

Testimony of Gerald Chooljian

For the Raisin Marketing Order 989

My name is Gerald Chooljian and I am a small grower and handler of raisins. Our packing company is Del Rey Packing Co. and my family has been packing California Raisins since the late 1920's. I am Chairman of the Marketing Subcommittee of the Raisin Administrative Committee and have held this position since 2002. My elected position on the Committee is as an Independent Handler.

I support all four proposed amendments, 1) Committee size reduction and restructure, 2) removing the nomination process that currently allows a person the option to choose Member or Alternate position, 3) quality standards for reconditioned raisins, and 4) updating the content requirements for the Marketing Policy. However, I am here to testify specifically for the reduction and restructure of the Committee.

Currently the committee consists of 47 members and 47 alternates. The raisin industry has severely regressed over the years with our crop size and number of growers. This has created some difficulty in filling the member and alternate positions. In fact, if you go on the Committee website (raisins.org) you will see that the committee currently has 18 vacancies, 2 in the Member positions and 16 alternate positions. This high vacancy rate has been consistent for many terms of office, which supports the need to reduce the Committee size.

Our current quorum requirement is 25 Members or Alternates who are in a voting position, which is 53% of the voting membership. We've had many meetings over the past several years where a quorum was barely reached and one meeting (January 2020) where a quorum was not reached. Reducing the Committee size automatically reduces the quorum requirement. The proposed quorum of 14 will require a slightly higher percentage of participation, 67% of the voting membership.

Eliminating Independent Producer Districts is appropriate with this overall Committee size reduction, especially Independent Producers who will only get approximately 5 seats, depending on tonnage. Districts 1 and 2 have a small grower base in comparison to District 3. Representation should be based on a fair vote for all nominees in a single District.

When the industry had Volume Regulation (Reserve Pool), a lot of the programs were driven by the "field prices/base price" established by the Raisin Bargaining Association (RBA). Example: the RAC had an Export Replacement Offer (ERO) program (aka, Raisin-Back and/or Cash-Back Program). The RBA field price for raisins was used as the "Base Price" to calculate the pricing in the Export Markets.