

New Texas truck inspection policy prompts protests, delays

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott wants state officials to inspect each truck, and drivers are backed up for miles with trucks full of



A member of the Mexican national guard speaks with Mexican truck drivers as they block the bridge connecting Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, with El Paso, Texas, on April 11. (Jose Luis

A new Texas policy to have state officials inspect every truck entering from Mexico has prompted a massive protest among drivers, backing up cargo for miles and leaving loads of fruit, vegetables and other material sitting idle for days.

Freight operators are panicking about the ramifications of the delays, as much of the United States' produce this time of year is imported from Mexico. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott (R) last week said the "enhanced safety inspections" of all commercial vehicles were necessary because he alleged federal officials were not stopping drugs and criminals from entering the United States. Now, trucking officials say, little is entering the country at all.

"This isn't a regional issue, or that the city of Laredo is not getting their produce at grocery stores," said John Esparza, president of the Texas Trucking Association. "We are seeing delays that will be felt across the country. There are a half a dozen divisions of trucking [affected]. There's the refrigerated segment of trucking, there's household goods, forestry, fuel tankers, commodities for trade goods — this is about General Motors, Ford and everything coming out of Mexico, our trade partner."

[Texas will bus migrants to the nation's capital, Abbott says](#)

Strawberries, asparagus, avocados, tomatoes and other

spring favorites are sitting in lines of refrigerated trucks many miles long as growers and shippers scramble to reroute and grocers hustle to find products from elsewhere to avoid empty shelves.

Abbott last week moved to impose new border restrictions, alleging that the Biden administration had “open-border policies” that “paved the way for dangerous cartels and deadly drugs to pour into the United States.”

He said Texas “will immediately begin taking unprecedented action to do what no state has done in American history to secure our border,” which means each truck will be inspected by the Texas Department of Public Safety for human trafficking, weapons, drugs and other contraband.

The [governor's plan](#) to have state officials scrutinize each truck means that up to 80 percent of perishable fruits and vegetables have been unable to cross since Friday, said Lance Jungmeyer, president of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas.

This is causing losses of millions of dollars a day for employers and employees who have been idled, he said, with customers unable to load product from their Texas suppliers. It also means transportation shortages are increasing as available trucks are stuck waiting in line to cross the border, all of which will continue to drive up the price of produce at

American grocery stores.

[*Biden accuses Abbott of 'government overreach' for investigating parents of children transitioning genders*](#)

"These trucks are already inspected by Customs and Border Protection — scanned and X-rayed and drug-dog sniffed," Jungmeyer said. "These new inspections are redundant. At numerous ports of entry, Laredo, Pharr, Eagle Pass and others, Mexican drivers are starting to protest."

Abbott's office did not respond to requests for comment on Tuesday.

The line for trucks to cross at the Pharr bridge has been reported at up to 7 or 8 miles long, said Rod Sbragia, vice chair of the Fresh Produce Association of the Americas and director of sales and marketing for Tricar Sales, a grower and shipper of Mexican produce. He said somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 trucks stand nose to tail waiting for entry. Refrigerated trucks, he said, have about six or seven days of fuel to run their refrigeration units. After that, spoilage is certain.



Trucks line up to be inspected at the Zaragoza International Bridge in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, on April 12. (Luis Torres/EPA-EFE/Shutterstock)

Sbragia said that nothing has crossed the border into Texas for the past three days and that trucks are packed so tight there's no way of getting out of line so they can reroute. He says many workers in Texas are not being paid right now because there is no product to work with and no trucks to load and unload.

"We have about \$200,000 to \$300,000 of produce waiting in line right now," he said. "And we're just one shipper. There are hundreds like me. Millions of dollars' worth of product sitting on trucks that may end up being spoiled."

The situation is fluid, said Laura Garza, a logistics specialist for K&K International Logistics, customs brokers in charge of traffic operations for Texas. But for now, she said, Mexican truckers have, in protest, blocked traffic going northbound or southbound on the Pharr Bridge, the No. 1 bridge for imports of produce in the U.S., leading to and from Reynosa, Mexico, which usually sees around 2,000 truck crossings per day. Nor is traffic moving in the northbound direction of the Free Trade Bridge at Los Indios, an international border crossing located eight miles south of Harlingen and San Benito.

[*The ban on avocados from Mexico could be bruising, the longer it goes on*](#)

"The transport companies are saying, 'If this lasts 30 days, we can last 30 days in protest, as well.' You're going to lose contracts and crops. Why affect trade this way? It doesn't make any sense. Border communities depend on trade," she said.

Matt Mandel is the vice president of finance for his family's company, which grows and ships Mexican fruits and vegetables. He heard about the new inspections on Friday. Heading out of town, he hoped it would blow over by the end of the weekend.

"But the issues have gotten worse, and the consequences have compounded," he said. "And I don't see an easy solution

to alleviate the logjam we find ourselves in.”

His company sells 60 percent of its produce in Boston, New York, Philadelphia and elsewhere in the Northeast. The rest goes to Canada. He had three trucks that were supposed to go out Friday and it is unclear, he said, when they might reach their final destination.

“We won’t know if we have losses until this product makes it all the way through the supply chain. When I have my name on an eggplant and it ends up looking and tasting like crap, that’s what people remember,” he said. “Ultimately there will be spoilage and higher costs for everyone involved. It’s literally just partisan politics.”