

Mexican Hass Avocados to be Distributed in All 50 States

In keeping with the provisions of a 2005 final rule, beginning Feb. 1, 2007, the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service will allow the importation of commercial shipments of fresh Hass avocados from approved orchards and municipalities in Michoacan, Mexico, into all 50 states on a year-round basis. The avocados remain prohibited in Puerto Rico and other U.S. territories.

The final rule to allow Hass avocados from Mexico into all 50 states became effective Jan. 31, 2005. The rule called for a two-year distribution delay into the commercial avocado-producing states of California, Florida and Hawaii. This delay provided USDA the opportunity to evaluate the program under actual production and distribution conditions before avocados would be allowed to enter commercial avocado-producing areas of the United States.

To reduce the risk of introducing plant pests associated with Mexican avocados into the United States, APHIS requires that the avocados be grown in certified orchards from the approved municipalities of Michoacan, Mexico. The avocados must be packed in clean, new boxes or clean plastic reusable crates prior to export to the United States. The boxes or crates must also be clearly marked with the identity of the grower, packinghouse and exporter. These phytosanitary measures, among others, were selected to mitigate the risk of introducing plant pests, such as the Mediterranean fruit fly, into the United States.

Previously, the boxes were stamped with the statement, "Not for importation or distribution in CA, FL, HI, Puerto Rico, or U.S. Territories." This statement is in the process of being removed on newly manufactured boxes; however, until the transition to the new boxes is complete, shipments may arrive in California, Florida and Hawaii after Feb. 1 in the old boxes. You may put stickers over this statement to avoid any confusion and county inspectors should ignore any markings or permit requirements prohibiting Mexican Hass avocados from entering these states.

Officials with USDA are also working very closely with their Mexican counterparts to gain full market access for California avocados in Mexico. In September 2005, U.S. and Mexican officials signed an agreement to allow the importation of Hass avocados from California into Mexico. Currently, avocados from California may be distributed in all Mexican states except Michoacan, Jalisco, Morelos, Puebla and Nayarit. Industry estimates that if California gains full access to the Mexican market, it will result in a \$6 to \$24 million gain for the state's avocado industry.

For additional information, please visit the APHIS Web site at http://www.aphis.usda.gov/newsroom/hot_issues/index.shtml and, under "Hot Issues" click on the link for Mexican Hass Avocado Imports.

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