



**CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE (CDFA)  
AVOCADO INSPECTION COMMITTEE (AIC)  
September 13, 2022 Meeting Minutes  
Teleconference**

**MEMBERS PRESENT**

Salvador Dominguez – Chair  
John Schaap  
Keith Blanchard – Vice Chair  
Stewart Lockwood  
Wayne Brydon  
Marc Fallini  
Aaruni Thakur

**INTERESTED PARTIES**

April Aymami, CA Avocado  
Commission (CAC)  
Ken Melban, CAC  
Dr. Mary Lu Arpaia, UC  
Riverside

**CDFA REPRESENTATIVES**

Karrie Batchelor  
Stacey Hughes  
Sam Santander  
Jennifer Leidolf  
Marcee Yount  
Sarah Cardoni

**MEMBERS ABSENT**

Bryce Bannatyne

**ITEM 1: CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 1:04 p.m. by Stacey Hughes.

**ITEM 2: INTRODUCTIONS/ROLL CALL**

Roll was called by Sarah Cardoni. A quorum was established, and self-introductions were made.

**ITEM 3: PUBLIC COMMENTS**

There were no public comments.

**ITEM 4: ELECTION OF OFFICERS**

Hughes opened the floor to nominations for Chair.

**MOTION:** John Schaap nominated Salvador Dominguez for Chair. Aaruni Thakur seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

Hughes opened the floor to nominations for Vice Chair.

**MOTION:** Stewart Lockwood nominated Keith Blanchard for Vice Chair. John Schaap seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

**ITEM 5: REVIEW OF MARCH 8, 2022 MEETING MINUTES**

Chair Dominguez asked for a motion to approve the March 8, 2022 Meeting Minutes as presented.

**MOTION:** Stewart Lockwood moved to approve the March 8, 2022 Meeting Minutes as presented. John Schaap seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously, with Aaruni Thakur abstaining.

#### **ITEM 6: COMMITTEE VACANCY AND TERMS REPORT**

Hughes provided the Committee Vacancy and Terms Report.

#### **ITEM 7: REVIEW OF THE AVOCADO INSPECTION PROGRAM BUDGET**

Sam Santander presented the CAC Avocado Inspection Program (AIP) Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2022/23. The beginning reserves for FY 2022/23 are \$907,261; total projected revenue is \$626,800; total projected expenses are \$827,922; with projected ending reserves of \$706,139.

**MOTION:** Stewart Lockwood moved to approve the FY 2022/23 CAC AIP Budget as presented. John Schaap seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed unanimously.

#### **ITEM 8: GEM VARIETY RELEASE DATES FINAL RESULTS**

Dr. Mary Lu Arpaia of the University of California, Riverside presented the final results of the GEM variety research project.

The provisional release dates for the GEM variety were established in 2018 utilizing a dataset that included data from two sites in Ventura County, and data from the AIP and the University of California, Irvine, from 2013 to 2018. The provisional release date set for Size 48 fruit was February 25<sup>th</sup>.

The two broad objectives of the research project were to: one, collect fruit samples over a three-year period for Size 40 and Size 48 every two weeks from multiple grower sites representative of the California Avocado Industry; and two, analyze the data on an annual basis to confirm release dates for the GEM variety and make a final recommendation to the AIC and CDFA.

Twelve collection sites were used: four sites in the Southern Region included De Luz, Temecula, Riverside, and Irvine; five sites in the Northern Region included Somis, Santa Paula East, Santa Paula North, Santa Paula West, and Goleta; and three sites in the San Joaquin Valley that included Lemon Cove, Lindcove, and Reedley. Total sampled fruit was 5,508 and included 2,233 pieces of Size 40 fruit and 2,771 of Size 48 fruit.

Release dates were calculated for Size 48 fruit in three different ways; all regions combined; Northern and Southern Regions combined; and San Joaquin Valley alone. A general stepwise regression analysis was conducted that separated the data by year and region, followed by a linear regression analysis to calculate the final release dates. General trends showed that fruit in the Northern and Southern Regions matured at a

rate similar to each other, while the San Joaquin Valley fruit matured significantly earlier.

Predicted release dates for Size 48 GEM fruit meeting the minimum maturity dry matter of 22.8%, were: January 25<sup>th</sup> for all regions combined; February 4<sup>th</sup> for the Northern and Southern Regions; and December 11<sup>th</sup> for the San Joaquin Valley. The predicted date of February 4<sup>th</sup> for the Northern and Southern Regions is earlier compared to the provisional release date of February 25<sup>th</sup> for several reasons. The current dataset includes data from additional growing regions with multiple growers and cultural practices and represents data collected at a different point in time. Moreover, the dataset is larger in terms of number of observations.

Chair Dominguez asked for members to comment on their position for which release dates they want to recommend. Blanchard voiced concerns about having two release dates stating that there would not be as much control like the industry has had with having grower support and cooperation with their harvest schedules. Furthermore, as GEM acreage increases, there is a greater chance of poor-quality fruit making it to market harvested at the minimum maturity standard.

Dr. Arpaia compared the proposed release dates for GEM to those for Hass and explained that the minimum maturity standard for GEM at 22.8% is comparable to the Hass minimum maturity standard of 20.8%. Blanchard expressed that the GEM has characteristics unlike Hass such as shriveling when it has low dry matter. Dr. Arpaia responded that during the Hass maturity research project conducted in 2003, Hass too presented shriveling at 20.8%. Furthermore, minimum standards are not optimal standards and the opportunity for a grower to market their fruit should not be excluded based on taste preferences at the minimum maturity standard.

Thakur inquired whether the AIC has the ability to revisit and adjust its recommendation if it is later determined that the release dates recommended were not conducive for the industry. Hughes responded that historically release dates have been established based on research and it is the Department's position to move forward with the proposed release dates utilizing the results of the GEM variety research project. The research resulted in two separate release dates, one for the Northern and Southern Regions combined and one for the San Joaquin Valley. Hughes further stated that although this may be a change to the avocado industry, having different harvesting times based on variety type and geographical regions is consistent with other commodities.

Chair Dominguez expressed gratitude for Dr. Arpaia's work asserting that it is not the position of the AIC to question the research analysis and results. However, there is consensus among industry members that a good quality GEM has a dry matter of 27% or higher and it is the position of the AIC to introduce the GEM variety in the best manner possible.

Blanchard inquired about the amount of GEM acreage in the San Joaquin Valley. Dr. Arpaia responded that the variety predominately grown in the San Joaquin Valley is GEM and that there has been a lot of interest in growers wanting to transition into the

avocado industry and establish new acreage. April Aymami added that the CAC acreage inventory reports 125 acres of total avocado production in the San Joaquin Valley, a minimal amount compared to the 50,000 acres across the rest of the state.

Hughes explained that release dates are not set in regulation but by a directive that is issued in a letter to industry each November. Release dates for all varieties are set utilizing the same type of research and analysis conducted by Dr. Arpaia. Marcee Yount confirmed that the Department's position is to move forward with setting release dates consistent with the data presented. Dr. Arpaia added that the data shows that the San Joaquin Valley fruit matures much earlier than the Northern and Southern Regions and highly recommends having two separate release dates.

Schaap asked Dr. Arpaia if there was this great of a differential between the San Joaquin Valley and the Northern and Southern Regions when conducting the Hass maturity research. Dr. Arpaia responded that the San Joaquin Valley was not included in that study. Schaap acknowledged that the San Joaquin Valley fruit matures earlier than the Northern and Southern Regions; however, setting two release dates is a big change for the industry and other varieties may need to be studied in the San Joaquin Valley.

Members urged their support in keeping one release date to be consistent with how all other varieties' release dates have been established and that one release date should be set statewide utilizing the data from the Northern and Southern Regions only, excluding the data from the San Joaquin Valley. Blanchard brought up the point that fruit can be harvested with dry matter testing before the release date as long as it meets the minimum maturity standard.

Chair Dominguez asked for a motion to recommend release dates for the GEM variety.

**MOTION:** John Schaap moved to set the release dates based on the Northern and Southern Regions that Dr. Arpaia presented for the recommended release dates for the GEM variety based upon the data collection and process that has been done historically for other varieties. Marc Fallini seconded the motion. A vote by roll call was taken. The motion passed by majority vote, with Chair Salvador Dominguez and Aaruni Thakur opposing.

### **ITEM 9: GEM VARIETY REGULATION UPDATE**

Blanchard shared an update on the regulatory change of adding the GEM variety to CDFA regulations stating that a letter is currently being drafted to the Secretary.

Blanchard, in addition, provided the Price Look-Up (PLU) update stating that Index Fresh applied with other industry handlers for the original PLU for the GEM. There had been discussion to apply for additional PLUs for the Gem and originally Index Fresh volunteered to move forward with the application process, but has since decided not to pursue applying for them.

Discussion ensued regarding the next steps on applying for additional PLUs. Members questioned if the CAC would be an appropriate author for the application. Aymami responded that it has been the position of CAC to not submit this application in the past and suggested it be a packer representative that would step forward and submit the application. CAC offered to assist in facilitating that process by bringing parties together to have that discussion.

**ITEM 10: PROGRAM UPDATES**

There were no program updates to report.

**ITEM 11: NEXT MEETING/AGENDA ITEMS**

The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 7, 2023.

**ITEM 12: ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 2:40 p.m. by Chair Dominguez.

Respectfully submitted by:

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Sam Santander, Program Supervisor  
Avocado Inspection Program  
Inspection and Compliance Branch