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Updates Concerning Legislation, Funding and Food Safety Training

- Commission Representatives Travel to Washington D.C.
- Central Coast Ag Order 4.0
- 2018 Farm Bill Becomes Law
- Commission Secures MAP Funding
- Produce Safety Alliance Trainings

Commission Representatives Travel to Washington D.C.

In February, John Lamb, newly elected California Avocado Commission chairman, and Ken Melban, Commission vice president of industry affairs, traveled to Washington, D.C. The purpose of the trip was to introduce Chairman Lamb to congressional members and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) representatives who the Commission works with closely. Key issues discussed were immigration, China market access and the Farm Bill. We also had a meeting with USDA Secretary Sonny Perdue and discussed the recent Commission-led congressional letter asking the USDA to “accelerate efforts to gain market access to China for California Hass avocados.” Secretary Perdue assured us that the USDA has made California avocados a priority in the trade negotiations.

While we were only on the ground for a mere 48 hours, substantive meetings were held with seven California congressmembers, high-level USDA officials, Senate staff members and at the People’s Republic of China Embassy. It was a great opportunity for our contacts in Washington, D.C., to hear from Chairman Lamb and gain a better understanding, directly from a grower, of



Ken Melban, Congressman Ken Calvert and CAC Chairman John Lamb.

the challenges that he and all California avocado growers face.

Commission Provides Comments on Central Coast Ag Order 4.0

Recently the California Avocado Commission submitted comments in response to the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board’s draft Ag Order 4.0. The purpose of Ag Order 4.0 is to:

Protect and restore beneficial uses and achieve water quality objectives

specified in the Basin Plan for commercial irrigated agricultural areas in the Central Coast Region by:

- a. Minimizing nitrate discharges to groundwater
- b. Minimizing nutrient discharges to surface water
- c. Minimizing toxicity in surface water from pesticide discharges
- d. Protecting and restoring riparian and wetland habitat
- e. Minimizing sediment discharges to surface water



CAC meets with Republic of China Ag Attachés.

The Commission's comments were developed in large part by Dr. Tim Spann, Commission research program director, and focused on the scientifically-based low risk of California avocado production resulting in nitrogen discharge. An excerpt from the cover letter reads, "The following comments highlight the stewardship of avocado growers with respect to nitrogen and phosphorous fertilizer use as demonstrated by scientific research. We are seeking an exemption for California avocado growers to the nutrient reporting requirements proposed in the draft Ag Order 4.0 based on the low risk for nitrogen discharge from California avocado production."

The Central Coast Region extends from Santa Clara County south to northern Ventura County, and includes land in the following counties: Santa

Clara (south of Morgan Hill); Santa Cruz; San Benito; Monterey; San Luis Obispo; and Santa Barbara. The Commission identified nearly 13,000 acres of avocado production within the Central Coast Region's jurisdiction, or about 25 percent of California's total avocado acreage.

It is anticipated decisions in the Central Coast Region will likely become precedential for other regions of the Water Quality Control Board that also would impact California avocado farmers. Commission staff will continue to advocate with the Central Coast Board on behalf of California avocado growers as its draft Ag Order 4.0 is finalized. The Commission's comments (and all others) may be found here: https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ag_waivers/ag_order4_public_comments.html.

2018 Farm Bill Becomes Law

The 2018 Farm Bill, worth \$867 billion, was signed into law on December 20, 2018. The Farm Bill provides funding for programs that are critical to California avocado industry members. The 2018 Farm Bill maintains disaster assistance funding for the USDA's Farm Service Agency (FSA) programs, which includes Federal Crop Insurance and the Tree Assistance Program (TAP). The FSA was very responsive to avocado industry members impacted by the Thomas Fire and many avocado growers were able to receive FSA disaster assistance funding. In addition, for 2018 about 36,000 acres of California avocados were covered under Federal Crop Insurance, representing almost 75 percent of the California avocado industry.

The USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) funding is continued through the 2018 Farm Bill. APHIS is responsible for preventing the introduction or spread of plant pests and diseases that threaten U.S. agriculture and the environment. APHIS provides funding to strengthen the nation's infrastructure for pest detection and surveillance, identification and threat mitigation. The Commission must work through APHIS to gain access to new markets, such as China. APHIS also provides critical phytosanitary inspection services for the detection and prevention of invasive pests.

Other areas of importance include:

- Specialty Crop Block Grants – provides \$85 million per year, which represents a significant increase in total funding for the program over the five-year lifespan
- Specialty Crop Research Initiative – allows all specialty crops to compete for the full \$80 million per year for specialty crop research
- Pest and Disease Research - the

2018 level of funding at \$75 million per year will be maintained through 2023

Commission Secures MAP Funding

Through the 2018 Farm Bill, \$255 million per year for funding for the USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) programs has been allocated. The FAS programs include the Market Access Program (MAP), the Foreign Market Development (FMD) program, the Emerging Markets Program (EMP) and the Technical Assistance for Specialty Crops (TASC) program.

The Commission has been awarded \$200,000 for 2019 to conduct marketing and promotions in South Korea. This is the second year the Commission has received MAP funds, with funding for 2018 totaling \$123,000 for promotions in Japan.

Produce Safety Alliance Trainings

In February, the California Avocado Commission, along with packers,

hosted two Produce Safety Alliance (PSA) trainings for California avocado growers. Both trainings were at capacity and fulfilled the Food and Drug Administration's Produce Safety Rule's mandatory one-time food safety training, which is part of the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA). The trainings were conducted by Dr. Trevor Suslow, vice president of food safety for the Produce Marketing Association. Dr. Suslow is a highly respected leader in agricultural food safety practices and was formerly director of the University of California-Davis Postharvest Technology Center. While at the University of California-Davis, Dr. Suslow worked with California avocado packers to identify potential food safety risks and implement mitigation steps. If a grower is inspected, under the rule they must be able to demonstrate completion of the one-time PSA training. This is the second year the Commission has hosted the PSA trainings to help California avocado growers meet the requirements of FSMA. 🥑



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