

# A New Voice for the Almond Industry

The Almond Board of California (ABC) was established in 1950 to represent the California Almond industry. As a Federal Marketing Order (FMO), there are defined responsibilities as well as defined limitations. One of those limitations is the ability to advocate for the industry. As a FMO, we can *educate* but not *advocate*.

However, in 2008 the ABC Board of Directors determined that an avenue for the establishment of an issues advocacy capability should be explored for the almond industry. The commitment to the idea was reconfirmed in 2011 during the Board's strategic retreat, under one of the Board's strategic priorities to *Build an Almond Board organization that optimizes its effectiveness in establishing and executing goals*, a supporting objective was established to *Articulate needs related to advocacy and seek out possible alternatives for meeting those needs*.

## A Memorandum of Agreement

Considerable time and effort was given to researching the variable options for creating a "sister organization" to speak for the almond industry. The most promising option was also the simplest – join forces with another established almond organization by sharing the expertise and knowledge already in place. In August 2013, a Memorandum of Agreement was entered into with the Almond Hullers & Processors Association (AHPA). In 2016, AHPA was rebranded as the Almond Alliance of California (AAC), a non-profit association established in 1980 to promote the business interests of almond hullers, shellers, processors, and growers. ABC and AAC represent many of the same businesses and as a result, share many of the same goals to assure the almond industry operates effectively and efficiently to remain the crop of choice in California and the nut of choice around the world.



## What does this really mean?

ABC staff, in their official capacity, must refrain from any action that may be construed as taking an official position on an activity not authorized under the marketing order.<sup>1</sup> The Memorandum of Agreement provides a mechanism whereby AAC can contract for ABC staff for advice/expertise on key subject matter issues. In their role **as an advisor to AAC, and under the umbrella of AAC**, they can advocate on those issues without violating the covenants of the federal marketing order. Specific members of ABC staff in that contractual capacity can liaise with the AAC's Government Relations Committee which is comprised of industry members active in both organizations.

The scope of issues covered by this agreement includes the Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA) implementation, Proposition 65 impacts on almond operations focusing on PPO and aflatoxin, pesticide analysis, bee health, water, and air quality/dust. As needed, the scope can be enlarged upon approval of the Board of Directors for both organizations.

Under the terms of this agreement, AAC has utilized Board staff expertise on proposed rule comments to the Food and Drug Administration on FSMA. Through this agreement, AAC has also utilized ABC staff in developing key talking points prior to testifying before a legislative committee and has consulted on letters to legislative members regarding pesticide issues. AAC has been a successful avenue for media communications and social media, utilizing ABC data to correct misreported statistics and information about the almond industry. These examples reflect the types of activities covered under the Memorandum of Agreement that benefit the almond industry as a whole.

## Where do we go from here?

The MOA leverages the strengths of two almond industry entities with the common focus of doing what is best for almond stakeholders. It does this without precluding alliances with other organizations whose expertise further maximizes the industry's expertise. As we move forward, ABC and AAC will continue to build upon the MOA to ensure that a unified almond grower, huller-sheller, and handler voice can be heard on issues of critical importance to the almond community.

<sup>1</sup> USDA Operations Manual, Marketing Order and Agreement Division, AMS Fruit and Vegetable Program, page 129.