



Ken Melban

## Situation Brief: USDA Mexico avocado inspection program

Hopefully you receive the California Avocado Commission's GreenSheet updates and have read our recent reporting on unilateral actions by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). These actions greatly diminish USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service's (APHIS) inspection program in Mexico for avocados exported to the United States. At the Commission's November meeting, the Board was provided the following information.

Your Board and management are exploring every possible strategy to restore full USDA inspections in Mexico. Clearly, we have work to do on this issue and others. Please stay engaged and talk with your District Board members, or me if you like. We need your input. My email is [kmelban@avocado.org](mailto:kmelban@avocado.org).

### Background:

**2001** – USDA and Mexico finalized the Operational Work Plan (OWP) for the import of avocados from Mexico to the United States. The OWP is to mitigate phytosanitary risks to U.S. growers. Under the OWP, USDA-APHIS is responsible for excluding, eradicating, and/or controlling plant pests, including pests known to follow the pathway of Hass avocados imported from Michoacan and Jalisco, Mexico. Since implementation of the OWP in 2001, USDA has utilized employees in Mexico to conduct bi-annual grove inspections and packing facility inspections.

**February 12, 2022** – USDA temporarily suspends phytosanitary export inspections of avocados in Mexico due to safety concerns for USDA inspectors.

**April 5, 2024** – Commission management talks with USDA regarding deforestation concerns in Mexico and is informed the U.S. State Department is recommending transferring phytosanitary export inspections to the Mexico government. Commission management responds that this will result in an outcry from California avocado growers and the Commission.

**June 17, 2024** – USDA temporarily suspends phytosanitary export inspections of avocados in Mexico due to safety concerns for USDA inspectors.

**June 24, 2024** – *New York Times* contacts the Commission following a press conference with U.S. and Mexico officials where it is announced that “Mexico would progressively start replacing APHIS inspectors with Mexican inspectors to avoid stopping exports whenever there's a security concern.”

**June 26, 2024** – Commission issues a press release: “California Avocado Commission Calls on USDA to Maintain Direct Oversight of Mexico Avocado Export Program.”

**September 17, 2024** – Mexico News Daily reports “US agrees to Mexico's agricultural inspectors supervising avocado exports,” removing USDA employed inspectors from grove inspections.

**September 23, 2024** – Commission submits a letter to USDA Secretary Vilsack calling for administration of the OWP to remain unchanged and requesting a meeting with Secretary Vilsack. The Commission also issues a press release, which is picked up by more than 250 media outlets.

**September 29, 2024** – Commission management receives a communication from a USDA inspector (unverified) in Mexico expressing concern with the transfer of oversight to the Mexican government.

**October 9, 2024** – A Congressional letter requested by the Commission is submitted to Secretary Vilsack requesting an explanation of USDA's decision.

**October 11, 2024** – Commission chair and management meets with Dr. Mark Davidson, APHIS Deputy Administrator for Plant Protection and Quarantine, and Ethan Holmes, APHIS Senior Policy Advisor. USDA does not provide a science-based explanation for changes in the inspections and states these changes are due to USDA's inability to ensure the safety of their employees.

**October 28, 2024** – Commission management receives a second communication from the USDA inspector (unverified) in Mexico, indicating pest detections in packing plants. Information on packing locations, inspectors, dates, and pest pictures is included.

**November 7, 2024** – APHIS publishes the Final Rule allowing Guatemala avocados U.S. market access.

**November 8, 2024** – Commission submits letter to Dr. Davidson asking when a response from Secretary Vilsack can be expected and requesting USDA Mexico avocado inspection reports since August 1, 2024. 🍷