

CAC Rebuts Misleading Media Claims

The California Avocado Commission (CAC) has spoken out against misleading comments published by *Forbes* magazine in a recent article about the proposal to lift the long-standing ban on Mexican avocados.

CAC president Mark Affleck responded to what he said were numerous misconceptions about California avocado growers put forth by the business magazine, including the claim that California producers shy away from competition. He noted that California growers already successfully compete against Chilean growers who annually export approximately 35 million pounds of avocados into the United States.

"Contrary to *Forbes'* misleading rhetoric," said Affleck, "California avocado growers are willing to compete on a level-playing field with Mexican avocado producers, just as we do with Chilean growers. However, we are not willing to sacrifice the health of our groves in the process."

Affleck emphasized the threat of pest infestation that would result from removing the pest quarantine without proper scientific support and protection. He urged that the Mexican avocado conflict be addressed as a scientific issue, not as a politically-motivated trade issue. "We object, based solely on the strong scientific evidence, to the US proposal to break the 81-year-old pest quarantine. We join the nation's leading scientists in opposing this politically-motivated trade proposal," Affleck said. California growers cannot be expected to shoulder the severe risk of pest infestation posed by Mexican avocado imports, he said.

In addition, Affleck objected to what he called the magazine's "scurrilous implication" that the California avocado industry is opposing Mexican imports in an effort to maintain high prices for the domestic crop to the detriment of US consumers. "The truth is that California growers support the spirit behind free trade. We compete with the pest-free Chilean avocado crop — in some years up to 100 million avocados — landing in our markets; and we compete with Mexico in Canada and abroad," Affleck said.

He also criticized the *Forbes'* article for claiming that the US government used better bug-finding technology in Mexico before issuing its proposal. "Numerous scientists have faulted the proposal for depending on sub-standard pest detection technology. *Forbes* apparently missed this detail," Affleck said.

Commission officials insist they will continue to urge the government to drop the proposal. US Department of Agriculture officials reported receipt of more than 2,000 letters and a petition with nearly 1,000 signatures in opposition to the proposed rule.