

Though President-elect Joe Biden is unlikely to make quick decisions on key issues for the agricultural industry as he comes into his new role, he is expected to govern moderately as he reaches those stages, according to a Produce Marketing Association representative.

Richard Owen, the Legislative and Regulatory Affairs Team Lead at PMA, told FreshFruitPortal.com that he believes Biden will “govern towards the middle, but will receive pressure from the progressive side of the party, so he will face challenges as he governs”.

He will have many pressing matters domestically, starting with the pandemic, that will likely occupy his attention early in the administration.

Issues regarding trade, labor and immigration policy will also be a focus, but most likely key decisions will be made after the first 100 days.

“It’s an overall comment that the Biden administration has made it clear that they are going to focus first on domestic issues, I would say for the first six to eight months,” Owen said.

However, soon Biden will have decisions to make about where to go with certain trade agreements such as the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Program (RCEP).

The question is whether the Biden administration has an interest or willingness to be a part of these agreements and how quickly he will decide.

“I think it’s a long shot for the U.S. to join the RCEP anytime soon, as the administration is getting some pressure to join. It’s certainly something that needs to be watched because the agreement will increase the power of the Asia-Pacific trade block,” Owen said.

He also believes the administration will try to reduce or eliminate the recent tariffs imposed by the EU, but may see difficulties as the EU will be so consumed with Brexit that they may have a hard time dealing with another major trade agreement with the U.S.

Regarding the USMCA, Owen sees a strengthening of the relationship between the three countries.

Concerning the case of labor and immigration, there is a “recognition of continued reforms that need to be made with providing a regular workforce into the U.S. [...] so there certainly will be a push from ag sectors for revisions to the H2A”, Owen commented.

Because it is a Democratic administration, Owen thinks that organized labor will have a larger seat at the table in the treatment of workers, workers' rights and fair wages.

Another issue on trade in the U.S. is a provision called Fast Track Authority or Trade Promotion Authority (FTA). It is a provision reauthorized by Congress roughly every five years and gives the administration the ability to negotiate trade agreements solo.

Under the FTA, Congress can only approve or disapprove the agreement reached, they cannot make changes to the agreement.

The authority ends in June 2021, and if it expires and isn't reauthorized, it will most likely make it difficult to negotiate with trade partners.

When it comes to trade policy, however, Owen believes Biden won't go it alone and instead will work with allies around the world to hold countries accountable, address certain issues and collaborate on other issues such as climate change.

"It has become pretty clear that one of the important issues across the board for Biden is on climate change, they have proposed a sort of roadmap to address climate issues called [Climate 21](#)," Owen said.

"I see reducing the carbon footprint of agriculture being a priority for the administration and I think in the future there could be funding and mandatory programs put in place," Owen said.

"I think one of the opportunities for production agriculture is to engage with the new administration," he said.

"You don't want to be left out of negotiating what's the best solution for your part of agriculture while things move forward at a pretty quick pace," he said.

Starting conversations about environmental benefits and best practices that are already in place could be beneficial moving forward and addressing a starting point.

Just how important is control of the Senate?

The Senate, one of the two chambers in the U.S. Congress, has to approve all the president's major political appointments for them to get authorization.

In order to determine which party will control the Senate, a special election will take place

on Jan. 5 2021.

“The best hope at this point is that the Democrats would pick up two seats in Georgia of which then it’s 50/50 and then the Vice President would cast the deciding vote,” he said.

If that happens, the Democrats would have more power to move forward quickly with their proposals on topics including climate, labor issues, environmental issues, stimulus funding and so on.

If there is a Republican majority in the Senate, there will need to be more moderate candidates that move through for them to be approved.

“Even if it’s closely divided, but with the Republican having a majority that means a lot more compromise and that the president-elect has to choose the issues that are a priority for him to get through a Republican Senate.”

He also may not be able to move as quickly or as far on some of his proposals as he would like,” Owen said.

Biden has previously served in the Senate and has relationships with senators from both parties from being there for many years. “He knows how it works,” Owen said.

“The bottom line is that senate control is pretty consequential for the Biden administration to move forward at the pace that they would like to once they take office,” Owen said.