

California Walnut Board

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GRADES & STANDARDS COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES

March 4, 2014

The California Walnut Board Grades & Standards Committee met on Tuesday, March 4, 2014, via teleconference. Committee Chairperson Bill Carriere called the meeting to order at 10:02 a.m. Ms. Dana Hull called the roll and established a quorum. The following Committee members were present via telephone:

Bill Carriere, Chairperson
Steve Lindsay, Vice Chairperson
Chuck Crain
Frank Guerra
Mike Poindexter (joined the call at 10:55 a.m.)
Pete Turner

Committee members Don Barton and Gus Mariani were absent. Others on the call were Jeremiah Szabo and Tom Jones of DFA; Andrea Ricci of USDA/AMS; and CWB staff members Dennis Balint, Carl Eidsath, Abhi Kulkarni, Heather Donoho and Dana Hull.

The first order of business was the approval of the minutes from the September 12, 2013, Grades & Standards meeting. Mr. Crain made a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Guerra seconded the motion and it carried unanimously by roll call vote.

Chairperson Carriere asked Mr. Eidsath to present the next agenda item, Review FDA's request for public comments on "Designation of High-Risk Food for Tracing: Request of Comments and for Scientific Data and Information." Mr. Eidsath stated that he emailed two documents to the Committee last week; one is a copy of the Federal Register notice for comments and for scientific data and information, the other is a more detailed explanation of the record-keeping requirements for high-risk foods. Mr. Eidsath explained that the CWC did enter comments last December on the *Salmonella* risk assessment and submitted a lot of data as did other tree nut commodities. We will be re-entering that information because it is almost identical to what FDA is asking for this time. Mr. Eidsath stated that FDA may use 30 categories of food similar to their reportable food registry. In that registry, tree nuts are all in the same category. If that is the case, we need to make sure that our scientific evidence and our comments counter that.

The Committee discussed having the comments ready prior to Mr. Balint and the Issues Management Committee's annual trip to Washington DC the week of March 24th. The Committee agreed that they should have another teleconference meeting on Friday, March 21st in order to review the proposed response to FDA that Mr. Eidsath will provide to the members.

Chairperson Carriere moved on to the next agenda item, Establish Recommendation for 2014/15 Grades & Standards Budget. Mr. Eidsath stated that the current fiscal year's budget is \$750,000 which includes \$350,000 for compliance officers all over the state – we were unsure how many people we could get and for the last two years we have spent considerably less than what was budgeted. Mr. Balint stated that if we could find more people, like the one we have (Don Henry), we would hire them as field consultants. The proposed budget for 2014/2015 for the compliance officers is \$200,000; we hope to find a handful of people to work for about six months of the year. Mr. Eidsath stated that the rest of the 2014/2015 proposed budget consists of \$75,000 for food safety research, \$100,000 for chemistry, \$75,000 for ARS/USDA, and \$150,000 for a reserve (unexpected events, projects or crisis); the total proposed budget is \$600,000.

Mr. Balint suggested that based on the discussions today, the committee would recommend to the Board the full \$200,000 for the compliance officer budget, but only release 40% of the money – the balance to be released upon further action of this committee. The Committee then discussed some of the ongoing food safety issues, including fosetyl-al and also the UNECE standard.

Ms. Donoho stated that the budget for 2014/2015 needs to be approved as a whole; after the Board approves the full budget in June, the Committee will reconvene in order to approve individual projects against the 2014/2015 budget. The Committee discussed potential costs they may face in regard to FSMA and the training it may require for handlers.

Mr. Guerra made a motion to recommend to the Board a 2014/15 Grades & Standards Committee budget of \$600,000. Mr. Lindsay seconded the motion and it carried by roll call vote.

Under other business, the Committee continued the discussion about fosetyl-al. Mr. Balint stated that we need support from organizations that represent multiple commodities, DFA for example. We are already engaged with the Almond Board and the Pistachio Board.

Mr. Poindexter mentioned the quality grades and standards that we are currently shipping under; the standards are the same as they were before the industry began using laser sorters. He asked if there is anything we can do to tighten up the tolerances on defects and foreign materials. Mr. Turner stated that the industry could not keep customers if they shipped under the minimum standards; most if not all handlers use standards that are well above the minimum based on customer requirements. Mr. Balint commented that it would mean changing a USDA spec; he asked Ms. Ricci about changing the grading specs. Ms. Ricci stated that grades and standards fall under the specialty crop inspection division of USDA, not the marketing order. Mr. Balint stated that if we set a spec that recognized the ability of a laser sorter, adopting that spec would require that all handlers have that technology. Mr. Szabo stated that the industry can always go above and beyond USDA standards in terms of self-regulating certain defect levels, based on customer needs. The Committee agreed to table this discussion until the next face-to-face meeting. Ms. Ricci will contact someone from SCI to have them come to that meeting to discuss the standards.

The time and place of the next meeting will be on March 21, 2014 at 10:00 a.m. via teleconference. There was no need for an Executive Session. Hearing no further business, Chairperson Carriere adjourned the meeting at 11:15 a.m.