

The following was submitted to United Fresh Produce Association from Sen. Barack Obama, D-III

Immigration

Congress has failed repeatedly to enact comprehensive immigration reform. The fruit & vegetable industry relies upon a strong, stable and mostly international workforce to bring our products to consumers in a timely and efficient manner. We are experiencing a labor crisis and our industry needs an adequate, legal workforce so we can remain competitive in the global marketplace. What is your plan to eclipse the rhetoric that has dominated this debate and enact comprehensive immigration reform in the next Congress?

The fruit and vegetable industry relies heavily on seasonal and migrant labor. I have played a leading role in crafting comprehensive immigration reform and believe that our broken immigration system can only be fixed by putting politics aside and offering a solution that strengthens our security while reaffirming our heritage as a nation of immigrants. We must secure our borders, fix our broken immigration bureaucracy, and require the 12 million undocumented to get on a responsible path to citizenship. They must pay a fine, learn English, and go to the back of the line for citizenship. I will also increase the number of people we allow in the country legally to a level that unites families and meets the demand for jobs employers cannot fill.

Food Safety

The recent salmonella outbreak cost our industry \$300 million – product was quarantined and jobs were lost. We believe FDA should have involved industry leaders much sooner in the process to tap our expertise and help track down the source. In fact, once we were involved and full information was provided, we traced the source rather quickly. On September 11, 2008, 150 of our members participated in a town hall forum with FDA where we expressed both our frustration with this process and reinforced our desire to work with them in the future. Let me be clear – United Fresh wants to roll up our sleeves with the next Administration and Congress on this issue. We take pride in providing our nation's food supply – and our families eat the same food as you do. Can you share with us both your idea on what food safety reform would look like and how you would encourage FDA to collaborate with industry?

In many ways, our current food safety system is broken. The rate at which we inspect food is far too slow, particularly for imported products and those that have a higher risk profile. Some facilities are inspected less frequently than once every ten years. Surveillance and detection of foodborne illness is insufficient, and it takes far too long to respond to outbreaks. We lack a set of standards that sets minimum process and performance goals based on risk and best-available science. As a result, foodborne illness annually causes more than 325,000 hospitalizations and 5,000 deaths, and our food safety agencies lurch from recall to recall. Imprecise and drawn-out recalls can ruin entire industries. As President, I will work to restore

the capacity and science base of the Food and Drug Administration, work with Congress to pass legislation that modernizes our food safety authorities, and bring stakeholders to the table to ensure that we are rapidly responding to outbreaks of foodborne illness.

Agriculture Policy

Our members are using cutting edge technology and utilizing research to make our food supply healthy and safe, while responding to consumer demand for convenient, fresh-cut, ready to eat fruits and vegetables. We are business owners and operators and create thousands of jobs – but we cannot be saddled with burdensome regulations. Can you shed some light on what USDA & EPA should and should not be doing from a regulatory point of view?

Under an Obama administration, we will make it a priority to bring stakeholders to the table when important public policy decisions impacting agriculture are considered, whether it is at the USDA or EPA. In addition, I will restore the basic principle that government decisions should be based on the best available, scientifically-valid evidence and not on the ideological predispositions of agency officials or political appointees. More broadly, I am committed to providing Americans with the tools to participate in their democracy using cutting-edge technologies to provide a new level of transparency, accountability, and participation for America's citizens. And finally, aside from the best available science, my administration will take into consideration the economic consequences of our decisions.

The 2008 Farm Bill made a historic investment in the specialty crop industry, focusing heavily on nutrition, research and many other priorities. We are pleased that an industry which represents half of all cash crop receipts in America, now has a seat at the agriculture table. It is imperative that the next Administration continues this recognition as it considers the implementation of the Farm Bill, the reauthorization of the Child Nutrition Act and overall agriculture policy issues. As you weigh many of these issues, how do you perceive the fruit & vegetable industry participating in this debate and crafting a 21st Century agriculture policy?

Clearly, fruits and vegetables should be considered in any conversation about the future of our agriculture and child nutrition policies. Fruits and vegetables are a source of important nutrients, and we should work to ensure that our children have access to them.

The inclusion of funding for specialty crop research and development, invasive species detection and eradication, and increased investments for nutrition programs, including those that provide schoolchildren with healthy fruits and vegetables, is one of the most positive elements in the 2008 Farm Bill. I was proud to support the Farm Bill, because it provides support to all of agriculture, increased investments in nutrition and conservation, and accelerates our path toward advanced biofuels and energy independence. I would have liked to see more reforms in the bill, and as President, I will work to make sure that payments are targeted appropriately, but I refuse to turn my back on important legislation that injects

billions of dollars into rural economies and supports providing schoolchildren with healthy snacks.

Energy

This issue is on the minds of all Americans. Many of our association's members are involved in the supply chain and moving fruits & vegetables throughout the nation – so gas prices and the cost of doing business is very important to us. Can you give us the latest developments on the energy debate in Congress and share your respective energy plans?

Like all Americans, you are pinched by record energy prices and, as growers, you feel firsthand the effects of our energy crisis. Yet you also know that rural communities are on the cutting edge of efforts to end it, and it's time Washington stepped up to help. That's why I have established a goal to have 60 billion gallons of our fuel come from sustainable, affordable biofuels by 2022, and I'll invest \$150 billion over the next ten years in our green energy sector, creating up to 5 million new jobs in the process – jobs that pay well and can't be outsourced. In the interim, I also recognize that continued support for responsible development of domestic oil and gas resources must also be a priority as we work to diversify our nation's energy supply.

Taxes

One of the most onerous taxes that impact our members is the death tax. If the 111th Congress and next Administration do not take action, the current law will sunset on December 31, 2010 and revert back to a 55% tax rate and an exemption of \$1,000,000. At these levels, our members would be forced to comply with paying these high taxes instead of creating jobs and investing back into businesses and technology. Would you be an advocate in urging Congress to extend the current policy past 2010? If not, what is the tax rate and exemption amount you support?

I have a comprehensive plan that would provide a tax cut for 95% of households and simplify the tax code. I support a reasonable estate tax policy that would effectively repeal the estate tax for 99.7% of estates. For the remaining 0.3% of estates that have more than \$7 million per couple, I will retain a rate of 45%. This policy would cut the number of estates touched by the tax by 84 percent relative to 2000.

My plan for capital gains is to maintain the current rate for families with incomes below \$250,000. Those in the top two income brackets would pay a new rate of 20%, which is equal to the lowest rate that existed in the 1990s and the rate that President