

ACWA Spring Conference Takeaways



Groundwater recharge in an almond orchard. (Photo: Sustainable Conservation—SusCon.org)

By Scott Hamilton
President, Hamilton Resource Economics

The Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) held its spring conference in Monterey May 9-11. The conference brings water managers, water district directors, and water professionals from around the state. Unsurprisingly, there was keen interest in groundwater issues and recharge this year. The use of groundwater recharge as a management tool to aid in groundwater sustainability is familiar to Kern County, a long-time leader in groundwater recharge. Aaron Fukuda from Tulare Irrigation District provided an overview of how

groundwater recharge was being implemented in his district utilizing three elements: recharge in unlined canals (150 cfs), on-farm (380 cfs), and dedicated recharge basin (370 cfs) for a total of 900 cfs. The incentive to take water for on-farm recharge, even when water costs are non-trivial, increased due to SGMA and his ability to get credit to the farm water account under his district's program. The status of surface and groundwater accounts and water use are available to farmers through an impressive computer dashboard.

On-farm recharge is occurring but with caution throughout the state. While on-farm recharge has the potential to increase significantly the capacity to

recharge groundwater, where the geology is suitable, and to reduce downstream flooding, there are concerns that farm chemicals and fertilizer could be transferred to the groundwater, impacting drinking water quality for domestic wells. From the farmer's perspective, it can interfere with farm operations. Additionally, in orchards and vineyards, there are concerns about impacts on tree and vine health and yield. Anecdotally, some farmers have pushed the limits of recharge in orchards and vineyards accidentally or deliberately. Following a levee break, one pistachio farmer had his trees flooded up to the trunk fork for several weeks when the orchard was dormant and then experienced his best bud break. Don Cameron farms in western Fresno County, where there are no surface water rights.

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Seminars on Soil Health, AgTech, International Trade and More Published by World Ag Expo

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

World Ag Expo is still eight months away, but attendees looking to learn more about soil health and other agriculture topics now have access to dozens of educational seminars on demand.

Holloway's Soil Health Seminar on "Bringing Our Soils Back to Life," is one of more than 70 ag seminars now published on WorldAgExpo.com.

Other sessions include presentations on dairy and livestock, international trade, agtech, and are being made available for free at Bit.ly/WAE23VideosOnDemand.

Holloway's soil health seminar was hosted by Holloway CEO Brian Maxted and Director of Agronomy Steve Lenander, who discussed the importance of leveraging soil, plant and water samples from independent, third-party labs for input recommendations.

"It all starts with what the soils are telling us," Maxted said. "When someone comes to us and asks, 'How much compost, or gypsum, or should I put this NPK on?' We say, 'Well, what are your soils saying?' Science should dictate what your farm needs."

Along with discussing the importance of soil, tissue and water sampling, the soil experts fielded questions from local growers and discussed the many soil challenges

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Holloway CEO Brian Maxted speaks during a soil health seminar held at World Ag. The presentation is one of more than 70 seminars available on demand at WorldAgExpo.com. (Photo: The Holloway Group)

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Garces Memorial High School FFA Chapter's First Showcase

By Audrey Hill,
Feature Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

Some exciting things are happening at the Garces Memorial High School FFA chapter! Ashleigh Rossi, the chapter's new leader, is helping guide her student's success as they work diligently to be our future farmers of America.

"Our FFA program is unbelievable because of [Ms. Rossi] and all her hard work," says Lou Ann Durrett, GMHS Director of Communications. Not only would the chapter have missed out on the Supervised Agricultural Experience (SAE) Showcase if not for her, but also the tremendous amount of growth that resulted.

The Garces FFA chapter's first Supervised Agricultural Experience Showcase occurred on May 2, where every student from the classroom presented their project. SAE

projects are a new facet of the FFA learning experience and encapsulate work-based, hands-on learning. They can come in the form of professional internships, small businesses, and almost every other form of animal and plant husbandry learning environment. These projects can last many months and allow students to deepen their education and generate some income! The students' grades depended on their detailed records for their project and the extent to which they took the project.

Of the roughly 70 students presenting at the showcase, nine finalists were chosen, and the overall winner was freshman Joseph Deniz with his project "Joe's Chickens."

"I first started with buying 50 chickens and one rooster and I gave all the eggs an incubator," says Deniz. "I managed to get over 5,000 chicks in a year off of those 50 chickens. [...] I was selling them every day. As soon as they came out of the incubator, I sold them to local

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FARM BUREAU NEWS

The United Voice of Kern County's Farming Community



President's Message

By Patty Poire
President, Kern County
Farm Bureau

Here we are in the middle of 2023; what a weather year

it has been, and it is only halfway. First, the Department of Water Resources (DWR) announced that the State Water Project (SWP) increased water supply allocations on April 20 to 100%. The last time that occurred was in 2006. The same day, the Bureau of Reclamation (Federal) announced that the Central Valley Project (CVP) water supply allocations went to 100%.

Today, anyone who drives around the Kern County area can't miss the flow of the Kern River and the filled recharge projects. The last classified wet year was in 2017, and this year is going to surpass that. Now comes the fun of ensuring that every drop stays within the Kern basin and is managed so that flooding is minimal. Let us hope Mother Nature keeps the weather gradually warming instead of an overnight heat spike. The Kern basin should be grateful that the agricultural water districts have continued to prepare for years like this and have spent millions on canals and recharge projects. This type of foresight should prevent what is currently happening in Tulare County, where flooding continues to occur; not to say that those agricultural water districts didn't prepare, but not to the extent that has happened here in Kern. For example, in 2017, there were over three-million-acre feet of water recharged/banked that helped weather the drought. This ability to manage the water will provide the Kern Basin with a little buffer if the next year should be dry. (Just a reminder, if you as a landowner are putting flood water onto your property, I recommend that you review the Governor's Executive Order, mentioned in last month's article.)

With all this excitement about water flowing, unfortunately, it doesn't stop the program called the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA). As I mentioned a few months ago, the Kern subbasin was deemed by DWR to be "Inadequate" in the submittal of the Groundwater Sustainability Plans (GSP). The Kern basin has the same three deficiencies that were delivered from DWR when the Kern basin was deemed "Incomplete." The word that sticks out the most to me about how DWR describes the GSP is "fragmented." The definition of fragment is a part broken off or detached,

or incomplete. The foundation of SGMA is a basin-wide program where it is required to reflect coordination, collaboration, and the same methodologies and data. But is the managed basin fragmented, or is it managed based on water deliveries? Who knows the basin better than the locals who have managed water here for decades? Remember that SGMA is about "local control." The question that landowners should be asking is will the Kern Basin work together and reflect coordination, collaboration, and the same methodologies and data so that the State Water Board does not call a "probationary hearing" (public hearing) to discuss next steps on oversight of the water extractions in the Kern subbasin.

As I mentioned in April's article, the cost to landowners/extractions is \$300 to register your well and then an extraction fee of \$40 per acre-foot. These fees can be increased at any time by the State Board, and most landowners/extractions have already paid for their water by their assessed fees from the water district. It would be approximately \$140 million dollars. In this type of situation, coordination and collaboration would be foremost and beyond question, but when it comes to comprise, which is a foundation of both, not sure how to move the needle. SGMA does not impede or impact a water right, but that SGMA is about living within your water budget. The Kern basin is approximately 326,000-acre feet of overdraft and must be addressed by 2040.

There are reasons why this overdraft has occurred. Since 2000 the SWP has not been a reliable source of water, where the reliability is currently at 52% as compared to prior to 2000, where the reliability was 88%. The state's decision not to deliver SWP water has made the Kern basin critically overdrafted. If the reliability had stayed at the 88%, the Kern basin would not be in its current situation. But that should have been handled years ago with the state on reliability. Please don't get me wrong, I am not a fan of SGMA and worked on the bill when it was going through the legislative process and was able to get some changes, like the 20-year timeline instead of the original 5-year. However, now is not the time to put landowners/extractions under the control of the state.

The Presentation of El Credo de FFA by Students From Kern County

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Spring was a season of significant events for California's FFA Association. Kern County was represented by students from several schools/chapters at both the regional and state competitions for the presentation of The FFA Creed in Spanish, El Credo de FFA.

This is the first year that this public speaking event was held at the state level and the first year the California FFA Association held a public speaking competition in Spanish. The students who presented El Credo de FFA did very well, with five placing at the regional level and one going on to placing 5th at the state level. The local competitors represented three KHSD schools: Independence, Mira Monte, and West.

At regionals, their placings were:

Azul Division (Freshmen and Sophomore grade)

- **Jesus Garcia**, Mira Monte – 2nd place overall
- **Diego Rojas**, Independence – 1st place overall
- **Paulina Vazquez**, West – 2nd place overall
- **Takari Zepeda**, West – 3rd place overall
- **Emily Garcia**, Mira Monte – 5th place overall

At the State Competition, Jesus Garcia, Mira Monte, brought home the 5th place title.

Roobie Richards, the Agriculture Department Chair at Mira Monte High School said of the students, "They represented KHSD, their school sites, and their communities very well as they recited the creed and answered questions demonstrating their



(Photos: National FFA Organization, "Future Farmers of America")

knowledge as well as sharing their experience and beliefs in agriculture."

In saying all this, as you all know, I have a saying "If you are not at the table, you are on the menu." Well, you are on the menu at this time. Engagement by you as a landowner should be foremost to assist in achieving coordination, collaboration, and forcing comprise

because I know farmers as a group; they work well with each other for the greater good. And the greater good will benefit all by keeping the State in Sacramento, not in the Kern basin. I recommend that you engage and be at the table.

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*Articles or commentaries are not direct opinions of
Kern County Farm Bureau*

Young Farmers & Ranchers



By Timothy Collins
Chair, Kern County
Young Farmers
& Ranchers

I recently purchased a 1946 Farmall H tractor that had been sitting for years, perhaps a decade or more. While working on it as a class project we

were able to get it fired up again and brought back to life. In researching the old tractor, I read a statistic that in 1945, 30 percent of the United States, about 1.6 million farms, still used only draft animals. The Farmall is a relic compared to the technology on modern tractors, and it is certainly small, although considered mid-sized in its day. However, tractors such as these were revolutionary in their time when replacing literal horsepower.

Tractors have become so incorporated into our picture of agriculture. They have become a symbol of Americana often represented in art, decorations,

and county music songs. When I think of farming, a tractor quickly comes to mind. While my memories of visiting my relatives' dairy farm as a kid bring back pictures of International Harvester tractors, my grandpa's childhood memories would have included plowing with draft horses or mules.

From the dawn of civilization until only a little over 100 years ago there was no way to work the land and grow food other than to use animals and manual labor. The tractor has brought down food costs considerably. In America, in 1900 food was about 40% of a family's income. Today that number is closer to 10%. We can produce ample food to feed a world of 8 billion people with only a small percentage of people even involved in the agriculture industry.

Perhaps a new challenge we face because of the strides in mechanization is getting people—whether it's our elected leaders or the public—to understand and support agriculture. Indeed, each person is as reliant on the industry as anyone else, we all must eat. Never has the disconnect between what people eat and where and how it is grown been wider. I hope the Young Farmers and Ranchers can help in fighting this new problem



My newly-purchased 1946 Farmall H tractor. (Photo: Timothy Collins)

by increasing our own knowledge of the industry and promoting ag in any way we can. Our next big event towards this goal is our 8th annual Charity Farmers Market Fundraiser on July 15th to be held in the Chuy's parking lot off Rosedale Hwy. If your farm or company would like to donate produce, please reach out to us. We hope to see everyone there!

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On-farm recharge on Don Cameron's Ranch in western Fresno County. (Photo: Terranova Ranch)

ACWA Spring Conference

farmers in California.

Continued from PAGE 1 Don aggressively floods his permanent crops when flood water is available. And the Almond Board is actively studying the impacts of on-farm recharge on almonds.

Paul Gosling, DWR's Deputy Director of Sustainable Groundwater Management, reported that groundwater plans for thirty subbasins had been approved, but six have not: Kern, Tulare Lake, Chowchilla, Kaweah, Tule, and Delta-Mendota, with Madera still under review. DWR has referred these subbasins to the State Water Resources Control Board (SWRCB) for consideration. The board can place these subbasins on probation and oversee their management. DWR took that action for several reasons, including insufficient attention to resolving groundwater subsidence, inadequate protection of domestic wells in disadvantaged communities, and insufficient coordination between groundwater plans within a subbasin. The prospects of probation throughout most of the southern San Joaquin Valley have many water district managers justly concerned.

The unsettling increase in power and authority of the SWRCB was raised in several forums but is receiving support in the state legislature (AB1337, SB389). Part of that arose due to actions by a handful of farmers in northern California during last year's drought. Rather than let their crops fail, they illegally diverted water from their local river, knowing that the SWRCB could not immediately stop them, and considered the subsequent fines to be a necessary business expense. A bill has now been introduced to prevent a similar reoccurrence. Still, that same bill dramatically extends the power of the SWRCB well beyond what is needed to fix that problem, with consequences for many

Additionally, there are several bills seeking to modify or upend water rights. Pre-1914 water rights, including all of the Kern River water rights, have been mainly exempt from SWRCB oversight until now. But with the increasing likelihood of droughts and the need to reallocate water during droughts to meet critical needs, the ability of the SWRCB to influence pre-1914 rights is likely to change. Additional bills look to upend the water rights system in California (see [Introducing Modernizing California Water Law | Planning and Conservation League \(PCL.org\)](#)). These proposals are being adamantly opposed by ACWA, the California Farm Bureau (Water rights 'under siege': California Farm Bureau warns of battles ahead | [Agri-Pulse Communications, Inc.](#)) and a coalition of organizations throughout California.

Ernest Conant, Regional Director of the US Bureau of Reclamation and much-loved retired Kern County Water Attorney, reported on numerous efforts by the Bureau to increase storage in the state, including Sites Reservoir, Del Puerto Reservoir, and enlarging San Luis Reservoir. John Lehigh, from DWR, reported on concerns resulting from aging infrastructure on the State Water project – infrastructure that is now more than 60 years and repair bills likely to run into the billions.

California farmers continue to face a tidal wave of government oversight, regulations, and reporting that only seems to worsen with each legislative session. While conferences are sometimes regarded as an excuse to get away from the office for a few days and exercise the company credit card, the ACWA Conference provides opportunities for water leaders to discuss their problems, understand the proposed solutions, and work together to improve the water situation in California. They need all the help they can get.

World Ag Expo Seminars

Continued from PAGE 1

brought about by excessive rainfall

this past winter, including:

- Ponding
- Water penetration problems
- Disease
- Other excess water issues

Viewers can watch the full Soil Health Seminar directly at HollowayAg.com/WorldAgSeminar.

To access the full library of World Ag seminar videos, viewers will need to sign up for or log in to their "My Show Account" at Bit.ly/WAE23Planner.

Along with the seminars, two World Ag-hosted events are also available online: the Prayer Breakfast and the U.S. House Committee on Agriculture 2023 Farm Bill Listening Session.

Learn more about all of the World Ag Expo videos on demand at WorldAgExpo.com/Attendees/Seminars.



View of the 2023 World Ag Expo, February 15, 2023. The International Agri-Center is led by an all-volunteer board of directors; has a full-time staff and more than 1,200 volunteers who dedicate their time to World Ag Expo, the California Antique Equipment Show, and other International Agri-Center programs. (Photo: International Agri-Center)

GMHS FFA Chapter's First Showcase

Continued from PAGE 1

feed stores."

Deniz hatched over five different types of chickens and raised 13,000 dollars by selling them to feed stores and hobby chicken farmers up and down the Central Valley. Deniz will invest some of his earnings in his show goat project and the rest will be saved for college. He hopes to attend either Cal Poly, SLO or Texas A&M.



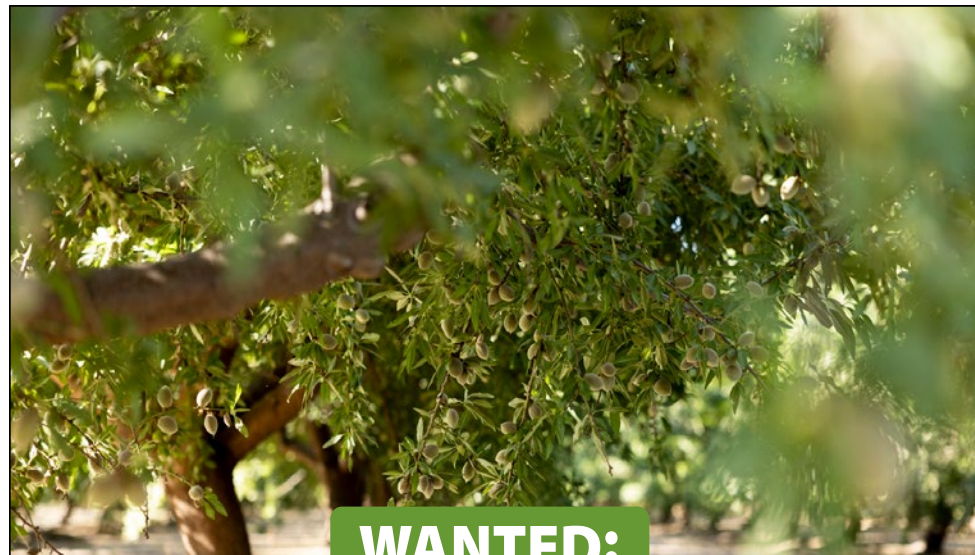
The nine finalists of Garces FFA's SAE Showcase. From right to left: Gabby Camou, Tessa Ludwig, Joseph Deniz, Kaylynn Killion, Melanie Haight, Reese Turman, Reese Froehlich, Kate Wegis, Rebecca Gutierrez. (Photo: GMHS)

In the interview with 23ABC, Garces Memorial FFA Leader, Ashleigh Rossi spoke about why she got involved in FFA: "I started out being the cheer coach for a couple years and I knew right off the bat that the school needed an ag program because I also knew a lot of alumni that had graduated and gone into the ag field. I thought how great it would be for them to have sort of a jumping off point from an educational background." After meeting the educational requirements to teach the class, and now having taught FFA for several years, Rossi states that "[the Garces FFA chapter] is a really well-rounded program. Some of our students aren't immediately interested in agriculture, but once they start the program or do some of the activities that FFA offers, they see where their interest in agriculture fits."

Ms. Rossi's students learn about the different facets of the agriculture industry in class, but their SAE project

allows them to dive deeper into specific areas that spark their interest. To Ms. Rossi, the addition of the SAE project that all students must complete is a necessary addition to the course since it lets them find passion in the subject themselves. Rossi states that she "wanted to give our school and community a chance to see what amazing projects our students were doing. I called it a showcase to give our FFA members the stage to showcase their hard work and knowledge of their projects. When students take pride in their work, it becomes more enjoyable and sparks creativity as well as growth."

With help from educators like Ms. Rossi and programs like FFA, students learn dedication through keeping records, responsibility by managing money, and the reward of a good work ethic. Congratulations to Joseph Deniz as the Garces FFA SAE Showcase Champion and all the students who achieved personal accomplishments through completing their showcase projects.



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Later Start Foils Holiday Push for Cherries



San Joaquin County cherry farmer James Chinchio checks the status of Coral cherries. With harvest set to begin this week, he says he will likely need to pick twice due to fruit ripening at different rates. Growers throughout the state report a delayed harvest because of the cool spring. (Photo: Ching Lee)

By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from California Farm Bureau Federation

As the first one out of the gate, cherries typically kick off the stone-fruit season with peak volumes heading into the Memorial Day holiday.

But longer periods of cool weather this spring have slowed development of the fruit, delaying harvest by about two weeks, farmers say.

Growers in the southern San Joaquin Valley—whose fruit accounted for 34% of the state volume last year—have been picking since earlier this month. Northern California growers, including from the Stockton-Linden-Lodi district and the Gilroy-Hollister-San Jose area, produced 65% of the volume in 2022, according to the California

Cherry Board.

James Chinchio, who grows cherries in Lodi, said he likely won't begin harvest until next week, noting that most of his fruit will miss the Memorial Day push.

Some of his cherries are marketed directly to consumers by mail, and he said the lateness of the harvest has some customers "upset that their cherries haven't shown up yet."

"I'm like, guys, they're still ripening on the tree," he said.

With harvest running behind, Chinchio said he may be able to stretch his season into the Fourth of July on later varieties. This would be "super unusual," he said of the typical three- to four-week harvest. But warming temperatures this week could speed ripening.

For earlier varieties such as Coral, yields have been "right in that sweet spot" of not too heavy and not too light, he said. The trees benefited from the wet year, which pro-

vided plenty of winter chilling hours but not damaging frost. A sunny forecast for the start of picking means no rained-on cherries, which are prone to splitting.

Chinchio said there is concern that some of his later varieties may not size properly. The fruit is also maturing at different rates on the same tree, meaning he would need to do multiple picks, increasing costs significantly, he said.

Statewide cherry acreage stood at 34,000 in 2022 and 2021, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Since 2012, acreage has fluctuated between 31,000 and 34,000.

Even though Bing cherries from California probably won't hit grocery stores until June, Tom Gotelli, a San Joaquin County grower, packer and shipper, said "we will have cherries for Memorial Day."

The "unusually late" cherry season is not isolated to California, he said, noting the Pacific Northwest also is running two weeks behind. This makes for more orderly marketing, as the two region's crops won't overlap and flood the market.

"I think it's a very marketable crop," Gotelli said. "For the grower, the packer and the sales company, I think it's a win-win year."

Early-season cherries typically command a higher price, which levels off as harvest ramps up and more supply hits the market, he added.

In the packinghouse, Gotelli said new sorting machines that can detect fruit size, color and defects have allowed him to reduce his labor by 40% to 50%. The Italian-made fully automated equipment uses optical-sorting technology that's 97% to 98% accurate, he said.

In Fresno County, grower Lance Jackson said he's on the verge of harvest and may be able to start picking Coral Champagne and Brooks cherries this week.

"We're sitting on our hands waiting," he said. "It's significantly behind, and we're seeing that in everything," from cherries to peaches and nectarines.

After multiple years of drought in which harvest tended to start earlier and earlier, Jackson said he got used to that timing. This year, "we go back to what's closer to normal," he said.

He described his production as "maybe 10%, 15% better than last year, but not a record by any means." Rains earlier this month did not have "detrimental effects" on his cherries, he said.

Though early-season prices have been "crazy" high, Jackson said they're "never sustainable."

"It's always the guys down south that benefit from those big numbers," he said.

With his season wrapping up this week, Kern County grower Greg Tesch said his focus has been on picking fruit that's ripe and ready rather than chasing higher prices on early fruit.

The winter and spring deluge has affected the entire produce industry, he said, with delayed planting and crops destroyed by flooding. These weather impacts have left gaps in the produce aisle, with retailers scratching their heads about what to promote from week to week. There's been a shortage of everything from strawberries to melons, he said, so stores may be looking to cherries to fill more shelves—and paying a hefty price for the supply.

Even though "it's a natural tendency to try to jump in" when the market is hot, Tesch said delivering unripe fruit to the market "will depress the price through the industry." The market will reject the fruit if it tastes horrible, he said.

"If (growers) don't jump the gun, then it'll be a really good experience for everyone," he said. "They might receive a slightly lower price, but they'll get slightly more (fruit) size, and they'll be appreciated long term."

Join the Journey!

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Learn how almond leaders throughout California are finding innovative ways to improve their operations, connect with their communities, and advance the almond industry. Hearing the voices of industry leaders might spark a connection or idea you can use in your own journey!

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California Department of Food and Agriculture Secretary Karen Ross says the Ag Vision for the Next Decade plan will grow opportunities for farmers and ranchers, farmworkers and communities. (Photo: California Farm Bureau Federation)

COMMENTARY: Ag Vision Seeks to Secure State's Agricultural Future



By Karen Ross
Secretary, California
Department of Food
and Agriculture

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from California Farm
Bureau Federation

It's no secret that times are tough for many California farmers and ranchers. I have heard their stories and concerns over their livelihoods and the future of agriculture in the Golden State. I know that, for many, it's hard to think beyond the immediate challenges at hand. While there is no silver bullet to address all they face, there is a new plan that will grow opportunity for farmers and ranchers, farmworkers, individuals and communities.

It's called Ag Vision for the Next Decade, and it builds upon the existing good work of many in agriculture who are constantly adapting and serving as good neighbors and stewards of the land and natural resources. It's a plan with numerous benefits. It connects farmers and farm products to local communities and builds bridges with urban audiences. It encourages innovation and training for the jobs of tomorrow to support farmworkers. And it takes aim at something we have heard time and again is important to the farming community: fostering smarter regulations.

It's a plan not only for agriculture to thrive well into the future but for all Californians. It was developed through an inclusive process including input from a diverse set of agricultural stakeholders. Interviews were held with members of an Ag Vision task force and the State Board of Food and Agriculture. Seven virtual roundtable discussions occurred with various segments of California agriculture—from dairy and livestock farmers to berry growers and tree nut producers—along with processors and supply-chain partners and historically underserved farmers.

While the plan is intended to outline areas where the State Board of Food and Agriculture and the California Department of Food and Agriculture can make the biggest difference, it's dependent upon collaboration, partnerships and industry involvement. It focuses on five key areas:

- Fostering climate-smart, resilient and regenerative food systems: We will augment the good work that is already occurring in farming operations across the state and encourage others to take part in climate-smart

agriculture programs. We will also support the development of ecosystem services markets and help turn waste streams into revenue streams.

- Building healthy, local communities: We will connect school districts, food banks and community members directly with California farmers and ranchers and support agricultural education. We will also support a host of strategies focused on equity, including the establishment of farmworker resource centers. Through these centers, farmworkers will have access to services related to housing, health care, immigration, training and other wrap-around services to improve quality of life.
- Driving next-generation talent and tools: Plans are unfolding to meet current agricultural labor needs, while supporting workforce development programs to ensure workers are equipped with the skills necessary for fast-changing precision and agricultural technology now and in the future. We will also collaborate with University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, the California State University Agricultural Research Institute and community college representatives to stimulate innovation and develop a master plan for California agriculture science and research.
- Enhancing understanding of agriculture: In partnership with California Grown, CDFA will support engagement with rural and urban audiences on the value of California agriculture. At the same time, we will collaborate with other agencies in the administration, and with farmers and ranchers to highlight the benefits beyond nutrition security that working lands provide.
- Collaborating on smarter regulations: CDFA and the California Environmental Protection Agency are undertaking a pilot project to demonstrate how we can work with other state agencies and stakeholders to explore and support smarter regulations that rethink ways to meet public obligations for health, safety and environmental protection and support small and mid-size farmers with simplified, less expensive regulatory compliance, reporting and implementation.

The end result of advancing all five priorities will be creating opportunity and eliciting trust and support from communities.

Today's issues and opportunities are complex, and no one agency or stakeholder can achieve the vision on its own. CDFA will work with the California State Board of Food and Agriculture, along with other state agencies and traditional and nontraditional partners to bring the vision to life.

Industry also has an important role to play, and Ag

Vision outlines numerous ways in which industry can get involved.

As you go back to your farm or ranch, we know you have a lot on your mind. Our hope is that you can support and get involved with Ag Vision. At the end of the day,

the plan is designed to be a catalyst for collaboration and partnerships, and we ask that you join us.

Visit CDFA.CA.gov/AgVision to learn more about how farmers and ranchers, trade groups, and the food and agricultural sector can help make Ag Vision a reality.



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Senate Passes Farm-backed Bill on Fire Insurance



Last week, the California State Senate passed legislation that would build on solutions signed into law in 2021 to improve insurance options for farms exposed to wildfire risk. (Photo: Caleb Hampton)

By Caleb Hampton, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

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Wildfires that raged across California over the past several years have devastated farms, spoiling crops and burning farm buildings. After the flames were extinguished, the threat of wildfires has continued to cost farmers in other ways.

Since the Thomas and Tubbs fires in 2017, farmers in parts of the state have seen the premiums on their property insurance policies rise exponentially. Some have had their policies dropped altogether.

“We started being targeted for living in an area that was susceptible to wildfires,” said Peter Nissen, a Napa

County winegrape grower and president of the county Farm Bureau. “In certain zip codes, insurance carriers would not renew—or not even entertain in the first place—a property’s ability to get insurance.”

Last week, the California State Senate passed legislation that would build on solutions signed into law in 2021 to improve insurance options for farms exposed to wildfire risk.

The California FAIR Plan, the state’s insurer of last resort for those struggling to find coverage options, covers residences. But the FAIR Plan long excluded commercial farm structures. Structures such as tasting rooms, outbuildings, packinghouses and storage facilities, some containing thousands of bottles of wine or other valuable commodities, became impossible for many farmers and vintners to insure.

“Just like any business, you want to be able to have insurance to manage your risk,” said Peter Ansel, policy advocate for the California Farm Bureau, adding that the problem threatened the viability of farm businesses.

Without insurance, business owners, like homeowners, are generally ineligible for the loans they need to establish their operations.

“If you are a homeowner, you typically can’t get a mortgage to buy that home without being able to access insurance,” Ansel said. “When we’re talking about farmers, they need to be able to access loans to build those farm operations and facilities.”

In 2021, lawmakers passed Senate Bill 11 to include commercial farm structures in the FAIR Plan. It was an important step, farmers say, but the policies were expensive and did not provide comprehensive coverage for many farms.

“People have had to get creative to meet the insurance threshold their lender requires,” Nissen said. “Before, they might have had one policy that covered five or six properties. Now, they may have several different policies to get the proper coverage because no one will cover everything.”

The FAIR Plan was not meant to be a permanent solution. “The goal is to get back into the competitive market where the rates will hopefully be better and the policies will be comprehensive,” Ansel said. To the extent that they have reassessed the risk profile of certain areas, “that’s also what insurance companies want,” he added. “They want to be able to compete and write more policies for businesses.”

The FAIR Plan has a clearinghouse where insurance companies can browse its policies and make coverage offers. However, the clearinghouse lists only residential policies, not commercial ones, preventing farmers from bringing all their properties back under the same, competitive insurance policy.

“You could find yourself in a scenario where your residential policy would end up on the clearinghouse list, but the policies written for the building across the driveway would still be in the FAIR Plan,” Ansel said.

Senate Bill 505, authored by state Sen. Susan Rubio, D-Baldwin Park, and sponsored by the California Farm Bureau, would add commercial policies to the FAIR Plan clearinghouse so that they can re-enter the competitive market and get better insurance coverage. It passed the Senate last week and now goes to the state Assembly.

“California’s farmers and ranchers need insurance options to safeguard their ability to continue producing the food that America needs,” said California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson. “Senate Bill 505 provides agricultural producers who turned to the California FAIR plan the ability to return to the competitive insurance market.”

The legislation is supported not just by farmers but also insurers, brokers and agents, he added.

“California businesses do best when they have more choices for insurance coverage,” said California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara, who co-sponsored the bill with the Farm Bureau. “Giving them more options must be our top priority.”

FARM, RANCH AND TRANSITIONAL USE PROPERTIES

TABLE GRAPES – \$27,500±/AC & \$28,500±/AC

119.92± & 150.27± acres | Delano Earlimart Irrigation District, Lower Tule River Irrigation District, Quality Varieties, Productive Soils.

WALNUTS – \$22,099±/AC (SALE PENDING)

149.33± acres | Lindsay Area, Lindmore ID, 3 Wells, and Productive Soils.

ALMONDS – \$29,994±/AC (PRICED REDUCED)

155.73± acres | Wasco Area, 2 SOURCES OF SEMI-TROPIC WSD CONTRACT WATER, 1 Well, Solar, Class 1 Soils, Almonds in full production.

FARMLAND – \$12,000±/AC (PRICED REDUCED)

156.96± acres | Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD non-contract water, 1 well, Productive Soils, and Perfect for permanent crops.

DRY LAND – \$2,250±/AC (PRICED REDUCED)

160 acres | Valley Acres, Recreation and Rural home site, Good Soils.

WINE GRAPES – \$18,378±/AC

161.06± acres | Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD non-contract water, 1 Well, High-Density planting.

PISTACHIOS – \$51,898±/AC (NEW LISTING)

237.31± acres | Wasco Area, Southern San Joaquin Municipal Utility District, Pistachios in full production, Productive Soils.

DRY LAND – \$2,105±/AC

290.41± acres | Taft Area, Wheeler Ridge Maricopa WSD Non-Contract, West Kern WD Residential service, Recreational and Rural home site, Rental Income.

ALMONDS – \$22,307±/AC (PRICED REDUCED)

295.46± acres | Arvin Area, Arvin Edison WSD Contract Water, 2 Wells, Excellent Soils, Almonds in Full Production.

WALNUTS, TABLE GRAPES, PISTACHIOS – \$24,900±/AC (PRICED REDUCED)

345.95± acres | Selma Area, North Fork GSA, Excellent Soils, Quality Well Water, Diversified Portfolio, Solar System.

ALMONDS – \$18,457±/AC (PRICED REDUCED)

394.47± acres | Wasco Area, Semi Tropic non-contract water, 3 wells, 863.4±KW Solar System, Productive Soils, Almonds in full production.

ALMONDS – \$17,988±/AC (PRICED REDUCED)

995.11± acres | Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract and non-contract water, 5 wells, Productive Soils, and Almonds in full production.

California Court of Appeal Sides with Farmers in Precedential Water Quality Cases

Reprinted with permission from California Farm Bureau Federation

In a legal win for California farmers, a state appeals court rejected all arguments brought by environmental groups and sided with the California State Water Resources Control Board, the California Farm Bureau and others related to the Central Valley’s Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program.

In its March 17 decision, the Third District Court of Appeal addressed three cases brought by environmental plaintiffs against the California State Water Resources Control Board in which the groups challenged the adoption of general waste discharge requirements for growers within the Eastern San Joaquin Watershed.

“The Court of Appeal’s landmark decision supports reasonableness and balancing in protecting water quality, while also maintaining our food supply and the economic viability of agriculture,” said California

Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson. “The court’s decision is precedential and applies to irrigated lands regulatory programs throughout the state.”

Johansson added, “The decision upholds farmer anonymity for nitrogen application data, the use of township-level nitrate data and surface water representative monitoring.”

Farm Bureau was represented in the case by Senior Counsel Kari Fisher and joined by fellow agricultural intervenors/respondents represented by Tess Dunham of Kahn, Soares & Conway and Jennifer Spaletta of Spaletta Law.

Access the Court of Appeal decision at [Mura.AgAlert.com/Sites/CFBv2/Assets/Image/ESJ-Court-of-Appeal-Decision-3-17-23.pdf](https://www.mura.agalert.com/Sites/CFBv2/Assets/Image/ESJ-Court-of-Appeal-Decision-3-17-23.pdf).

The California Farm Bureau works to protect family farms and ranches on behalf of nearly 29,000 members statewide and as part of a nationwide network of 5.3 million Farm Bureau members.



A scientist measures water quality with a digital PH meter. (Photo: Deyan Georgiev / Adobe Stock)

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The Asian citrus psyllid spreads a bacteria called HLB to citrus trees. The bacteria makes the citrus fruit inedible and eventually kills the tree. (FCA)

California Citrus Mutual Takes Leading Role in Keeping HLB Out of State's Groves

Farm Credit has supported advocacy group's efforts on behalf of industry for over 20 years

Press release provided by Farm Credit Alliance

California Citrus Mutual, the advocacy arm of the state's \$3 billion a year citrus industry, works on behalf of growers on a wide range of issues, including water supply, labor and tariffs that limit exports to China and other nations.

But one of its most important roles is helping lead the fight to prevent a tiny insect known as the Asian citrus psyllid from getting a foothold in California's 255,000 bearing acres of oranges, mandarins, lemons and grapefruit, said Citrus Mutual's president and CEO, Casey Creamer.

"It's wiping out the Florida citrus industry as we speak, so we're now the No. 1 state by default. We advocate for funding to help find the cure," Creamer said.

"We're a small organization with a staff of six and some consultants, but annually we bring back funding on HLB alone (from the federal and state governments) totaling over \$70 million a year. That's something nobody else is going to be doing besides us."

The tiny insect damages citrus trees by eating their leaves but is especially dangerous because it can carry bacteria from an infected tree to a healthy one, causing citrus greening disease. Also known by the Chinese name huanglongbing (HLB) – the disease first causes fruit to remain green and taste bitter, and eventually kills the tree.

For more than 20 years, Farm Credit organizations in California have come together to support Citrus Mutual as part of our broader support of agricultural advocacy efforts, said Kevin Ralph, California State President at AgWest Farm Credit.

"Since Citrus Mutual was founded in 1977, it has established itself as a leading advocate for the state's citrus industry, and its work on preventing the spread of HLB and supporting research to find a cure for the disease has been immensely important," Ralph said.

"Together, Farm Credit contributed nearly \$1 million to farm-related nonprofits last year and we will continue to support these organizations as they engage in work to help our state's farmers and ranchers feed the nation."

Farm Credit organizations supporting Citrus Mutual are AgWest Farm Credit, American AgCredit, CoBank and Fresno Madera Farm Credit. These organizations are part of the nationwide Farm Credit System – the largest provider of credit to U.S. agriculture.

Fighting HLB is vital for California's growers. By 2005, just seven years after the psyllid was first found in Florida, HLB had spread to most of the Sunshine State's commercial citrus groves. Since then, the industry has shrunk by two-thirds, resulting in over \$8 billion in economic losses and tens of thousands of lost jobs.

Fortunately, there has been progress. Researchers at the University of California, Riverside, are working on a promising method of using peptides from an Australian citrus tree that is resistant to the disease that can be injected or sprayed onto American citrus trees to allow the trees to survive infestation. Citrus Mutual helped obtain funding for that research as well, Creamer said.

Keith Hesterberg, President and CEO of Fresno Madera Farm Credit, said Citrus Mutual's work is particularly important in the Central Valley, which is home to 80% of the state's citrus groves.

"We've seen how devastating this disease has been to Florida's farm economy, and it's encouraging that research is progressing to find a potential cure," Hesterberg said. "Education and research like this is a top priority for Farm Credit's philanthropic efforts on behalf of the industry."

Most citrus production occurs in the Sierra foothills from Madera south to Kern County, with significant production in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties and in Riverside and San Bernardino counties.

Creamer said sponsorships such as Farm Credit's help support the entire Citrus Mutual organization and is particularly important to the success of its annual educational conference, which is free for members to attend. This year's conference in March attracted about 1,000 people who were able to get the latest information about water, labor law, international trade and, of course, HLB.

"It's the sponsors who put the conferences on. We couldn't hold them without the help of our industry allies," Creamer said. "And besides its sponsorship support, Farm Credit continues to service our members and protect their viability, keeping them afloat in tough times. That's incredibly important."

Availability of the Draft Environmental Impact Report for Friant-Kern Canal Draft Water Quality Guidelines

Press release provided by Friant Water Authority

The Friant Water Authority (Friant) released the Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed Guidelines for Accepting Water into the Friant-Kern Canal (proposed Guidelines). The proposed Guidelines will define the water quality thresholds and other requirements for introducing water into the Friant-Kern Canal from a source other than Millerton Lake (Non-Millerton water). Implementation of the proposed Guidelines would not result in Friant making any physical modifications to the Friant-Kern Canal; however, in response to the proposed Guidelines water contractors may need to take certain actions that could include blending of water, changes in timing of the introduction or discharge of Non-Millerton water, use of alternative water supplies, or construction and operation of small water treatment facilities at the source of the pump-in. In addition, Friant or contractors may need to construct and/or maintain facilities for monitoring and forecasting water quality (e.g., water quality monitoring stations). The proposed Guidelines are available for download at FriantWater.org/Public-Notices.

Friant, the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), invites agencies and the public to provide input on the adequacy of the analysis in the Draft EIR. Comments will be accepted until 5:00 p.m. on Monday, June 26, 2023.

Written comments should be mailed or e-mailed to:



Friant-Kern Canal. (Photo: Florence Low / California Department of Water Resources)

Friant Water Authority, c/o Ian Buck-Macleod, 854 N. Harvard Avenue, Lindsay, CA 93247, IBuckMacleod@FriantWater.org. Please use "Guidelines for Accepting Water into the Friant-Kern Canal EIR Comments" in the subject line. Please also include the name of a contact person if submitting comments on behalf of an agency, tribal group, or organization. All comments received, including names and addresses, will become part of the official administrative record and may be available to the public. A virtual public meeting will be held on Tuesday May 30, 2023, from 3:00 to 5:00 p.m. via the Zoom web conference application. Information about the Draft EIR, submitting comments and the public meeting can be found on Friant's website: FriantWater.org/Public-Notices.

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New Report Finds 97% of Fruits and Vegetables Sampled in California Meet Pesticide Safety Standards



Worker spraying pesticides. (Photo: Tong2530 / Adobe Stock)

**By Julie Henderson, Director,
California Department of Pesticide Regulation**

Press release provided by CA Department of Pesticide Regulation

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) today released a report finding that 97% of fruits and vegetables sampled within the state in 2021 met federal pesticide safety standards.

The 2021 California Pesticide Residue Monitoring Program Report shows that 97% of domestically grown and imported produce samples collected in 2021 had either no detectable pesticide residues or had residues within the allowable federally-established

tolerances. In addition, more than 98% of produce samples labeled as “grown in California” had no residues or tolerances that exceeded allowable levels. These results, compiled annually, are consistent with the department’s last several years of produce residue monitoring, and reflect the strength of California’s pesticide regulatory program and compliance with it.

The 2021 report’s findings are based on 3,444 produce samples collected by the department at approximately 500 locations.

The pesticide residue monitoring program supports DPR’s mission to protect people and the environment. Federally established tolerances identify the maximum allowable residue level of a specific pesticide on food that provides a ‘reasonable certainty of no harm.’

“DPR’s produce monitoring program is the largest and longest-running state program for testing fruits and vegetables for illegal pesticide residues,” DPR Director Julie Henderson said. “With a focus on food eaten by children, as well as the state’s diverse ethnic communities, this program helps protect *all* Californians from pesticide residues on both domestic and imported produce.”

DPR scientists throughout the year visit food distribution centers, stores and outdoor markets to collect samples of foreign and domestically grown produce. The samples are tested by California Department of Food and Agriculture labs for more than 500 pesticide residues and breakdown products.

U.S.-grown produce continues to have significantly fewer illegal pesticide residues than imported produce. Imported produce accounted for nearly 77% of illegal pesticide residue samples. Of the imported commodities sampled, cactus pads and fruit originating from Mexico continue to show high percentages of illegal pesticide residues.

When illegal residues are detected, DPR investigators trace the suspect crop through its lines of trade – from store shelves, to shippers, importers or growers. Tainted products and crops are quarantined and subject to reconditioning, such as washing to remove residues, or potential destruction. In addition to potentially losing their inventory, growers and distributors whose produce exceeds tolerances can face fines and other penalties.

During 2021, DPR issued 120 quarantine notices

for more than 70,000 pounds of produce carrying illegal pesticide residues. In addition, DPR referred 22 cases of illegal California-grown samples to local County Agricultural Commissioners (CACs) for investigation of potential illegal pesticide uses. CACs issued statutory fines against growers in instances where produce sources were able to be identified.

As part of enforcement activities, DPR staff provide guidance to growers and importers for ways to prevent sales of illegal produce.

For previous reports and more information about the department’s residue testing program, please visit the Pesticide Residue Monitoring Program’s webpage.

About the Department of Pesticide Regulation

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation’s mission is to protect human health and the environment. The department achieves this mission by fostering safer, sustainable pest management and operating a robust pesticide regulatory system. DPR’s work includes registering all pesticides sold or used in California, conducting pre- and post-registration scientific evaluations of pesticides to assess and mitigate potential harm to human health or the environment for pesticides in the air and water, and enforcing pesticide use laws and regulations in coordination with 55 County Agricultural Commissioners and their 500 field inspectors.

DPR also conducts outreach to ensure pesticide workers, farmworkers and local communities have access to pesticide safety information. More information about DPR can be found on our website.



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U.S. Cattlemen's Association Applauds Introduction of DRIVE Act



Unloading cattle off a truck. (Photo: Violet / Adobe Stock)

Press release provided by U.S. Cattlemen's Association

On Tuesday, May 2, 2023, Representative Josh Brecheen (R-OK), a fourth-generation rancher and former trucking company owner himself, introduced the *Deregulating Restrictions on Interstate Vehicles and Eighteen Wheelers Act*, or DRIVE Act.

The bill would prohibit the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration

from "implementing any rule or regulation requiring vehicles over 26,000 pounds that are engaged in interstate commerce to be equipped with a speed limiting device set to a maximum speed."

In 2022, the FMCSA issued a notice of intent that it was considering rules requiring speed-limiting devices for certain large commercial vehicles.

U.S. Cattlemen's Association Transportation (USCA) Committee Chairman Steve Hilker issued the following statement:

"Our members are responsible for the daily transportation of millions of animals. Livestock haulers must take into consideration the welfare of their cargo which means avoiding rough-road conditions, adjusting speed, and being more aware of their surroundings to prevent animal injury.

"USCA is opposed to any federal mandate that limits a driver's autonomy over their own truck and trailer. We'd like to thank Rep. Brecheen for his support of our nation's livestock haulers through the introduction of the DRIVE Act."

The bill was co-sponsored by Reps. Pete Sessions, R-Tex., Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., Scott Perry, R-Pa., Eric Burlison, R-Mo., John Moolenaar, R-Mich. and Matt Rosendale, R-Mont.

USDA Announces Signup for New Rice Production Program



The new Rice Production Program will provide up to \$250 million in assistance to rice farmers. (Photo: Aziz / Adobe Stock)

Press release provided by U.S. Department of Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced that the Farm Service Agency (FSA) will begin sending prefilled applications to rice producers the week of May 8 for the new Rice Production Program (RPP), which will provide up to \$250 million in assistance to rice farmers based on 2022 planted and prevented planted acres.

On Dec. 29, 2022, President Biden signed into law H.R. 2617, the *Consolidated Appropriations Act*, 2023, which provided the authority and funding for USDA to make payments to rice producers based on data already on file with USDA, including planted acres and acres prevented from being planted.

"USDA is streamlining the application process for rice producers by mailing a pre-filled application to eligible producers," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "This approach will result in significant time savings for both farmers and USDA employees, helping to ensure the swift delivery of program benefits to producers and further our goal of better serving farmers."

How to Apply

FSA is mailing pre-filled applications to producers using information on file with USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) or FSA, as reported by rice producers through their crop insurance agents or FSA county offices.

To apply for assistance through the RPP, producers must return their completed FSA-174, *Rice Production Program Application*, to their recording FSA county office by close of business on **Monday, July 10, 2023**. Applications may be submitted either in person, by mail, email, or facsimile.

Producers who reported eligible rice to FSA by the acreage reporting deadline but do not receive a pre-filled application may still apply by visiting their local FSA office and completing the application by Monday, July 10, 2023. Producers who filed late or modified 2022 rice acreage reports will not be eligible for RPP.

Program Payments

FSA will make an initial payment to eligible producers

at a reduced payment rate of one cent per pound. If funds remain at the end of the application period, a second payment, not to exceed one cent per pound may be issued to eligible producers. To be eligible, a producer must have reported to FSA a share interest in eligible rice.

As directed by the omnibus legislation, FSA will calculate payments by multiplying the:

- Payment rate;
- Individual average actual production history (APH) as reported to RMA or the FSA-established yield; and
- Amount of certified rice acres determined by the number of planted acres and acres that were prevented from being planted.

If applicable, a prevented planted factor of 60% will be applied.

Payment Limitation

The payment limitation for the program is set by statute and is higher if the farmer's average adjusted gross farm income (income from activities related to farming, ranching or forestry) is more than 75% of their average adjusted gross income (AGI). Specifically, a person or legal entity with an average adjusted gross farm income of less than 75% of their average AGI cannot receive, directly or indirectly, more than \$125,000 in payments. Farmers who derive 75% or more of their average AGI from farming qualify for a \$250,000 payment limit. AGI is based on the three taxable years preceding the most immediately preceding complete tax year.

Rice farmers may visit their local county office to submit the appropriate form and certification (FSA-510, *Request for an Exception to the \$125,000 Payment Limitation for Certain Programs*), if they qualify for and want to seek the higher payment limit.

More Information

For more information, view the fact sheet or contact your local USDA Service Center.

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ACWA Supports Newsom's Leadership on Streamlining the Delivery of Critical Infrastructure Projects

Press release provided by Association of California Water Agencies

Association of California Water Agencies (ACWA) Executive Director Dave Eggerton released the following statement on May 19th, in support of Gov. Gavin

Newsom's leadership on streamlining the delivery of critical infrastructure projects throughout the state.

The Governor today signed an Executive Order and his Administration is posting budget trailer bills aimed

at streamlining the delivery of critical projects, including water infrastructure projects.

"ACWA applauds the Governor's leadership today in announcing actions aimed at streamlining the delivery of infrastructure projects – actions which will help ensure critical water infrastructure projects are built at

the pace and scale needed to respond to the growing impacts of climate change.

"ACWA members have been on the front lines of preparing for a changing climate through continued investments in critical water infrastructure. That's why ACWA has made permit streamlining a priority issue. Permit decisions can and must be made more efficiently, while protecting the environment."

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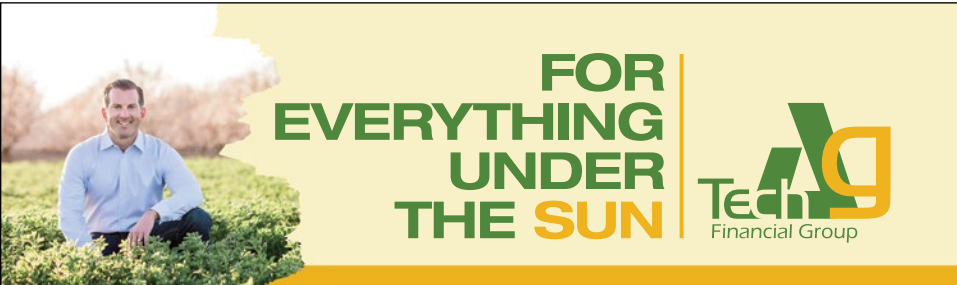
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COMMENTARY: Advances for Farms, Workers Blocked by a 1977 Rule

By Bryan Little, Director of Employment Policy,
California Farm Bureau

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California's high concentration of tech inventors and engineers, venture capital firms and farmers are only beginning to imagine the ways autonomous technology can bring new efficiency to agriculture, continue improvements in farm safety and boost earnings. It's the story of the last 500 years of human history, writ small in a California lettuce field or a strawberry patch.

Autonomous or remote-controlled tractors can perform many of the tasks that farmers use tractors for now, from towing an air-blast sprayer through an orchard to hauling bins of hand-harvested winegrapes from a vineyard to a winery. Yet, sadly, the prowess offered by driverless tractors is being blocked by state regulators under pressure from labor groups seeking to exploit antiquated rules to advance a false argument over saving jobs.

These technologies increase safety because they do not require a tractor driver, who normally would have to worry about protective clothing and a properly fitted respirator. Autonomous tractors or sprayers or weeders rely on GPS coordinates, visual recognition technology, laser-based detection of objects and obstacles, infrared



An autonomous tractor that requires no driver on board is equipped to work in vineyards. But its use clashes with a '70s order requiring an operator at the vehicular controls. (Photo: Blue White Robotics)

sensors and other tech to guide them through rows of orchards or vineyards. Their visual detection technology can spot-check the health of trees and vines and precisely target a chemical application.

Autonomous weeders are already in use, employing visual recognition to separate newly sprouted lettuce from weeds and using lasers to burn weeds down to the root, removing the need for large crews of field workers wielding hoes or bending over seed beds to distinguish between sprouts and weeds.

This technology can be applied to assistive devices such as so-called mules, small electric vehicles that can follow a strawberry picker into a row and transport a full bin

back to the end of the row to be checked in, examined for quality and recorded to ensure the picker receives appropriate credit when picking on a piece-rate. This spares the picker the physical burden of carrying each full bin to the end of the row, which adds rest and helps maximize earnings.

Yet the California Labor Federation and other purported advocates for workers assert that autonomous technology will eliminate jobs. Never mind that the California Employment Development Department tells us California has only about half as many tractor drivers as it needs. Labor unions and advocates also assert that such technology is dangerous to employees. Never mind that a driver is obviously safer when not even on the tractor.

The benefits of autonomy in agriculture are, unfortunately, being stymied by a nearly 50-year-old regulation dating to the groovy decade of the 1970s. General Industry Safety Order 3441(b) of 1977 was implemented to provide for safe operation of furrow-guided tractors creeping through fields at 2 miles per hour, not high-tech tractors or weeders.

The regulation requires that all "self-propelled equipment shall, when under its own power and in motion, have an operator stationed at the vehicular controls."

The regulation describes detailed safety requirements for such tractors carrying harvesting platforms, seedling planters and other equipment that typically would have people working in close proximity. Steering controls are to be provided in an alternative location on the tractor if the tractor relies on furrow steering.

Yet autonomous and semi-autonomous vehicles had not been dreamed of when this regulation was written. They cannot comply with operator requirements of the 1977 order because they require no operator.

No other state or nation regulates autonomous agricultural vehicles—none but California, home of the Silicon Valley technology hub and America's largest agricultural production state.

At its March meeting in Los Angeles, California Occupational Safety & Health Standards Board denied a request to even bring together stakeholders, including farmers, tech entrepreneurs, engineers and farm employee advocates, to begin talking about how autonomous technology can be deployed safely.

Empaneling such an advisory committee might result in regulatory proposals, which could be beneficial if all stakeholders reach a consensus around safe-use practices. My hope is that such a discussion could be productive, perhaps allowing for some exception to 1977 rules for advanced machinery or for setting minimum safety-practice standards for the use of such technology.

It's truly unfortunate that so-called worker advocates adamantly oppose an advisory committee, taking a position that there is no way such technology can be safely used. They used their considerable influence before the Cal/OSHA standards board to ensure no conversations even occur to discuss how such technology can be properly deployed.

The California Farm Bureau and other organizations representing our state's farmers and ranchers are ready to sit down with our labor and regulator counterparts to talk about how autonomous agricultural technologies can be used with appropriate safeguards. Preventing the progress—and safety—offered by these advancements is not the answer.

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IFG Expands the Cherry Season Window with Low-chill Cherries

Consumers Can Expect Large, Tasty and Crunchy Cherries Much Earlier in the Cherry Season

Press release provided by International Fruit Genetics

International Fruit Genetics LLC (IFG), the world's largest table grape breeder, which boasts over 48 patented table grape varieties and ten patented sweet cherry varieties, is expanding its low-chill cherry program and closing a critical gap that has eluded retailers and cherry lovers for years. Given that IFG's low-chill cherries are all early harvest, retailers can now offer more IFG cherry varieties much earlier in the season, providing a make-or-break experience that will entice the public to return for future purchases.

The low-chill cherries will be sold in the U.S. and in other countries as the plantings start to mature, which in turn allows for more IFG cherries to bloom early in the season.

"Early is important, but there is a caveat – these cherries must be fully formed, large, tasty, and crunchy, with great flavor that will set the tone for a great cherry season," says Alwyn van Jaarsveld, International Commercial Cherry Manager, IFG. "Low-chill cherries allow retailers to begin the cherry season several weeks earlier, but they must do so without disappointing consumers – which means we cannot allow the early cherries to be small, tasteless, or soft."

Low-Chill Development Also Means Hardy, Tasty, Large Cherries

Over the past few years, according to van Jaarsveld, the low-chill cherry program at IFG has flourished, allowing growers to harvest cherries with fewer "chill hours" during the winter, resulting in the fruit ripening more quickly. In February, IFG announced adding more cherry varieties to its low-chill program, including the new trademarked names to its Cheery Cherry™ line, including Cheery Cupid™,

Cheery Nebula™, and Cheery Chap™.

There are many benefits to the IFG low-chill program besides providing cherries earlier in the season. This includes producing cherries that are more uniform in quality -- offering hardy varieties that are less susceptible to damage from either hot drought temperatures or excessive rains while staying fresh despite potentially long shipping and storage durations. With cutting-edge technology, IFG's Research & Development team can naturally breed low-chill cherries, ensuring the fruit can withstand several challenges and remain fresh, large, and tasty.

In response, growers worldwide are beginning to plant IFG's Cheery Cherry varieties – most notably in Chile, which has become an essential cherry-growing region for IFG.

"We welcomed growers in the orchards of Northern Chile, in Ovalle, IV Region, to showcase our Cheery Cherry™ varieties," says van Jaarsveld. "In 2016, the first Cheery Cherry™ variety to be commercially planted was Cheery Moon™, and acreage for all Cheery Cherry™ varieties has expanded to more than 120 acres (50 ha) today."

In addition to Chile, IFG licensees are starting to harvest low-chill cherries in areas where cherries are rarely grown due to warmer climates, such as Spain and Australia.

Given the growing popularity of the IFG low-chill cherry program, many growers are now installing the proper cooling and other infrastructure needed to make the low-chill efforts a reality.

"Our growers now have access to the markets, pack houses, and cooling and shipping routes – everything they need to grow and distribute quality low-chill cherries," says van Jaarsveld.

"And this is very lucrative for the growers and the retailers as IFG has helped them expand their window for cherry season."

Growers Spend \$500,000 Per Year on Automation

The second annual Western Growers Specialty Crop Automation Report reveals a 25 percent increase in average year-over-year agtech investment as the labor shortage persists

By Ann Donahue, Senior Manager, Media & Content Strategy, Western Growers

Press release provided by Western Growers

Growers are now spending an average of \$500,000 a year on automation in response to the persistent ag labor shortage, according to the Specialty Crop Automation Report released today and commissioned by Western Growers.

This is the second year the Specialty Crop Automation Report has been released by WG in collaboration with consultants at Roland Berger. The report, which tracks and measures industry progress in harvest automation across the fresh produce industry, is part of WG's Global Harvest Automation Initiative, which aims to accelerate ag automation by 50 percent in 10 years.

"This year's report takes a deep dive into some new areas: The European market, Controlled Environment Agriculture, and the innovator's side of automation," said Walt Duflock, VP of Innovation at WG. "We found progress from a fundraising and traction perspective in key areas like weeding, spraying and harvest assist – and less progress in other key areas, notably harvest."

Among the report's findings:

- Around 70 percent of participating growers indicated that they had invested in automation in 2022, with

an average annual spend of \$450,000-\$500,000 per grower. This shows a considerable increase since last year when average investments in automation were around \$350,000 to \$400,000 per grower per year.

- Most progress was made in the weeding and harvest assist segments; market-ready solutions are able to meet grower economic targets and alleviate key challenges, such as lack of labor availability. Growers reported ROIs for weeding solutions of less than one to two years depending on the type of crop and technology used.
- Growers want more trained agtech personnel, with 50 percent indicating that they had internal employees who dedicated the majority of their time to the integration of automation investments. This suggests that the process of elevating and upskilling the agriculture workforce is well underway.
- The time it takes to build automation solutions is getting shorter and the costs are getting smaller thanks to overall advances in robotics and nonagriculture fields that benefit agtech startups, as well as the increasing talent pool that agtech startups are able to add to their teams.

The Specialty Crop Automation Report is available for download here: [AgHarvestReport.com](https://www.agharvestreport.com).

For more information, please contact:

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About Western Growers

Founded in 1926, Western Growers represents local and regional family farmers growing fresh produce in California, Arizona, Colorado and New Mexico. Western Growers' members and their workers provide over half the nation's fresh fruits, vegetables and tree nuts, including half of America's fresh organic produce. Connect and learn more about Western Growers on Twitter and Facebook.

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At some point in every believer's life, they will face the question, "Why does God allow bad things to happen?" Everyone who bears the eternal name of Christ will need to account for such a question. (Photo: Gorodenkoff / Adobe Stock)



Evil and Love

By Joshua Stevens
Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

At some point in every believer's life, they will face the question, "Why does God allow bad things to happen?" Examples are everywhere, from movies such as 2016 *Batman v. Superman* to scholars such as Bart Ehrman in his 2008 book *God's Problem*, to friends or family earnestly attempting to reconcile the question soon after tragedy has hit their own life.

Everyone who bears the eternal name of Christ will need to account for such a question. We will examine several attempts to answer this question. Keep in mind, regardless of how true these answers may be, they alone cannot provide solace in the face of evil. They explain how an infinite Being beyond our comprehension may work, yet we only see a small piece of the tapestry. So when you encounter someone suffering, not intellectually from this question but suffering personally from this experience, then hold the theodicy and instead engage in prayer and loving compassion for the one who needs it.

The first reconciliation is that of humanity's free will. For we know that God will not tempt us (**James 1:13**) and that God cannot sin (**Deuteronomy 32:4**), so when people sin, it is because they choose to sin (**Genesis 3**). Sin has natural consequences; for example, if a man robs a store, then the store owners would lose out on the potential profit from what was stolen. If someone were hurt, they would have to deal with recovering the injury. So, it is the responsibility of the man to know the right thing to do (**Romans 2:1-11**).

There is a natural objection to this: "Well, why doesn't God create a world in which evil does not exist?" This question misunderstands the meaning of love. For this

to be true, it must mean that God limits our ability to choose in one way or another. If God makes a world in which we cannot choose evil, he could not honestly say He loves us. In this example, we would be forced to love Him and thus would not be loved at all.

This example may cover one set of evil, but there are many more; for example, what happens if someone were to pass away in a natural disaster? In **Romans 8:22**, natural disasters are compared to "pains of childbirth." They are both temporary and a natural result of sins' effect on the world. In the same way, we know that sickness is temporary and a result of sin.

Later in **Romans**, we read, "And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those whom he foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." In the end, we know from our own experience and those who have come before us that this is true. Every trial brings us closer to the Lord to whom we cling. Every moment of suffering comes with the recognition that we stand at the foot of the cross, broken sinners, in the process of being redeemed. We know our pain is not permanent and that the reward for our steadfastness will be eternally surrounded by the presence of God.

Let us pray. Lord, thank you for your unwavering faithfulness. We come before you earnestly seeking the truth and ask you to reveal it to us that we may be better vessels of the gospel and more equipped to defend our faith. Lord, guide us in righteousness and give us hearts of compassion when we come across those who suffer. Above all else, Lord, let your will be done. *Amen.*

Crossway Bibles. (2001). *The Holy Bible English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

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