



1400 Independence Avenue, SW.
Room 3071-S, STOP 0201
Washington, DC 20250-0201

RECOMMENDATIONS

WEST COAST PORTS WORKING GROUP

Committee Statement

Many perishable agricultural export containers are currently being delayed at the west coast ports even after the resolution of the recent labor dispute. It is estimated that the current back log is up to 6 months long before resuming normal operations.

1. Recommendation

The Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee is seeking the Secretary's assistance to prioritize and expedite the movement of the highly perishable agricultural products. Product is rotting and being destroyed, sales lost, contracts being violated and reputations tarnished.

Proposed AMS Action

The Committee emphasized that this is the industry's top priority. AMS proposes that the Secretary send a letter to the West Coast Port Authorities asking them to consider expediting the movement of perishable products that might otherwise be destroyed. Such a letter would be a welcome and symbolic gesture to the agricultural community that USDA understands the challenges caused by the West Coast port slowdown.

AMS obtained some initial supporting documentation from the industry regarding the impact of the port inspection delays on business operations (see attached case studies and testimonials). Through its Transportation and Marketing Program, AMS will also continue to monitor the situation as the vessel backlog decreases.

RESEARCH AND GRANT FUNDING WORKING GROUP

Committee Statement 1

The Committee would like to commend the various functions and personnel of APHIS on their efforts and support of the Florida (and U.S. Citrus) industry in the current challenges faced by the industry in dealing with the Huanglongbing (HLB) greening disease. However, in retrospect, the overall response to the control of the insect vector, the Asian Citrus Psyllid (ACP), could have identified sources of funding for research and development of control procedures in a more expeditious manner.

2. Recommendation

USDA should seek to develop a preemptive program for the identification of invasive pests and diseases that can have potential total destruction effects on current agricultural commodities.

Proposed AMS Action

AMS will share the Committee's recommendation with the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the Under Secretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP) to underscore industry support for accelerated pest and disease detection, coordinated testing and research, and timely identification of all potential funding sources in order to expedite USDA action against invasive pests and diseases.

3. Recommendation

USDA should assign one (1) intra-agency function to be the coordinating entity to manage the total process for identified pest and disease issue(s), with supporting efforts from all other USDA functions as appropriate.

Proposed AMS Action

AMS will forward the Committee's recommendation to APHIS for review and consideration. Based on a teleconference call with Committee members, APHIS has already acknowledged the need to review and develop improved communications and coordination with other agencies involved in pest detection and disease issues, along with acquiring the necessary funding for implementation.

Committee Statement 2

The Committee commends and appreciates USDA's investments in developing public cultivars of fruits and vegetables, including regionally-adapted ones. In light of the critical importance of this research to the success fruit and vegetable growers, and to the long-term survival of our industry, it is clear that these federal investments must be increased, in terms of both funding for research, and restoring the human capital necessary for successful plant breeding programs.

4. Recommendation

USDA should increase to 30 percent the allocation of Specialty Crop Research Initiative (SCRI), Organic Agriculture Research and Extension Initiative (OREI) and Community Food Security grant funding for public plant variety development, and ensure that at least half of such funds are targeted for development of regionally-adapted varieties.

Proposed AMS Action

AMS will work with its own Grants Division and key staff at USDA's National Institute for Agriculture (NIFA) regarding funding opportunities for public plant variety development and how to promote awareness of these funds.

5. Recommendation

USDA should lead the development and support the implementation of a comprehensive national plan to restore funding and institutional capacity for the development of public plant varieties. A goal of this plan should be to increase the number of public cultivar developers in each of the seven US climatic regions. The plan should also address: the

negative impacts of consolidation and concentration in the ownership of seeds by encouraging more independent regional seed companies; increasing farmer and researcher access to innovation in the development of elite cultivars; the negative impacts of utility patents and restrictive licenses; development of new, innovative partnerships and models to address regionalized and participatory approaches to public cultivar development; strengthening and democratizing public germplasm collection systems; and building greater public awareness of the importance of public cultivar development.

Proposed AMS Action

AMS will work with the Agricultural Research Service and the National Institute of Food and Agriculture to contact land grant universities and other agricultural research universities. Per the Committee's recommendation, AMS will communicate with these institutions about the importance of restoring funding to develop public plant varieties.

AGRICULTURAL LABOR WORKING GROUP

6. Recommendation

The passage of a National Immigration Reform program is of critical importance. Until such reform is implemented, the Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee supports and requests that USDA become more involved in the H2-A guest worker program and become the direct advocate for the program to the US Agricultural industry.

Proposed AMS Action

AMS will ensure that USDA's Office of Congressional Affairs is aware of the Committee's position. AMS will also report back to the Committee about USDA's immigration and agricultural labor reform position, as well as efforts to communicate and coordinate with the Department of Labor on agriculture labor issues.

EDUCATION AND BRANDING WORKING GROUP

Committee Statement 1

The Committee applauds the thorough and varied educational opportunities, resource materials, and grants available for encouraging children to eat fruits and vegetables, such as:

- USDA Farm to School Website: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/farm-school>
 - USDA Farm to School Census: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/census#/>
 - USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/census#/toolkit>
 - USDA Farm to School Grant Program:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/farm-school-grant-program>
 - Fact sheets: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/fact-sheets>
 - Procure local foods: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/procuring-local-foods>
 - Healthy Habits Take Root Videos and Webinars:
<http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmentoschool/videos-and-webinars>

- Smarter Lunchrooms: <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>
- National Farm to School Network: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/>
- Kids Gardening: <http://www.kidsgardening.org/>

7. Recommendation

The Committee respectfully recommends efforts be undertaken to make these resources more widely known by the public to increase use and thus consumption of fruits and vegetables by youth.

Proposed AMS Action

AMS will share this recommendation with other USDA agencies to help determine potential promotional efforts and identify partners that can help facilitate these efforts, including the Food and Drug Administration, the USDA Food and Nutrition Service, USDA's Farm to School Program, AMS's Transportation and Marketing Program, and AMS's Commodity Procurement Division. AMS will also engage with non-governmental organizations such as the Produce for Better Health Foundation, the Produce Marketing Association (whose President is a Committee member), the United Fresh Produce Association, specialty crops promotion and research programs, marketing order and agreement programs, and others.

Committee Statement 2

The U.S. consumer is becoming more conscious, more educated and more concerned over the food they are eating. It is important for them to be presented with accurate and transparent labeling so they can make informed purchase decisions. Food label standards for genetically engineered products must be created on a uniform, national basis. It is unrealistic for food manufacturers to package and label products based upon on state-by-state regulations.

8. Recommendation

The Committee recommends the prompt creation of a uniform, national labeling standard for genetically engineered products. Further, the Committee strongly believes that the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is the most appropriate agency to oversee and develop the national labeling standard.

Proposed AMS Action

AMS will track and monitor the recently-introduced bill regarding national voluntary labeling of non-GMO products. Through its audit verification programs, AMS will also offer options to producers and companies for voluntary labeling of their products to reflect the absence of genetically engineered ingredients.

Committee Statement 3

Industry celebrated the science-based dietary guidance from USDA and FDA. We appreciate that the federal feeding programs reflect that guidance. It is especially important that children learn to eat healthily and that they have access to healthy foods. We appreciate and support Secretary Vilsack's steadfast commitment to our children's health through our new school breakfast and lunch standards.

9. Recommendation

- Maintain the new standards.
- Continue to educate stakeholders (school food authorities) on the importance of the standards to children's health and learning.
- Increase fruit and vegetable reimbursements to ensure school food authorities can afford to meet the federal fruit and vegetable requirements.
- We urge the Secretary to work more closely with the State Departments of Agriculture on this issue.
- USDA should support opportunities to attract, educate and retain conventional and organic, and local and national farmers of all sizes and types.
- The USDA should support the increased distribution of fruits and vegetables into underserved communities.

Proposed AMS Action

AMS will coordinate internally – with its Commodity Procurement Division and Transporting and Marketing Program – and across USDA – with USDA's Farm to School Program, Food and Nutrition Service, Know Your Farmer Know Your Food Initiative, and Center for Nutrition Policy and Promotion – to determine how USDA can further support healthy eating education and awareness. AMS will also encourage MRP and the Food, Nutrition, and Consumer Services Mission Area to engage with the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture in order to increase outreach to State Departments of Agriculture and Education.