

The Association of Producers, Packers and Exporters of Avocado in Mexico (APEAM) says that disruptions to Michoacan operations are continuing despite an agreement having been reached during talks earlier this week.

Last week, hundreds of growers who are unhappy with the prices they were being paid by packers paralyzed harvesting and packing operations by blocking roads with vehicles.

They are seeking to establish a minimum price for the fruit, but APEAM says that such a move would be illegal because competition laws in both Mexico and the U.S. allow for free trade between individuals.

Growers have also been protesting against fruit grown in other parts of the country being exported illegally from the Michoacan to the U.S.

In a statement, APEAM said that during a meeting on Tuesday with growers and representatives of the government agency the Federal Competition Commission (COFECE), an agreement was reached to end the roadblocks and to meet again later this week.

However, it said that some growers have failed to comply. As a result, APEAM said that operations have been halted indefinitely for safety reasons.

"APEAM has decided to stay out of the conflict since after listening to what was said by the group of non-conforming growers and having listened to the recommendation of the COFECE, it is evident that this related to a trade issue between individuals," it said.

"In this sense, the association, adhering to its statutes, is refraining from participating in what is clearly an illegal act with severe legal and criminal penalties, the intention to try and fix and manipulate the price of avocados."

Local media Mexico News Daily reports that the strikes are costing the industry 85 million pesos (US\$4.3 million) a day.

It said that more than 1,000 producers stopped work and set up checkpoints on highways in 11 municipalities last week. The producers on strike are reportedly asking for a minimum price of 35 pesos (US\$1.75) per kilo.