

In January 2011, the California Grape & Tree Fruit League's Board of Directors ranked the top issues in order of priority for the upcoming year. Here's this year's list, along with brief explanations.

1 LABOR LAWS/CARD CHECK

After failed attempts to circumvent the secret ballot process, card check was re-invented to make union representation a remedy for 'egregious' employer conduct affecting a secret ballot election. Under a new Administration, the potential for passage of card check legislation through the Legislature remains high.

2 IMMIGRATION REFORM/AGJOBS

The latest attempt to move immigration policy without addressing economic questions related to securing an agricultural labor force proved ill-fated, ultimately leading to the defeat of the piecemeal attempt. The League advocated in favor of a solution which addresses agricultural labor in the context of both comprehensive and a more focused legislative package in recognition of the need for a stable and reliable workforce.

3 WATER SUPPLY ISSUES

In a state divided over questions of water conveyance, available supply, and ecosystem protection, the effort to promote a state water bond package on the 2012 ballot will begin anew with messaging focused on providing certainty in future years. The demand on California's water supply and infrastructure will continue to grow as demand increases in the future.

4 LABOR COSTS/MINIMUM WAGE

The costs associated with a dependable workforce for cultural, harvest, and packaging continues to range from 50-70 percent of total production costs. Because labor costs significantly affect the continued economic viability of League members the potential for government mandated increases in the minimum wage adds to the challenge of producing the highest quality fruit in the State of California.

5 INVASIVE PEST ISSUES

The League continued to work on the front-lines with top regulatory agencies to combat the devastating effect of invasive pests, such as the European Grapevine Moth, on the growing and shipping of fresh fruit while simultaneously working with international trading partners to avoid unnecessary phytosanitary restrictions.

6 HEALTH CARE MANDATES

In the wake of the passage of a massive federal health care proposal, much of the burden of providing health care for the uninsured population will likely result in added costs for businesses.

7 FOOD SAFETY REGULATIONS

The passage of controversial food safety legislation established a framework for federal agencies to more rapidly respond to instances of foodborne illness outbreaks in what is an overall safe U.S. food system. The League is positioned to work with key regulatory agencies to shape the implementing language of the nation's new food safety policy while maintaining that requirements must be commodity specific, risk-based, and supported by sound science.

8 WORKERS' COMP COSTS

The potential for an increase in workers' compensation costs was recognized by League members as an important concern, as carriers have repeatedly sought rate adjustments to cover cost increases associated with rising medical costs.

9 ENERGY COSTS

The concern over increasing energy costs in the face of climate change policy mandates will force the energy production sector to purchase new technologies and replace production from fossil fuel sources which will likely result in higher energy prices passed along to consumers.

10 AIR QUALITY REGULATIONS

The continual evolution of air quality regulations – imposed at the national, state and local levels – directly and indirectly affect California agricultural operations of all sizes. The recent implementation of the state-wide on road diesel truck regulation is an example of a requirement that affects growers and shippers with their on-farm fleets as well as those businesses that will see an increase in their operational costs in order to continue to rely on diesel powered trucks to provide services and supplies to producers.

