

12-8-2004

U.S. Removes Most Restrictions of Mexican Avocados After 90 Years

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "U.S. Removes Most Restrictions of Mexican Avocados After 90 Years." (2004). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/4809>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

U.S. Removes Most Restrictions of Mexican Avocados After 90 Years

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2004-12-08

The US government has agreed to eliminate most restrictions on imports of Mexican avocados, effective on Jan. 31, 2005. The decision, announced by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) in early December, allows Mexican avocados to enter 47 US states year round. Restrictions will remain in California, Florida, and Hawaii until 2007. The import rule applies only to the Hass variety, which accounts for more than 90% of the fresh avocados consumed in the US. Mexico is the world's largest producer of avocados, producing 1 million metric tons a year.

The market-opening measure is the latest and most significant step by the US to eliminate an embargo that was placed in 1914 on Mexican avocados. The embargo was put in place to prevent the introduction of pests via imported avocados. The US took the first step to reduce barriers to Mexican avocados in 1997, allowing imports into 13 northeastern states, but only for a period from November to February (see SourceMex, 1996-10-16, 1997-02-05, and 1997-10-29).

In 2001, the US made further concessions by adding another 19 states in the central and northern US to the list of those allowed to import Mexican avocados and expanding shipments to a period between mid-October and mid-April (see SourceMex, 2001-05-16 and 2001-08-29). The Mexican government, while welcoming the two market-opening measures in 1997 and 2001, continued to push for further easing of US import rules by bringing the issue to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA).

Mexico argued that the US was imposing non-tariff barriers because it failed to produce credible evidence that Mexican avocado imports represented a threat to the health of US-grown avocados (see SourceMex, 1997-11-12 and 2002-02-20). As expected, the Mexican avocado industry was pleased with the recent USDA decision, which could allow producers to triple their exports to the US to about US\$150 million or more.

Mexico exported a little less than 5% of its production annually to the US, about US\$52 million worth last year. "We're obviously very happy," said Benjamin Grayeb Ruiz, president of Asociacion de Productores, Empacadores y Exportadores de Aguacate de Michoacan (APEEAM). "The United States is a very important market for us." Michoacan, by far the largest producing state in Mexico, is home to 10,000 avocado growers, according to Aguacateros Integrados de Michoacan.

Beatriz Uribe Garduno, general manager of APEEAM's counterpart, the Aguacateros Integrados de Michoacan, said avocado producers in her state are aware that competition will be strong for the US consumer dollar. "We will be competing with domestically produced avocados from California and with imports from Chile," said Uribe Garduno. She noted that Chile has been allowed to export avocados to the US market without restrictions.

Producers in three US states obtain two-year moratorium The California Avocado Commission (CAC) and other state organizations continued to oppose the market-opening measure until the very end. The commission raised concerns that Mexican avocados could still bring the threat of infestations from three types of weevils and one moth species that are common in Mexico but are not seen in California orchards. A weevil infestation nearly wiped out California's avocado industry in the mid-20th century, forcing many growers to burn their orchards and replant their fields. "This really scares me," California avocado grower Chuck Keagle told the Los Angeles Times.

The USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) attempted to appease California growers by pointing to an analysis suggesting that infestations would be difficult. Under current sanitary regulations, said the APHIS, fewer than 400 infested avocados would cross into the US each year after the trade rules were relaxed, and no more than a dozen infested avocados would have to be discarded in a producing region.

Furthermore, the APHIS noted, a very unlikely set of circumstances would have to develop for an infestation to take place. First the pest would have to survive the trip from Mexico. The infested avocado would then have to be tossed near plants that could sustain the insect. Then, the pest would have to avoid being killed by another animal, inclement weather or other threats. And finally, the insect would have to find a mate.

Facing the reality that the USDA would not change its stance, the CAC and growers from Florida and Hawaii obtained a moratorium allowing them to continue restrictions on Mexican avocado imports through 2007. "That gives us two years to carefully watch this import program to make sure there's no holes in it," Eric Larson, executive director of the San Diego County Farm Bureau, told the San Diego Union-Tribune. California, which currently supplies nine out of every 10 avocados sold in the US, produced 430 million pounds of the fruit last year, valued at US\$380 million, said the California Avocado Commission.

A recent USDA analysis projects sales of domestic avocados could decline by 10% to 20% when all restrictions are lifted in 2007. Exports from Chile are also expected to drop, the USDA said. California growers said they are not concerned about competition from Mexico, as long as the entry of pests is controlled. "We already see avocados from Chile imported to all 50 states, and we have been able to deal with that," Keagle told the Los Angeles Times. (Sources: Spanish news service EFE, Notimex, 12/01/04; La Cronica de Hoy, The Herald-Mexico City, El Financiero, El Universal, Los Angeles Times, The San Diego Union-Tribune, 12/02/04; The Cal-Trade Report, 12/06/04)

-- End --