



TOP TEN ISSUES

In February the California Grape & Tree Fruit League's Board of Directors ranked the top issues in order of priority for the current year. Here's this year's list along with brief explanations.

1 *Availability of a Legal Workforce/AgJOBS*

After the failure of AgJOBS in 2007, followed by the threatened enforcement of "no-match" letters, it's no wonder this has remained a top concern. On the positive side, the three presidential candidates have strongly supported AgJOBS in the past.

2 *Cost of Labor/Minimum Wage Increase Impact*

Labor is the highest variable cost for League members as about 50% to 70% of the cost of production. With the minimum wage set to rise by 70 cents in July 2008 and 2009, consumers must recognize that fruit prices need to rise.

3 *Water Supply/Above Ground Storage*

Growers understand the reality that exists in the state regarding water supply and demand. The hefty Sierra snow pack during the winter served as a vivid reminder that additional storage is of paramount concern to ensure supplies are captured to serve the state's growing needs.

4 *Air Quality Regulations*

Growers and shippers can't afford to change out their truck and tractor fleets to meet increasingly rigorous air quality standards; however air regulations continue to grow in number and stringency.

5 *Invasive Pests/Quarantines*

This issue's emergence reflects that of the light brown apple moth, along with the Mediterranean fruit fly quarantines. The implications of a quarantine in the San Joaquin Valley are mind-boggling.

6 *Labor Regulations*

The card-check legislation that would do away with the right to a secret ballot in union elections was vetoed by Gov. Schwarzenegger last go-round, but the issue is far from settled.

7 *Food Safety*

League members are keeping a close eye on what happens with leafy greens while at the same time seeking recognition that their crops are different, i.e. not ground level. Any regulations should be at the federal level, not state.

8 *Water Quality Regulations*

Increasing efforts to look at not just runoff but ground water basins have disturbing implications.

9 *Availability of Plant Health Materials*

There is a rise in the priority this year driven by concern that pesticides necessary for export are increasingly at risk.

10 *Farm Bill/Investment in Specialty Crops*

This appears on the list for the first time because fruit crops are part of the Farm Bill for the first time.

The three issues from 2007 that were dropped off this year's list were Workers Compensation, Energy, and International Trade.

**NOTE: Portions of the summaries were from American/Western Fruit Grower magazine (April 2008) titled "Top Ten Issues".*