

No Mexican Avocados Soon, Says USDA

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In late August, the USDA announced that imports of Mexican avocados will not likely be entering the US anytime soon. It was the first announcement made by the agency on the Mexican avocado issue in several months.

"The opportunity to import probably won't become possible for another year," said Paul Drazek, senior trade advisor to US Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman. "We could lift the ban tomorrow, but that would not mean anything immediately. We probably would not see avocados come in until next season, next November," he said.

According to Betty Bohrk, industry affairs manager for the California Avocado Commission (CAC), Drazek's announcement mainly reflects the fact that it is too late in the season to gear up an import program, were the USDA to lift the ban. The proposed USDA plan would permit Mexican imports only during the months of November, December, January and February.

Many suspect the USDA's decision on the issue won't be released until after the November presidential elections. Meanwhile, the California industry continues its efforts to convince USDA officials of what it feels is overwhelming evidence that Mexican avocados would introduce new, economically-damaging avocado pests into California groves. The CAC submitted new data to the USDA last spring indicating the agency underestimated the pest problems in Mexico, and urged it to reopen its evaluation of the plan.

"From a common-sense point of view, the Department (USDA) should reconsider this plan, but due to politics, they will probably go ahead with it," said CAC Vice President Tom Bellamore.

If the ban is lifted, the California Avocado Commission will pursue a lawsuit against the USDA on behalf of California's avocado growers, Bohrk said.