

Norm Kachuck, MD

**Consulting Neurologist
CEO, Kachuck Enterprises
Neuroavocado Warrior**

April 23, 2025

John Carroll
Reporter/Anchor
jccarroll@kpbs.org

The opportunity to explore how the avocado farmers of San Diego County are being impacted by current actions by the US government is too important to me to allow this moment to slip by without sharing a little of what you may not learn from your current sources.

The effects of the agreements governing trade relationships between Mexico and the United States are of course due in large part to the two countries' adherence to the World Trade Agreement, but also to the USMCA, which superseded NAFTA in 2020. However, the present US administration has abrogated significant components of the USMCA as it pursues strategies to exert financial control and dominance over Canada and Mexico, the other member countries to that agreement.

The institution of tariffs to be levied on avocados being imported into the US from Mexico as part of these maneuvers is the point of contact for our San Diego avocado growing and distributing community members with the current situation you are looking into. That the Fed administration is changing the rules and enforcement of them as they wish without consistency or predictability makes it hard to speak to the consequences of these alterations in our trade relationship with any confidence. What is as important, though, as these current events, is how they are imbedded in the pre-existing dynamic of the imported avocado pipeline into the US. If that is not part of the discussion, then the import of a tariff won't be understood.

So a contextualization is important here, and I'd like to make sure you have at least some access to the history of how US avocado growers have been working through the challenges facing our sector of the American agricultural world.

The American Avocado Farmers has created a website, <http://americanavocados.org>, that has allowed some amount of dissemination of what I think is important to create a context to your present interest. I've attached a copy of the Welcome I wrote for it. As well, investigative reporting has been a critical tool for shining a light on the kind of competition we are facing from the avocado import pipeline from Mexico to American markets. I'm attaching a bibliography of available published materials that have helped make it clear how we are being subjected to unfair trade practices, both as producers and, as packers/shippers.

We have filed a class action suit in US Superior Court in Central California in pursuit of justice and redress of the wrongs we believe have been done to the American avocado

producer community by the Mexican avocado pipeline controllers. The announcement of its filing is attached here as well.

We have been unable to pursue remediation of unfair trade practices without financial support necessary to pay for discovery and the legal actions which could be enacted based on it. The California Avocado Commission (CAC) would be the logical source of support for these efforts, but for the reasons I've outlined in the material also attached here as well as posted on the website, those who control the CAC board have been unable to manage their conflicts of interest arising from their relationships with the importers to allow them to advocate for the growers as they are legally mandated to do.

To the point of the tariffs. American agriculture has been protected by controls over imports, which can include ways to assure adequate oversight and certification of the products being imported into the American market. Subsidies from government sources, as well as trade agreements that seek to balance the ways countries can reasonably compete with domestic sources, have been critical to allow US agriculture to keep pace not just with what Americans want, but what they expect to have guaranteed in the matching of the quality and ethical sourcing, workplace conditions, and productions standards coming from overseas, with what we seek to do to optimize these factors on American farms.

The history of the avocado's rise to its present position in the American diet is a story that is really only about 60 years old, arising from exotic obscurity to a mainstay at the dining table after a concerted marketing effort, choices of types of avocado that sell well, transport, age, and standardize in quality, taste and appearance, and the fearsome GUACAMOLE! I'll leave the details to your usual sources for that background. The prominence of the Mexican avocado pipeline in controlling the American market came about as their ability to grow fruit with a climate, water availability, and environmental qualities that allowed the original fruit-bearing persea trees to flourish, came to the attention of the growing ag export economy there, and the creation of the Hass Avocado Board here in the US. The HAB was a critical component in partnering the US produce system with Mexico's, and over the decades the importers ascended to being the primary supplier to our market, eclipsing the domestic producers. The USDA and HAB were unable to maintain a regulatory primacy of protective actions to deal with this dynamic imbalance, given the financial rewards that accrued to the import sector, and the packer/shippers here which came to rely on that pipeline for the majority of their business. The CAC was to have been the next line of defense for us, but failed for the same reasons.

The Mexican pipeline, meanwhile, is part of an economy that struggles with fair practices, effective government oversight and enforcement of regulatory standards, and the class struggles of their attempts at democracy which gave rise to criminal cartels, corruption, oppression of the underclasses, and control of their farmers' ability to grow, harvest, and sell free of the taint of illegality, violence and illegitimate exploitation of them, the land, its resources, and profit.

To the point of tariffs: constraints on the import pipeline have been needed for the entire time that Mexico, and now Peru and Chile, began looking to America as their primary market. The last decade in particular has seen a massive reduction in the domestic farm acreage devoted to avocado growing, as the lower prices that the imports could endure were outstripped by the increasing costs of doing it the American way, on American soil, under the watchful eyes of so many regulators and best practices requirements.

The last few years – 2021-2024 – were awful in the financial shortfall domestic growers endured. A variety of ways to counter this were initiated, but failed to gain traction in our governance and policy makers' priorities. As things heated up concerning the inability of the USDA, State Department, and our state food and agriculture offices to monitor the importation pipeline, there were signs that certain critical shortcomings of their guarantees to the American public were becoming untenable messaging for marketing and consumer satisfaction. The prices on market, the costs of materials, water, and the labor difficulties over immigration, along with the increasing number of farms going out of business, or contracting their harvestable acres, are details you can read about in the website material.

The California crop comes to maturity in December-January, and there are oil-percentages tested in the fruit that is rated by sizes, so that they are approved for sale in those size-classes mostly in those months. Southern California has a shorter season than Northern California, and the former is usually size-picking for the first few months, and then strip-picking all sizes into July. The groves in the central and northern state areas can continue into September.

The growers/producers started making our displeasure known in early 2024 in ways that I think accelerated the recognition of the crisis which domestic growers were experiencing, and the consequences of our voices being heard began to really divide our community between growers and the packer/importers. With the lawsuits enacted to counter the deforestation of precious natural forests in Mexico, and the lack of ability to know what the ethical and ecological standards with which we are competing, a tension in the avocado marketing strategies was created.

With all of that excitement, the Mexican government put some measures in place to ostensibly inspect and certify the sourcing of the fruit bound for our markets. These are completely unregulated, poorly documented in their operational procedures and still without anyone from the US allowed to check on anything off the main highways, since they have been unable to do so by State Department direction since August 2024 due to threats of violence.

From the first opening days of the California harvest in December, well before the new US administration took office, and continuing up to today, the prices on market have been 2-3 times higher than we have seen in recent years...excepting the periods following the import bans of fruit from Mexico enacted by the USDA when the inspections were prevented by threats and violence by elements of the Mexican industry.

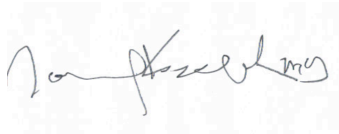
It was NOT the threat of tariffs that initiated the pegging of market prices at these levels...one could speculate that the import controllers saw an opportunity to take advantage of an American retail market that was concerned about sustainability, quality, and legality of their fruit sources, and would pay higher prices under the expectation that the costs were covering improved agronomy and economy. The import pipeline made more money without demonstrating that they were actually covering higher costs; the American growers were finally getting enough income to cover expenses, and, so mollified, could possibly be able to stop their complaining and activist work to level the playing field...and all could be well, for a while. And if tariffs are instituted, then how that expense (and profitability) is divvied up between the American-side packer/shipper/importers and the Mexican-side industry owners, will be invisible to anyone other than them.

Tariffs increase the price to the consumer. They have nothing to do with the production costs, or profitability for those who control our market if prices are already higher prior to the institution of this effective tax. And there will be less blowback, reduction of market sales volume, and everybody is happy...but how will this impact in a longer term than these months, this season? There is no way to predict that, and with the present economic uncertainty in the American economy due to the destruction of the American trade relationships, diplomacy, employment, government support of American families, and an imminent predicted recession, will 3\$ avocados remain a consumer priority?

I would predict that they will not, and the continued uncertainty over our trade policies will remain a damper on our ability to make the necessary net profit to survive, for at least the remainder of this US administration's autocratic, kleptocratic hegemony over the national economy. And that can mean the end of the domestic avocado farmer, just as it has similarly occurred to other ag sectors which were allowed to die in the face of unmanaged foreign competition. You want an America that grows its own, you need to make sure that the importer is playing by the same rules as the domestic producers and marketers are governed by. And that the American industry itself has its modus operandi and mandates for good behavior monitored and maintained.

You want more specifics, contact me.

Cheers on that note,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Norm Kachuck", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Norm Kachuck, MD