Improved Orchard Recycling Practices, Grants Help Growers Transition to New Plantings

By Brian Milne, Vice President, Director of Marketing & Communications, The Holloway Group

Drive down the I-5 or Highway 99 these days, and you’re sure to see a few old, unproductive almond orchards looking the worse for wear.

That’s because from 1997 to 2002, California planted an average of 22,765 acres of almonds a year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service, as the almond industry quickly grew to become the state’s top specialty crop by 2011. By comparison, new almond acreage was down to its lowest totals in two decades the past two years, with 19,873 acres planted in 2020 and just 14,998 planted in 2021.

That growth in plantings at the turn of the century, along with record production numbers for half those seasons, amounted to more than 182,000 additional acres of almonds going in during the six-year span, many of which are now (a quarter of a century later) coming out of production—if they haven’t already been removed.

An almond orchard typically has a lifespan of about 20 to 25 years, and the Almond Board of California now projects about 30,000-40,000 acres of almonds will be coming out of production annually over the next decade. And with fire being phased out in the San Joaquin Valley by Jan. 1, 2025, and permits and burn days becoming harder to come by, farming operations have few options for disposing of old fruit or nut trees. That leaves growers in a tough position, not only having to pay for the removal and chipping/grinding of old trees, but also cover the costs of having the shredded material hauled off—during a time when diesel prices are soaring to record highs.

Grants for WOR

Fortunately, there are grant programs and improved GROWERS TRANSITION TO NEW PLANTINGS on page 9.

Avian Quarantine in California

By Audrey Hill, Feature Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

On February 23, 2022, the California State Veterinarian Annette B. Jones D.M.V. imposed a poultry quarantine and state entry requirements due to an outbreak of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI) in the U.S. The first cases were seen in South Carolina in January and have since spread throughout the U.S.; however, California has remained clear thus far. Over 40 million birds have been affected across 37 states and cases are still being reported every month. 199 reported cases have been from “backyard flocks” and 186 have been from commercial operations.

Poultry entering California must receive a permit if coming from a HPAI control area, however this restriction only applies to poultry from HPAI control areas or areas suspected of having the virus. Currently, (updated July 8, 2022) the HPAI control areas are Weld, CO, Carson City, NV, Lancaster, PA, and King, WA. States with active HPAI in domestic poultry are Colorado, Maine, Oregon, Washington, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Nevada. The CDEA Avian Influenza alert page will continue updating these control areas and active virus states.

Fortunately, the strict regulations and quarantine currently imposed in California is helping the state to stay free of HPAI. Although no cases have been identified since the start of the outbreak, precaution is highly advised. In a video found on the YouTube channel CDEA TV and the CDEA Avian Influenza website page, Dr. Annette B. Jones discusses means of prevention and reporting at home. Common signs of avian influenza are lethargic birds, decreased food and/or water intake, and sudden death. It is strongly recommended to notify a local veterinarian or call the CDEA Sick Bird Hotline: (866) 922-BIRD if any of these signs are seen. It should be noted that humans can but rarely contract avian influenza.

Dr. Jones states that wild birds are major carriers of avian influenza and separating personal flocks from wild is the best form of prevention at home. Larger producers such as Central Valley Eggs are taking the threats of waterfowl like ducks and geese very seriously and are on high alert during the Spring migration, which tends to bring in the most diseases. By removing spilled feed and stagnant water, or moving flocks away from the water, bird owners can help limit interactions with contagious wild birds. Limiting visitors and wearing clean attire can also be helpful as the virus can live on hands, boots, and equipment. It is times like these where everyday biosecurity measures can make or break an operation.

Lessons to Be Learned From Frogs in Mississippi

By Scott Hamilton

President, Hamilton Resource Economics

You may think that your orchard or vineyard is not a habitat for endangered species. But the US Fish and Wildlife Service (the Service) has the discretion and authority to deem it so under a recent regulatory rule change by the Biden administration. That should be a source of concern and a call to action.

The issue is born in the Endangered Species Act (the Act). Loss of habitat is the primary reason many species become imperiled. The purpose of the Act, as specified by Congress, is “to provide a means whereby the ecosystems upon which endangered species and threatened species depend may be conserved.” In that sense, the Act might be better titled the Ecosystem Preservation Act, restoring emphasis to ecosystem preservation rather than species’ preservation—a conundrum the Service faces when trying to protect the San Joaquin kit fox that prey on Tipton Kangaroo Rats—both of which are listed under the Act.

Lessons to Be Learned From Frogs on page 4
President’s Message
By Patty Poire
President, Kern County Farm Bureau

Here we are in August, and July went out with a roar! You might ask why a roar? Well, it is because of the Department of Water Resources (DWR), Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) deadline of July 27th. DWR issued a determination letter of an incomplete status back on January 28, 2022, with three deficiencies indicated in their review and determination. Since then, the Kern subbasin Groundwater Sustainable Authorities (GSA) have worked to collaborate and coordinate the response to DWR. Now that the submittal has been completed, DWR has stated that they will be reviewing then providing their final decision by the end of 2022. As I have mentioned in previous articles, that decision could end up of having the Kern subbasin going into a probationary status, which means the State Water Board steps in and begins its oversight and review. As a farmer, you want to have DWR come back and provide a complete status and have the basin move forward with the implementation of SGMA at the local level. You don’t want the state!

And if that isn’t enough to get you excited, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has proposed that businesses begin disclosing their “climate-related risks” by tracking greenhouse gas emissions throughout their supply chain. In the United States, the food supply chain is largely made up of all sizes of farms, small, medium, and large, that send their products to processors or directly to market. According to Pacific Research Institute, Wayne Winegarden, senior fellow in Business and Economics, wrote in a filling to the SEC that the proposed rule would “mandate unachievable reporting requirements, (impose) costly new burdens on companies and (provide) information dubious of value to investors.” As a farmer of any size, providing your “climate-related risks” would be subjective as well as objective and to what level would be required and would you be held accountable for the disclosure? No one knows yet! Is the SEC stepping beyond its expertise and expanding its mission beyond what has been placed on it by legislation? One begins to wonder.

Now that I have your attention even more, the California Department of Pesticide (DPR) held several workshops to present their proposal on a statewide notification system and to seek input from the public and the agricultural industry. The state’s proposal would create a system where a user would input a California address and receive notifications 24 hours in advance of any restricted material products (pesticides) used within a 9-mile radius. The notification would not include the exact address of the application, but would identify if it occurred within one mile of the user’s address. It sounds like a useful notification until you realize that it will more than likely trigger more instances of use challenges through appeals and protest/resisting incidents. And apparently at the workshops held by DPR, which were well attended, that comments from the agricultural industry were met with hostility and attacks from anti-pesticide advocates. This doesn’t come as a surprise since anti-pesticide advocates have become more and more vocal of their desire to end the use of pesticides, as was on display at one of the Kern County Supervisor Board meetings. They proceeded to explain that the local Kern County farmers have a history of violations which is not the case. To be exact, Kern County farmers have the least number of violations. This type of behavior has just recently been given a tag name—called “conflict entrepreneurs.” It is defined as a person who profits, who makes a living, by sowing discord of behavior has just recently been given a tag name—called “conflict entrepreneurs.” It is defined as a person who profits, who makes a living, by sowing discord.

I should end with at least some good news, so the Friant Division of the Federal Bureau of Reclamation announced on Friday, July 8, that they are increasing the 2022 water allocation for Class 1 contractors from 13% to 20%. They even stated that they are optimistic that there may be an opportunity to increase the Class 1 allocation to 30%, if no additional water in Milberton Lake is required by the Exchange Contractors.

As I have stated in previous articles, the California farmer is on display and being challenged in so many ways, however, the Kern County Farm Bureau will continue the fight and works towards the betterment of you, the California farmer.

Executive Director’s Report
By Romeo Agbalog, Executive Director, Kern County Farm Bureau

August is the height of summer, and your local Farm Bureau is peaking with activity. Recently, your Farm Bureau spoke up and shared its concerns regarding the state’s “Regions Rise Together” initiative to both the Governor and Speaker of the Assembly. We have been closely following the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) and its process of developing a Statewide Pesticide Application Notification System, including engagement at public workshops, and submitting formal comments to DPR expressing concerns.

Your Farm Bureau sub-committees are humming with activity as well, with the activation of the Political Committee which is tasked with identifying key local, state, and federal races and interviewing candidates for these offices to determine which will be agriculture’s strongest advocates and earn the coveted Farm Bureau endorsement. Of course, the Bounty of Kern County Committee continues its work planning and preparing for Kern’s premier Farm to Fork event of the year slated for Saturday, October 8th. Also, right around the corner is our Save Water, Drink Beer event planned by our Education and Outreach Committee to be held on Thursday, August 11th at Temblor Brewing in Bakersfield. Should you have any questions about any of these events or would like to attend, please call us at 661-397-9635 or email KCF@KernCFB.com.

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not mention a few past events and the hard work of the volunteers and supporters who make them happen. First, special thanks to Pam Brunni for her work on this year’s Teachers Ag Seminar that concluded and the end of July. Pam is a familiar face and the rudder behind Farm Bureau’s Farm Day in the City, but her work with Teachers Ag Seminar is invaluable insights and knowledge to local area educators about the agriculture industry and its value to the community and beyond that can be shared with students in classrooms across the county. Also, congratulations to Kern’s Young Farmer’s and Ranchers for holding another successful farmers market at Norris Middle School that showcased a variety for fresh fruits and vegetables from local area farms and sharing proceeds to help Bakersfield’s Edible Schoolyard program. Lastly in the spirit of advocating, educating, and promoting local agriculture agriculture Farm Bureau Board President Patty Poire served as a guest speaker at the Kern County Hispanic Chamber of Commerce’s Governmental Review Council meeting as well as guest speaker at Teachers Ag Seminar banquet. Farm Bureau officers serve on a volunteer basis, so I appreciate very much the time and effort they provide to promote the Kern County Farm Bureau and local area agriculture.

Young Farmers & Ranchers

By Timothy Collins
Chair, Kern County Young Farmers & Ranchers

This summer I took a day hike up in the San Emigdio Mountains, which form the south end of our San Joaquin Valley. From up in the rugged terrain, the clearings in the trees give way to breathtaking views of the great valley below me. The green fields spread out like a patchwork quilt of what is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the entire world, but it was not always so. The valley has changed drastically over the past couple hundred years and continues to change today.

I hiked down a trail not far from the El Camino Viejo—used by the Spanish in the 18th and 19th centuries as an inland alternative to the coastal El Camino Real. While looking out over the valley, I thought of what those who hiked down the mountains 200 years ago had looked at. Instead of patchwork fields, the San Joaquin was a largely unsettled flatland with marshes and lakes. I doubt they could have imagined that in the 21st century we would be growing over 250 different crops and yielding a third of all the produce grown in the United States. Just what will the San Joaquin Valley be in another 200 years? There are many challenges to the ag industry here today, from water shortages to suburban sprawl, and all of us play a part in what the future will hold.

In June, I attended the California Ag Teachers Association State Conference held in San Luis Obispo. Teachers from across the state are divided into six regions, mine being the San Joaquin Region. We are the group that is training up the next generation of the ag industry in the San Joaquin Valley. What direction the ag industry goes in this valley tomorrow will be determined by those kids in school today. If you are in the ag industry, be sure to connect with and support ag programs at the high school and college level. There is always more room for real local industry experience in the classroom.

Those who began settling the San Joaquin valley over 200 years ago and their descendants have created a vast agricultural powerhouse. Us Young Farmers and Ranchers today will be the ones to shape the future of the valley. Our goal, I believe, is that when anyone looks out over the valley 200 years from now they will see an even greater agricultural region that continues to feed the world by the ability to innovate and overcome challenges, such as those we face in our lifetime.

Email: KernYFRAKernCFB.com
Instagram: @Kern_YFRA
Facebook: KernYoungFarmersAndRanchers

Save Water, Drink Beer this August 11th (Photo: Temblor Brewing)
Potential Merger Is Good News for Central Valley Table Grape Growers

By Melissa Nagel, Feature Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

In a deal announced earlier this year, Special New Fruit Licensing (SNFL)—a global leader in table grape breeding and development—announced plans to combine with International Fruit Genetics (IFG). The transaction, which is currently under regulatory review, will bring IFG’s and SNFL’s industry-leading research and development, along with its breeding programs together, creating new opportunities for innovation and expanded market access for California’s table grape growers.

SNFL has had a close relationship with California’s table grape growers for more than two decades and is well-respected within the industry for its breeding program focused on health benefits, disease tolerance, and other important grower traits for common table grape varieties. California-based IFG has spent the last 20 years developing its own impressive breeding program, focused on consumer traits and flavor, which has led to the development of new and unique flavored varieties, such as cotton candy grapes, that have become popular with consumers across the U.S.

As it is becoming more important to growers to track new investment in research and development following the merger, will lead to additional table grapes on the shelf at grocery stores and expand consumer access to the huge benefits and both companies have stressed the need to continue investment in research and development following the merger. This union will catapult the Central Valley towards deeper industry expertise, improving new varieties.

“The merger will allow the growing field for California table grape growers looking to grow new varieties,” said Jack Campbell of Four Star Fruit. “Now more than ever, we need to invest in advancing our industry and develop disease-resistant grapes that are high in antioxidants, expand unique flavors, and give our consumers access to healthy, high-quality fruit.”

For consumers, the companies say the increased investment in research and development following the merger will allow the growing field for California table grape growers looking to grow new varieties, adding to the ranks of thousands that have become victims of this crime in Kern County. The absurd story of the catalytic converter and California policy makes one of today’s most prevalent crimes even more frustrating. Government has gotten so big that at all levels there are bureaucrats mired in minutia and almost all of them can’t step back and look at the macro view of their policy, and with California leading the league in bloated government, there are plenty of examples of policy inconsistencies. Although California has plenty of mistakes, many more egregious than this, the catalytic converter gives a snapshot of California’s governing incompetence.

In the mid-1970s California required all new vehicles to be equipped with a catalytic converter. As a pioneer in burdening its citizens with regulation, California was the first to institute this tail pipe scrubber. Due to the number of vehicles sold in California, auto manufacturers eventually began equipping all vehicles for the U.S. market with catalytic converters, allowing the rest of the nation to share in the cost and burden of smog checks on vehicles to make sure they were equipped with a catalytic converter and conformed to state standards for vehicle owners to use their vehicles on public roads. Although government took credit for cleaning up vehicle emissions through mandates, these edicts did little to improve air quality. As is usually the case with everything, economics created the biggest cleanup of vehicle emissions. Rising fuel prices spurred the private sector to innovate creating electronic fuel injection and more advanced tuning, and the economic goal of burning less fuel had the largest effect in emission reductions, but government mandates don’t shrink.

Fast forward to modern day where the world has embraced California’s love for regulation and almost every vehicle on the entire planet is equipped with catalytic converters. The crucial components of catalytic converters require platinum, palladium, and rhodium, some of the most scarce and precious metals on earth. In a sane world, a government body that requires a scarce mineral material to permit your vehicle to travel the public roads would simultaneously loosen mining restrictions to increase the amount of said required mineral material. Not in California. In fact, after requiring vehicles to include this mined material, California has plenty of missteps, many more egregious than this, the catalytic converter gives a snapshot of California’s governing incompetence.
Enter the case of the dusky gopher frog which once lived throughout coastal Alabama, Louisiana, and Mississippi, in the pine forests that covered much of the southeast. More than 98% of those forests have been removed to make way for urban development, agriculture, and timber plantations. Timber plantations, in this scenario, are not unlike orchards—they changed the landscape in a way that made it uninhabitable for the frogs. The humble frog, or at least its legal case, made it to the Supreme Court because the Service included 1500 acres of plantation in its critical habitat designation, not because the plantation was habitat, nor had been for decades, but because the Secretary of the Interior is permitted to include in the definition of critical habitat areas that are not occupied but are essential to the conservation of the species. The Service saw the existing available habitat for the frog as insufficient to preserve the species and so included land that could be restored to habitat. The Supreme Court disagreed with the designation, essentially saying that if land is not currently habitat, it cannot be critical habitat. What the Service could have done is purchased the ephemeral ponds in the plantation that are so essential to the frog, and the surrounding land, restored the habitat, and then modified their critical habitat designation. By designating the whole 1500 acres of the plantation as critical habitat, which in its entirety cannot be degraded under the Act, the Service substantially reduced the value of the property to its owners.

Under the Biden Administration, the Services reaction to the Supreme Court ruling is to take a broad and discretionary approach to determining what is or could be habitat, so that critical habitat is now within the designated area of habitat, even if it is unoccupied or never has been. Landowners must now rely on the reasonableness of Service line staff to ensure property values are not eroded unnecessarily. That may give certain landowners little comfort given that the Service is overwhelmed by new listings and is trying to anticipate protections in the future given climate change and wildfires without much science on which to support their decisions. One solution would be to amend the Endangered Species Act, but even attempts to modify the Act in relatively minor ways have failed over the past 30 years.

There is another solution, but it is not an easy one. It recognizes the intent of the Act to preserve ecosystems. The different types and extent of ecosystems that once existed in the San Joaquin Valley are well documented. They include grasslands, seasonal wetlands, riparian associations, and woodlands. The federal Endangered Species Act has a provision for Habitat Conservation Plans (HCPs) and the State has a counterpart in Natural Community Conservation Plans (NCCPs). By preserving enough habitats to protect listed and other desired species, the need to take private property or to continually obtain permits to conduct otherwise lawful activities, such as cleaning stream beds to prevent flooding, is significantly diminished. The development of NCCPs in California was as the burden of getting them permitted has increased. Some have suggested their lack of use has been due to the creation of arbitrary and unreasonable bureaucratic demands and hurdles. But the potential benefit of such plans could be enormous. The opportunity to develop such plans has been enhanced recently because the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act is likely to force hundreds of thousands of acres of farmland out of production and the State government is making tens of millions of dollars available to facilitate just such land retirement. Strategic retirement of land to facilitate ecosystem restoration in conjunction with the development of HCPs and NCCPs would protect those ecosystems for future generations, prevent future listings, and protect landowners from unreasonable regulations. But currently, such a comprehensive plan is lacking.

Lessons to Be Learned From Frogs
Continued from PAGE 1
Driverless Tractor Future May Be Arriving

By Kevin Hecteman
Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

This is not your grandfather’s Farmall tractor—because this new-age machine makes its way up and down an orchard or vineyard seemingly all by itself, carrying out multiple tasks with no human required.

As technology advances, autonomous tractors are becoming more attractive to farmers looking to keep their fields productive amid chronic labor shortages. Besides offering driverless tractors, some companies can retrofit existing machines to operate autonomously. Connor Kingman runs one such outfit in Lemoore; his autonomous gear can be installed on a variety of makes and models.

“Nobody has to be out in the field in a van or anything, or out there monitoring it,” Kingman said. “It runs 24 hours a day, only stopping for fuel.” So far, a Kingman driverless tractor is found only in vineyards. But there, it’s capable of “everything,” Kingman said—“it will disk, it will mow, spray.”

A farmer can monitor its performance through a smartphone app or an office computer, he added; if the tractor encounters an obstruction, it will stop and send an alert to the farmer, who can then check a live video feed or head to the field to investigate.

Customers tell Kingman the technology allows them to use fewer machines.

“We’ve got one ranch where there’s just one tractor, and it’s single-handedly managing about 1,000 acres of grapes,” he said. “For the farmer, that’s not only an incredible amount of labor savings, but it’s an incredible amount of capital savings, because typically you’d have five, six tractors. Now you’re just running one, 24 hours a day, stopping just for fuel.”

There may be other benefits as well for applications of crop-protection materials.

“Taking humans out of the equation and being able to spray without worker exposure is not only a huge benefit of the cost but also in terms of safety,” Kingman said.

Blue White Robotics is also making a play for the driverless market. Alon Ascher, Blue White’s chief business officer, said a field team spends time with farmers once the equipment is installed, helping them master the learning curve. Depending on the farm, one operator can oversee anywhere from four to 12 tractors, he added.

“Every crop, farm, equipment and operation is different and requires different approach and attention,” Ascher said. “We see firsthand what are the needs, make sure performance and safety is adequate, and can provide additional solutions, from local communication networks to smart implements, if needed.”

To Ascher, the goal is to help “farmers maximize saving on labor, equipment, input usage, maintenance, communication and energy at the same time, with data-driven and precise operation.”

He said the tractor is just one aspect of a 21st century sustainable farm featuring ground and air autonomous vehicles, clean energy and fast communication.

Some makers of tractors that still require human drivers are now changing up the means of propulsion. Mani Iyer, chief executive of Solectrac, has two electric tractors: a 25-horsepower version on the market and a 70-hp model in testing for orchard, winery and vineyard work. It is expected to be available in 2023.

“Almost 80% of the tractor industry is 100-horsepower and below,” Iyer said. “Our aim is to reach that category.”

While the purchase price can be 25% to 30% more than a comparable diesel model, going electric pays for itself in the long run, Iyer said.

“The charging cost is 1/10th the fuel cost,” Iyer said. “With one moving part against 300-plus moving parts of diesel—no oil, no fuel—maintenance is fairly low,” Iyer said.

Mike Haney, a Yolo County farm manager, has been using a 25-hp Solectrac machine since December. So far, he’s satisfied.

“We have a lot of fruit trees that I just planted,” Haney said. “Running the compost and things like that, it works really nice.”

One thing Haney appreciates most is the $0 fuel bill since “diesel’s so crazy high.” He’s not even spending money to charge it, as the farm has solar power.

One roadblock to widespread autonomous adoption in California is a state regulation mandating that “all self-propelled equipment shall, when under its own power and in motion, have an operator stationed nearby.”

As technology advances, autonomous tractors are being developed as a means of dealing with labor shortages. The driverless vehicles can also apply crop-protection materials without exposure to workers. (Photo: Blue White Robotics)

Avian Quarantine in California

By Dann Snyder
Complex Manager for Central Valley Eggs

Continued from PAGE 1

commercial farm has the potential to kill many birds. Keeping them safe from infection means the difference between producing normally and starting new flocks completely. Once avian influenza has reached a farm, the state and federal governments must be notified, and the farm must be “depopulated”—truly, the worst loss to any animal production facility.

For now, California remains in the clear with HPAI and there is hope that it will remain that way. Cases seem to be dying down; however, a single case can change the fate of many. It is important that individual bird owners and commercial operations stay on high alert. Thank you to all who have worked so diligently to keep California HPAI free.

Videos, infographics, and updates on the virus can be found at the CDFA Avian Influenza website and is a major source of information for this article.
Improved Wheat Market Has Farmers Eyeing Fall Planting

By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with Permission from California Farm Bureau Federation

After years of languishing prices, the mercurial rise of the wheat market this year may inspire more plantings in the fall, but don’t expect California growers to go gangbusters on the grain.

Wheat harvest is mostly wrapping up in the state, with farmers on track to deliver 80,000 acres of winter wheat, the same amount as last year, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s June forecast. California farmers were also expected to harvest 24,000 acres of durum wheat, an increase of 4,000 acres from 2021.

Despite record-setting prices for wheat, many farmers contracted their crop before the surge and locked in prices that were “way lower,” said Claudia Carter, executive director of the California Wheat Commission. Though prices have moderated in recent weeks, farmers could take advantage of the overall strength in the market by locking in prices for next year’s crop, she added.

“The positive side is that for next year, we could see much higher wheat being harvested and ‘way higher prices’—not significantly more, but slightly more than this year because the prices are still OK,” she said. “But things can change.”

After years of languishing prices, the mercurial rise of wheat prices have moderated in recent weeks, farmers could take advantage of the overall strength in the market by locking in prices for next year’s crop, the added.

Farmers are facing a lot of challenges right now—weather conditions, production costs. Farmers who grow dryland wheat saw yield reductions.

Much rain last fall led to unfavorable planting conditions, causing delays, oversaturated fields and lost plantings. Dry conditions during the growing season then forced some growers to irrigate the crop, increasing production costs. Farmers who grow dryland wheat saw yield reductions.

Yolo County grower Larry Hunn described a “frustrating” season in which he had to “muck” in the crop after storms that flooded his fields and killed his plantings. He replanted some of it in January, which he said he had never done before.

Because of the late planting, his harvest is also late; he expects to finish sometime next week. He described yields so far as average to below average. He blamed much of it on weather conditions and his late start in irrigating the crop, as “we were all hoping and praying to get some rain.”

Because he presold most of his crop last year, Hunn said he missed out on “the super-duper prices that maybe some of the guys got when this Ukraine war started.”

Even so, he said, his contracted price is much higher than what it had been in the past three to four years.

“This totally turned around in the last 12 months,” Hunn said. “Who would have known that Putin would invade Ukraine? You couldn’t have bet on that.”

Hunn said he assumes wheat prices will hold strong through next spring, though “maybe not as high as we saw.” He said he also expects more wheat will be planted in California this fall. His concern, he said, is with Russia dumping wheat on the world market, causing a potential market crash. He noted the price of corn and wheat already is “settling out a little bit.”

Because where he farms is susceptible to seepage from the Sacramento River that could wreck yields, Sacramento County farmer John Perry said he wouldn’t pre-distribute his crop until April. This year, that strategy paid off—big time. He said he sold 30% to 40% of his wheat “almost at the top of the market.”

Perry finished harvest at the end of June. He said he plans to market the rest of his crop on the spot market. Though prices have dropped since April, Perry said they are still “substantially higher than they’ve been in the last 15 to 20 years.”

“If we’d known what the price was going to be, we probably would’ve planted a little bit more,” Perry said.

Even though he had to irrigate his crop twice this year, which he said is unusual, wheat still requires less water than other field crops such as rice and corn. Besides being a good rotational crop, wheat also is “not a real high input crop” compared to tomatoes, rice or corn, all of which use more fertilizer and fuel to run tractors, Perry added.

Looking to 2023, Merwin said he’s “constantly thinking about what’s next year going to look like”—and when to contract his future crop. He noted the price of wheat being offered a few weeks ago stood at $360 a ton, higher than what it was in late April. With conditions not looking good in a few wheat-producing regions and the market seemingly unstable, Merwin said “the chance of it spiking just for a moment is pretty good.”

For Imperial County farmer Ralph Strahm, how much durum wheat he’ll grow this winter will depend on water and how much rain and snow is in the Colorado River watershed. Regardless of the higher price, he said he won’t be growing more wheat than what he grew this year. He said he will also plant some of his less productive ground, as he wants to devote his water and better soils to his cash crops, which are carrots, onions, alfalfa and melons.

Even with rotational crops, Strahm said he has options.

Wheat in his region is usually planted in December and harvested in May. He can plant sudan grass, for example, in April, at which time he will know what his water situation will be.

“It remains to be seen what price it is going to be at and if it’s attractive enough for us to take that price,” he said.
SATURDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2022
Sponsorship & Team Registrations at:
VictoryFS.org/SFV2022

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Victory Family Services supports children and foster families through continuous training, education, and development, because every child deserves Victory.
Worries of Milk Price Drop Weigh on Dairy Farmers

By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

With milk prices reaching record-high levels this year, dairy farmers should be feeling optimistic about the sustainability of current market conditions. But impacts from the ongoing drought and soaring production costs are crimping profit margins and dampening spirits as they navigate a volatile market landscape.

Already, a growing number of market reports indicate higher milk prices have begun to zap demand, with sales of milk and dairy products slipping. “I’ll be honest, being in operation is scary,” said Merced County dairy farmer David Barroso, “just knowing anything else, if milk prices decide to fall.”

In its June report, Rabobank said it expects milk prices to have peaked and will begin to retreat through the rest of the year and into 2023. “However, the decline in prices will be modest,” the bank said.

Several factors have led to the record-setting milk prices. Perhaps the biggest is the decline in national milk production, which has led to tighter supplies. With rising feed costs, dairies are milking fewer cows. A stronger cattle market has also incentivized dairies to raise more bulls for beef rather than dairy replacement heifers, lowering U.S. cow numbers. Kings County dairy farmer Joaquin Contente said.

In California, water restrictions due to the multi-year drought have shortened the supply of feed available to dairies. Contente, who grows most of his own forage crops, said he will need to leave some of his land fallow. He did not plant about 40 acres last year due to water shortages. “That means he has much less feed in reserve.”

With water cutbacks constraining the amount of feed dairy farmers can grow, they must now buy more feed, Tulare County dairy farmer Joey Airoso said. He has had to idle about 18% of his acres this summer due to lack of water.

In his region, water shortages have put “a lot of pressure on everybody in dairy, especially the counties in the south,” which have zero surface-water allocation, he said. Groundwater regulations have also limited how much water farmers there can pump.

“All of people in our area...have ground that you can’t farm, because there’s not enough water to farm it,” Airoso said. “When people can’t farm all the ground, it creates more of a demand for the feed that’s grown locally, such as corn silage, alfalfa.”

He said even though the current milk price is covering his increased costs, that may not be the case for all dairies, particularly those that must buy all or most of their feed.

“All things considered, the margins would be positive,” he said. “When you overlay the water situation over the top, it becomes negative.”

Senate Ag Committee Passes Cattle Legislation in Nearly Unanimous Vote

Press Release Provided by US Cattlemen’s Association

On Wednesday, the U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry considered S. 3870, the Meat and Poultry Special Investigator Act of 2022, and S. 4030, the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act of 2022.

The Committee unanimously passed S. 3870, with amendments offered by Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa. One of those changes, which the U.S. Cattlemen’s Association (USCA) supports, is to ensure that the assigned “Special Investigator” is a senior level U.S. Department of Agriculture career staff and not a political appointee.

After a lengthy debate, including remarks by Senator John Thune (R-SD) and Cory Booker (D-NJ) urging their fellow committee members to close the Product of the U.S.A. loophole and reinstate mandatory country-of-origin labeling, the Committee passed S. 4030.

Both critical pieces of legislation are now eligible for consideration by the full Senate.

USCA President Dr. Brooke Miller issued the following statement:

“USCA is proud to stand with Senators Deb Fischer, Chuck Grassley, Jon Tester, and 17 other Senate cosponsors in support of the Cattle Price Discovery and Transparency Act. This bill is one of the much-needed solutions to an increasingly consolidated meat industry. Studies have shown that, without government intervention, negotiated trade in the U.S. marketplace will fall to zero percent by 2026 in parts of the country. When producers don’t have the ability to negotiate a fair price for their cattle based on current market conditions, it results in a vertically integrated, corporate-controlled beef supply chain. This threatens the livelihoods of producers and the security of our national food system.

“USCA would also like to thank Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow for overseeing today’s business meeting. Senator Stabenow is a strong advocate for a safe, resilient food system for consumers and a fair, competitive marketplace for producers. USCA urges the full Senate to follow the lead of Chairwoman Stabenow, and swiftly pass both of these important pieces of legislation. Once again, a vote against these bills is a vote for the status quo. Our members cannot wait another calf cycle for significant market reform.”
Growers Transition to New Plantings

Continued from PAGE 1  Whole Orchard Recycling practices available for growers to help ease those costs and even improve soil conditions as they transition from aging orchards to new plantings and varieties they hope will remain productive for another 25-30 years.

Over the past couple of years, Whole Orchard Recycling has become eligible for funding via a number of programs, including:
• CDEAs Healthy Soil Incentives Program
• USDA-NRCS Conservation Stewardship Program
• San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District’s Alternative to Agricultural Open Burning Incentive Program

Companies like Holloway have been working with growers to help efficiently remove, stack, grind and reincorporate orchard material into the soil—rather than having it hauled off, or burned to meet the requirements for grant funding.

“Fortunately we’ve been able to help many of our growers successfully apply for those grants, which is great,” said Brian Maxted, CEO of Holloway, an approved Whole Orchard Recycling service provider. “Now, there’s always a cost-benefit analysis that needs to take place, given the different ways to reincorporate woodchips, and different challenges that exist afterward. But it’s certainly something a farmer should consider.”

Maxted said other considerations include determining the appropriate carbon-to-nitrogen ratios to break down material after reincorporation, along with what crop the operation will be moving into.

That’s where working with a trusted provider, and consulting Whole Orchard Recycling data from the Almond Board and UC Davis can help growers navigate some of those decisions.

Additional Benefits of WOR

Reincorporating the wood material not only helps keep the air smoke-free, it prevents having to run more trucks to landfills and biomass power plants, cutting down on emissions.

The Almond Board of California also notes the following benefits of Whole Orchard Recycling:
• achieving zero waste by recycling all orchard material on site
• increasing water-use efficiency
• improving soil water holding capacity

Then there are the operational efficiencies that come with Whole Orchard Recycling, particularly when the material is ground into finer woodchips that are spread back across a new orchard floor in a more uniform fashion.

“The other benefit is it’s a faster, more efficient way to remove an orchard,” said Holloway Ag Operations Manager Alex Parsons, who previously worked as Farm Unit Manager for South Valley Farms in Wasco. “By reincorporating onsite, you can get the material spread out in a matter of days, versus having to haul it all off.”

Improve Soil Health

While cutting down on ag burning is a key benefit to Whole Orchard Recycling, Parsons added the benefits for the soil shouldn’t be overlooked. Reincorporating woodchips or grindings into the soil can increase carbon sequestration, as well as improve soil biological activity, nitrogen and organic matter in the soil.

In aging orchards, it can also be tough to break up soils and make for a homogeneous root zone after dozens of tractor passes each season lead to compaction issues. But during the orchard recycling process, the soils are broken up when the trees and roots are removed and chiseled, and then again during the deep ripping and reincorporation process—when the woodchips are spread back into the soil.

Holloway Vice President of Farm Services Jordan Burt says post-removal, during the deep-ripping phase, is a great time to get soil amendments applied and incorporated deep into the soil profile where the roots of newly planted trees will be established.

“We take a soils-first approach to orchard redevelopment,” Burt said. “We dig soil pits prior to a redevelopment, so we have a better idea of what you have to do to get your ground ready for the next crop.”

“This is your one shot to get it right. So, think about what your soil needs. When can you ever put amendments under your tree? This is your one chance to get nutrients down there for another 20 years.”

Learn more about Holloway’s Whole Orchard Recycling process at: HollowayAg.com/WOR

Holloway managing a whole orchard recycling project in Firebaugh. An excavator removes the trees and then later loads the dried trees into the grinder. (Photo: The Holloway Group)
Rain Bird Agriculture Launches S5 Smart Spacing for Pressure Compensating Heavywall Dripline

The custom dripline product saves water, energy and labor

Press Release Provided by Rain Bird Agriculture

Rain Bird Agriculture, a leading manufacturer and provider of precision irrigation products, recently launched S5 Smart Spacing for Pressure Compensating Heavywall Dripline, the ultimate in smart irrigation for growers of high-value fruit and permanent crops.

Rain Bird’s S5 Pressure Compensating Heavywall Dripline features Smart Spacing, which allows growers to specify repeating patterns of variable spacing between emitters. This helps growers to deliver water directly to the root zone of the plants and not the areas in between. By eliminating unneeded emitters between plants, Smart Spacing can significantly reduce input costs by saving water, energy, labor and fertilizer.

“At Rain Bird Agriculture, we are strongly committed to water conservation and the development of water-efficient products, such as our new S5 Dripline with Smart Spacing,” said Greg Palumbo, Director of Rain Bird Agriculture. “With the ongoing uncertainty regarding water availability in the Western U.S., we feel a great responsibility to provide products that offer meaningful solutions for growers. By eliminating unneeded emitters, Smart Spacing allows growers to conserve water and simultaneously reduce other input costs that are dependent on the irrigation system.”

S5 Dripline uses Rain Bird’s unique GritX™ Emitter, which features a filterless design that prevents clogging by allowing grit to easily pass through the emitter. GritX Emitter Technology features market-leading distribution uniformity, precise and accurate flow rates, and faster recovery time when grit gets into a system.

With a five-year workmanship and seven-year environmental stress-cracking warranty, S5 Dripline is recommended for use on almonds, apples, avocados, pecans, pistachios, walnuts and more. S5 Dripline can be purchased from authorized Rain Bird Agriculture dealers.

To learn more about Rain Bird Agriculture and its portfolio of precision irrigation products, visit RainBirdAg.com or call 1-800-Hello-AG.

About Rain Bird Corporation

Based in Azusa, Calif., Rain Bird Corporation is the world’s leading manufacturer and provider of irrigation products and services. Since its beginnings in 1933, Rain Bird has offered the industry’s broadest range of irrigation products for farms, golf courses, sports arenas, commercial developments and homes in more than 130 countries around the globe. Rain Bird has been awarded more than 350 patents worldwide, including the first in 1935 for the impact sprinkler. Rain Bird and The Intelligent Use of Water™ are among six registered trademarks.

Rain Bird maintains state-of-the-art manufacturing assembly facilities in the United States, China and Mexico. RainBird.com/Agriculture
Statement on the Bureau of Reclamation’s Updated 2022 Water Supply Allocation for the Friant Division

On July 8th, the Bureau of Reclamation increased the 2022 water allocation for Friant Division Class 1 contractors from 15% to 20%. As in the prior two years, Friant Division Class 2 contractors did not receive an allocation, which continues to reflect that the hydrology for the 2022 water year is very dry. The increase in the Class 1 allocation is a welcome change, especially given other challenging conditions in the Friant Division, such as the deliveries of water supplies from Millerton Lake to the San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors that began on April 1. As those deliveries ramp down, it increases our certainty that the remaining water in Millerton Lake can be allocated to the Friant Contractors. Based on current reservoir levels and forecasts, it appears that there may be an opportunity to increase the Class 1 allocation to 30% if no additional water in Millerton is required by the Exchange Contractors. FWA is optimistic that today’s revised allocation is the first step towards achieving that number.

DWR Releases Draft Environmental Impact Report for Future Drought Salinity Barriers

In an effort to better prepare for future drought conditions in the face of climate change, the California Department of Water Resources (DWR) on July 11th released a draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) analyzing potential construction effects of future drought salinity barriers in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta.

The draft EIR looks at the impacts of installing a drought salinity barrier if needed along the West False River in the Delta twice within a 10-year timeframe. The barrier, which would remain in place for up to 20 months, would improve long-term planning and provide the State with greater flexibility to respond to future droughts, which are growing more frequent and severe due to climate change.

The existing drought salinity barrier along the West False River, which was installed in 2021 following Governor Newsom’s executive order, has helped to prevent saltwater contamination of fresh water supplies used by tens of millions of Californians. The barrier also helps preserve critical water supplies in upstream reservoirs for later use by reducing the amount of water that must be released into the Delta to repel salinity during the dry summer months.

The draft EIR does not affect the existing emergency drought salinity barrier along the West False River.

“As California prepares for the possibility of a fourth dry year, these are the types of actions needed to adjust to more frequent, extreme droughts such as the one we are experiencing now,” said Ted Craddock, Deputy Director for the State Water Project. “Climate change is having a direct impact on our water supply, and we need to take a proactive approach to prepare for future droughts and protect our State’s fresh water supplies.”

The release of the draft EIR kicks off a 45-day public comment period from now until August 22, during which time members of the public will have the opportunity to review the proposed project and provide comment. DWR will host a virtual public hearing on the draft EIR on July 27. Details on how to join the meeting and provide comment will be made available on the project’s website prior to the event. Information will also be posted on DWR’s social media channels.

The existing emergency drought salinity barrier is scheduled to be removed by November 30, 2022 as conditions allow. For more information, visit DWR’s Emergency Drought Salinity Barrier webpage.

LIQUA-JIP

LIQUA-JIP is a free form of liquid calcium, derived from calcium organic acids, calcium amino acid complex, carboxyl poly hydroxy acid, and hydrolyzed proteins. The solubility of the calcium in LIQUA-JIP is 100 times greater than other forms of gypsum.

Maintaining Soil Cation Balance

- Provides high concentrations of calcium (essential for adding solidity to nut crops)
- Helps displace sodium ions, aiding to leach away excess salts from roots
- Replaces dry gypsum application, easily applied through irrigation, reducing costly application labor
- No concerns of clogging filters, emitters or nozzles
- No settling of product, as LIQUA-JIP stays in solution
- Helps strengthen root systems
- Helps water penetration
- Improves soil texture and flocculation
- Made in CA and can be delivered quickly
STOCKPILING FOR EXTENDED STORAGE OF INHULL ALMONDS

The key to successful stockpile management is controlling moisture content and insects, which requires commitment and close coordination among growers and hullers/shellers.

Scan the QR code to learn about best practices for stockpile management to prevent aflatoxins and minimize the formation of concealed damage.
NASS Forecasts Smaller Almond Crop for 2022

Press Release Provided by the Almond Board of California

The 2022 California Almond Objective Measurement Report published July 8th by the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) estimates that the crop harvested in 2022 will come in at 2.6 billion meat pounds, 11 percent below last year’s 2.9 billion pounds.

The estimate is down 7 percent from NASS’s subjective forecast in May and comes in a complicated year. Some growers were impacted by frost in spring while the entire almond industry, and all California farmers, have been navigating a difficult water year and continued logistical issues impacting the ability to ship almonds

Statement on End of First of Two Beef Checkoff Cases

Press Release Provided by R-CALF USA

On June 28th, the U.S. Supreme Court denied R-CALF USA’s petition requesting an appeal of the first of two lawsuits the group had filed against the operation of the mandatory beef checkoff program. The first lawsuit had previously been dismissed by the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals.

R-CALF USA CEO Bill Bullard issued the following statement in response to the effective end of its first lawsuit:

“While obviously disappointed that our effort to force even more needed reforms upon the beef checkoff program has ended in our first of two lawsuits, we are grateful for the important reforms we did achieve for U.S. cattle producers.

“Our objective in this case was to bring an end to the corrupt manner in which the beef checkoff program was being operated. Specifically, we set out to stop the U.S. Department of Agriculture from unconstitutionally compelling U.S. cattle producers to fund the private speech of private state beef councils.

“We largely succeeded in that effort early in our case. In response to our lawsuit, the USDA took steps to assume necessary control over the speech of the state beef councils identified in our case to limit their ability to express private messages with the money that cattle producers are mandated to pay into the program.

“The district court found that those corrective steps taken by the USDA effectively transformed the preliminary injunction R-CALF USA had initially won into the lasting outcome the group had sought—"an end to USDA’s allegedly unconstitutional government-compelled subsidy of speech." Having determined that we were the prevailing party in our request for a preliminary injunction, the district court awarded us over $150,000 in legal fees.

"Importantly, the district court found that USDA’s decades-long conduct in operating the beef checkoff program prior to R-CALF USA’s litigation was not substantially justified and stated: “USDA should have known that the program that R-CALF challenged was unconstitutional…”

“Another important reform won in this case was that the USDA promulgated formal rules that now allow cattle producers to opt out of funding the activities of their state beef council.

“We will now focus on achieving additional reforms in our second lawsuit that alleges the USDA violated the law when it entered into agreements with numerous state beef councils to assume control over those council’s messaging. More specifically, we allege the USDA ignored its legal obligation to conduct a formal rulemaking process before taking such action.

“We are grateful for the exemplary legal representation provided by our lead counsel, David Muraskin, Litigation Director of the Public Justice Food Project, who helped us preserve the important protections our U.S. Constitution provides every citizen.”
12 Central Valley High School Students Receive Wonderful College Scholarships

Annual Program Has Directed Over $25 Million for More Than 2,300 Scholarships, Aiming to Break Down Barriers to Higher Education for Local Students

Press Release Provided by The Wonderful Company

As part of the Wonderful Community Scholarship Program intended to help college-bound students reach their full potential, 12 Central Valley students from the communities of Wasco and Shafter will each receive up to a $30,000 scholarship to assist with tuition, living expenses, and other costs at an accredited college or university of their choice. Created and funded by philanthropists Lynda and Stewart Resnick, co-owners of The Wonderful Company, the program builds on the company’s longstanding commitment to help Central Valley students fulfill the dream of a college education as a pathway to entering the workforce. To date, over $25 million has been directed to more than 2,300 college scholarships.

With the goal of getting more children to and through college, the scholarship program helps first-generation college students prepare for, pay for, and persist through college. Currently, 17 percent of Kern County, California, residents possess a bachelor’s degree, and many don’t see college as a realistic option. This program is one of the many ways the Resnicks strive to increase access to higher education opportunities in the communities The Wonderful Company serves.

“Today’s children are tomorrow’s citizens, and we’ve determined to make sure the next generation of leaders in the Central Valley not only excels in academics, but that they also use their passions to ignite change in the communities where our employees live and work,” said Lynda Resnick, vice-chairman of The Wonderful Company. “A quality education must be equitable and inclusive so that every child can gain the skills and earn the credentials needed for successful, fulfilling careers. Our children have so much to contribute to the world and, thanks to them, I know our future is bright.”

Every year, The Wonderful Company and its co-owners invest more than $30 million in community development, education, and health and wellness initiatives across the Central Valley and beyond. Established initially to provide college scholarships to the children of Wonderful employees from the Central Valley, the program has expanded over the last 28 years to also award college scholarships to Wonderful College Prep Academy graduates, Wonderful Agriculture Career Prep students, and now first-generation college students from high schools in Wasco and Shafter. Presently, 900 Wonderful scholarship recipients are enrolled in college and an additional 300 graduating seniors received a Wonderful College Scholarship this year.

“We’re proud of our students for pursuing their education as a pathway to entering the workforce. To build on their long-standing commitment to help the planet,” said Lynda Resnick, vice-chairman of The Wonderful Company.

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The Wonderful Company Opens Application Window for $1 Million Central Valley Community Grants

Grants Build on Company’s Commitment to the Health and Well-Being of Local Communities and Supports Innovative Work at Schools and Nonprofit Organizations

Press Release Provided by The Wonderful Company

The Wonderful Company is pleased to announce that its $1 million Wonderful Community Grants application process is now live, building on a long-standing commitment to help local organizations and schools in the Central Valley further their missions and programs. Over the last seven years, The Wonderful Company and its co-owners, Lynda and Stewart Resnick, have awarded over $5 million in Wonderful Community Grants to more than 71 area nonprofits and 165 schools in California’s San Joaquin Valley.

Designed to help spark increased engagement with local and regional organizations, the Wonderful Community Grants program encourages initiatives that support health and wellness, recreation, arts, social services, and community beautification. The funds will directly support game-changing programs that demonstrate community need and yield tangible and visible results. Every year, The Wonderful Company and its co-owners invest more than $30 million in visible results. Every year, The Wonderful Company and its co-owners invest more than $30 million in local and regional organizations, the Wonderful Community Grant recipients will be announced in October 2022.

For additional information and to submit an application, please visit WonderfulCommunityGrants.com or email WonderfulCommunityGrants@Wonderful.com.

About Wonderful Community Grants

The Wonderful Company and its co-owners, Lynda and Stewart Resnick, have a long-standing commitment to invest in the communities their employees call home, especially in California’s Central Valley. In addition to the millions of dollars the Resnicks and The Wonderful Company invest in the Central Valley every year, the Wonderful Community Grants program provides critical funding to organizations impacting change throughout the area. Local governments, area nonprofit schools, and faith-based organizations can apply for grants in the categories of health and wellness, recreation, arts, social services, community beautification, and COVID-19 recovery efforts for amounts between $1,000 and $100,000. Funds are available for program development/expansion, innovation, small scale capital improvements, technology, and equipment.

More information about Wonderful Community Grants can be found at WonderfulCommunityGrants.com.

Wonderful College Scholarships

Continued from PAGE 1

The state that created the mandate and contributed to the exorbitant black-market value also lets criminals out of prison and doesn’t punish them for theft. Here are some solutions that will sound simple because you readers have some logic that apparently eludes state policy makers: 1. Lock up criminals (groundbreaking thought). 2. Look to remove restrictions on mining of required rare metals. 3. If you are too dense to do 1 or 2, eliminate the catalytic converter mandate. Don’t punish all of us because you can’t see the big picture.

This is a small issue with relatively simple solutions, but it is characteristic of all of California’s big issues. The lack of a macro view has created so many solvable problems in this state. The state doesn’t deliver promised and paid for water and so farmers pump more, a government created problem that we all pay for through SGMA. The state lets criminals out of jail, doesn’t regulate illicit drugs, while at the same time making hiring very expensive, and enacting some of the strictest, most expensive building regulations in the nation, and doesn’t understand why we have a homeless problem. Though a good snapshot of California’s ineptness, there are bigger problems than catalytic converters. Unless California voters and law makers step back and take a macro look at the problems, the productive folks will keep leaving this state and there will be fewer and fewer tailpipes to tax.
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Agriculturalists Offer Input on the 2023 Farm Bill

By Christine Souza, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

With Congress set to craft omnibus legislation to govern the nation’s agricultural and food programs, farmers and others with an interest in farm policy offered feedback on what is working and what isn’t.

“We want to hear where we can make improvements in the 2023 Farm Bill reauthorization,” said U.S. Rep. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, a senior member of the House Agriculture Subcommittee who held a listening session last week at California State University, Fresno, as well as online.

Costa, farmers and others discussed how the next Farm Bill could help farmers navigate the many challenges facing agriculture—including extreme drought, a limited labor supply and supply-chain backlogs that impact trade.

“Clearly the No. 1 problem for pistachio growers at this time is the drought and the reduction or elimination of access to state and federal water,” said Richard Matoian, president and CEO of the American Pistachio Growers. “We urge your committee to expand or adopt existing or new programs that will increase water supplies for our growers.”

Fresno County farmer Dan Errotabere suggested that the next farm bill include funding for ecosystem restoration to improve water supplies and reliability.

“We hope the farm bill will include funding for programs that help the delta estuary that a lot of the water projects depend on,” said Errotabere, who added that better forest management also means a better yield of water into reservoirs.

Fresno County farmer Carol Chandler, a member of the Western Growers Association board, asked for increased funding for research on improving the nation’s labor system and elevating innovation in agriculture.

“Our farm, we’ve had to transition away from high-labor crops like raisin grapes and tree fruit to harvest more mechanized crops,” Chandler said. “We believe the farm bill needs to dramatically change innovation around agriculture, harvest and farm labor in our sector.”

“The speed of innovation is not fast enough,” she added, “and we want to be sure innovation reaches producers of all sizes and crops.”

In discussing trade, many participants touted benefits of the Market Access Program, or MAP, and other programs that aim to enhance the competitiveness of fruits and vegetables.

Matoian recommended that MAP funding be increased to $400 million, double the stagnant funding levels of previous decades. “We believe this program has been a great benefit to opening export markets,” Matoian said.

Discussions on the farm bill also centered on risk management, including federal crop insurance and a critical safety net for farmers.

California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson said crop insurance and disaster programs are needed to assist farmers, ranchers and foresters affected by changing weather conditions and “catastrophic wildfires that are burning more intensely and no longer limited to a season.”

“The Congressional Research Service estimates that only about 80 specialty crops are covered through crop insurance programs from the roughly 400 agricultural commodities grown here in California,” Johansson said. “You must find solutions to overcome limitations inherent in the current system and provide RMA [Risk Management Agency] with the necessary tools and structures. They need to do this gap.”

Johansson said Farm Bureau is also seeking sufficient funding for initiatives such as the Emergency, Livestock, Honey Bees and Farm-Raised Fish program, or ELAP, the Livestock Indemnity Program, Livestock Ford Disas- ter Program, Tree Assistance Program, Dairy Margin Coverage Program and others.

“We must preserve the integrity of the crop insurance program,” Johansson said. He also called for expanding conservation programs, including the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and the Conservation Reserve Program.

Dairy producers and others representing the sector called for improving the Dairy Margin Coverage Program.

“We need to make some changes to this program,” said Fresno County dairy producer Melvin Medeiros, who is involved in Dairy Farmers of America and the National Milk Producers Federation. “We feel that these programs are designed as safety nets and should be equitable for all-size producers.”

Kings County farmer Kirk Gilkey said cotton producers “must have an effective safety net.”

“This includes all commodity policy that provides either price or revenue protection for the prolonged periods of low prices and depressed market conditions,” Gilkey said. “This bill should also include a strong and fully accessible array of crop insurance products.”

As farmers face dramatic increases in production costs, Gilkey said, input increases have undercut protection from traditional farm policies and crop insurance tools designed to protect revenue against yield losses.

“These sharp increases translate into a significant decline in the effective safety net offered by the Price Loss Coverage program,” he added. “Considering the big increases in production input cost, the PLC reference price needs to be evaluated.”

Many speakers emphasized the farm bill must continue funding for protection of agricultural commodities from pests and diseases. Fresno County Agricultural Commissioner Melissa Cregan, also representing the California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers Association, praised the success of the Plant Protection and Quarantine Program.

“Given the program’s overwhelming success, we are urging Congress to authorize the plant protection act program at $100 million each year,” Cregan said.

Jon Reelhorn, president of Belmont Nursery in Fresno, also called for continued support for the National Clean Plant Network. He said the network provides “improved access to clean plants for nursery crops such as tree fruit, citrus, berries, grapes and roses, and enhances the competitiveness of these sectors.”

Speaking on concerns over wildfires impacting Sequoia groves, Tim Borden of the Save the Redwoods League called for additional funding for prescribed burns, forest treatments and a streamlined permitting process.

Ian LeMay, president of the California Fresh Fruit Association, said the farm bill is important because “growers deserve a bolstering of resources that can help propel our industry towards a sustainable and competitive future.”

“The production of our food and fiber is not only a national security issue but a global security issue,” LeMay said. “We have the opportunity to fortify that security with a reauthorization, and it is CFA’s hope that Congress will be bold enough to make the meaningful investment necessary to meet that moment.”

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The Gospel in the Gifts

By Joseph Delgado
Guest Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

It’s that time of year again! Pools are full, fireworks fill the sky, and you’ve probably spent some time around a BBQ. I’m willing to bet that you’re preoccupied with planning family vacations and camp adventures and the last thing on your mind is a stable filled with shepherds, cattle, and Mary rocking baby Jesus to sleep. Did that just catch you off guard?! Are you even a tad bit surprised that we’re discussing a chilly silent night while you’ve just finished your third slice of watermelon on a lawn chair in your backyard? In the spirit of surprises and considering that we’re halfway through the year and quickly approaching one of the most popular holidays in the world, I’ve decided to celebrate a little Christmas in July by studying a SURPRISE we find in the widely known Christmas account that is often overlooked.

One of the most widely debated aspects of the Christmas story revolves around the elements given to Jesus by the wise men. The bible reads “going into the house [the wise men] saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh” (English Standard Version Matthew 2:11). For centuries, scholars have pondered the significance of these gifts and why they were appropriate to give to a divine two-year-old boy. On his commentary in The English Standard Version Study Bible, Michael Wilkins believes that these gifts had a practical use that would assist the family in fleeing to Egypt to escape King Herod’s decree to put to death all males under the age of two in hopes to kill the prophesied king of the Jews (ESV Matt. 2:16). Wilkins states, “Frankincense is resin used ceremonially for the only incense permitted on the altar (Exodus 30:9, 34–38). Myrrh is sap used in incense and perfume and as a stimulant tonic. The gifts were likely used providentially to support the family in their flight to Egypt.” 1 These incredibly expensive gifts could have been used for ceremonial and religious practices or could have easily been sold to purchase food and shelter for the family on their journey. The Believers Bible Commentary approaches the significance of the gifts in a more symbolic fashion in which each gift represents and foreshadows the life, death, and resurrection of Christ. The commentary reads “Gold is a symbol of deity and glory; it speaks of the shining perfection of [Jesus’] divine Person. Frankincense is an ointment or perfume; it suggests the fragrance of the life of sinless perfection. Myrrh is a bitter herb; it presages the sufferings He would endure in bearing the sins of the world.” 2 So, what is the correct way to interpret what is being taught in Matthew’s account? Why not both? The gifts were a divine provision from God for Mary’s family while simultaneously being documented to encourage Matthew’s audience and readers today that He has provided for us a way to enjoy eternal life in Jesus through Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

As I’ve preached on this subject over the years, I’ve come to form a title that I believe captures the heart of the Father and the message of Christmas. If we look closely, we can see The Gospel in the Gifts.


DPR Opens $4.65 Million Grant Application Process to Fund Innovative Solutions Supporting a Transition to Safer, More Sustainable Pest Management Tools and Practices

Press Release Provided by Department of Pesticide Regulation

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) today opened the application period for the 2023 Alliance and Research Grants cycle, offering $4.65 million in potential funding to accelerate the transition to safer, more sustainable pest management in agricultural, urban, and wildland settings.

California is a leader in the development of more sustainable pest management,” said DPR Director Julie Henderson. “DPR-funded grant projects are critical to identifying and fostering new methods and tools to reduce reliance on pesticides and their impact on human health and the environment.”

The increased funding for the 2023 Alliance and Research Grants, provided for in the 2021-2022 state budget, supports the state’s goal to accelerate and increase the adoption of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) in agricultural, urban, and wildland settings. IPM is an innovative approach to pest management that uses the least-toxic, most effective method to solve pest problems.

Over the last 20 years, the department has invested more than $22 million to fund 92 projects within the Research and Alliance Grant programs. Last year’s DPR Grants Programs cycle represented the first year of increased funding allocated by the state budget. The department awarded $3.75 million in Research Grants to fund 10 research projects that explore IPM tools for urban, non-agricultural and agricultural pest management. DPR expects to award an additional $1.8 million in Alliance Grants funding later this month.

The 2023 Research Grants Program will award grants for projects up to two and a half years in length that develop pest management tools and practices to reduce the use of high-risk pesticides or decrease the impacts of pest management chemicals on public health and the environment. Project budgets may range from $50,000 to $3.15 million. Research Grant applications will be accepted through Thursday, September 22, 2022.

Highlights from past Research Grants projects include:

• Evaluated drone-based releases of biocontrol organisms.
• Tested non-chemical entrapment surfaces for monitoring and control of bedbugs.
• Studied the effects of pesticide-free plant immunity enhancing materials.
• Developed standardized practices for transplant greenhouses to reduce the need for fungicides.

The 2023 Alliance Grants Program will award grants for projects up to two and a half years in length that promote or increase the implementation, expansion and/or adoption of effective, proven and affordable IPM systems or practices. Project budgets may range from $50,000 to $1.5 million. Alliance Grant applications will be accepted through Thursday, December 8, 2022.

For more information on the Alliance Grants and Research Grants Programs, including how to join our virtual information sessions aimed at providing grant applicants with additional information and answering questions on how to apply, please visit our department’s website.

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