



January 20, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins  
Secretary of Agriculture Designate  
Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Re: Importation of Mexican Avocados into the United States

Dear Secretary of Agriculture Designate Rollins:

The California avocado industry negotiated an agreement with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Mexico in 1997 that allowed avocados grown in Mexico to be marketed in the United States if specific requirements were continuously met. The agreement provides, as it relates to USDA, that USDA shall inspect the avocado orchards in Mexico from which avocados will be harvested for importation into the United States and USDA shall inspect these avocados at packing facilities to ensure they are free of stem weevil, seed weevil and seed moth.

This system worked until late 2024 when USDA unilaterally abandoned the agreement, asserting that turning over orchard inspections to Mexico was necessary to protect the safety of USDA employees. Almost immediately, increased numbers of avocados infested with the destructive weevils were detected at packing facilities. This evidenced a breakdown in the orchard inspection process and in turn increased the likelihood of pest-infested avocados slipping through plant inspections and crossing the border into the United States.

The USDA's decision to proceed with this ill-advised action violates the longstanding agreement with the California avocado industry. This has thrust California's three thousand farmers whose crop creates \$1.5 billion annual economic value into harm's way, and there does not appear to be any willingness by USDA to correct this situation.

We request that USDA, under your leadership, immediately re-establish the inspection systems originally agreed to before irreversible harm is done, and that safeguards be implemented to protect the USDA employees in question.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this urgent request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Melban". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Ken Melban  
Vice President Industry Affairs & Operations

California Avocado Commission Board of Directors:

Jason Cole, Chair; Cole Limited Family Partnership (Ventura County)

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John Dmytriw, Index Fresh (Riverside County)

Rob Grether, Grether Farming Company (Los Angeles & Ventura Counties)

Robert Jackson, Jackson Farms (San Diego County)

James Johnson, Simpatica (Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Monterey & Tulare Counties)

Rachael Laenen, Kimball Ranches – El Hogar (Ventura County)

Hayden McIntyre, Sierra Pacific Farms Inc. (Ventura County)

Daryn Miller, Villa Pacifica Ranch (Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, Monterey & Tulare Counties)

Peter Shore, Calavo Growers (Ventura County)

Al Stehly, Sunrise Ranch (San Diego County)

Tina Wolferd, Wolf Pak Family Farm (San Diego, Riverside, Orange, San Bernadino, & Los Angeles Counties)