

**2013-2015 FRUIT AND VEGETABLE INDUSTRY
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
March 10-11, 2015**

WEST COAST PORTS

1. 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.

Recommendation

The Fruit and Vegetable Industry Advisory Committee (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. Time is of the essence for action.

RESEARCH AND GRANT FUNDING WORKING GROUP

1. Statement

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.

Recommendation #1

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.

Recommendation #2

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.

2. Statement

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.

Recommendation #1

USDA should increase to 30% the the allocation of SCRI, 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.

Recommendation #2

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.

AGRICULTURAL LABOR WORKING GROUP

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.

EDUCATION AND BRANDING WORKING GROUP

1. Statement

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/farmtoschool/farm-school>
 - USDA Farm to School Census: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/census#/>
 - USDA Farm to School Planning Toolkit: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/census#/toolkit>
 - USDA Farm to School Grant Program: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/farm-school-grant-program>
 - Fact sheets: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/fact-sheets>
 - Procuring local products: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/procuring-local-foods>
 - Healthy Habits Take Root Videos and Webinars: <http://www.fns.usda.gov/farmtoschool/videos-and-webinars>
- Smarter Lunchrooms: <http://smarterlunchrooms.org/>
- National Farm to School Network: <http://www.farmtoschool.org/>

- Kids Gardening: <http://www.kidsgardening.org/>

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.

2. Statement

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.

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.

3. Statement

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.

Recommendation

1. Maintain the new standards.
2. Continue to educate stakeholders (school food authorities) on the importance of the standards to children's health and learning.
3. Increase fruit and vegetable reimbursements to ensure school food authorities can afford to meet the federal fruit and vegetable requirements.
4. We urge the Secretary to work more closely with the State Departments of Agriculture on this issue.