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ICYMI: THE CRIMINAL PLOT BEHIND THE MEXICAN AVOCADO

The Mexican Avocado Export Chain to the United States Was Violated by Organized Crime Interests

Fullerton, Calif. (August 7, 2026) — A day after the California Avocado Commission issued a statement renewing its calls for a seasonal tariff-rate quota in light of the U.S. State Department's closure of operations in Mexico's avocado growing state, Mexican newspaper La Universal published an article headlined [**The criminal plot behind the Mexican avocado.**](#)

From the article: *The Mexican avocado export supply chain to the United States was compromised by organized crime interests. Intelligence held by the U.S. government indicates that the Comprehensive Avocado Harvesting System (SICOA) was manipulated to introduce fruit into the export circuit that did not meet program requirements. The case file implicates officials from the Association of Avocado Producers and Packers-Exporters of Mexico (APEAM) and also points to potential corruption within the Local Plant Health Boards of Michoacán.*

This is the underlying reason for the suspension of U.S. personnel activities in Michoacán, rather than a direct threat or the detention of inspectors, as occurred in February 2022 and June 2024. In this instance, the U.S. government reportedly withdrew its officials after detecting that product traceability had been compromised. The distinction is significant. Manipulating a certification system necessitates audits, the purging of registry lists, and a comprehensive review of the export program.

The two most prominent APEAM officials are Luis Javier de la Rocha, the Director General, and Jesús Martínez Castillo. The investigation seeks to determine how fruit from orchards ineligible for the export market was introduced, who altered the records, and what role the Plant Health Boards of avocado-producing municipalities played. Available evidence does not support the claim that producers are part of the cartels; most are victims of extortion. Allegations focus on the interference of criminal networks in production, transport, packing, certification, and territorial control processes.

APEAM was aware of the scale of the problem, yet on Tuesday, they presented a different explanation at the National Palace. President Claudia Sheinbaum confirmed meeting with industry representatives; following the meeting, it was agreed to bolster the National Guard's presence and request a meeting with the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Security officials and representatives from the National Service for Agri-Food Health, Safety, and Quality also participated in the discussions.

*APEAM leaders focused their presentation on the rise in extortion targeting producers and packers, as well as the state's "Forest Guardian" (*Guardián Forestal*) program. They did not inform the President about the file regarding SICOA or the U.S. investigation into the Phytosanitary Boards. Nor did they explain that the association had allegedly failed to honor*

agreements and operational protocols established with the Department of Agriculture, the State Department, and the Embassy to ensure the program's security and integrity. Rather than providing a complete explanation, they presented a version of events that served their own interests to the presidential administration.

The President's reaction was based on that assessment. Sheinbaum stated that if U.S. inspectors did not return, they could be replaced by Senasica personnel. However, this alternative is technically unfeasible without Washington's authorization. Mexican avocados enter the United States under an Operational Work Plan agreed upon by USDA-APHIS, Senasica, and APEAM. Mexico cannot unilaterally alter that mechanism or decide who certifies shipments entering the U.S. market.

The proposal is even less viable given that the core issue is a lack of confidence in Mexican controls. If the United States is investigating the manipulation of SICOA and potential irregularities within the Phytosanitary Boards, it is unlikely to agree to entrust certification solely to Senasica officials. Such a substitution would require a bilateral modification of the plan, re-accreditation of processes, and the establishment of a USDA-approved oversight framework.

The scale of the business underscores the gravity of the situation. According to USDA figures, Mexico exported approximately \$3.65 billion worth of avocados to the United States in 2025. For 2026, the Department of Agriculture projected Mexican exports of 1.3 million tons, with the United States as the primary destination. Michoacán accounts for the if U.S. authorities confirm that avocado traceability has been compromised by criminal networks, the review could extend to packing houses, exporters, certifying bodies, and other agri-food products. For the government of Alfredo Ramírez Bedolla and the administration of Claudia Sheinbaum, simply resuming inspections would address only the immediate emergency. The fundamental challenge will be to prevent the infiltration of organized crime from ultimately compromising nearly the entire export platform of Michoacán, majority of these shipments, and the industry supports roughly 200,000 jobs. The daily value of national exports hovers around \$10 million; therefore, the figure of \$100 million per day cited during the meeting at the presidential palace lacks arithmetic basis.

"The Trump administration is right to protect American personnel and confront the cartels," said California Avocado Commission President Ken Melban. "The Office of the United States Trade Representative and the U.S. Department of Agriculture are highly skilled, fully informed and well positioned to act. Consistent with the administration's America First, anti-cartel and Make America Healthy Again agenda, cartels cannot be allowed to exploit the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement to undercut American growers and destroy domestic production."

*"Our growers have no hope of surviving when the ordinary rules of the market are replaced by the Wild Wild West," Melban said. "This is the moment for a seasonal tariff-rate quota on Mexican avocados and the full reinstatement of rigorous U.S. Department of Agriculture inspections before any Mexican avocados are permitted to enter the U.S. market. **Business as usual with Mexico must end.**"*

Learn more about the California Avocado Commission's calls for a TRQ here:

<https://californiaavocado.com/trq/>

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