

## **Hass Avocado Promotion, Research and Information Act of 2000**

### **The Honorable Ken Calvert**

*U.S. Congressman, 43rd District  
Riverside, California*

Got Avocados? The Hass Avocado Promotion, Research and Information Act of 1999 (H.R. 2962) was introduced on the 28<sup>th</sup> of September with this question in mind. The legislation's one goal to get more American families outside of California eating avocados. How? By establishing a federal check off program. Check off programs are nothing new. In fact, check-off programs, or self help promotion programs, already exist in other states who produce beef, cotton, dairy, eggs, fluid milk, honey, mushrooms, popcorn, pork, potatoes, soybeans and watermelons. Each of these twelve commodities has self-help promotion programs which provide a vehicle for producers to assess themselves in order to expand the market for their particular agricultural product. Hass Avocados can now be added to that list.

The effort to establish the national Hass Avocado promotion program provided me with the opportunity to help this California industry create increased economic activity and job opportunities. California is the sole United States domestic producer of Hass Avocados. A program that operates at no cost to the nation's taxpayers.

Since 1978, The California Avocado Commission has operated an effective state promotion program where California domestic growers assess themselves in order to promote the dietary benefits and recipes that would put more avocados on more plates, more often. In 1988, an estimated 32% of United States households bought fresh avocados compared to 41% in 1995 a growth well beyond the increase in number of U.S. households. Avocados have held their attraction numbers at 40% or more in U.S. households, but a very solid market development effort by California growers at the consumer level may not be adequate to offset the onslaught of ever-increasing Hass avocado imports.

The California State checkoff program could not assess imports. Imports of Hass avocados have grown rapidly in the last few years, primarily from Chile and an increasing amount from Mexico. The reason is simple: imported Hass avocados from the southern hemisphere are available mostly during those months when California Hass avocados are not. By increasing the overall demand, the California checkoff program also increases demand for imports. Therefore, Chile and Mexico have historically benefitted from the California state promotion program while not paying their fair share of the benefits reaped. Without an expanded national avocado promotion program, imports would continue to supply a larger share of the U.S. avocado market and undermine U.S. production.

H.R. 2962 offered a "win-win" solution to the issue by permitting domestic growers AND importers to work in partnership to increase the market for avocados and avocado products. The legislation contained an up-front referendum allowing avocado growers to decide whether to implement a 2.5 cents per pound self-assessment to create a promotion program to reach a larger consumer audience. The funds generated would be administered by a twelve member Hass Avocado Board that would be comprised of both domestic growers and importer representatives.

After conquering the legislative process, H.R. 2962 was signed into law on the 28<sup>th</sup> of October 2000. How did it happen? H.R. 2962 was introduced; co-sponsorship sought and gained from fifty-one Members of Congress, nearly the entire California delegation and two members from Florida; considered and passed by the Agriculture Committee's Subcommittee on Livestock and Horticulture; underwent lengthy negotiations with the United States Department of Agriculture, United States Trade Representative, Members of Congress and the Avocado Industry; and finally, added to the Fiscal Year 2001 Agriculture Appropriations Bill Conference Report. It was this end product that was signed into law after thirteen months of diligent and hard work by the Hass Avocado industry, congressional staff and Member of the California Delegation.

Today, the Hass Avocado industry now has the ability to expand the market for avocados throughout the entire United States. I was honored to be the author of a bill which allows all Americans to be educated on and enticed by avocados and avocado products. Finally, the joys and health benefits avocados can be "Shouted From The Roof Tops" if the industry wishes.