

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

FEDERAL IMMIGRATION POLICIES: CURRENT AND FUTURE LABOR

Despite both legal and political hurdles we 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. The Association continues to be a key component in the policy shaping debate on both short and long-term proposals to strengthen labor security.

INCREASING WAGE COSTS (BASE WAGES/OT THRESHOLDS)

Labor costs have continued to increase resulting from changes to agriculture overtime and an increasing minimum wage, which rose to \$12.00 per hour in January 2019. 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 \$17.00 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.

WATER SUPPLY AVAILABILITY AND CURTAILMENT

With a highly diverse membership, 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 2016 placed significant stress onto farming operations, shifting more permanent fresh fruit crop producers to rely upon groundwater supplies. Despite current hydrologic conditions, the viability of our permanent crop sector is dependent upon a certain supply and the political will to protect California agriculture production in the face of mounting regulatory and legal challenges which undoubtedly will curtail or limit access to critically needed water supply.

IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT (I.C.E.)

Frustrations continue as earnest attempts to secure passage of a comprehensive immigration package have been met with resistance in both the House and Senate. In order to ensure the continued production of a domestic food supply, comprehensive reform that contains an agricultural labor component remains vital. In working as part of diverse national coalitions, the Association continues to urge Congressional representatives and the Trump Administration to support measures designed to ensure an adequate and legal work force for agriculture, while highlighting the fact that the pressure on employers and the employee base continue to mount.

GROUNDWATER MANAGEMENT REQUIREMENTS (S.G.M.A.)

The passage of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act 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.

LABOR REGULATORY COMPLIANCE

Every year the California Legislature considers measures that advance opportunities for organized labor to unionize the agricultural labor force. Missing from that consideration is the 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 deflating the value of union membership. The Association remains committed and ready to confront biased rulemaking and legislative attempts to tilt the balance against the employer while ignoring the will of the employee to freely choose whether or not to be part of a union.

WATER QUALITY AND CLEAN DRINKING WATER REGULATIONS

The adoption of water quality regulatory programs has put the burden of improving the water quality for disadvantaged communities in rural areas onto agriculture. Farming operations have seen added impacts in the form of compliance costs associated with regulatory oversight and reporting. 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. The Association is positioned to continue its work across legislative and regulatory audiences to ensure industry compliance with water quality goals while continuing to advance the importance of maintaining the economic viability of the agricultural sector.

FEDERAL AND STATE FOOD SAFETY COMPLIANCE REQUIREMENTS

Ensuring a safe food supply remains a top priority and the industry continues its advancements in employing 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 exceed 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 will look to lead with the implementation of science and risk-based practices to continue to preserve consumer confidence and meet their expectations.

HEALTH CARE COSTS (POLICY COSTS/PAID SICK LEAVE)

In the wake of the Affordable Care Act employer mandate, providing health care coverage to employees became the norm, as opposed to the exception. It is the desire of the employer to ensure a healthy workplace and continue to make investments into employee wellness. For instance, some employers have created unique partnerships with health-care providers within their own local community and others have created on-site health care options for both farm employees and their families. Employers recognize that healthy employees and families increase the likelihood of continued productivity. However, as employees grow older and health care costs rise onto both employers and employees alike, the Association remains concerned over changes that could shift a larger portion of financial responsibility onto the employer to offer affordable coverage, or be faced with offering coverage that borders the line of affordability for both parties in a way that becomes a financial burden for both employer and employee alike.

PLANT HEALTH MATERIALS (PESTICIDES/HERBICIDES/FUNGICIDES)

The Association works to protect the use of critical plant health materials to ensure quality, marketable fruit. The Association is well-positioned to serve as the conduit for preserving critical tools for the fresh grape, berry and deciduous tree fruit sectors in order to meet the demands of the domestic and international markets.



“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