

The California Fresh Fruit Association's Board of Directors identifies its top 10 issues, in order of priority, on an annual basis. The following is this year's list, along with brief explanations.

1. WATER SUPPLY/DROUGHT-RELATED IMPACTS

The Association's (CFFA) membership is highly diverse, spanning from Lake and Mendocino counties in the north, down through the San Joaquin Valley and south into the Coachella Valley. The need for long-term water certainty remains of utmost importance to sustaining a viable agricultural sector. The drought conditions that continued through 2015 placed significant stress onto farming operations, shifting more permanent fresh fruit crop producers to rely upon groundwater supplies. The Association is actively working to protect Prop 1 water bond resources designed specifically for larger, aboveground surface storage projects which stand to produce the broadest benefits to water users, in the face of active opposition attempts to restrict available resources.

2. RETROACTIVE LABOR REGULATION COSTS & RELATED IMPACTS

With the passage of AB 1513, an addition to section 226.2 to the California Labor Code regarding compensation and wage statement requirements for rest and recovery periods and "other nonproductive time" for piece-rate employees, employers are open to serious financial liability. In addition, other labor costs will continue to increase resulting from the implementation of health care mandates, a tightening labor supply and an increasing minimum wage, which rose to \$10.00 per hour in January 2016. Seasonal wages, along with those in every category of agricultural production such as tractor drivers and irrigators, increase proportionately along with a higher minimum wage. Farmers routinely experience seasonal hourly costs of approximately \$12.00 to \$15.00 per hour now and these amounts will only increase as the largest business cost for growers and shippers of labor intensive fresh fruit commodities who must compete in a highly competitive global market.

3. FOOD SAFETY PRACTICES & IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of preventative food safety practices has allowed fresh fruit growing and shipping operations to provide consumers with safe and nutritious food. Ensuring a safe food supply remains a top priority and the industry continues its advancements in producing science and risk-based practices through food safety research designed to identify potential risks and guide the continued production of safe, fresh fruit. Growers and packers are looking to ensure their implementation of food safety practices conform to government standards such as the Food Safety Modernization Act for safe production and the ever increasing retailer demands for meeting demand-side food safety expectations. The industry, as well as CFFA, will look to lead with the implementation of science and risk-based practices to continue to preserve consumer confidence and meet their expectations.

4. IMMIGRATION REFORM

Despite both legal and political hurdles, as an active member of Agriculture Coalition for Immigration Reform (ACIR), the Association will continue to impress upon our elected representatives that Congressional action is needed to ensure a long term solution toward addressing labor security for the agricultural sector. CFFA continues to be a key component in the policy shaping debate on both short and long-term proposals to make sure our members have a legal and stable workforce.



5. GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS

The passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) provides for local management of groundwater basins throughout California. The creation of sustainable groundwater management agencies will combine management with enforcement mechanisms in an attempt to ensure the sustainability of groundwater resources through planning which must be in place as early as 2020, and achieve sustainability goals in the basin within 20 years of implementation. There is significant concern that as a result of this Act the governance of groundwater supplies will look much differently in just a few years as local agencies will be tasked with ensuring groundwater pumping does not jeopardize the basin's ability to be sustainable over the long-term.

6. LABOR REGULATIONS

The California Legislature continues to consider measures that advance opportunities for organized labor to unionize the agricultural labor force. There is a strong need for a thorough examination of the will of the labor force and the value they perceive in paying a percentage in dues for added wages, benefits, and working conditions which either have been addressed or continue to be advanced by the Legislature or through regulation, thus rendering union membership unnecessary. The Association will continue to confront misguided rulemaking and legislative attempts to amend the Agricultural Labor Relations Act which have the impact of ignoring the will of the employee to freely choose whether or not to be part of a union.

7. WATER QUALITY REGULATIONS

Farming operations have seen added impacts in the form of compliance costs associated with regulatory oversight and reporting related to water quality. Significant efforts remain to identify whether agricultural nitrogen management practices are sufficiently protective of groundwater or whether practices must change in order to mitigate groundwater degradation. In the near-term, reporting will project clearer pictures from which to discern the potential impacts from agricultural practices. The Association is positioned to continue its work across legislative and regulatory audiences to shape implementation of regulatory proposals in a way which recognizes that there is shared responsibility to ensure compliance with water quality goals while continuing to advance the importance of maintaining the economic viability of the agricultural sector.

8. HEALTH CARE MANDATES / AFFORDABLE CARE ACT

Implementation of the Affordable Care Act continues to increase operational costs for employers. Growers securing labor through the services of a farm labor contractor are facing pass-through costs that vary depending on number of eligible employees and contract terms, which may include higher commission rates and added per employee charges. With implementation underway the cost of labor will climb to an even higher proportion of an operation's overall labor costs.

9. INVASIVE PEST ISSUES

The Association continues to collaborate with key regulatory officials and trading partners in the effort to combat the devastating effects of invasive pests, such as the European Grapevine Moth, Light Brown Apple Moth, and Spotted Wing Drosophila at a time when both Federal and State resources continue to shrink. Prevention of invasive pests and diseases is imperative to California producers who sell their products globally. Investment in prevention is always preferable to eradication efforts that become necessary once an infestation takes place.

10. WORKERS' COMPENSATION COSTS

Workers' compensation costs remain an important concern given the volume of labor needed to perform field and packing activities. New safety techniques and training help to increase the awareness of workplace hazards and practices, which help to mitigate and reduce risk of injury or illness caused by a work activity or process. Joint liability for both labor contractors and client employers for the failure to maintain valid workers' compensation insurance for workers, potentially add to the growing costs of doing business for growers.

“To fulfill the needs of its membership while serving as the primary public policy organization advocating on behalf of fresh fruit growers and shippers in California.”

- California Fresh Fruit Association Mission Statement