

New Scientific Research Reveals Agriculture's Actual Water Usage

The environmental sector receives highest fluctuation of state water.

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

New scientific research from the California Bountiful Foundation shows that California's agriculture sector utilizes 15% of the state's water. This figure starkly contrasts previous claims by the Public Policy Institute of California, which cited 80% of the state's water use to agriculture operations. According to the head of research at CBF, Dr. Amrith Gunasekara, current water usage statistics put out by policymakers are vastly exaggerated.

"What the data shows is that there's a captured portion and an uncaptured portion, and the 80% comes from the captured portion," Gunasekara

said. "But that's essentially taken out of context because they're not taking into account the full amount of water that comes into the state and who uses what."

The state receives approximately 200 million acre-feet of captured water annually, dependent on a wet or drought year. But the captured water that is stored behind reservoirs and released throughout the year is always distributed the same way, whereas uncaptured runoff goes directly into the environment, Gunasekara explained.

Gunasekara's research method used existing data from the PPIC and Department of Water

See **WATER USAGE** on PAGE 5

Hallmark Group Joins the Water Blueprint Team

By Scott Hamilton
President, Hamilton Resource Economics

The Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley is a coalition of community leaders, businesses, water agencies, local governments, and agricultural representatives working together to advance common-sense water solutions for our region. Its mission is to unify the San Joaquin Valley's voice to advance an accessible, reliable solution for a balanced water future for all. Concerned about wanting to make real progress towards increasing water supplies within the Valley and recognizing that any water project in California faces significant challenges, the Blueprint hired the Hallmark Group as Project Manager for the Blue-

prints water projects. Hallmark has a proven track record on project management having worked on projects for UC Merced, UC Davis, the Bay-Delta Conservation Plan, the California Water Fix, BF Sisk Reservoir Expansion, and Los Vaqueros Reservoir Expansion. Hallmark's team for the Blueprint includes Chuck Gardner, Hallmark's president, Cutis Creel, well known to most in Kern County as past general manager of the Kern County Water Agency, and Maddy Benner as project coordinator.

Hallmark officially started work on March 1. Since then, they have developed criteria to identify high-priority projects. The selection criteria are points-based

See **HALLMARK GROUP** on PAGE 9



Charles (Chuck) Gardner, Hallmark Group President



Curtis Creel, Hallmark Group Director of Water Supply Management

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102 Groups Oppose Remission of Packers and Stockyards Act

A coalition of farmers and ranchers addressed Congress on Agriculture Appropriations.

By Valley Ag Voice

A coalition of 102 farmer, rancher, consumer, labor, farmworker, and faith organizations appealed to the U.S. House Committee on Appropriations in a letter, urging committee members to remove a policy rider from the 2024 Agriculture Appropriations Bill. The policy would prohibit the U.S. Department of Agriculture from writing, preparing, or publishing proposed rules to strengthen the Packers and Stockyards Act of 1921—a law that protects farmers and ranchers from abusive and anti-competitive behavior.

Congress initially enacted the P&S Act to ensure that farmers and ranchers were safeguarded in competition and trading practices and to protect members of the livestock, meat, and poultry industry from discriminatory and monopolistic practices.

Billy Hackett, policy specialist for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, explained in a press release that Congress cannot use the cover of an appropriations bill to deny U.S. poultry and livestock producers from fair competition.

See **GROUPS OPPOSE REMISSION** on PAGE 7



FARM BUREAU NEWS

The United Voice of Kern County's Farming Community



President's Message

By Patty Poire
President, Kern County
Farm Bureau

We are now on the back end of 2023, and since

my last article, a lot has happened. To mention a few in this month's article, I will start with a legislative bill that is continuing to move forward—AB 985. Apparently, Assemblymember Joaquin Arambula seems to think that the San Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District is not “regulating” or “enforcing” the reduction of air emissions. To help understand the complexity and why this legislation is not good for agriculture, let me take a few sentences to assist. Currently, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) has the responsibility to regulate vehicular air pollution and the air district has the responsibility to regulate all other sources of air pollution which are stationary emissions. The air district, through its regulations and programs, has reduced over 90% of stationary source emissions, and the San Joaquin Valley air quality strategy is the most stringent in the entire nation (see diagram on the right).

Now, this regulation has cost agricultural millions of dollars in upgrading its equipment to meet the set standards, but the air district developed an emission reduction credit system to assist. Now, that program is being questioned as to whether it is a viable program that produces reduced emissions. This legislation would require CARB to conduct an analysis of the air district's emission reduction credit system and ensure that the reduction credits are deemed invalid if they were issued in violation of state, local, or district laws. It goes on to require that CARB analyze all permits in the district that use a credit for certain air emissions constituents and submit its findings to the legislation. This could easily open all air district agreements to be analyzed and thus, those who have those agreements will look for other ways to comply. The most air emission pollution in the San Joaquin Valley is vehicular (mobile) and the air movement from the coast and northern California. When wildfires occur, the wildfire smoke travels into the Valley at such a high rate that, for the last couple of years, the Valley cannot meet federal standards. The San

Joaquin Valley Unified Air Pollution Control District developed a program to assist, but now that does not seem to be enough.

I mentioned in a previous article that Governor Newsom signed the card check bill (AB 113) into legislation and moved forward with “correcting” legislation—this legislation has moved forward to the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB). The ALRB has wasted no time in publishing their draft regulations regarding those correcting legislation and is scheduled to adopt them on June 23. The new regulations would rescind the mail-in voting option and allow farmworker unions to collect and submit ballots for union elections.

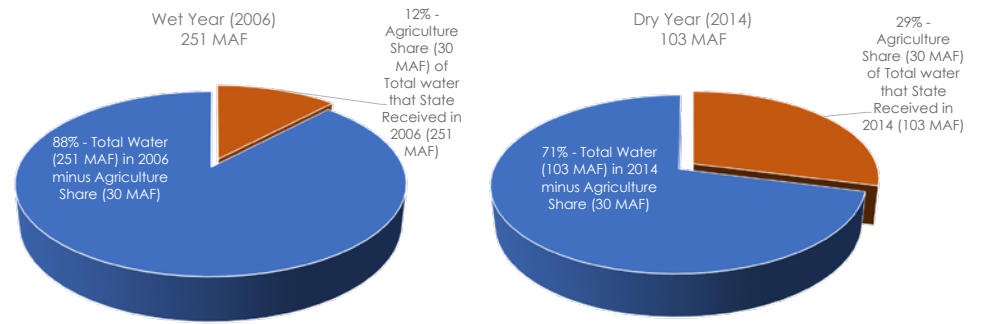
Of course, I must mention water in every article, but this time I am bringing to your attention the study completed by the California Bountiful Foundation. In that study, it looks at ALL the water that Mother Nature provides to the State of California and how it is used (see slide on the right).

The Kern County Farm Bureau e-blasted the report out last week and I strongly suggest that you take the time to review. Agricultural needs to start “speaking” up for itself. Recently, the State Water Board held a workshop on the addition of Tribal Beneficial uses to water quality for the delta. At the workshop, the tone by the tribes was that the delta water needed to be as close to potable as possible (drinking water standard). What does that mean to the existing agricultural beneficial use? No one asked! My understanding of being silent means acceptance. And you all know, if you are not at the table, you are on the menu!

P.S.

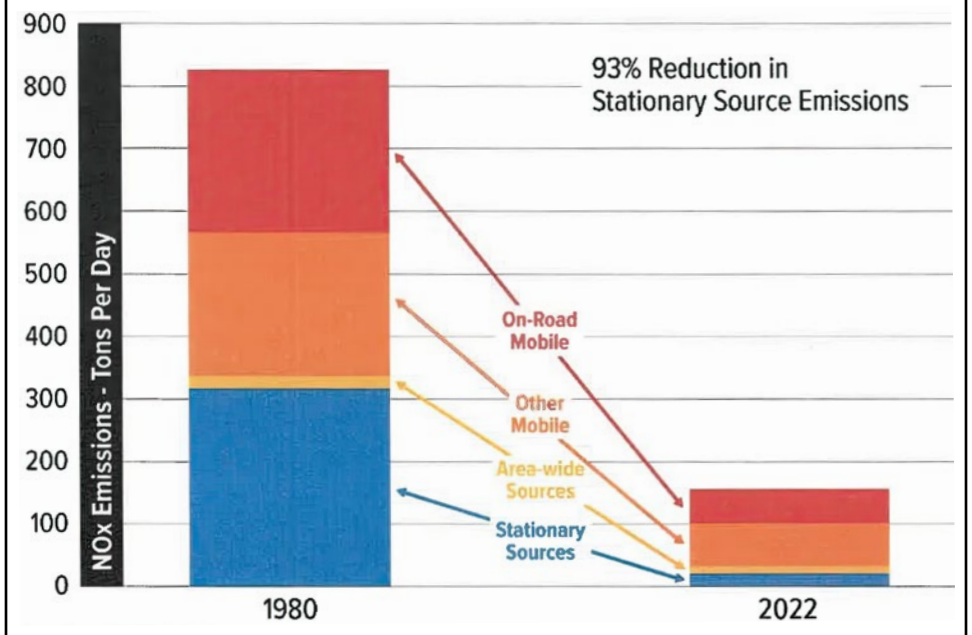
By the time this reaches you, the State Water Board will have held their meeting in Sacramento considering the basins classified as Inadequate, including Kern. Rumor has it, this informational item will rank the basins based on how they will go to a probationary classification. If you would like information on this ranking, please contact me.

How much water does agriculture get in California from total water?



Note: The amount of water agriculture gets in a wet or dry year does not change (30 MAF). Agriculture only receives approximately three times the amount of domestic water use (9 MAF).

More Reductions in Air Pollution



Graphic provided by San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District

Young Farmers & Ranchers



By Timothy Collins
Chair, Kern County
Young Farmers
& Ranchers

July is here already, and the Young Farmers and Ranchers are working toward our 8th annual Charity Farmers Market on Saturday, July 15th,

from 8:00 am to 12:00 pm. We are glad to be back in Chuy's parking lot on Rosedale Highway, as it has been one of our most successful locations in the past. This year we will raise funds to support the school garden project for Kern Resource Center. As always, we are very thankful to those who donate produce to make this event possible, and we are always looking for more produce donations. Please reach out to us to donate. The event is only possible if people come by to support us and get produce. Be sure to make the trip to 8660 Rosedale Hwy on the

15th for the fresh local produce we have available!

Kern County YF&R would once again like to thank Steve and Vickie Murray for hosting us for our annual cherry-gleaning meeting back in May. This year, we met at their Little Purple Barn Copus Road location for the first time. We enjoyed a tour of the farm and, of course, picked cherries. It is always encouraging to hear the history of how Steve began with very little and, over time, was able to build Murray Family Farms, especially since there are so few first-generation farming operations today. He reminds us, young people, that there are still opportunities in farming!

The more I travel across the state and country I am reminded of how fortunate we are to live in Kern County, where so much of the food we eat comes from. Other places are beautiful and great to visit, but most of what they offer is recreation. It is good to be a part of a county producing what it takes to make the state, country, and world function. Few other countries have the agriculture, oil, and even renewable energy that Kern County does. Those



(Photo: Timothy Collins)

other counties would not be able to function without us—that is something to be proud of! There is a reason we all live here and have such a great community. The Kern County Young Farmers and Ranchers are part of what makes that possible.

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Facebook: [KernYoungFarmersAndRanchers](https://www.facebook.com/KernYoungFarmersAndRanchers)

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Grand Prize winning team Amiggle of UC Davis. (Courtesy Photo)

Robotics, Changing the Future of Farming

California's ag industry shifts to artificial intelligence.

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Farming in California has always been labor intensive, but recent technological developments mark a new future for the industry. According to the USDA, modern agricultural operations routinely utilize technological advancements, including robots, temperature and moisture sensors, drones, and GPS technology to assist daily operations.

ROBOTIC FARMERS ADDRESS LABOR SHORTAGE

On June 3, a robot designed to streamline harvest operations and reduce farmworker injuries won the top prize at the 2023 Farm Robotics Challenge. The robot from UC Davis increases efficiency in harvesting by monitoring risky postures and carrying harvested crops.

Robots that assist in farming procedures are growing in popularity and use as they require limited human intervention, addressing the current labor shortage. The advancements of robotics in agriculture have increased in value after a report in 2019 from the California Farm Bureau Federation found that farmers were forced to significantly scale back their harvest due to the worker shortage.

According to SPER market research, the global

market for autonomous agriculture robots is expected to reach over \$34 billion by 2032. Other emerging technologies, such as robotic milkers and self-driving tractors, are pushing agriculture toward an era of artificially intelligent farmhands.

Along with advancements in automated harvesting, the agriculture industry is shifting to skill-based labor with personnel trained in ag-tech to oversee technological operations. In May, a summit hosted by Bakersfield College, the California Department of Food and Agriculture, and the Western Growers Center for Innovation and Technology discussed the future of agriculture technology education as agribusiness strides toward more high-tech endeavors.

At the summit, Linsey Mebane, performance analyst for Tasteful Selections, explained that the next generation of agribusiness leaders must understand emerging technologies to remain competitive and efficient.

"We're all trying to learn and grow and pack better, faster, stronger with less," Mebane said. "You have this orchard, and you need to produce twice as much now with half the water. [It's] just keeping us all moving because it's not going to get any easier in ag."

References at Valley Ag Voice at ValleyAgVoice.com.

Noteworthy Legislative Updates

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Several agricultural bills are circulating on the House floor to address various sectors of the industry including water rights, underground water storage, dairy emissions, agricultural technology, labor, and taxation.

WATER BILLS

Three of the water bills are supported by farmer

storage, and reduce flood risk.

The second water bill to move through the House is Senate Bill 366, represented by Democratic Senator Anna Caballero. SB-366 establishes water supply targets to capture and produce water for all uses—urban, agriculture, and the environment. If enacted, the bill would establish long-term water supply targets, of which state agencies would develop a strategy to achieve those targets in partnership with local water agencies and other stakeholders.

Senate Bill 651, established by Republican Senator Shannon Grove, would potentially streamline California Environmental Quality Act requirements for surfaced underground storage during flood periods. Along with advancing groundwater recharge projects, SB-651 would require the state board and regional water quality control boards to prioritize water right permits.

Three other water rights bills in opposition to farmer advocacy groups also passed the floor. Democratic Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan represented Assembly Bill 460, which would allow the State Water Board to issue water curtailment orders that would restrict due process for diverters. Another bill, Assembly Bill 1337, advanced to the second house under Democratic Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, allowing the State Water Board to restrict riparian water

rights without an emergency order and during non-drought years.

Under the proposed Senate Bill 389, represented by Democratic Senator Ben Allen, the State Water Board would have the right to investigate any water right claim at will to determine its validity.

DAIRY BILL

Senate Bill 709, represented by Democratic Senator Ben Allen, would prevent industrial dairy operations from increasing herd sizes. The bill is meant to eliminate progress made in reducing dairy methane emissions. SB-709 did not move through the house and currently resides in the suspense file.

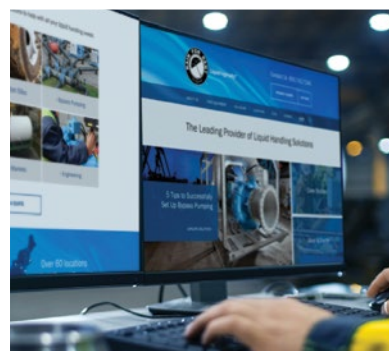
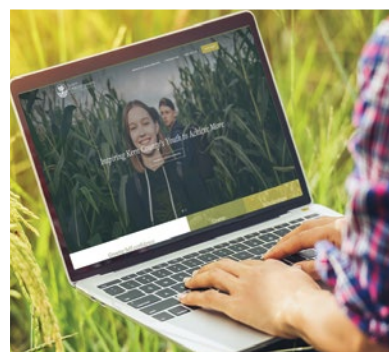
AGRICULTURE TECHNOLOGY

Assembly Bill 1016, represented by Democratic Assemblymember Reginald Jones-Sawyer, moved to the Senate. AB 1016 would modernize aerial pesticide applicator credentialing requirements and expand the Department of Pesticide Regulations' ability to create training programs.

TAXATION

Senate Bill 701, represented by Democratic Senator Melissa Hurtado, passed the Senate Floor unanimously and has moved to the Assembly. SB-701 would allow any county board of supervisors to implement a fresh fruit and vegetable wholesaler's fee to a maximum registration of \$500.

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Image by Nathan Hutchcraft / Adobe Stock

The Cattleman's Corner

Seed Stock Royalty



By Austin Snedden
Ranching Contributor,
Valley Ag Voice

Purebred cattle are often perceived as “royalty” compared to their commercial counterparts, who are seen as “peasants.” I think the analogy is fitting—purebred cattle have a proud lineage, get more notoriety, and often live a more pampered life, while their commercial counterparts toil as peasants on the hillsides, often unnoticed. This perception becomes problematic when carried out in the production of genetics that will enter the commercial industry. Royals aren’t famous because of their ability or accomplishments; they are famous only because they were born to the right family. Rather than looking at pampered cattle as inherently better than the commercial peasant cow, seed stock producers should view their operations as a challenging ground to see if cattle are worthy of being used in the commercial industry. Seed stock operations should be less like Buckingham Palace and more like biological boot camp.

Seed stock producers should challenge their genetics at least as hard as their commercial customers. I recently heard a prominent seed stock producer talking about his protocol for herd health, parasites, nutrition, and calving. This operation vaccinated

their cow herd three times per year, deworming and doing parasite treatment three times yearly along with fly tags. This operation supplemented their cows with minerals over a dollar a pound, protein, and an additional supplement to help with reproduction. This operation checked their heifers at calving three times per day and brought them to a barn to calve. While none of these are bad on their own, together they create an unsustainable situation. Many seed stock operations work under the assumption that every calf may be worth somewhere near \$4,000. With a value forecast so far above that of the commercial world, the purebred producer can afford the labor and cost of treatments and supplementation to sustain cows that would fall out in the real world. While there is inherently nothing wrong with pampering cattle, there is something wrong with not challenging cattle and then dumping those untested genetics on the commercial industry, which relies to some extent on resilience in cattle.

The purebred industry should constantly ask themselves, am I doing things to keep cows in production that my commercial customers can’t afford? Am I cheating my customers by over-treating my cattle for parasites and not allowing the ones with natural resistance to show themselves? Am I supplementing minerals and feed that commercial producers can’t afford and sustaining genetics that are sub-quality foragers? The seed stock industry should not spend additional time, labor, or money

to sustain the stragglers. We have a duty as stockmen to treat animals that need care. Still, from a seed stock perspective, if we must throw more resources towards them because of a biological insufficiency, we should move that animal to commercial production.

Purebred operations done right will already have additional investment in time per animal because weighing, measuring, observing, and maintaining pedigrees is critical to identifying not only the top but also the bottom of the genetic spectrum. The maintenance side is the part where seed stock operations must remain disciplined. If hooves need to get trimmed, if a teat must be milked out so a calf can nurse, if a mature cow needs assistance calving, if an animal needs additional supplementation above its commercial contemporaries, by all means, treat them, but make sure that treatment signals you to move them immediately out of producing genetics that will be dumped on the commercial world. Purebred breeders need to have a breeding philosophy that will make genetics that work in the world of \$1,000 calves, one full-time man or woman to 400 cows, country and facilities where the cow herd may only be treated once per year, and then build your breeding program to select the ones that will make it on this budget, with this labor, and this environment. Seed stock producers need to challenge their cattle, the commercial producers deserve it. We need to propagate the ones that excel living like a peasant and not propagate the ones that only exist because of a pampered life of a royal.



Free Cover Crop Seed!

Project Apis m.'s Seeds for Bees program - supported by the Almond Board of California - opens in June. Growers can receive \$2,500 in free seed for first-year participants and \$1,500 in free seed for second-year participants. Cover crops and resident vegetation can provide enhanced agronomic and ecosystem benefits to California almond orchards.



Potential Cover Crop Benefits:

- Improved soil quality
- Enhanced natural pest management
- Increased pollinator forage
- Improved water holding capacity

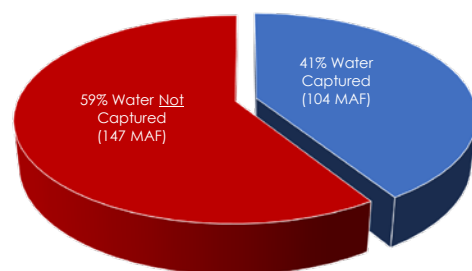


Open enrollment for the Seeds for Bees program runs through August 31 or until funding is exhausted. Scan the QR code and apply today to see the potential benefits of cover crops.

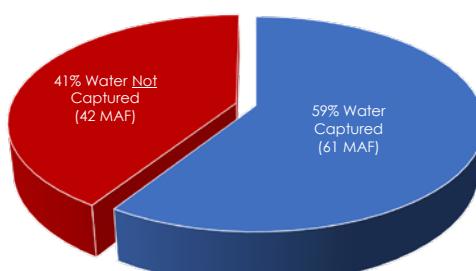


How much water is captured for use in California?

Captured Water – Wet Year (2006)



Captured Water – Wet Year (2014)



Water Usage

Continued from PAGE 1 Resources as well as California's State Water Plan, which is a mass analysis of water usage in the state. Colleagues at the University of California, Merced cross-checked Gunasekara's findings.

The research found a statistical discrepancy in omitting data from uncaptured water. Gunasekara explained that uncaptured water, which courses out during high flows in the winter, is beneficial primarily to the environment as it receives roughly 80% of the state's uncaptured and captured water. The issue with this, he explained, is that policymakers are not accounting for uncaptured water as a part of the environmental share.

Gunasekara states two distribution shares never change—agriculture and the urban sector. Agriculture's water share is always about 30 million acre-feet—in a wet year, that is about 12%, but in a drier year, it could be as high as 30%, he explained. Urban receives roughly 10% of the state's water, with the San Francisco Bay and South Coast regions accounting for most urban water usage, according to the PPIC Water Policy Center.

Gunasekara and his team began drafting a one-page policy brief after making their research public in order to guide policymakers.

"We just want to set the record straight," Gunasekara said. "Agriculture has been under attack from all these newspapers, especially in the drought, and it's wrong to portray agriculture like this—especially when we use it to live off of."

WATER STORAGE AND RECHARGE EFFORTS

While the current wet year has provided Central Valley agriculture some respite, the state's water challenges are far from over. High amounts of snow and rainfall have filled the Central Valley's reservoirs, but the lack of capable water storage capacities caused the state to activate the "intertie" relief valve to carry excess water at 500 cubic feet per second to the California Aqueduct, officially becoming property of the State Water Project.

"Once the Kern River Water enters the California Aqueduct through the Kern River Intertie, the [Department of Water Resources] determines where it will be used within the state system," Mark Mulkay, Kern River Watermaster, said in an email.

Mulkay explained that the intertie will remain open until the state allows the Kern River

interests to reduce outflow from Lake Isabella to below 7,000 cubic feet per second. However, there is no set time for the event.

In an interview with NPR, hydrogeologist and professor at UC Santa Cruz, Andrew Fisher explained that a majority of the uncaptured portion of water will flow into the ocean.

"Some of it can be captured for later, but the short answer is it falls so quickly that we lack the ability to take that water and set it aside quickly enough in a place where we can store it for later," Fisher said. "The primary forms of storage for water in California are the snowpack, [which] typically accumulates annually, and then reservoirs behind dams, and then groundwater aquifers."

Current efforts by the California government to recharge and store groundwater have cited heavy agricultural pumping as the reason for its depletion. In an executive order released in Feb. Governor Gavin Newsom approved a plan to capture high flows from extreme storms to store underground, and more than 600,000 acre-feet will be rerouted to wildlife refuges along the San Joaquin River, further increasing the environmental water share.

In April, the House Committee on Natural Resources joined the Subcommittee on Water, Wildlife and Fisheries as well as other members of Congress on a field tour in Fresno to assess California's water storage capabilities. Their findings, conclusively, were that the state's inadequate water storage will not be sustainable through the next drought cycle.

After the tour, members reconvened for a legislative field hearing in Tulare County to discuss two bills addressing California's water issues—the WATER for California Act represented by Republican Congressman David Valadao and the FISH Act represented by Republican Congressman Ken Calvert.

The WATER for California Act contains "common sense solutions" to increase water storage capacity as well as to streamline federal processes involved while the FISH Act provides effective management for certain fish species to eliminate unnecessary, duplicative regulation.

"If we don't take action to fix the complex and contradictory laws and regulations that control how much we're able to pump, and what storage projects we're able to move forward, our ability to feed the nation will be in jeopardy," Valadao said at the hearing.

Farm Bureau Continues to Advance Farmers' Right to Repair

Press release provided by the American Farm Bureau Federation

The American Farm Bureau Federation signed a memorandum of understanding with CLAAS of America, providing even more farmers and ranchers the right to repair their own farm equipment. The MOU follows similar agreements AFBF entered with John Deere, CNH Industrial Brands (which includes Case IH and New Holland), AGCO and Kubota. Combined, the five MOUs cover approximately three quarters of the agricultural machinery sold in the United States.

"The memorandum of understanding with CLAAS demonstrates AFBF's continued commitment to ensure farmers have access to the tools they need to keep their farms running, and America's families fed," said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. "Farmers and ranchers are more dependent on technology

than ever before and they asked us to find a private-sector solution to the right to repair issue. This agreement is another step toward guaranteeing timely repairs for farmers regardless of the equipment they use."

Eric Raby, senior vice president, Americas, for CLAAS said, "CLAAS is delivering on our continuing promise to provide solutions that improve our customers' businesses, as their success and our success go hand in hand. We are pleased to announce our MOU with AFBF solidifying for farmers the right to repair."

The agreement creates a framework for farmers and independent repair facilities in all 50 states and Puerto Rico to access technical manuals, tools and product guides to self-diagnose and self-repair machines, while respecting intellectual property and legislated legal requirements of the manufacturer. It also reconfirms the ability to lease diagnostic tools, purchase products and parts from CLAAS dealers.



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The Wonderful Company Prepares for Industrial Agriculture's Future

Bakersfield College and the Wonderful Career Center offer unique automation training.

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The Wonderful Company and Bakersfield College formed a partnership to introduce automation education to the upcoming agriculture workforce in response to the growing demand for skilled labor. On June 8, an open house event at the Wonderful Career Center welcomed prospective students and introduced three core programs that students can apply for and attend free of cost.

The programs include the Maintenance Technician Apprenticeship (MTA), Powered Industrial Truck (PIT), and Technical Operator Program (TOP). The PIT program has not officially launched. All three programs are suited to different needs within the agricultural industry. The year-long MTA program is partnered with Bakersfield College to provide individuals with classroom and lab instruction—students who complete the program will earn credit from Bakersfield College.

According to Paul Hughes, vice president of capital projects at Wonderful Co., the MTA program is catered to individuals at the community college level who want to become skilled technicians. Unlike the PIT and TOP programs, MTA received a grant from the State of California to pay students as they successfully complete the course.

The Wonderful Co., according to Hughes, sees the value of hiring in-house, skilled labor rather than sourcing from outside contractors.

“Their whole methodology is this, ‘If we’re gonna pay a contractor \$100 an hour to do the work, why don’t we put \$50 dollars of that an hour into somebody’s capability set so they can do better in their career and then pay the person the other 50 instead of [hiring] outside of the company,’ ” Hughes said.

The future of automation in the industrial agricultural industry will continue to see growth as robotics continue to evolve, Hughes explained. The demand for the labor workforce in agriculture is expected to go down but the skilled workforce is set to increase exponentially.

“I think with the changes we’re seeing in [Artificial Intelligence] and the amount of automation coming, there’s gonna be a huge need for what we call ‘on-the-ground’ or trade skill sets,” Hughes said. “No matter how much artificial intelligence you have or how much automation you have, somebody has to keep it running; somebody has to keep it connected and make sure that it’s working.”

The idea to partner with Bakersfield College came from a shared commitment to serve the local community as well as to set a foundation for Kern County residents to achieve their career aspirations. Cindy Palacios, Wonderful Co.’s associate director of technical training, told KERO-TV that the company strives to invest in their employees as well as the future of Kern County.

“We are adding bits of BC’s curriculum into the academic portion, but they do have on-the-job training. So, anything that they learn theory-wise, whether it be basic electronics, electric motors, mechanical systems, or OSHA training, they will have the opportunity to apply that in a real life setting with one of our employer partners,” Palacios said.

Along with the program offered through BC, the Wonderful Career Center’s TOP program provides a two-week training curriculum that covers the basics of mechanical and electrical work, providing a certificate at the successful completion of the course.

Hughes created the TOP program out of Lost Hills, Calif. with the hope of providing employees with an opportunity to grow in their careers within or outside of the Wonderful Company. Hughes explained that he started working for the company in 2008 as a technician and moved up to vice president of capital projects in 2015.

“I actually worked my way through the organization when I started 23 years ago, so we wanted to give the opportunity to other employees that started in the company as a forklift driver or a packer or something and give them the skill sets to work their way up in their career,” Hughes said.

In a classroom presentation, Kimberly Medina, technical trainer at Wonderful Co. explained that the TOP program almost guarantees a job after its completion, either within the company or through outside partners such as Amazon and Target. She explained that the company coaches students for job interviews and helps them polish or create their resumes.

“We realize that we’ve given them good skills that they can use—they are ready for the workforce,” Medina said. “We really want to place them somewhere where they’re going to succeed.”

To qualify for the TOP program, individuals must be at least 18 years old and possess either a GED or high school diploma. Classes meet from 8a.m. to 2 p.m. For more information on the course, visit The Wonderful Career Center’s website at <https://wonderful-training.com/>.



Photos by Natalie Willis

Groups Oppose Remission

Continued from PAGE 1

“The ongoing, public process to promote transparency and competition in the marketplace by modernizing the Packers and Stockyards Act is aligned with core American values and must continue,” Hackett said.

In the letter, the signed organizations stated that although the P&S Act was enacted in 1921, it still has precedence today due to the vertically integrated nature of the livestock and poultry industries. The four largest processors in each sector include 70% of the market for hogs, 62% for sheep and lambs, and 85% for cattle. The letter explained that this gives dominant meatpacking corporations considerable power within the market and enables contracting provisions and retaliatory practices that are “abusive and harmful” for family farmers.

The letter also cited examples of how the restriction on the P&S Act would harm farmers and ranchers.

“Whether it be a contract poultry grower whose contract is abruptly terminated when they resist



Photo: by Sutipond Stock / Adobe Stock

taking on overwhelming debt for corporate-mandated facility upgrades, a cattle producer who loses money year after year because the only packer in their market can manipulate the price of beef, or a livestock producer who experiences retaliation after they speak up against a corporation’s unfair practices, farmers and ranchers are being driven out of business and off their land across this nation,” the letter stated.

The signing organizations concluded the letter by asking committee members to reject the policy rider on the P&S Act that would prevent the USDA from performing its duty of protecting American farmers and ranchers—to ensure that the markets remain fair and competitive.



Photo by patarapong / Adobe Stock

Recent California Legislation Addresses Pigs, Water, and Farm Bill Priorities

New Regulations for Central Valley Farmers.

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

There are three major legislative events occurring in 2023 that could alter the trajectory of farming in the Central Valley. Impending regulations on senior water rights holders and pork industry professionals are expected to advance in Calif. Law, but the 2023 Farm Bill has been delayed by a lack of funding.

FARM BILL DELAYS AND PRIORITIES

The highly anticipated 2023 Farm Bill continues to face delays leading up to its expiration on Oct. 1 due to budgeting issues, debt ceiling negotiations and Congressional Budget Office Projections. In a Senate Ag Committee Hearing on June 7, Senate Ag Chair Debbie Stabenow explained that there will not be funding for the new farm bill which means that any increase in funding will require financial reallocation from other sections of the bill.

The Committee began the 2023 Farm Bill hearing in 2022 and is expected to continue into the early parts of 2023. These hearings will provide a chance for producers and agriculture industry experts throughout the nation to introduce their priorities for the bill. The National Farmers Union, for example, proposed several farm program priorities including permanent disaster assistance, crop insurance, and additional initiatives to strengthen food security.

REFORMING WATER RIGHTS

California’s water allotment runs through a complex system of riparian and appropriative rights, and senior water rights holders are generally protected by ironclad contracts. On May 30, Assembly Bill 1337 passed the state assembly and is processing

through the state senate. This bill, introduced by Democratic Assembly Member Buffy Wicks, will reduce any use of water regardless of senior rights.

If enacted, AB 1337 would grant the Water Resources Control Board the authority to curtail any diversions from rivers and reduce agricultural diversions during drought years.

PROP. 12 REGULATIONS AFFECT NATIONAL PORK INDUSTRY

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in favor of Proposition 12 on May 11, which sets new confinement regulations for pig farmers in California. While the proposition was approved four years ago, it has not taken effect due to legal challenges. It will become a law on July 1 under self-certified compliance with third-party verification expected to occur by Jan. 2024.

Under Proposition 12, it is a criminal offense to sell whole pork meat in Calif. unless the sow that bore the pig was housed within 24 square feet of space. Pork producers nationwide that are not in compliance with California’s new regulations are prohibited in the market.

In the Supreme Court’s ruling documents, Judge Brett Kavanaugh stated that the pork industry outside of the state will receive a harsh blow as a result of the ruling, citing that “California has a 13% share of the consumer mark market [which] makes it economically infeasible for many pig farmers and pork producers to exit the California market.”

The California Department of Food and Agriculture which is responsible for implementing the provisions of the legislation released a guidance report for pork sales in the industry.

FARM, RANCH AND TRANSITIONAL USE PROPERTIES

DELANO COLD STORAGE — \$5,900,000 (NEW LISTING) 15.66± acres, Delano Area, Rd 176 and 1/3 mile North of County Line Rd. Total Cold area 81,416± sqft, Pallet capacity including precoolers 5,040, Equipment yard, Shop, Storage and Office space.	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.
TABLE GRAPES — \$25,500±/AC & \$26,500±/AC (PRICED REDUCED) 119.92± & 150.27± acres Delano Earlimart Irrigation District, Lower Tule River Irrigation District, Quality Varieties, Productive Soils.	ALMONDS — \$22,307±/AC (PRICED REDUCED) 295.46± acres Arvin Area, Arvin Edison WSD Contract Water, 2 Wells, Excellent Soils, Almonds in Full Production.
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.	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.
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.	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.
DRY LAND — \$2,250±/AC (PRICED REDUCED) 160 acres Valley Acres, Recreation and Rural home site, Good Soils.	ALMONDS — \$17,660±/AC (NEW LISTING) 906.8± acres Wasco Area, Matador/Sunbird Ranch, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract and non-contract water, Well water, Productive Soils, and Young Almonds in production.
WINE GRAPES — \$18,378±/AC 161.06± acres Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD non-contract water, 1 Well, High-Density planting.	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.
PISTACHIOS — \$51,898±/AC (NEW LISTING) 237.31± acres Wasco Area, Southern San Joaquin Municipal Utility District, Pistachios in full production, Productive Soils.	ALMONDS — \$18,261±/AC (NEW LISTING) 1,237.33± acres Wasco Area, Portwood Ranch, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract non-contract water, 7 Wells, Productive Soils, and Young Almonds in production.

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General Manager of the Kern Water Bank Authority Jon Baker led a tour of the water bank and the surrounding recharge ponds.



Touring the Kern Water Bank

Caroline Webby, Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

The Water Association of Kern County recently partnered with the Kern Water Bank Authority to provide a tour of the Kern Water Bank property. Jon Parker, General Manager of the Kern Water Bank Authority, led the tour.

If this tour were held any other time in the last five years, it would be a vastly different scene. Water filled the shallow recharge ponds that surrounded the tour bus at every turn, and the river was fuller than it has been in years. Due to extensive rain this year and increased snowmelt, the Kern River is flowing at a level not seen since 1983. Kern County residents, especially those in Bakersfield, are excited by the sight of the flowing river, but it is a wonder where all the water will go. As the tour participants learned, some of that water will go to the bank. Not a traditional bank one would use for their finances, but a water bank.

A water bank is where a water authority can conduct water banking, which includes capturing and storing surface water in an aquifer until needed. It is an efficient water management tool that helps increase water reliability by storing the surface water in years of abundance for later use during years of scarcity. The Kern Water Bank (KWB) accomplishes this goal with groundwater

recharge basins.

The Kern Water Bank was established in the mid-90s as a water banking project. It is a sizeable water banking project that covers approximately 32 sq. miles of ground with about 8,800 acres of recharge ponds.

On the tour, Parker spoke about water banking and the role the land and ponds play in wildlife preservation and conservation. The bank operates under a conservation plan that designates land for specific uses until 2072. The ponds are earthen-lined and gently sloped to create a more natural environment for wildlife. The KWB also uses natural remedies to mitigate fire risk and overpopulation of insects, such as cattle for grazing and fish for mosquitoes and other insects. In addition, the KWB leaves brush around the recharge ponds for birds to nest close to their water sources.

Overall, the tour was informative, revealing facts that most people may not know about water in Kern County and the state. Parker said of the water bank, “We provide a huge benefit to a lot of Kern County...” and that is evident in how the project navigates wet and dry years while simultaneously helping conserve part of the local environment.

If you would like to learn more, visit the Kern Water Bank website at www.kwb.org/.

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Kern River Water Continues to Flow to the California Aqueduct; Reservoir Expected to Fill by End of Year

Kern River Watermaster updates Greater Bakersfield Chamber on Kern River.



(Photo by Barbara / Adobe Stock)

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

On June 2, the Bakersfield Chamber of Commerce welcomed Kern River Watermaster Mark Mulkay to explain current conditions on the Kern River. Because of the above average snow and rainfall, the Central Valley's reservoirs have replenished after three years of extreme drought, but its excess has caused the state to activate the "intertie" relief valve for the first time in 17 years.

Mulkay requested that the state authorize the use of the relief valve on May 10 to divert flood water to spare Tulare Lake. According to Bakersfield Now, Governor Gavin Newsom approved this notion in his executive order.

"With flooding impacts expected to continue into the summer, California is committed to supporting robust preparation, response, and recovery efforts in this hard-hit region and to using floodwaters to recharge our critical groundwater supplies where it's safe to do so," Newsom said in the order.

As soon as the water reaches the aqueduct, it belongs

to the State Water Project, which expects to deliver up to 30% of water to California farmers, a stark contrast from last year's zero percent allotment. The valve has been opened for 14 days, with 500 cubic feet per second released to the California Aqueduct. According to Mulkay, the intertie valve will theoretically shut off within three weeks.

An early March storm sparked significant snowmelt, "jumping from 100,000 acre-feet to over 400,000 acre-feet," Mulkay said. This jump led to flooding concerns, and the state issued a mandatory release with significant flows coming from the reservoir. This release brought numbers down to 300,000 acre-feet. The ebb and flow have continued ever since and currently sits at about 430,000 acre-feet, according to Mulkay.

The goal, Mulkay explained, is to fill Lake Isabella.

"As you remember, the reservoir has been under construction since 2004 to fix the seismic issues, [which] luckily was just finished last year," Mulkay said. "The current projection is we're probably going to get somewhere around 600 to 620,000 acre-feet in the reservoir."

Temporary COVID-19 Form I-9 Flexibilities End July 31, 2023

By Teresa McQueen

As discussed here, U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) temporary COVID-19 Form I-9 flexibilities are scheduled to sunset on July 31, 2023.

Although changes are in the works[i], DHS has not yet published a final rule that would allow alternate procedures for examining identity and employment eligibility documents. As such, employers should plan on revising current protocols to comply with the July deadline.

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Hallmark Group

Continued from PAGE 1

and include project feasibility, yield, cost per acre-foot of yield, the potential to benefit multiple interests, level of potential opposition to the project, scale of geographic benefit, time to benefit, benefits to disadvantaged communities, and advancement of state policy. Initially, Hallmark will focus efforts on a few yet-to-be-identified high-priority projects – efforts intended to improve cost-efficient water supply. That is only one part of the Blueprint's ongoing focus. Hallmark brings a wealth of valuable management experience to Blueprint's other endeavors.

Blueprint President Ian Lemay is interested in articulating a set of Blueprint projects. The identification of those projects will fuel ongoing discussions at the Blueprint board. At a high level, the Blueprint seeks more water from the Delta, improvement of drinking water supplies, advancement of water-supply projects identified in groundwater sustainability plans, restoring infrastructure impacted by subsidence, development of new conveyance to get water to where it is needed, inter-regional planning and developing an environmental vision for the San Joaquin Valley. That is undoubtedly an ambitious list, but progress is being made.

Regarding inter-regional planning, the Bureau of Reclamation provided a million dollars to the California Water Institute and the Blueprint to update the water plan for the San Joaquin Valley. The previous plan was completed before the implementation of SGMA, which demanded a radical rethinking to address water challenges in the Valley.

Regarding new supplies from the Delta, the Blueprint will likely take a renewed interest in regulations that limit water supply with the addition of Hallmark to the team. The State Water Contractors, including

the Kern County Water Agency, are already actively involved in a re-consultation process to improve Delta operations. Also, plans are moving forward to develop a pilot project for fish-friendly diversions in the Delta (a means of diverting water without harming fish) with the expectation that water exports can be increased during periods of high outflow.

Regarding conveyance, the Blueprint completed a high-level study for a new mid-Valley Canal to bring surplus federal water into the Valley last year. There are times during wet years when more water could be exported from the Delta, but there are no more "homes" (i.e. places) to store water. New conveyance from the Aqueduct would increase the ability to divert water to groundwater storage. An economic analysis of a new canal has been placed on hold pending the results of efforts to increase Delta exports.

As for an environmental vision, a collaborative effort parallels the Blueprint – the Collaborative Action program for the San Joaquin Valley is underway. One of the work teams within that effort is identifying environmental projects to enhance ecosystems within the Valley. That group includes representatives from responsible environmental groups such as River Partners, Sustainable Conservation, and The Nature Conservancy.

One area still needing more work from the Blueprint is identifying unmet water needs for rural communities. Public agencies such as the State Water Resources Control Board and NGOs such as Self Help Enterprises are working to improve water supplies for rural communities. The extent to which the needs of some communities remain unmet is not yet known.

The water challenges facing the San Joaquin Valley are significant, but a team of competent water managers is not backing away, a team made even stronger by the addition of the Hallmark Group.

Imperial Valley Farmers Await Water Deal

By Caleb Hampton, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

California, Arizona and Nevada reached a long-sought consensus last month on how to conserve water and prevent the Colorado River from running dry.

Under the plan for states to reduce their water use by 13% through 2026, farmers in the Imperial Valley are expected to shoulder much of the burden.

But growers in the valley, who are entitled to more than a third of the water in the river's Lower Basin, say they have had to delay plans to fallow crops and save water this summer. That's because details on compensation have yet to be worked out between the Imperial Irrigation District and the federal government, which pledged to make \$1.2 billion available for impacted water users.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation is negotiating with individual water users across the Lower Basin to determine how much each will be paid to leave water in the river.

"We have been pressuring them, saying our growers have cropping decisions to make, and we're getting close to running out of time," IID Water Manager Tina Shields said.

Finally, on June 1, IID officials told the Bureau of Reclamation it was too late for farmers to adjust their crop planning to implement new conservation programs. "It's not going to happen in 2023," Shields said.

With farmers in the Imperial Valley holding some of the most senior water rights on the Colorado River, the irrigation district cannot impose reductions on growers. "We operate voluntary conservation programs where we seek grower participation and provide funding, and then they make business decisions on whether or not that's attractive," Shields said.

But until growers have been told how much they will be paid for each acre-foot of water they save, they cannot calculate whether it is viable for them to forfeit crop revenue by drying up certain fields.

"Those are the things we've got to weigh and balance," said Mark McBroom, who has farmed in the Imperial Valley for four decades and chairs IID's Agricultural Water Advisory Committee, a group of 15 growers that advises the irrigation district.

"We're playing the waiting game," said Rachel Magos, executive director of the Imperial County Farm Bureau. "Growers are willing to be a part of the solution, but there will need to be some alignment as far as compensation goes in order to get the participation that is needed."

Shields said in an interview last week that IID and the Bureau of Reclamation were "continuing to have ongoing discussions." A spokesperson for the federal agency said it did

"not have a timeline for the IID conservation agreement process."

Since 2003, Imperial Valley farmers have used less water than they are allocated, transferring 16% of their entitlement to cities such as San Diego in exchange for funding they must use to build efficient irrigation systems. Under the proposed consensus plan to restore the Colorado River, Imperial Valley farms would forfeit another 8% of their water—about 250,000 acre-feet per year—by leaving it in the river.

McBroom, the committee chairman, said farmers were ready to make the additional cuts this year had a program been available. "We could have started this summer, but the BOR has not responded with the price of water," he said. There are also permits, environmental analyses and other details that must be finalized before a conservation program begins.

"As of right now, there won't be any changes to what we're already doing," McBroom said. "This additional amount of water, it won't be coming this year."

With the Lower Basin aiming to save 3 million acre-feet of water by 2026, Shields said deferring Imperial Valley programs that could have saved "a good chunk of water" this year was a missed opportunity. "It changes our overall potential," she said.

The delay has frustrated farmers who hoped to begin replenishing Lake Mead, the massive reservoir fed by the Colorado River and only source of water for the valley and its \$2.9 billion agriculture sector.

"Another year goes by, and the lake gets lower," said farmer Mark Osterkamp, who grows alfalfa, carrots, onions and other crops. "They have to be more cognizant that if they're going to ask us for water, there are timelines that are extremely important to a farmer."

In the Imperial Valley, farmers generally make crop planning decisions for the year between early April and early June. "After that, it's too late to change course," Osterkamp said. "We can't start working on a sugar beet crop in August."

Most of the crops for the year are planted in September, and "it takes all summer long to prep the ground," said Ronnie Leimgruber, a third-generation Imperial Valley farmer. This month, Leimgruber is disking out old crops, breaking up ground and flooding it to germinate weeds. "Then, you've got to disk it up again a month later and level it all back out and then shape your beds," he said. "You can't slow down because then you can never get caught up."

In April, IID's Agricultural Water Advisory Committee proposed a program in which farmers would stop watering alfalfa and other forage crops for a 60-day period in the summer. The concept, called deficit irrigation or temporary fallowing, is designed to save

water by forfeiting one or two hay cuttings without killing the plant population in those fields.

During the Imperial Valley's hot summers, alfalfa requires more water and produces lower yields of poorer quality. Locking the irrigation gates during that period can maximize water savings while minimizing production losses, explained Ali Montazar, University of California Cooperative Extension irrigation and water management advisor for Imperial, Riverside and San Diego counties.

However, the system also brings risks. "If we do a bad job, we can lose the plant stands and lose plant population," said Montazar, who conducted a three-year study on deficit irrigation with Imperial Valley alfalfa farmers. "You need to be very careful on this."

In recent years, the Imperial Valley has resisted using fallowing programs because of their impact on jobs and the local economy, but farmers said the 2026 deadline for Colorado River conservation means they will have to dry some fields.

"This is the program we have put up to get close to the quarter-million acre-feet per year that's needed," said McBroom, referring to the deficit irrigation program. "This is the quickest, easiest and most sure way to come up with that amount of water."

There is also a possibility that additional fallowing programs will be needed "to ensure we can meet the annual targets for our piece of the conservation agreement," Shields said. "It may be a necessary evil in the near-term to protect the system, to ensure we have a long-term water supply."

When a conservation program is funded and approved, growers in the Imperial Valley emphasized that each farmer has a unique set of circumstances to weigh before participating.

Leimgruber, for example, has invested up to \$5,000 per acre installing efficient irrigation systems, infrastructure that will sit idle if he does not plant his fields. "It makes no sense for us to fallow," he said.

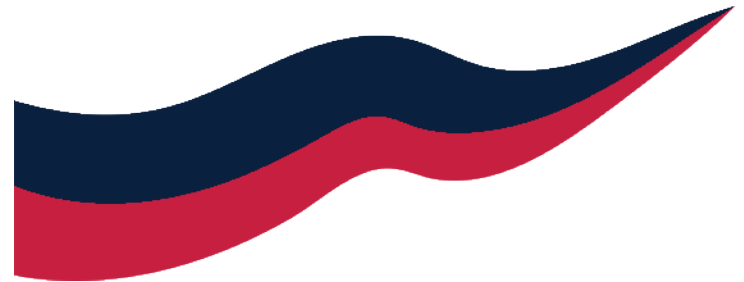
There are also long-term considerations.

"It's taken three generations for my family to develop markets for the alfalfa that I plant," Leimgruber said. "The three-year deal that the feds want is peanuts compared to a lifelong commitment and the relationships we've developed with our employees and our customers. We don't want to lose all of that by fallowing for a year or two."

For now, farmers in the Imperial Valley continue to discuss conservation strategies and wait on a funding deal.

"Once we know what the compensation is going to be for us to forgo irrigating our crops, providing for families and maintaining the community," McBroom said, "then we'll be able to tell you what we can do."

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U.S. Cattle Producers to Discuss Beef Checkoff Program, Public Lands Rule in Reno, Nevada

Press Release Provided by the U.S. Cattlemen's Association

The U.S. Cattlemen's Association (USCA) will meet in Reno, Nevada this July 10-11, 2023 at the Silver Legacy Casino Resort for its inaugural Summer Business Meeting.

The USCA Board of Directors, Committee leaders, and other active association members will discuss organizational business and trending issues facing the U.S. cattle industry. Topics to be addressed include the Beef Checkoff program, the Bureau of Land Management's proposed Public Lands rule, and more.

The Summer Business Meeting will also host an "Organizational Bootcamp" workshop to provide training and insight on how USCA

members can continue building a strong, untied voice for U.S. cattle producers on Capitol Hill. Attendees will work on their recruitment and fundraising skills, as well as reviewing the organization's foundational bylaws.

USCA would like to extend an invitation to the 2023 Summer Business Meeting not only to its producer members, but also to other cattlemen and women who have an interest in strengthening the U.S. cattle industry. The Summer Business Meeting will provide a forum for producers to add their voice to these important industry conversations.

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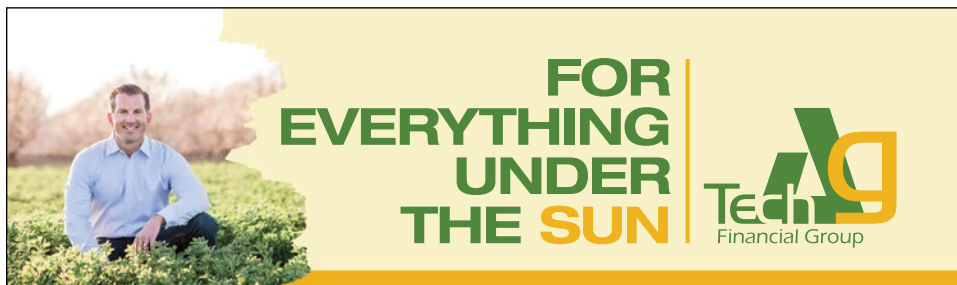
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Almond Board of California Announces 2023 Election Results

New board starts term Aug. 1.

Press Release Provided by the Almond Board of California

The Almond Board of California (ABC) on Thursday announced the Board of Directors election results and the names of the following nominees have been submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for selection to terms of office beginning August 1, 2023:

Grower Position One, Member:
1-year term

Paul Ewing, Los Banos

Handler Position One, Member:
3-year term

Alexi Rodriguez, Caruthers

Handler Position Three, Member:
1-year term

Darren Rigg, Le Grand

Co-op Grower Position One, Member:
3-year term

Kelli Evans, Live Oak

Co-op Handler Position Two, Member:
3-year term

Alicia Rockwell, Sacramento

Grower Position One, Alternate:

Katie Staack, Hughson

Grower Position Two, Alternate:
3-year term with two years remaining

Brad Klump, Escalon

Handler Position One, Alternate:

Ron Fisher, Modesto

Handler Position Three, Alternate:

Chad DeRose, McFarland

Co-op Grower Position One, Alternate:

George Goshgarian Jr., Fowler

Co-op Handler Position Two, Alternate:

Dean LaVallee, Sacramento

The ABC board is made up of five handler and five grower representatives. It sets policy and recommends budgets in major areas, including marketing, production research, public relations and advertising, nutrition research, statistical reporting, quality

control and food safety.

About the Almond Board of California

California almonds make life better by what we grow and how we grow. The Almond Board of California promotes natural, wholesome and quality almonds through leadership in strategic market development, innovative research and accelerated adoption of industry best practices on behalf of the more than 7,600 almond farmers and processors in California, most of whom are multi-generational family operations. ABC is a non-profit organization that administers a grower-enacted Federal Marketing Order under the supervision of the U.S. Department of Agriculture. It was established in 1950 and is based in Modesto, CA. For more information on the Almond Board or almonds, visit Almonds.com or check out California Almonds on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and the Almond Living Magazine.

Congress Moves to Boost Citrus Breeding Efforts

Press Release Provided by California Citrus Mutual

California Citrus Mutual (CCM) welcomes Congressional support for critical federal citrus programs including the Citrus Health Response Program (CHRP), the HLB Multi-Agency Coordination (HLB MAC), and an additional \$1 million in federal funding for the new citrus breeding program.

The House Appropriations Committee has included additional funding for citrus breeding research to develop and evaluate high-quality, superior citrus selections for use in citrus-producing regions and to evaluate rootstock and scion materials where citrus is commercially grown for the fresh fruit market.

The California program is an expansion of the existing national USDA ARS citrus breeding program located in Florida, which is focused primarily on varieties that are optimized for growing conditions in Florida. The Florida program has resulted in new varieties with higher yields, increased disease resistance, improved color, and a longer shelf life. The Florida and California breeding programs along with the continued efforts of the University of California citrus breeding program at UC Riverside will work together to deliver the best results for California citrus growers in the nearer future.

"On behalf of the industry, we are appreciative of the Committee and our Congressional leaders for their commitment to fully developing this program and look forward to finding solutions to the issues California citrus growers are faced with every day," said CCM President and CEO Casey Creamer.

This additional funding comes after Congress provided \$1 million during the current fiscal year to establish the citrus breeding program at the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) field station in Parlier. The new California citrus breeding program will identify new citrus varieties that are best suited for changing climatic pressures such as drought, consumer taste preferences, and resistant to pests and diseases such as HLB.

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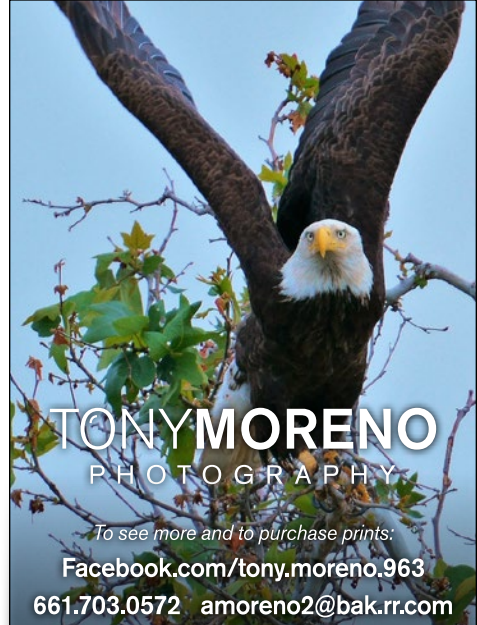
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Water, Farm Bill Drive Talks at Food and Agricultural Summit

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

By Christine Souza, Assistant Editor Ag Alert

The outlook for California's agricultural economy shows some signs of improvement after several years of supply-chain constraints, high input costs and a multiyear drought that forced farmers to fallow acres and remove orchards.

Drenching storms that hit the state early this year turned the tide, contributing to a more positive outlook for agriculture this year, an economic analyst told attendees during a food and agriculture issues summit in Sacramento last week.

"A year ago, we were discussing logistical bottlenecks and elevated fertilizer prices in the middle of an exceptional drought," said David Magaña, a Rabobank vice president and senior analyst based in Fresno. "Now, we see port congestion getting better, availability of containers is improving and the water situation is better as we go from zero water allocation to a 100% water allocation."

Magaña offered insights as part of the Food & Ag Issues Summit West, held June 5. The event was presented by Agri-Pulse, with the California Farm Bureau among the top sponsors. It brought together farmers, agricultural leaders, researchers and state officials for discussions on topics including water, labor and policy.

In his economic outlook for California agriculture, Magaña said challenges remain on the demand side as consumers adjust to the inflationary environment, including higher food costs. He said he expects the trend to continue before declining in the next few years.

"In the long run, we'll continue to see this massive collision of forces of increased demand for food globally and supply-side constraints that are water, labor and regulatory," Magaña said. "In the future, there will be a lot of opportunities to continue growing food for a global population."

Daniel Sumner, director of the University of California Agricultural Issues Center, spoke about global pressures affecting farmers. The agricultural and resource economics professor at UC Davis said commodities such as winegrapes, tree fruit and nuts face more competition from around the world.

At home, Sumner said, the No. 1 challenge affecting farmers is "dealing with regulations." To be successful, he said, farmers must be given flexibility to innovate and adapt.

Affecting farmers statewide is California's 2014 Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, or SGMA, which requires local agencies to bring groundwater aquifers into balance by the 2040s.

Fresno County farmer Don Cameron joined a panel in discussing the feasibility of groundwater recharge. Cameron said replenishing groundwater is "a simple operation," which is "taking water when it's available to bring it on the farm and allow it to trickle down into the aquifer." But he added, "There's more to it than that: You have to have the conveyance and the infrastructure."

When stretching the water supply, California farmers could either idle farmland or find water, which is why capturing floodwater is key, said Cameron, president of the California State Board of Food and Agriculture.

In discussing roadblocks to groundwater recharge,

Fresno County farmer Stuart Woolf of Woolf Farming said more certainty about when and under what circumstances water would be available would help farmers.

"If we knew that under certain conditions and certain flows there would be water available, we would go out on our farm and make greater investments to avail ourselves of those opportunities," Woolf said. "For us to do 25,000 acre-feet this year, we're going to spend \$3 million or \$4 million. There's a lot of money that goes into just putting the water into the ground."

Woolf suggested the state should plan better and have a greater sense of urgency to take advantage of floodwaters. He said, "In the wet periods, we need to have a target of 5 million acre-feet or 6 million acre-feet (of groundwater recharge)."

California Department of Water Resources Director Karla Nemeth estimated the state has about 3.3 million acre-feet of capacity for groundwater recharge. She described 2023 as a "stunning water year for California," noting that the state quickly emerged from one of the deepest droughts on record with most reservoirs now brimming with water.

The state announced last week that since late last year, it has authorized the diversion of 1.2 million acre-feet of water for underground storage, wildlife refuges and other purposes. This is in addition to an estimated 90,000 acre-feet of floodwater diverted to underground aquifers permitted through Gov. Gavin Newsom's executive order.

"We will have these very intense storm events that can build an entire water year that pulls us out of a drought," Nemeth said. "We can also have intense

storm conditions in the middle of a year that also turns out to be dry. That's been the story of the last three-plus years."

During a discussion on the 2023 Farm Bill, California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson joined specialty crop leaders in addressing how commodities such as fruits, vegetables and nuts might fare in the omnibus legislation.

With members of Congress reaching an agreement on the debt ceiling to avoid a default, Johansson said, "This changes the whole game" and "relieves some of the pressure so that we can start to have some real discussions." The next farm bill is expected to cost \$1.5 trillion. The 2018 Farm Bill expires in September.

"It is the first time that the conversation really seems to be happening at both kitchen tables in San Francisco or Los Angeles, as well as on my family's and members' farm tables," Johansson said. "There are a lot of challenges, so when we talk about programs—soil conservation, disaster relief and insurance needs of commodities—consumers now see this front and center, from wildfires and hurricanes as well as rising food prices."

Aubrey Bettencourt, president and CEO of the Almond Alliance of California, emphasized the need for the next farm bill to include improved disaster programs.

"Our disaster programs are horrendous and disgusting and disrespectful to our farmers. At least for the West, we can't qualify for even disaster programs because of the AGI (adjusted gross income) requirements," Bettencourt said. "It's not our fault that our 40-acre guy grows a high-value crop that the world wants

See **WATER, FARM BILL** on PAGE 15



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Empowering Agriculture and Farming Operations: The Advantages of FormForce SaaS Platform

By Valley Ag Voice

Technology is crucial in streamlining operations and driving efficiency in the ever-evolving ag industry. FormForce, a powerful Software-as-a-Service (SaaS) platform, has emerged as a game-changer for the agriculture and farming industry. This article explores the numerous benefits FormForce offers regarding document management, compliance, data analysis, digital recordkeeping, data security, and asset management. By leveraging these features, FormForce empowers agricultural operations allowing for seamless technology integration into daily practices.

Document Management

FormForce revolutionizes document management by providing a centralized repository for all essential operations-related documents. Easily upload, organize, and access documents such as permits, licenses, contracts, and legal agreements. Eliminate the hassle of physical paperwork and significantly reduce the risk of losing important documents. With FormForce, you can retrieve any document at your convenience, promoting streamlined operations and efficient decision-making.

Compliance

Compliance with regulations and standards is critical. FormForce simplifies compliance by offering tools and features that ensure adherence to relevant regulations. The platform allows tracking and management of compliance requirements such as pesticide usage, environmental regulations, and labor laws. Automated reminders and notifications help you stay updated on deadlines and ensure timely compliance. By leveraging FormForce, you can confidently meet regulatory obligations minimizing the risk of penalties and maintaining a strong reputation within the industry.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is essential for making informed decisions and optimizing agricultural operations. FormForce provides robust data analysis capabilities, creating valuable insights from the vast amount of data generated from operations. The platform supports advanced analytics tools that can process and visualize data. By analyzing this data, trends, patterns, and potential areas for

improvement are identified, leading to optimized processes and increased productivity.

Digital Recordkeeping

Digital recordkeeping is a significant advantage of FormForce. By transitioning from traditional paper-based record keeping to a digital system you can enjoy streamlined operations and enhanced accessibility. The platform enables you to store and manage records related to crop yields, field observations, equipment maintenance, and financial transactions. Digital record keeping saves physical storage space and allows for quick and easy information retrieval. Additionally, FormForce ensures data integrity, preventing loss or damage to critical records.

Data Security

Data security is a top priority for any agricultural operation. With FormForce, you can rest assured that corporate data is protected. The platform employs robust security measures, including encryption, secure data transmission, and access controls. This ensures that sensitive information remains confidential and protected from unauthorized access. FormForce adheres to industry best practices and compliance standards, providing peace of mind regarding data security.

Asset Management

Efficient management of agricultural assets is crucial for maximizing productivity and minimizing costs. FormForce offers comprehensive asset management capabilities that allow you to track and monitor equipment, machinery, and inventory. The platform records asset details, tracks maintenance schedules, and monitors utilization. By having a holistic view of assets, you can optimize equipment usage, schedule maintenance proactively, and avoid downtime. Effective asset management provided by FormForce leads to improved operational efficiency and cost savings.

The FormForce SaaS platform is a powerful tool that transforms agriculture and farming operations. With its robust features in document management, compliance, data analysis, digital recordkeeping, data security, and asset management, FormForce empowers agricultural operations allowing for seamless technology integration into daily practices. Visit FormForceInc.com/VAV-demo for more information and to schedule a free demo.



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COMMENTARY: Ranchers Blindsided by ‘Conservation Lease’ Scheme



By Zippy Duvall, president of the American Farm Bureau Federation

Reprinted with Permission from California Farm Bureau Federation

I love visiting the great American West. Every time, I leave in awe of all I have seen. I am not a stranger to diverse landscapes coming from my home state of Georgia, with its mountains, forests and coastline. But the West is truly unique, not only in the landscape but in how ranchers serve as caretakers of our shared public lands.

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management is proposing significant changes to how public lands are managed, and we are looking at this closely to ensure ranchers can continue their critical work, keeping the land healthy for agriculture and natural wildlife. BLM recently released a proposal on “Conservation and Landscape Health” that really alters how multiple uses are balanced on public lands.

Among other things, the proposal creates a new “conservation lease” that it claims will strengthen the stewardship of America’s public lands. In California, the BLM manages over 660 livestock grazing allotments used by more than 550 permit or lease holders on 6 million acres.

On the surface, the term “strengthening stewardship” has a good ring to it. Ranchers are stewards of the land after all. They are on the frontlines, often the only folks for miles with eyes on the land and wildlife.

But this BLM proposal raises a lot of questions without providing much time for ranchers to get answers. Many are concerned that by making conservation a new “use” and issuing conservation leases, vast areas could be shut down from public use altogether. The public comment period, which is only 75 days in total, closes on June 20. Usually, big changes like these take months to years of conversations with interested stakeholders and many public hearings to ensure a sustainable, workable solution for all.

Ranchers are delivering a return on the trust placed in them to care for public lands. They are clearing debris, spotting wildfire risks and reporting other potential dangers to local law enforcement. Livestock grazing also brings overall health benefits to the land, from reducing wildfire risk and slowing the spread of invasive weeds to building robust root systems and spurring forage growth for native species.

The University of Wyoming Extension

crunched the most recent U.S. Department of Agriculture Census numbers and found that for each pound of beef raised on public lands, Americans get 44 cents in ecosystem-related returns.

There are red flags both in policy and process from BLM. They are using vague language and coming up with their own new terms for public lands use. Ranchers don’t know what the impact will be on their current grazing leases or what happens when they are up for renewal.

What’s more, there are some areas out West where the lines of public and private land look a bit like a checkerboard. So, if a rancher suddenly cannot graze or move their livestock across neighboring public lands, they will quickly be out of feed and out of business.

Ranchers are already becoming an endangered species, if you will, out West with the rising cost of land and other challenges from water access to restrictions like these on public lands. One rancher in Colorado observed that in the region where he works, the number of ranch families is barely a third of what it was 30 or 40 years ago.

What makes this proposal even more of a tough pill to swallow is that ranchers have traditionally worked closely with BLM. It’s truly been a partnership, but ranchers were blindsided by this proposal. Western ranchers have been caring for the land for decades, if not centuries, for some families. Their work is critical not only to the nation but also to their local, rural communities. A rule of this magnitude should provide the broadest opportunity for feedback, especially given the impact on those local communities.

Farm Bureau is actively engaging on this issue. We are urging BLM to extend the comment period, and we will submit comments highlighting our concerns on behalf of our rancher members. We are also working with members of Congress to pass legislation that would send BLM back to the drawing board.

Most importantly, it is time for BLM and lawmakers to hear directly from ranchers. Ranchers, I urge you to share your story, share your concerns and talk with your lawmakers about the benefits your work brings to the land.

Stewardship is truly strengthened when farmers and ranchers have the flexibility we need to do right by the land. Stewardship is strengthened when farmers and ranchers have access to tools and incentives that help bolster their sustainability practices. The BLM can and should do better.

“Dirty Dozen” List Discredited by Peer Reviewed Research, Government Data

Press Release Provided by the Alliance for Food and Farming

Peer reviewed research published in the Journal of Toxicology found that the recommendation in the “Dirty Dozen” list to substitute organic forms of produce for conventional does not result in any decrease in risk for consumers because residues on conventionally grown are so low, if present at all.

The research also found that the list authors follow no scientifically established methodology in the development of their list.

Further, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s (USDA) Pesticide Data Program (PDP) consistently finds that over 99% of foods sampled had residue levels well below Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) safety standards with 25% having no detectable residues at all. According to the USDA: “Based on the PDP data, consumers can feel confident about eating a diet that is rich in fresh fruits and vegetables.”

And the EPA states: “EPA is confident that the fruits and vegetables our children are eating are safer than ever. EPA evaluates new and existing pesticides to ensure that they can be used with a reasonable certainty of no harm to infants and children as well as adults. EPA works continually to review and improve safety standards that apply to pesticide residues on food.”

The “Dirty Dozen” list authors admit that their list does not assess risk nor do they apply basic tenets of toxicology in the development of their list. From Environmental Working Group’s (EWG) “Dirty Dozen” report: “The Shoppers Guide does not incorporate risk assessment into the calculations. All pesticides are weighted equally, and we do not factor in the levels deemed acceptable by the EPA.”

Research published in the journal Nutrition Today has also shown that fear-based messaging used by groups like the EWG may result in consumers purchasing less produce – organic or conventionally grown. And, in a survey conducted by

the Alliance for Food and Farming (AFF), 94% of registered dietitians agreed that the “Dirty Dozen” messaging negatively impacts their ability to increase consumption of fruits and vegetables among their clients and consumers.

“The consumption of fruits and vegetables can help decrease chronic diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer. These fear tactics used in the ‘Dirty Dozen’ report are actually hurting consumers, especially the vulnerable populations, and may lead consumers to eat even less produce,” says Dr. Sylvia Klinger, DBA, MS, RD, founder of Hispanic Food Communications who serves on the AFF’s Management Board.

In a report released by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) last year, only one in 10 Americans consume enough fruits and vegetables each day, which is unchanged from previous survey levels announced in 2015. Those living below or close to the poverty level were the least likely to meet vegetable recommendations.

From the CDC: “Continued efforts to increase fruit and vegetable consumption by improving access and affordability in diverse community and institutional settings will help mitigate health disparities among U.S. residents. Additional policies and programs that will increase access to fruits and vegetables in places where U.S. residents live, learn, work, and play, might increase consumption and improve health.”

“Consumers can and should disregard these types of lists,” Dr. Klinger says. “Simply follow the advice of dietitians and health experts and choose the fruits and vegetables that you enjoy are affordable and accessible for you and your family, but choose to eat more every day for better health and a longer life.”

For consumers who are still concerned about residues, the Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) states that washing fruits and vegetables under running tap water often removes or eliminates any residues that may be present. (Never use soaps or detergents to wash produce.)

Water, Farm Bill

Continued from PAGE 13

and, when he’s wiped out from a freeze, there isn’t an insurance product available and he’s got a wait a year to see if he will survive or have any assistance in the next year.”

She said her members also want to see funding increased in the Market Access Program and Market Facilitation Program “to move our product into a new generation post-COVID, post pandemic and post supply-chain disruption.”

Ian LeMay, president of the California Fresh Fruit Association, said strengthening the domestic food supply is critical.

“We had a very unique experience in the last five years. For the first time, at least in my lifetime, people went to the grocery store and saw a shortage on the shelves,” LeMay said. “Our members are wholly capable of supplying our domestic food production, but we need

that assistance.

“A domestic food supply needs to be fortified,” he added.

As California farmers face a shrinking supply of employees, some have advocated for increased automation. LeMay suggested the farm bill include grant funding to help more farmers to modernize and enhance food production.

“We can research and develop all we want, but unless we help the market, then adopt these new technologies, we can’t capitalize it quick enough,” LeMay said, adding that labor is 70% of total costs for most of the commodities he represents. “We have to create efficiencies within our operations so that we can continue to propel our commodity sectors forward.”

To ensure California is successful in growing the food supply that’s needed in the future, Sumner said, “the long haul for agriculture really is in innovation” and attracting innovators and new technologies to farming.

“That’s been true for 100 years,” he said. “And it’s going to continue to be true for the next 100.”



Photo credit: AFBF Photo, Phillip Gerlach

Farmers Take Action in Washington

Press Release Provided by the American Farm Bureau Federation

More than 150 farmers and ranchers from across the country traveled to Washington, D.C., to meet directly with lawmakers and discuss priorities for the 2023 farm bill. The American Farm Bureau Federation Advocacy Fly-In included remarks from Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow (D-Mich.), House Agriculture Committee Chairman Glenn “GT” Thompson (R-Penn.) and Senate Agriculture Committee Ranking Member John Boozman (R-Ark.). House Agriculture Committee Ranking Member David Scott (D-Ga.) sent a video message.

“It’s crucial that lawmakers hear directly from the people who are affected by farm policy,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. “America’s farmers and ranchers are dedicated to growing the food, fuel and fiber families across the nation rely on. We know how important the farm bill is to maintaining a secure and sustainable food supply. I’m confident the personal stories shared by our members will help inspire lawmakers to support and swiftly pass a new farm bill.”

Agriculture Committee leaders spoke before the group fanned out across Capitol Hill. They discussed the challenges they’ll face in getting the farm bill passed this year and urged attendees to speak with as many elected leaders as they can, both in Washington and when members of Congress return home. They stressed the value of personal connections and stories of direct impact, including through the Advocacy Fly-In.

Chairwoman Stabenow said, “I was glad to join Chairman Thompson, and Ranking Member Boozman at the Farm Bureau’s 2023 Advocacy Fly-In. I look forward to working with the Farm Bureau, as I always have, to pass a bipartisan farm bill that reflects the diversity of American agriculture, provides strong, responsible risk management tools for our nation’s farmers,

supports our rural communities, and continues vital nutrition assistance programs on which millions of Americans rely.”

Chairman Thompson said, “To have an effective farm bill, we must reach across the aisle and the Capitol. Conversations like the one we had here today highlight the importance of bipartisan and bicameral work to support our nation’s farmers, ranchers, foresters, producers and consumers.”

Rep. Scott said, “Today’s discussion with the American Farm Bureau Federation is critical to ensuring the next farm bill adequately supports America’s diverse agriculture industry. The farm bill contains programs and policies that support the well-being of America as a whole, from coast to coast and from farmers to families. I am committed to working with my colleagues across the aisle to pass a bipartisan farm bill that gives America’s farmers the reassurance they need to continue ensuring America’s position as a world-leading producer of food and fiber, and to ensuring we continue our fight against poverty and hunger with a strong nutrition title.”

Sen. Boozman said, “I am grateful for the opportunity to join with my colleagues at the Farm Bureau’s 2023 Advocacy Fly-In. This is the perfect time for members to be in Washington to make their voices heard on the farm bill. There is simply no substitute for speaking directly with lawmakers about the impact decisions made in Washington have on your livelihoods at home. I’m a firm believer in the idea that the best ideas come from the ground up.”

Attendees were informed there are 260 members – more than half of Congress – who have never worked on a farm bill, making personal stories of impact even more important. AFBF members also discussed other pressing issues facing agriculture, including the impact of the recent Sackett v. EPA decision by the Supreme Court, as well as the need for Congress to address agricultural labor reform.



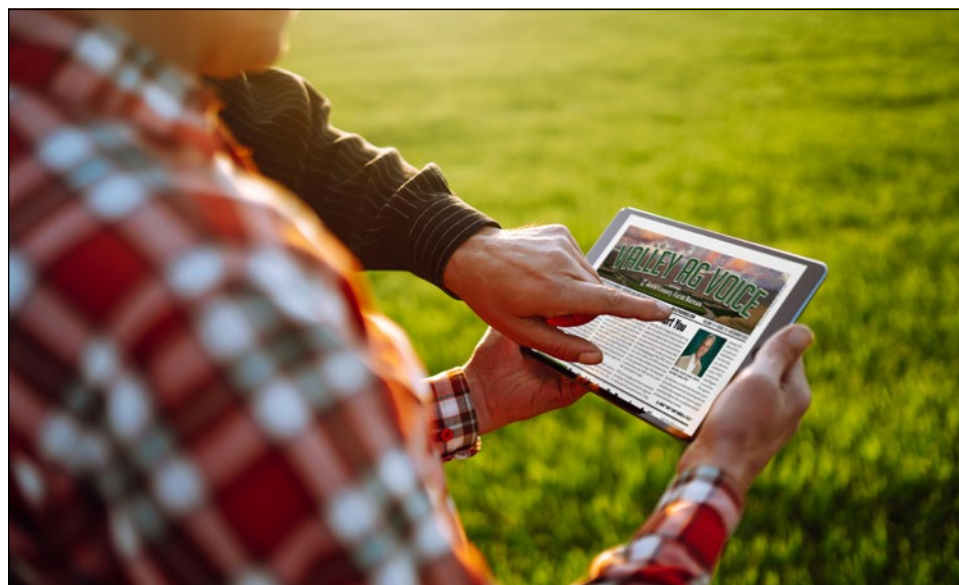
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USDA Launches Effort to Strengthen Substantiation of Animal-raising Claims

Press Release Provided by the U.S. Department of Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) announced today that it is implementing a multi-step effort aimed at strengthening the substantiation of animal-raising claims. This action builds on the significant work the USDA has already undertaken to protect consumers from false and misleading labels and to implement President Biden's Executive Order on Promoting Competition in the American economy.

"Consumers should be able to trust that the label claims they see on products bearing the USDA mark of inspection are truthful and accurate," said Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack. "USDA is taking action today to ensure the integrity of animal-raising claims and level the playing field for producers who are truthfully using these claims, which we know consumers value and rely on to guide their meat and poultry purchasing decisions."

Animal-raising claims, such as "grass-fed" and "free-range," are voluntary marketing claims that highlight certain aspects of how the source animals for meat and poultry products are raised. These claims must be approved by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) before they can be included on the labels of meat and poultry products sold to consumers. FSIS most recently updated its guideline on these claims in 2019.

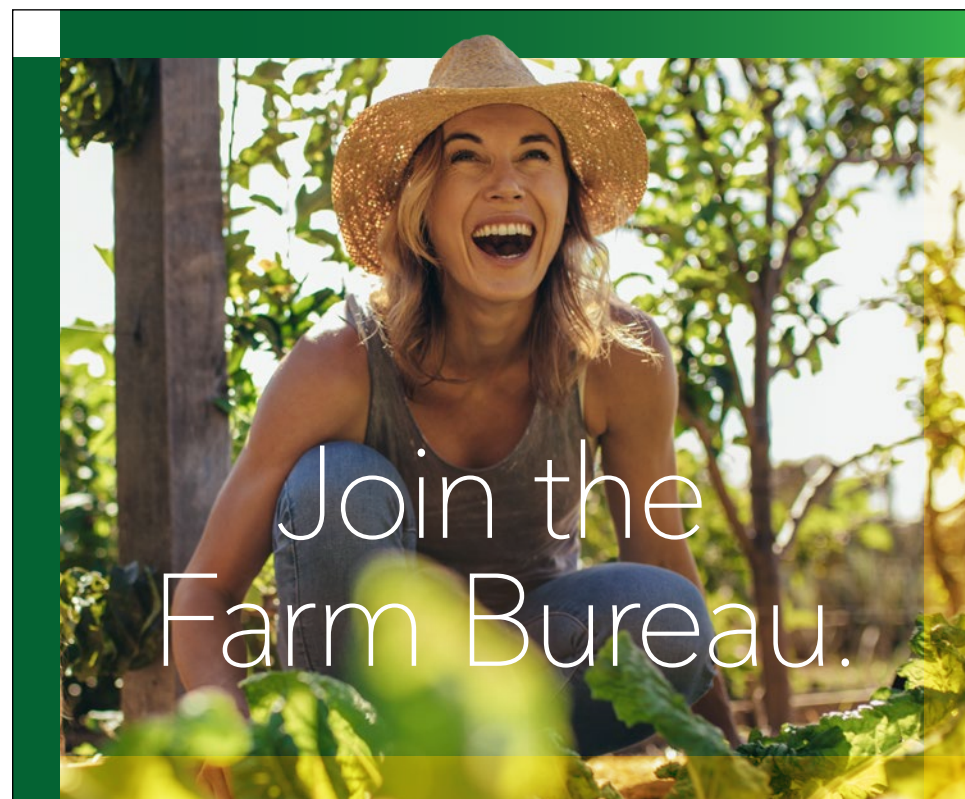
FSIS has received several petitions, comments, and letters from a wide range of stakeholders asking the agency to reevaluate its oversight of animal-raising claims, specifically, how they are substantiated. In addition, the veracity of "negative" antibiotics claims (e.g., "raised without antibiotics" or "no antibiotics ever") has come into question.

FSIS, in partnership with USDA's Agricultural Research Service (ARS), will be conducting a sampling project to assess antibiotic residues in cattle destined for the "raised without antibiotics" market. The results of this project will help inform whether FSIS should require that laboratory testing results be submitted for the "raised without antibiotics" claim or start a new verification sampling program.

FSIS will also be issuing a revised industry guideline to recommend that companies strengthen the documentation they submit to the agency to substantiate animal-raising claims. The agency plans to strongly encourage use of third-party certification to verify these claims.

Together these actions will be used to guide potential rulemaking on animal-raising claims. USDA looks forward to continued engagement with stakeholders as it works to ensure these claims meet consumer expectations.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. In the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America's food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy, and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.



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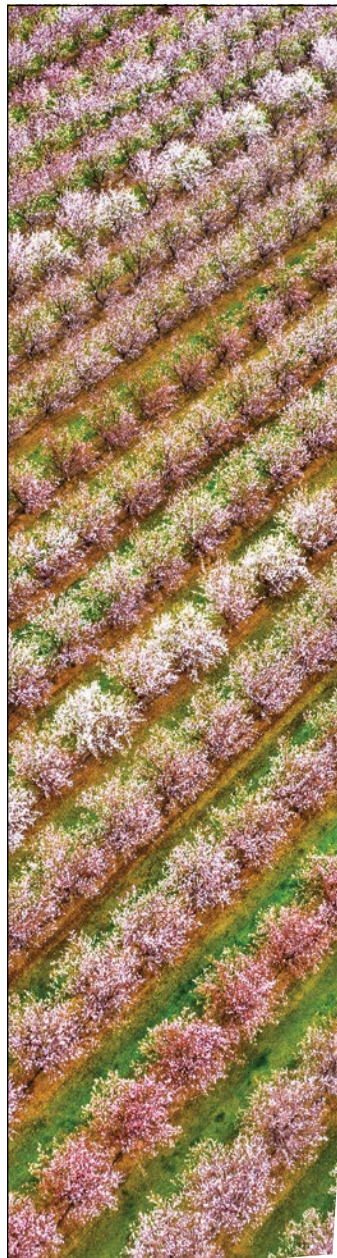
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Freedom in Christ

By Joshua Stevens
Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

This month we celebrate our nation's Independence Day. We will see friends, family, and neighbors join in traditional festivities—from barbecuing to watching baseball and setting off fireworks. Americans will join in as we remember breaking free from the chains of England and becoming a nation all our own. It is an excellent time to remember another freedom we have. This freedom was also bought by the blood of someone long ago who died so that we may be free. He did not die so we could vote, have freedom from housing soldiers, or have a fair and speedy trial, rather, he died so we may be reconciled to our Creator and Lord.

Paul writes in Galatians 5, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery.”¹ Paul, of course, is talking about how faith in Christ has set us free from the law, which he talks about extensively in Romans. Not only that, but one of the main thrusts of Galatians is the emphasis on justification. In the context of the Bible, when we talk about justification, we mean to declare something righteous in the eyes of God. So, Paul is communicating that what makes us righteous is not works nor the law; it is Christ and Christ alone.

Many Christians hear this and think that it ends there. The ball game is over because Christ has secured victory for us; if we believe it, we will be in Heaven with him forever. And that's not exactly wrong; it just misses the necessary context to make it wholly true. Faith is not passive, it is active. Hebrews 11 gives examples through the action of Abraham, who obeyed God, and Moses, who refused to be called the son of Pharaoh. We know from the book of James that faith must be paired with actions. This is not to say that actions are a requisite for salvation but instead that

they are the logical next step for one who has faith. We see this in situations throughout life. You have faith that the chair will hold you up, so you sit down. The quarterback has faith that the receiver will catch the ball, so he throws it to him. The batter has faith that his bat will hit the ball over the wall, so he swings for the fences. The action comes because a reasonable belief in the faith precedes it. If this was not the case, the quarterback would not throw, the batter not swing, and you not sit.

So then, what is it Paul is trying to drive home here? He is reminding the church that we are justified by one means—Christ alone. While others insist we must work for our salvation, they are not only wrong but stand against the Gospel of Christ and His work on the cross.

“For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”²

As we think about our earthly freedom this month, let us remember our eternal freedom in Christ that we should strive to proclaim first and foremost. Let us love and share the gospel to bring others into the same freedom we have.

Will you pray with me?

Lord, thank you for all you have given us, from our freedom today to our freedom in eternity. Thank you for keeping your holy hand over us, guiding us, and continuing a good work in us. As we continue this month, provide us opportunities to share who You are with others and how You have permanently altered our lives. Let us be a light to the world that guides others to reconciliation with you through Christ. Let us be humble, wise, and bold so that we may navigate this world's issues and stay centered on the gospel. Above all, we align our will with Yours that we may accomplish all You have laid out before us, glorify You, and act as good and faithful servants. In Jesus' name, I pray, *Amen*.

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2001). *The Holy Bible English Standard Version*. Wheaton: Good News Publishers.

² Crossway Bibles. (2001). Galatians 5:13

Kern County Wildlife Profile: American Badger



(photo by Moose Peterson / MoosePeterson.com)

The American badger is a member of the Mustelidae, or weasel family. It has a flat body with short legs, a triangular face, and a long, pointed, tipped-up nose. It has long brown or black fur with white stripes on its cheeks and one stripe running from its nose to the back of its head. With a strong sense of smell and long claws, they are well-equipped for finding and digging their prey from their burrows. The American badger is between 20-32 inches long and weighs 10-24 pounds, and males are slightly larger than females. American badgers prefer to live in dry, open grasslands, fields, and pastures, and they feed mainly on rodents. The badger also eats snakes, birds, and reptiles; they sometimes bury extra food to eat later.



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