Message from the President

By Ken Melban
President



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CAC Continues to Press for America First Trade Policy

The California Avocado Commission's pursuit of a tariff rate quota (TRQ) on Mexican avocado imports remains an uphill battle, but developments in early October show why we keep pressing.

On October 1, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and Mexico avocado industry leaders announced certifications intended to improve labor compliance and environmental traceability. While these goals appear laudable, their legitimacy is suspect. In a country known for its lawlessness, these actions are more likely tantamount to putting lipstick on a pig regarding inspections, and they do nothing to address import surges and excessive volumes into the United States.



CAC President Ken Melban (right) meets with Ambassador Jamieson Greer, Mexico City, July 2026.

An October 2 Fresh Plaza article reported that Mexico is restricting exports from orchards established on deforested land. It also cited research by the Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime, which found that official sources estimate 80% of Michoacán's avocado orchards were established illegally.

The article describes how corruption helped countless groves gain legal status, which brings into serious question the validity of these new certifications. The concerns cited in the article go beyond environmental documentation and describe an industry deeply affected by organized crime, extortion and corruption, which demands scrutiny of the Mexican supply chain serving the U.S. market!

On October 5, seven California congressional Republicans urged U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer to address surges in Mexican avocado imports. Their letter stated: "Preferential access to the American market should not allow Mexican cartels to use their influence over the supply chain to undercut lawful U.S. producers. Reasonable limits on surges would help USTR accomplish its USMCA (United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement) seasonal produce and trade-deficit reduction goals while preserving domestic production and preventing American growers from becoming the latest casualties of the Mexican cartels. For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to make reasonable and enforceable limits on avocado surges from Mexico a priority in the USMCA renegotiation."

The congressional request reflects the Commission's position: California growers need trade provisions that address import surges and afford them the opportunity to sell their fruit in their home market during their production season.

The next day — October 6 — the Commission issued a press release challenging Mexico's announcement. As I said in the release, "The administration should reject this charade and impose a seasonal tariff rate quota while California growers are in the market. Eighty percent of the orchards are already established illegally. Promises of future compliance do not remedy the harm California growers are enduring today. California growers can compete with farmers anywhere in the world, but they should not have to compete with drug cartels."

The Commission's message is clear: U.S. trade policy must give American growers a fair chance to compete. A TRQ would set an import volume eligible for preferential tariffs with imports above that level subject to a higher tariff. It must meaningfully address market surges and excess supply.

California avocado growers have invested too much in their groves, employees and communities to have their future put at risk, and the Commission remains relentless in its advocacy on your behalf.