by CAC from handlers. The Committee also discussed producer eligibility as it relates to business entities and ownership, as well as the current interpretation of causing to be produced. Mr. Stehly stated that the Governance Committee was currently reviewing the interpretation of causing to be produced as it relates to producer eligibility.

Grievance #4 – CAC's actions in response to threats to the integrity and best practices in the avocado import pipeline to the U.S. market

Mr. Stehly asked Mr. Kachuck if this grievance reflects his disagreement with policy decisions by the Board of Directors or if he was alleging violation of Commission law and policies. He also asked Mr. Kachuck to clarify his claim of threats to integrity and his definition of best practices.

Mr. Kachuck stated that CAC has a mandate to support the California avocado industry, an obligation to report criminal activity, and seek enforcement of anti-dumping and price suppression. He continued that CAC has a statutory duty to inform consumers of the issues associated with imported avocados. The Committee discussed these claims, noting that aside from lobbying, there was not much CAC could do. Mr. Kachuck commented that it was CAC's responsibility to pursue investigations that affect the California avocado industry.

Mr. Kachuck also commented on CAC's position regarding calling for the Hass Avocado Board to conduct a referendum. Ken Melban, CAC president, noted that the topic of a HAB referendum was brought before the CAC Board in February 2024, at which time the Board had voted against pursuing. He explained that a HAB referendum vote would be to determine if HAB's operations would continue, and not to change the scope or structure of HAB. Mr. Kachuck stated his position that a no vote in a HAB referendum would allow for the restructure of HAB and that the CAC Board vote was significantly effected by those with conflicts of interest.

Mr. Stehly stated that the job of the Grievance Committee is to understand if the CAC Board has violated any law or policy. Comments from Committee members indicated that CAC appeared to be operating within existing policies, and that while policies could change, CAC was not necessarily culpable of the accusations being brought before the committee.

Mr. Kachuck reported that a letter had been sent to CAC from a legal group stating that it is their responsibility to engage in activities discussed under Grievance #4. In addition, he commented that CAC has formidable allies in the State and Federal government who support America first. Mr. Kachuck stated that CAC is the voice and vehicle for California avocado growers to communicate with these governmental agencies.

Mr. Melban commented that the requests and issues brought forward by Mr. Kachuck and his legal counsel were discussed by the CAC Board. He noted that CAC staff takes direction from the Board, and without the Board authorization to take a position on a topic, staff cannot proceed independently.

Conclusion of Grievance Committee Discussion

Mr. Soares provided an overview of the next steps, indicating that the investigation would conclude in early February at which point Mr. Kachuck would be provided an opportunity to request an informal hearing. If requested, the hearing would be scheduled within 45 days and following the hearing the Committee will have 60 days to present their findings to the CAC Board. The CAC Board will review the Grievance Committee findings and then advise Mr. Kachuck of the findings.

Mr. Kachuck commented that a recommendation was needed from the Committee prior to the referendum vote. Mr. Stehly reported that the CAC Board had already voted to hold the referendum from February 16 - March 18, therefore based on the timeline stipulated in the Grievance Procedures, it would not be possible for a recommendation to come prior to that timing.

Mr. Kachuck agreed to officially withdraw Grievance #2 at this time, with the understanding that he may bring it forward again at a later date.

ADJOURN MEETING

Mr. Stehly adjourned the meeting at 11:47 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

April Aymami, CAC Director of Industry Affairs and Operations

EXHIBITS ATTACHED TO THE PERMANENT COPY OF THESE MINUTES

- Exhibit A January 22, 2026 Grievance Committee Packet
- Exhibit B January 22, 2026 Grievance Committee Meeting AB 2720 Roll Call Vote Tally Summary



EXHIBIT B

CALIFORNIA AVOCADO COMMISSION

AB 2720 Roll Call Vote Tally Summary

To be attached to the Meeting Minutes

Meeting Name: <i>Grievance Committee Meeting</i>	Meeting Location: <i>Hybrid Meeting In-person (Yorba Linda) Online (Zoom)</i>	Meeting Date: <i>January 22, 2026</i>
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Attendees Who Voted	<u>MOTION 26-1-22-1</u>
John Haskett	Yea
Andy Sheaffer	Yea
Al Stehly	Did Not Vote
Outcome	Unanimous