

By Ken Melban  
Vice President of Industry Affairs

## Increasing our Engagement

The external pressures on California farming are daunting. With input costs continuing to rise (e.g., water, labor, fuel, fertilizer), and operators coping with a prolonged drought, farming in California's already burdensome regulatory environment is becoming even more difficult.

As the California Avocado Commission enters a new chapter, strategic efforts are underway to increase our engagement on issues impacting California's avocado farmers. We are collaborating with other commodity groups to join forces and increase the visibility of the agricultural industry. The Commission is actively pursuing opportunities to engage in discussions with elected officials and policy makers on the challenges California agriculture is facing. We are committed to sharing our story with all audiences on a broad range of issues – from water and labor availability to the value California's avocado groves provide in protecting the environment through sustainable practices.

While a strong advocacy effort does not necessarily guarantee success, it does create an environment wherein our industry may at least have a shot at having our voices and concerns heard. Hopefully, that hearing translates into listening when decisions are made that impact the California avocado industry. By voicing our concerns and our contributions, we hope those who are crafting legislation, casting a vote, and developing and implementing policies will pause and consider: "How will the California avocado industry be impacted?"



CAC Vice President of Industry Affairs Ken Melban (l) and IFPA CEO Cathy Burns meet with congressional staff.

As in-person meetings begin to reconvene, the Commission has ramped up our involvement and presence. In May, the International Fresh Produce Association (a new organization created by the United Fresh Produce Association and Produce Marketing Association merger) hosted a Public Policy Forum in Washington, D.C. The Forum brought together more than 250 agricultural leaders representing both private companies and commodity associations.

As a member of IFPA's Government Relations Committee, the Commission representative met with officials and elected leaders concerning the status of the Farm Workforce Modernization Act. The Act was passed by

the House in March 2021, and now sits with the Senate. We strongly voiced (yet again) the critical need for a solution to agriculture's aging workforce and the need for a guest worker program that supports the needs of specialty crops, like California avocados.

We held multiple meetings with key Senate staffers to deliver the message that agriculture labor issues must be addressed, and the opportunity is now. Of course, with the almost equal partisan divide in the Senate — and the required 60 votes to pass legislation — success will only come with some level of bipartisan support.

A meeting of the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance Steering Committee also was convened in D.C. in May.



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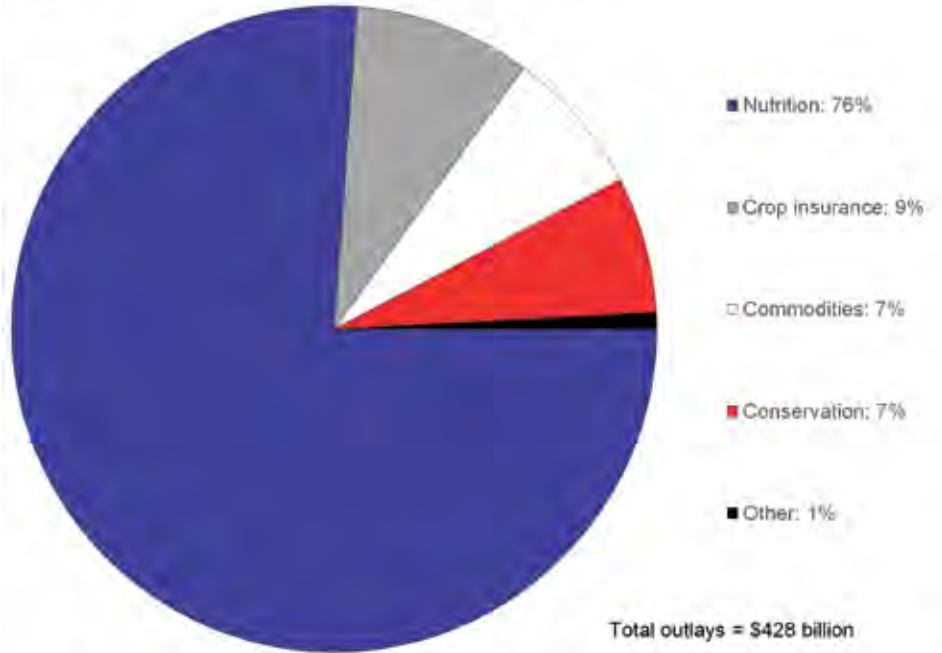
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Projected outlays under the 2018 Farm Act, 2019-2023



Source: USDA, Economic Research Service based on Congressional Budget Office, Direct Spending Effects for the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, December 11, 2018.

The Committee is comprised of selected specialty crop representatives, both private sector and association leadership, with the goal of ensuring the next Farm Bill (2023) will address specialty crop needs. As a member of the Committee, I provided input on the benefits California avocado growers have received from the current Farm Bill. Examples included Market Access Program funding, Specialty Crop Research Initiative funding and Tree Assistance Program funding. One area that has brought challenges for California avocado growers is under TAP, specifically whether Extreme Heat is a covered event. Freeze events are covered, and in previous years of extreme heat the Commission, on behalf of impacted growers, has argued successfully for the inclusion of extreme heat. The decisions by the United States Department of Agriculture have been inconsistent, however, so we are working to ensure extreme heat is specifically called out in the next Farm Bill's TAP.

The Farm Bill, known as the Agri-

culture Improvement Act of 2018, consists of 12 titles governing a wide range of policy areas related to food and agriculture. The Congressional Budget Office projected the total cost of the 2018 Farm Act would be \$428 billion over the 5-year period 2019-2023. Nutrition programs account for about three-fourths of this total, with projected outlays for crop insurance, conservation, and commodities representing nearly all the rest.

The Committee is focused on maintaining and even increasing funding for specialty crops (roughly around \$800 million annually), and we have identified the five following focus areas: Healthy Americans; Competitiveness and Sustainability; Trade and Foreign Competition; Research and Innovation; and Natural Resources and Climate.

If you have an issue you believe the Commission could help the California avocado industry address, please feel free to contact me at [kmelban@avocado.org](mailto:kmelban@avocado.org).