

By Ken Melban
President



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USDA Returning Inspectors to Mexico; USMCA Renegotiations Begin in 2026

More than a year of negotiations between the California Avocado Commission and the U.S. Department of Agriculture recently resulted in USDA agreeing to return its inspectors to Mexican avocado groves. This reinstates the USDA and CAC negotiated Operational Work Plan, initially agreed to in 1997, that was abruptly and unilaterally changed by USDA in 2024 because of cartel security issues.

Within a few weeks of USDA pulling its inspectors from groves, stem and seed weevil began showing up in packing houses located in Mexico. Detections went from zero to 150 in a couple of months. This immediately elevated CAC's concerns regarding a pest invasion, as did USDA's rather hollow assurance that detections prove the system is working.

California avocado growers already have borne the costly financial burden of other invasive pests from Mexico to the tune of at least \$14 million per year in production costs. CAC's message to USDA has been clear and consistent: an invasion of stem and seed weevil would be many times more in cost and devastating to the future of the California avocado industry.

Fortunately, the solution to the threat is not that complicated. First, Mexico must be held accountable to more aggressively deal with its pest and security problems or lose the privilege of exporting their avocados to the United States. Second, USDA must engage as it agreed to decades ago and ensure Mexico fulfills its responsibilities.

The details concerning USDA inspectors returning to groves are being finalized and the Commission will share these with growers as soon as they are available.

The Commission is also examining another opportunity to advocate on behalf of its growers by engaging in the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) renegotiations beginning in 2026. In preparation for this, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) has invited written comments through November 3, 2025, and will schedule public testimony for a later date.

With the mindset of leaving no stone unturned in defense of the California avocado industry, the Commission Board of Directors unanimously adopted the following proposal at its meeting on October 9, 2025.

MOTION: The Commission shall submit formal comments and testify in response to the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR) [Docket Nos. USTR-2025-0004 and USTR- 2025-0005] Request for Public Comments and Notice of Public Hearing Relating to the Operation of the Agreement Between the United States of America, the United Mexican States, and Canada, reflecting the following:

1. The need to assure phytosanitary security by reinstating the original United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) pest inspection program approach applicable to avocados to be exported from Mexico to the United States by requiring that USDA employed inspectors shall inspect avocado groves in Mexico and packinghouses prior to shipment to the United States; and

2. Requiring immediate cessation of the importation of avocados from Mexico into the United States when actions in Mexico compromise the integrity of the pest inspection program (e.g. threatened safety of USDA inspectors; incomplete or inaccurate records; misrepresenting sources of avocados subject to inspection).



At the same Board meeting there was extensive discussion of U.S. avocado market conditions indicating that consumption has generally plateaued over the last few years while global production continues to increase. I shared with the Board the shift in perspective I have heard from the grower community in recent months with many growers calling for control measures on offshore supplies during the California avocado season. Further, it was noted that efforts to build a U.S. market for avocados during the past 30 years has led to robust demand in American markets. However, with U.S. consumption flat and global supply increasing, California and the imports end up in a race to the bottom

on price, as we witnessed this year.

With that in mind, the Board took the following action:

Authorize representatives of CAC to submit comments and input to pending USMCA negotiations supporting proposed Sections 232 tariffs, and/or seasonal Tariff Rate Quotas (TRQs) to control volume of imported fresh avocados.

The Board's authorization for CAC to submit comments in support of a seasonal tariff rate as part of the USMCA negotiations in alignment with recent remarks by USDA Secretary Brooke Rollins. She said in part that "We have got to produce food for our own selves. The President has talked

significantly about the importance of onshoring our manufacturing. We also have to onshore our food. We have got to get back to the point where we can feed ourselves...in a way that's healthy using locally produced food. We have got to reshore our food."

The Commission will provide additional information as comments are developed and meetings with the Trump Administration and Members of Congress occur.

Please email me at kmelban@avocado.org if you have any questions or comments. 🥑