



APHIS and AQSIQ delegations

CAC Participates in U.S./China Ag Meeting

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A bilateral meeting on agriculture was held October 21-22, 2016 between the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and China's General Administration of Quality Supervision, Inspection and Quarantine (AQSIQ). The meetings were held in Chicago and the California Avocado Commission was in attendance.

Industry members were not allowed to join the actual bilateral discussions since it was an official government-to-government meeting. However, the Commission did participate in a pre-bilateral meeting with APHIS on October 20 to discuss the next steps in securing a trade agreement for avocados with China. In addition, on October 22 the Commission co-hosted and participated in a dinner for the AQSIQ and APHIS delegates.

In the pre-bilateral meeting, APHIS reported that China was very close to finalizing the Pest Risk Assessment (PRA). The purpose of the PRA is to identify pests (insects and diseases) that are known to exist within California avocado

production but that are not present in China. Finalizing a PRA is a critical step in developing a trade agreement, and it must be completed and agreed upon by both governments. Once a PRA is finalized, measures to mitigate the introduction of pests are identified in a workplan, also known as an agreement.

During the bilateral dinner both AQSIQ's Director General Li and APHIS's Deputy Administrator Osama El-Lissy spoke about their shared goal of modeling a collaborative working relationship for their government colleagues. They laid out an ambitious plan for concurrently signing six agreements in 2017 — three for the United States and three for China. California avocados were included in the U.S. products.

This was a very positive sign that the California avocado agreement could be finalized within the next year. However, this report must be tempered with the realization that these negotiations seldom unfold as planned. In addition, now that the U.S. presidential election has concluded, there will be a change in administration that may cause some delays.

The Commission first petitioned APHIS for China trade access in 2005. APHIS then initiated the process by work-

ing with AQSIQ, but by 2011 nothing had been received from AQSIQ on the California avocado PRA. During the last five years, the Commission has worked with senior APHIS staff to ensure that California avocados were a high priority for both APHIS and AQSIQ. Although the development of a trade agreement is supposed to be limited to phytosanitary issues, the politics between the two negotiating countries can play a significant role. In this instance, China is attempting to negotiate access for specific commodities to the United States, and APHIS is facing tremendous pressure from domestic producers of those commodities. The same is occurring in China. Fortunately, there is little (if any) commercial avocado production in China so those internal industry pressures don't exist specific to the California avocado request. However, in some instances trade negotiations may result in a "quid pro quo" situation, and California avocados have been caught in the middle of efforts on both sides involving other commodities.

In 2014 the Commission pressed APHIS to once again provide AQSIQ with an updated pest list in the hope of jumpstarting the stalled process. In January 2015, the Commission secured a visit to a California avocado grove for AQSIQ's Director General Li and APHIS's Deputy Administrator Ellis. The visit seemed promising as both were very positive about moving the California avocado process forward. In August 2015, the pest list was again provided by APHIS to AQSIQ.

Finally, in May 2016, the Commission hosted a technical visit for three AQSIQ officials to California. AQSIQ had developed its draft PRA and wanted to visit California avocado groves and packing facilities to finalize its PRA. The technical visit lasted a full week with a total of eight groves and four facilities visited. The report back from AQSIQ to APHIS was positive, with follow-up information requested on some specific pests.

The above detailed timeline illustrates how delays can, and do, occur. However, the initial reports concerning the bilateral meeting are favorable and there is hope that the PRA will be completed soon. Both countries must agree on four remaining pests. Once the PRA is finalized, a workplan will be negotiated to identify the steps necessary to mitigate all identified pest risks in the growing, packing and ship-

ping processes.

After the PRA and workplan are completed, all California avocado packing facilities interested in shipping to China must be certified. Once the workplan is finalized APHIS will provide training for packing facility personnel on the specific requirements. The Commission will keep you updated as developments occur. 🍌

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