***Specialty Crops Inspections Rises to the Challenge***

AMS Specialty Crops Program promotes Secretary Perdue’s motto, [“Do Right & Feed Everyone”](https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/do-right-feed-everyone.pdf) even more now than ever. The Specialty Crops Inspection (SCI) Division deployed a Rapid Response Team (RRT) of 25 inspectors and Federal Program Managers to Nogales, AZ last month. We sent our expert team to the border crossing to ensure uninterrupted trade of Mexican tomatoes and table grapes when our State cooperators were unable to meet inspection demand due to illnesses and absences related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Carrying out this level of work during a national crisis is extraordinary. In all, the team delivered more than 1,900 certificates on 2,000 truckloads of table grapes via the Nogales border crossing in record time!

Their efforts earned the appreciation of USDA leadership, the Mexican government, and our industry stakeholders. AMS Administrator **Bruce Summers** and representatives of the Mexican Embassy were extremely complimentary of SCI’s work. The [Fresh Produce Association of the Americas](https://www.freshfrommexico.com/) sent an email saying, “I can’t tell you enough how professional, experienced, and knowledgeable the USDA team members are. They are very helpful. They have helped turn around a challenging situation. Our largest shipper is caught up. One other large company has been speaking with USDA a lot making sure he has grapes in the right inspection locations to get inspected efficiently. All of this is possible because of the USDA assistance here in town. We really appreciate that help. Communication has been a two-way street and has helped greatly.”

SCI’s mission is to support the global specialty crops market by collaborating with the agricultural community to provide trusted, impartial, prompt, and accurate quality assurance and food safety verification services. In addition, SCI provides audit-based services to verify [Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs)](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/gap-ghp), Good Manufacturing Practices (GMPs), [GroupGAP Food Safety](https://www.ams.usda.gov/services/auditing/groupgap), traceability, and food defense. We also offer quality monitoring solutions that are tailored to each customer’s need. In addition to our staff, SCI has Cooperative Agreements with 42 states giving SCI access to an additional 2,500 Federal-State partner employees. During our shared COVID-19 experiences, SCP’s work remains challenging, yet we persevere and accomplish so much for the USDA and our industry stakeholders.

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