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**USDA & USTR Cabinet Level Leadership:**

**U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)** President Donald Trump has announced his nominees for the U.S. Department of Agriculture:

**Brooke Rollins as Secretary of Agriculture (vice-Tom Vilsack):**

Secretary-designate Rollins began her U.S. Senate confirmation hearings on January 23 and is expected to be confirmed in early February. She graduated from Texas A&M University with a degree in agricultural development and earned her law degree from the University of Texas. Ms. Rollins was President Trump's domestic policy chief during his first term and most recently led a Trump-aligned think tank.

**Stephen Vaden as Deputy Secretary of Agriculture (vice Xochitl Torres-Small):** Mr. Vaden holds a law degree from Yale University and a bachelor's degree from Vanderbilt University. He currently serves as a judge on the U.S. Court of International Trade, a position he has held since December 2020. He was also USDA's General Counsel during President Trump's first term where he helped reorganize and relocate a number of USDA agencies outside of Washington, D.C. Prior to his government service he worked at the prominent law firm of Jones Day and Patton Boggs in Washington, D.C. His position also requires U.S. Senate confirmation.

**Luke Lindberg as USDA Undersecretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs (TFAA & vice-Alexis Taylor):** During Trump's first term Mr. Lindberg served as Chief of Staff and Chief Strategy Officer at the Export-Import Bank. He is currently the President & CEO of South Dakota Trade and a member of the Board of Directors of the National Association of District Export Councils. Senate Majority Leader John Thune (Republican-South Dakota) is Lindberg's father-in-law. He will be responsible for managing the Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS).

**Dudley Hoskins as Undersecretary for Marketing and Regulatory Programs (MRP & vice-Jennifer Moffitt):** Mr. Hoskins currently serves as counsel on the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry, and previously spent four years at USDA during Trump's first term as the Chief of Staff for Marketing and Regulatory Programs, and senior advisor to the secretary. Mr. Hoskins will oversee the Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) and the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS).

### **U.S. Trade Representative (USTR):**

#### **Greer Jamison as USTR Ambassador (vice-Katherine Tai):**

USTR-designate Jamison is a University of Virginia law school graduate and served as the chief of staff to President Trump's first-term U.S. trade representative, Robert Lighthizer. President Trump's announcement stated that Greer will focus his office on "reining in the country's massive trade deficit, defending American manufacturing, agriculture, and services, and opening up export markets everywhere."

Mr. Jamison is labeled as a 'China hawk' since he helped Mr. Lighthizer implement broad tariffs against China during President Trump's first term in office. Mr. Greer is an Air Force veteran and has been deployed to Iraq. This cabinet-level post is involved in creating trade policy and trade negotiations with other nations. The agency has over 200 employees and offices in Washington, Geneva, Switzerland, and Brussels.

**USTR Chief Agricultural Negotiator (vice-Doug McKalip):** No candidate has been nominated to date.

### **U.S. Department of State:**

#### **Marco Rubio as the Secretary of State (vice-Anthony Blinken):**

Secretary Rubio was confirmed as Secretary by the U.S. Senate on January 21. He is the son of Cuban immigrants who fled communist Cuba to Florida in the 1960s. As the former senior Senator from Florida, he has served in the Foreign Relations, Intelligence, Appropriations, and Small Business Committees. As senator, his major foreign relations focus has been in Latin America and accordingly, his 1<sup>st</sup> major trip is already planned in February for South America to meet with all top leaders.

His top overall priorities after being confirmed included:

- Build a more innovative, nimble, and focused State Department including replacing some priorities, de-emphasizing some issues, and eliminating some practices.
- Curb mass migration and securing our borders.
- Reward performance and merit including eliminating "Diversity-Equity-Inclusion or DEI" requirements.
- Return to basics of diplomacy by eliminating our focus on political and cultural cause that are divisive at home and unpopular abroad.
- Stop censorship and suppression of information and reprioritize the truth.
- Do away with climate policies that weaken America. While we will not ignore threats to our natural environment and support sensible environmental protections, we will fulfill President Trump's promise for a return to American energy dominance.

**U.S. Ambassador to South Africa (vice-Dr. Reuben Brigety):** No candidate has been nominated to date.

**U.S. Ambassador to Botswana: Ambassador Howard Van Vranken:** He is a career (not political) Ambassador appointee and currently remains in his position. Although he has submitted the traditional

Ambassadorial resignation letter after the new Trump Administration assumed the Presidency, Secretary Rubio will likely decide his fate in the near future.

**U.S. Fruit & Vegetable Industry Voice Preliminary Thoughts - Trump Administration Political Impact Affecting Horticultural Production & Trade:**

A Fresh Fruit Portal newsletter from late January has stated that the new Trump Administration has shaken the global agriculture industry with several executive orders focusing on tariff increases, immigration control, deregulation of governmental environmental restrictions, fossil fuel expansion, and a prioritization of consumer health.

Fresh Fruit joined Fruit Logistica's International Media Briefing to discuss the incoming Administration's agricultural goals with International Fresh Produce Association (IFPA) President Cathy Burns, Director Richard Schouten of GroentenFruit Huis, and General Delegate Philippe Binard of Freshfel Europe.

IFPA President/CEO Burns stated that U.S. agriculture is focused on 2 main areas: deregulation and health. She believes that that deregulation will be favorable to growers and the business community and that a greater consumption of fruit and vegetables will align with an Administration campaign to make America healthier.

Mr(s). Schouten and Binard voiced concerns about the possibility of raising tariffs on both Mexico and Canada and the withdrawal from the Paris Climate Agreement. Both are concerned of a disconnect in objectives between the U.S. and Europe when focusing on agricultural sustainability, a major issue for growers around the world, and that tariffs will negatively impact U.S. market access, deregulate prices, and disrupt trade relationships. Mr. Binard also pointed out that during the first Trump Administration, their trade policy was not cohesive which led to a decrease in exports to Canada, Mexico, China, and India because of sanctions placed on those countries.

All agreed that an agricultural labor shortage would be a major challenge with the Administration heavily targeting illegal immigration. Ms. Burns stated that IFPA is working with the Trump Administration to ensure a legal and safe workforce needed to help drive consumption and sustainability, supply chain efficiencies, and technology.

**Communication with USDA - Animal & Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS), U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) & the U.S. Department of State (DoS):**

**South Africa Citrus Black Spot (CBS) Rule:** The CBS rule remains linked to improved access for U.S. pork, poultry, and dairy products to South Africa. I discussed briefly with Mr. Bobby Acord, technical representative for the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) to see if any scientific progress had been accomplished bilaterally between the official veterinarians representing APHIS and DALRRD. However, Mr. Acord stated that although both sides continue discussing these issues, no successful breakthroughs have occurred. Mr. Acord did say that it might be possible that the Trump Administration would be able to work with the South African government to produce a much broader trade agreement that would include South Africa citrus and U.S. animal products as part of the package. For example, he noted that President Trump confidant Elon Musk has recently expressed interest in a possible South Africa joint venture collaboration with his Space X and electric powered battery businesses.

For additional information, please find a quick summary of the following U.S. pork, poultry, dairy exports (\$USD-Value/Metric Ton-Quantity) to South Africa over the past several years per data from the U.S. Census Bureau:

<b>Pork</b>	<b>Poultry</b>	<b>Dairy</b>
2021: \$21K/7.3 MT	2021: \$75 Million/45,669.0 MT	2021: \$19.8 Million/10,276.3 MT
2022: \$59K/33.8 MT	2022: \$44 Million/80,219.0 MT	2022: \$21.4 Million/11,068.0 MT
2023: \$614K/211.5 MT	2023: \$40 Million/+75,000.0 MT	2023: \$6.4 Million/3,878.6 MT
2024: \$372K/213.3 MT	2024: \$19.8 Million/245,212.0 MT	2024: \$9.5 Million/4,708.9 MT

**Botswana Citrus Market Access – Draft Pest Risk Assessment (PRA):** The comment period for the Draft PRA closed on January 3, 2025, after the extension to the full 90-day period. APHIS is now consolidating and reviewing the technical comments received. However, the traditional regulatory approval process will be halted until the new USDA political leadership is fully placed to review and implement the new Administration’s agricultural trade and bilateral relationship priorities. From my past experience working with APHIS through the transition period between different Administrations, I would speculate that this would take about 3-4 months. As mentioned previously, from a scientific or technical perspective, the final Botswana pest list should follow the South Africa pest list/export model utilizing cold treatment to mitigate the fruit fly complex and False Codling Moth. More positively and differing from South Africa, Citrus Black Spot will not require “disease free certification/free areas” but a more generic/flexible “systems approach” certification where all citrus groves would qualify with basic cooperation-management by growers, packing houses and the national plant protection service (NPPO).

Following President Trump’s first term, the relationship with South Africa and Botswana will likely be very “transactional” where the Administration will look at the bilateral association from a “business-trade” perspective as well and whether the country is considered to be “loyal” or a reliable partner with the United States.

Botswana political leadership at the highest levels must continue to communicate with the U.S. Department of State, USTR, and USDA as well as utilize any new White House connections to press citrus as a national priority. The previous Biden Administration considered Botswana a close ally representing Western democratic ideals/values and equally important, as a buffer to growing Chinese influence on the African Continent. Botswana must continue this “full court press” to finalize the USDA regulatory process and finalize as a new regulation within the next 12-14 months.

#### **USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) Releases January 2025 Report- U.S. Citrus Forecast for 2024/25 Season:**

**U.S. Citrus Summary:** The NASS monthly report was released on January 10, 2025, demonstrating some early good news with citrus showing overall good quality. However, the total U.S. volume of oranges was forecast at 60.3 million boxes which is down slightly from the 61.5 million box amount from last season. Grapefruit production was forecast at 7.4 million boxes, down from 8.5 million from last season. Lemon projection was forecast at 27.5 million boxes, up slightly from 27.2 million boxes from last year. For the tangerine and mandarin varieties, the volume for the current season was estimated to be 25.3 million boxes, up from about 24 million from last year.

**Florida:** Florida all-orange production remains unchanged from December but 33% less than last season.

**Non-Valencia Production:** Remains unchanged from the December report at 5 million boxes but down 17% from the early season projections of 6 million boxes.

**Valencia Production:** Remains unchanged from December at 7 million boxes but down 22% from the early seasonal forecast of 9 million boxes.

**All-Orange Production:** Unchanged from December at 12 million boxes but down 20% from the October and November forecast of 15 million boxes projected.

**All Grapefruit Production:** Unchanged from the December forecast of 1.2 million boxes but down 14% from the 1.4 million box projection.

**Lemon Production:** A slight increase projected from the December report at a 500,000 box count up to 600,000 boxes.

**Tangerine & Mandarin Production:** A decrease projected from 350,000 boxes in December to 300,000 boxes in January or a 14% decrease from last month.

#### **California:**

**Non-Valencia Production:** No change at 39 million boxes from the December report forecast.

**Valencia Production:** A slight decrease to 8.4 million boxes from 8.7 million boxes in December.

**All-Orange Production:** Another slight decrease from 47.7 million boxes in December to 47.4 million in January.

**All-Grapefruit Production:** A slight drop from 4.2 million boxes in December to 3.7 million in January.

**Lemon Production:** No change at 26 million from the December forecast.

**Tangerine & Mandarin Production:** No change at 25 million boxes produced from December.

#### **Texas:**

**Non-Valencia Production:** A strong increase projected from 400,000 boxes produced in December to 600,000 in January.

**Valencia Production:** A drop from 450,000 boxes in December to 300,000 in January.

**All-Orange Production:** A slight increase projected from 850,000 to 900,000 boxes from December to January.

**All Grapefruit Production:** An increase from 1.9 million boxes produced in December to 2.5 million boxes in January.

#### **Arizona:**

**Lemon Production:** No change at 900,000 boxes from the December forecast.

#### **Alico Incorporated - Leading Florida Citrus Producer Announces Closure of Citrus Operations:**

Alico, a Fort Myers based organization, has announced closure of their citrus operations due to increasing financial challenges faced from Huanglongbing or Citrus Greening Disease and growing adverse weather challenges. Alico owns roughly 53,371 acres of land in 8 counties as well as 48,700 acres of oil and gas, including mineral rights within the state. Alico plans to diversify all farming operations on all of its land and entitle certain parcels for commercial and residential development. The move is an effort to provide investors with a greater return on capital investment.

President and CEO, John Kiernan said, “the organization’s citrus production has declined some 73% over the last 10 years. The impact of Hurricanes Irma in 2017, Ian in 2022, and Milton in 2024 on our trees, already weakened from years of Citrus Greening Disease, has led Alico to conclude that growing citrus is no longer economically viable for us in Florida.”

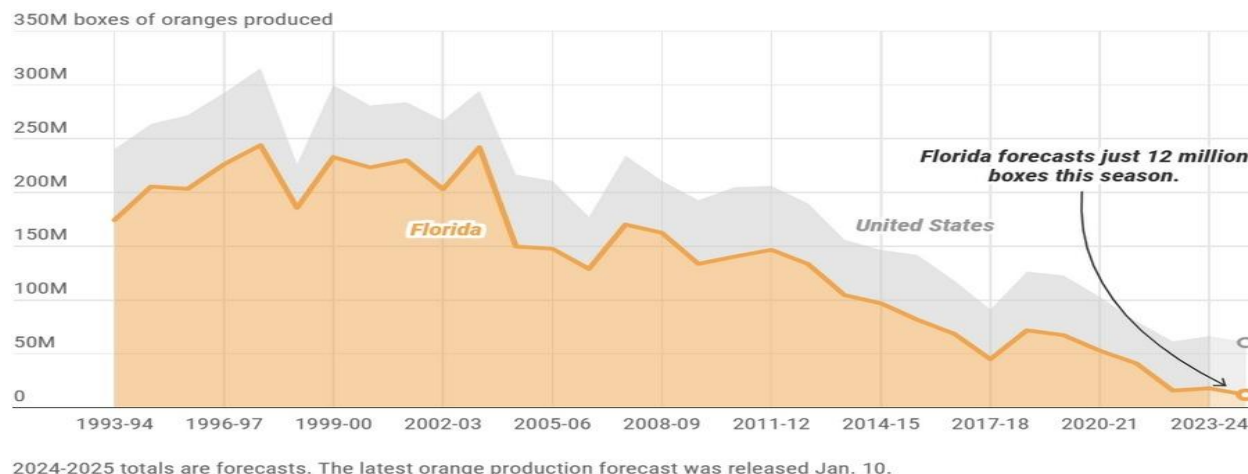
Alico will immediately reduce most of its citrus production workforce and expects that approximately 3,460 acres will be managed by third-party caretakers for one more season through 2026.

### **Tampa Bay (Florida) Times Article – Florida Orange Growers Face Record Low Harvest Amid Citrus Greening (Huanglongbing) and Climate Challenges:**

The Tampa Bay Times newspaper published a story on January 28 stating that the state's citrus farmers face a continued decline in production. This month, USDA anticipates a production decrease of 90% compared to 3 decades ago. This downturn follows the closure of a major labor group and the exit of one of the state's largest producers, Alico Inc., followed by the closure of the Gulf Citrus Growers Association, with both citing economic non-viability. Mainly due to the non-curable Citrus Greening Disease that was introduced about 20 years ago and more unpredictable weather cycles resulting from climate change, the cultivation of citrus is becoming much more difficult. To highlight this point, the industry has lost over half the citrus acreage since 2012. USDA-National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) released the following on January 10:

### **Florida orange growers set for another record low year.**

Citrus greening disease and repeated hurricanes have weakened Florida's once bustling citrus industry.



### **New Root-Knot Nematode Species, *Meloidogyne limonae* Described in China:**

A recent Chinese scientific research publication via the American Phytopathological Society describes a new root-knot nematode species, *Meloidogyne limonae* (Meloidogynidae), isolated from cultivated lemon trees (*Citrus limon*) in China. Affected plants exhibited chlorotic leaves, small fruit, including galled, twisted, and necrotic roots that led to plant death.

The scientific article was published on April 22, 2024, from the following website:

<https://apsjournals.apsnet.org/doi/10.1094/PDIS-05-23-0919-SR>

