

For Immediate Release

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CALIFORNIA TOMATO FARMERS AWARDED NEARLY ONE MILLION DOLLARS FOR EXPORT MARKET DEVELOPMENT

FRESNO, CALIFORNIA (March 16, 2009) – California Tomato Farmers will promote the goodness of California fresh tomatoes in Canada and Mexico this summer, after receiving \$940 thousand dollars in Market Access Program (MAP) funding as administered by the United States Department of Food and Agriculture (USDA).

“We believe our export programs in Canada and Mexico offer the best examples of how growers can leverage government funds to successfully grow export demand, even when faced with strong competition from domestic producers in those countries,” California Tomato Farmers President Ed Beckman said.

The importance of the government funding was documented in 2008, when the tomato industry was subject to numerous media reports linking fresh tomato consumption to a widespread salmonella outbreak that was later linked to peppers from Mexico. “Sales to Canada declined dramatically due to the outbreak, with retailers removing tomatoes from store shelves,” said Beckman, “We invested \$250,000 in MAP funds in support of radio and newspaper campaigns to promote our fresh tomatoes in Western Canada and by October sales increased dramatically.”

The USDA Market Access Program provides funds to promote U.S. grown products in foreign markets under stringent regulations that govern how the funds can be used. California Tomato Farmers invests \$0.75 for each \$1.00 in funding received. For 2008, the organization’s total export marketing budget topped \$800,000.

In making their awards for the next fiscal year beginning in July, USDA announced that the average recipient would witness an 8% reduction in funds. California Tomato Farmers fared better. The \$940 thousand dollar award is only 4% below that received in the previous year.

The California Tomato Farmers cooperative was established in 2006 and began its export market development programs in 2007. California Tomato Farmers and the Florida Tomato Committee share the USDA grant award that’s made to USA Tomatoes – the joint promotional program of the two groups.