



THE LOCAL VOICE FOR OUR FARMERS, RANCHERS, AND DAIRY PRODUCERS SINCE 2013 VALLEYAGVOICE.COM VOLUME 13 • ISSUE 9 • SEPTEMBER 2023

Water Politics Alter California's Ag Future

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Since its implementation in 2014, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act has monopolized California's political landscape, propelling various agendas among stakeholders in restructuring the state's water infrastructure.

With six Central Valley groundwater basin plans

rejected and deemed inadequate by the California Department of Water Resources, the State Water Board has begun an intervention process.

When Groundwater Sustainability Agencies initially formed, various stakeholders vied for a seat at the table, but small farmers were largely left out of basin plans, according to a white paper released by Civic Well.

"You know, I used to go to the meetings until I

realized that this room might as well just be empty," Bakersfield farmer Steve Brunni said. "Whoever's sitting at the front of the room, could be state, could be DWR...but everybody in the room has a completely different opinion, and when that room goes to questions and answers, it lasts forever."

When the six basin plans—Kern, Kaweah, Chowchilla, Tule, Tulare Lake, and Delta-Mendota—were rejected, Brunni was not surprised.

"To me, it was already predetermined, 'You're not going to make it. We are taking your water,'" Brunni said.

ADDRESSING INADEQUACIES

The six critically over-drafted basins were deemed inadequate by DWR for not addressing deficiencies in their sustainable management criteria, according to a press release from DWR. The deficiencies, Deputy Director of Sustainable Groundwater Management,

See **WATER POLITICS** on PAGE 7



Kern County water districts and farmers were effective in capturing record Kern River flows in 2023. But additional water from the Delta that could have been captured was not recharged due to insufficient capacity. A number of planning efforts are underway to understand how much additional recharge capacity is needed to achieve groundwater sustainability. (Photo provided by California Almonds)

Work on a Collaborative Valley Water Solution Continues

By Scott Hamilton
President, Hamilton Resource Economics

The road to meaningful change in managing California's scarce water resources is long and dusty. The journey is not for those in a hurry. Patience, perseverance, a willingness to listen, a desire to be understood, a solid plan, and friends who believe in the cause – these are essential for success.

Recognizing this, there have been several collaborative efforts formed with the intent of forging a water solution for the Valley. Valley Ag Voice has provided numerous updates

on the work of the Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley. That organization seeks to mobilize the Valley into a single voice on water issues to minimize miscommunications between legislators and Valley residents. Well aware of the prospects for the Valley if the only tool in the SGMA toolbox is land "repurposing," it seeks solutions that will see farms and communities in the Valley continue to thrive. Those solutions are fundamentally water supply based – capturing more high flow water and conveying it to long term storage that can survive the volatile nature of the state's precipitation.

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Exhibitors and Entertainers Prepare for Kern County Fair

By Audrey Hill, Valley Ag Voice

The Kern County Fair is approaching fast! The 12-day event will start on September 20 and end on October 1. This year's fair includes free concerts, delicious food, monster trucks, a rodeo, livestock events, and much more!

The first Kern County Fair took place in 1916, located where the Kern County Museum and Clock Tower stand today. The entire five-day event was held on the 106-acre plot under tents, as no buildings had been erected yet. The first 34 years of the fair were held at this location until moving to the 160-acre plot off South P Street, where the fair is still held every year around late September into early October. Governors, parades, special

political visitors, and of course, the community have all gathered on the fairgrounds to celebrate and enjoy themselves throughout the many years of its history.

Many know the fair to be the last hoorah of summer. Children and adults alike enjoy rollercoasters, carnival games and delicious treats to celebrate the end of the season. Originally, however, fairgoers celebrated the end of a different season. Livestock and harvest competitions have lived at the heart of the Kern County Fair for its entirety, and what may seem like a small slice of history is alive and unfaltering in the Kern agricultural community. Roughly 3,500 hogs, meat and dairy goats, lambs, beef and dairy cattle, turkeys, chickens, other fowl,

See **KERN COUNTY FAIR** on PAGE 13



FARM BUREAU NEWS

The United Voice of Kern County's Farming Community



President's Message

By Patty Poire
President, Kern County
Farm Bureau

Summer has come and gone! Now comes the “Fall”—legislation is back in session in Sacramento, continuing the overburdening of regulations as well as the discussion on the 2023-2024 budget. Last month's article was strictly about the Sustainable Management Act (SGMA), but this time I am going to cover several items that are coming at you as farmers or landowners.

Quick note on the 2023-2024 budget: in a memo from the Legislative Analyst's Office (LAO) the Cap and Trade Revenue generated from AB 32 — originally created to reduce greenhouse gas emissions — will grant 65% of revenue to the high-speed rail project (25%), Affordable Housing and Sustainable Communities Program (20%), Transit and Intercity Rail Capital Program (10%), low carbon transit operations (5%) and Safe and Affordable Drinking Water Program (5%, up to \$130 million). Also stated in the memo, which began in 2022, \$200 million is continuously appropriated for forest health and wildfire prevention activities. As for the remaining percentage, it is available for appropriation by the legislation through the annual budget process. What is fascinating to me is that the source of funds for the Cap and Trade come from the oil and agricultural industries, and those industries are not mentioned in the LAO's memo as recipients of the funds. Interesting!

The Department of Pesticides (DPR) is working on a state-wide notification system that will provide a public web-based site where they will be notified when a proposed scheduled pesticide application is going to take place close to their residence. The DPR scheduled a presentation of their web-based product last month for the citizens of the City of Shafter who attended the

AB 617 meeting. The DPR also developed a Sustainable Pest Management roadmap that provides a roadmap for the agricultural industry going forward as well as an urban roadmap. This is the first time that I am aware of DPR exploring and addressing how urban usage contributes to “drifts” in urban areas.

The State Water Board and California Water Commission Board are entertaining a roll-out of a water market concept. With the passing of Assembly Bill 1755, the California Water Data Consortium was established in 2019 to support the implementation of the Open and Transparent Water Data Act. Since the passing and founding of the Consortium, work has progressed in a web-based accounting platform as well as a user-friendly data system that should be coming out later this year. This system is what the State Water Board and the Water Commission are looking to handle the water market that they are considering. I strongly recommend that you visit the California Water Data Consortium website to fully understand their mission and as a part of their advisory committee, I stress the agricultural perspective. (www.cawaterdata.org)

Update on SGMA — rumor has it that the April 2024 probationary hearing date for the Kern subbasin seems to be slipping slightly, which will help in moving the basin forward, finding “acceptable” solutions to the inadequate determination. I use the word acceptable because the agricultural industry will be the hardest hit under SGMA. Finding solutions should not destroy the industry but allow the industry to reduce the overdraft via a glide path that gives the farmers/landowners time to adjust and reduce their demand. The statute states that by 2040 the basin needs to be able to prove sustainability not tomorrow, not in 2025 but by 2040. There are some individuals in this basin who are requesting that the GSAs placate the state's demand to become sustainable within 5 years. Do the landowners/farmers have that same thought, or do they even know that is what is being recommended? As I mentioned in the above paragraph about a water market, one needs to understand its water allocations — SGMA is moving toward providing farmers/landowners with sustainable water allocations, and some basins to the north have already provided water allocations to their farmers/landowners. Another rumor out there is that the State Water Board staff is wanting the adoption of groundwater pumping allocations to pass those basins that received inadequate letters. So, it appears that water markets and water allocations are lining up!

My time as the farm bureau president is coming to an end. My last article will be next month, but I do want to begin thanking you all for the opportunity that you presented to me to be the president of the nation's number one agricultural county. If there is anything that you remember about me, I hope that it is my favorite saying: “If you are not at the table, then you are on the menu!” Engage!

Executive Director's Report



By Rachel Nettleton
Executive Director,
Kern County Farm
Bureau

In the heart of the valley, my journey as the new Executive Director of the Farm Bureau began with a sense of enthusiasm and curiosity. Stepping into this role, I embarked on a variety of experiences that have not only enriched my knowledge but have also deepened my connection with the incredible farmers, ranchers, and supporters who form the backbone of our community.

The past month has been a transformative period, filled with opportunities to learn and grow. One of the most remarkable parts of this journey is meeting the individuals who work tirelessly to feed our nation. These conversations have illuminated the challenges they face and the innovations our local farmers and ranchers employ to ensure the sustainability of our agricultural landscape.

Among the memorable events last month, our “Save

Water, Drink Beer” event stands out as a resounding success. Laughter filled the air as farmers, supporters, and beer enthusiasts gathered to enjoy a night of fun, networking, and meaningful discussions.

As we look ahead, the anticipation for our largest event — The Bounty of Kern County — is soon approaching on Saturday, October 7. This event encapsulates the essence of community and agriculture, where attendees can connect with local farmers, and appreciate the heart and soul of the region's agricultural endeavors. We extend an open invitation to all for this year's Bounty. If you are interested in attending or becoming a sponsor, you can visit our website at kerncfb.com for more information.

The Kern County Farm Bureau is full of activity as we finalize our 2024 event calendar. While we are saving the finer details for a reveal in the fourth quarter, rest assured that the coming year will be filled with engaging events and initiatives that highlight the importance of our farming community.

I am full of anticipation for the exciting year ahead and believe that together, we'll continue to cultivate Kern County's legacy in agriculture for generations to come.



Young Farmers and Ranchers members from across the state at Sweet Thistle Farms for our Summer Leaders Meeting in Fresno (Photo by Timothy Collins)

Young Farmers & Ranchers



By Timothy Collins
Chair, Kern County
Young Farmers
& Ranchers

I have written in previous articles about how the Young Farmers & Ranchers are giving scholarships, promoting ag, learning about the industry, or being involved in the community, but this month I want to focus on the leadership development aspect of YF&R. Members of our officer team were able to attend the California State Young Farmers & Ranchers Summer Leaders Meeting recently. This is a two-day event where many of the county YF&R chairs and other YF&R officers from across the state gather.

We met in Fresno this year and spent Friday touring local ag operations, participating in community service projects, and networking over dinner. The focus of the event was to facilitate discussions on leadership development and learn from other groups across the state.

There are numerous facets that go into running a successful YF&R club, and it is important to be part of the state-level organization. The success of our YF&R in Kern is something we were able to share with many counties across the state.

As an active FFA member in high school, I was always too timid to become an officer, but YF&R gave me an opportunity 8 years after high school to take on responsibility and build leadership skills. As a professional out of school and in the industry, I was fortunate to have a friend invite me to the group. At the time, becoming the chair was never something I envisioned for myself, but as I write these 5 years later, I am well into my second year as chair. I've learned and grown so much by becoming involved and joining the officer team. I have been able to get so much out of the group by putting so much into it.

I know what it takes to plan events and fundraisers because we are the ones that actually make them happen. I can comfortably lead a meeting—something I would not have dreamed

See **YOUNG FARMERS** on **PAGE 3**

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

Farm Bill Likely to Miss Deadline

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

With the Farm Bill set to expire on Sept. 30, the House Committee on Agriculture has begun to draft the multi-year bill after numerous listening sessions and requests from agriculture workers across the nation.

During an August trip to Penn State's Ag Progress Days, Chairman Glenn "GT" Thompson explained that the Farm Bill is behind schedule and will likely require an extension.

"The Senate is going to need to finish their work. Part of it is competition for floor time," Thompson said.

Thompson plans to release his Farm Bill draft a week before the committee markup—wherein the bill will be considered in session. House leaders will debate the legislation on the floor for a week, offering amendments, and voting on any changes.

Current titles in the Farm Bill include Commodities, Conservation, Nutrition, Credit, Rural Development, Research, Forestry, Energy, Horticulture, and Crop Insurance. Thompson discussed the likelihood of extending the 2018 Farm Bill as legislators craft a new bill

with special chapters for SNAP, farm credit, and other proposed protections.

Central Valley Congressman David Valadao hosted Chairman Thompson as well as other members of the House Committee on Agriculture at the 2023 World Ag Expo in Tulare. At a listening session, Central Valley farmers and ranchers shared their priorities for the new Farm Bill such as crop insurance for the valley's diverse commodities and specialty crops.

As a regional lead for the Farm Bill, Valadao detailed his priorities in an Op-Ed piece, explaining that the bill should include a developed crop insurance program as well as a safety net for the agriculture industry for extreme weather events.

"I'm working closely with Chairman Thompson to ensure the Farm Bill supports Central Valley agriculture producers," Valadao said. "Some of my priorities are strengthening crop insurance, supporting specialty crop growers, making improvements to REAP, investing in agricultural research services, and making it easier for local growers to qualify for disaster relief programs."

Young Farmers

Continued from PAGE 2

of back in high school. I am more capable of building relationships with those around me in the ag industry and elsewhere. Little of this would have happened if I had laid low and let someone else do the work. The success of our group depends on everyone in our executive team—you will be hearing more from me in the future about how great our team has been to work with and how often they put in more work than me! Another benefit is the new group of friends made from working together

throughout the year.

Sometimes it seems like the good life is to be free of responsibilities; however, it is our responsibilities that make life worth living. Being involved takes work and time commitment but it has certainly been worth it. I am very thankful for the opportunity to serve on the officer team. What I have taken on in YF&R will certainly help me in taking on the greater responsibilities in life that are sure to come, whether that be in family, work, church, or anything else.

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Beewise Maximizes Bee-Saving Efforts

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

According to findings from the University of Maryland and Auburn University's annual bee survey, roughly 50% of the nation's honeybee population died last year. Judith Arkush from Beewise, a robotic beehive development company, explained that the population of bee colonies around the world will continue to decrease in response to weather fluctuation, Varroa mites, and pesticide exposure.

"Considering the essential role bees play in pollinating our food crops, this is a real concern for everyone, especially when we think about global food security," Arkush said.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture explained that 35% of the world's food crops depend on pollinators—roughly equating to one out of every three bites of food.

However, despite the reduction of U.S. bee colonies last year, beekeepers involved in the survey explained that the nation's colonies will remain "relatively stable."

Commercial beekeepers, through expensive and time-consuming work, have stabilized the bee colony population through splitting and restocking hives, integrating new queens, or creating starter packs for colonies, AP News reported.



(Photo from Adobe Stock)

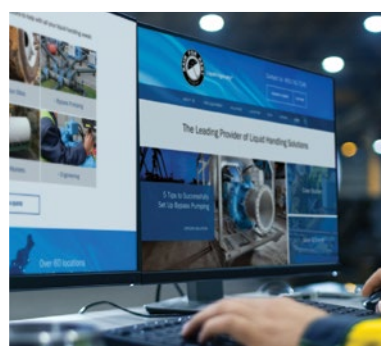
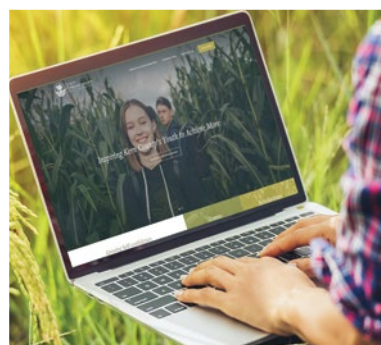
AUTOMATED HIVES

Beewise utilizes precision robotics and AI technology to help beekeepers maintain colony populations. According to Arkush, Beewise technology redesigned traditional beehives through solar energy to control climate, humidity, and pests.

"The hurdles of distance and time are bridged by our system's ability to inspect and treat bees remotely," Arkush said. "Our machine learning algorithms fill the knowledge gap, assessing hive health as effectively as an experienced beekeeper would."

The BeeHome is equipped with robotic arms capable of removing frames for inspection whilst AI capabilities identify threats such as pesticides, diseases, or parasites. Upon detection, the technology takes action to protect the hive and sends notifications to the beekeeper.

Beewise manages over seven billion bees—or 25,000 acres of pollinated crops. Arkush explained that the BeeHome reduces bee mortality by 80% and increases yields by roughly 50%.



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OPINION: Balancing Industry Strength and Individual Producer Vitality

By Austin Snedden
Ranching Contributor,
Valley Ag Voice

It is important that we recognize that the strength of an industry is vital for every sector, but it is equally important to recognize that we can have industry strength and producer contraction at the same time. As associations and advocates for our trade, we need to realize that industry strength and producer vitality aren't always simultaneous. Most of us advocate and have a strong passion for our industry because of our relationships with producers. If our primary goal in advocating for our industry is to create an environment where our fellow producers can thrive, we must make sure that sector health is represented in our model.

The march toward vertical integration is generally accomplished by many little steps that slowly move industry control up the chain. Vertical integration often contributes to industry efficiency and growth (until it gets too top heavy), but almost always results in the contraction of certain sectors in the industry. The number of pounds and dollars can go up, and simultaneously, the number of producers can go down. We have a short-circuited view of industry health if we are only gauging it on pounds and dollars, and ignoring what probably spawned



(Photo by Austin Snedden)

our passion for the industry—the people. In my younger years, there was advocacy and identity in the “cattle industry,” with a separate but related advocacy and identity in the “beef industry.” Both were dependent on each other, but both were interested in their own colleagues. We shifted to a point that the advocacy for the “cattle industry” was absorbed under the umbrella of the “beef industry.” According to USDA data, from 1996 to 2017, we have lost over 171,000 cattle producers in the U.S. At the same time, total industry dollars and pounds of production have increased. I am not advocating for burying our heads in the

sand and rejecting all efficiency and scientific advances, but as leaders and advocates for our sector, we cannot give up leverage to those further up the chain. We can simply look to the pork and poultry industry to see where the vertical integration model leads. Producers have very little independence in the genetics they raise and the means of production. They are given some form of security in forward contracts, but give up independence in genetic decisions and production methods. This is a very efficient system when it comes to pounds and dollars, but has led to larger farms and less farmers. The application to the cattle industry is upon us,

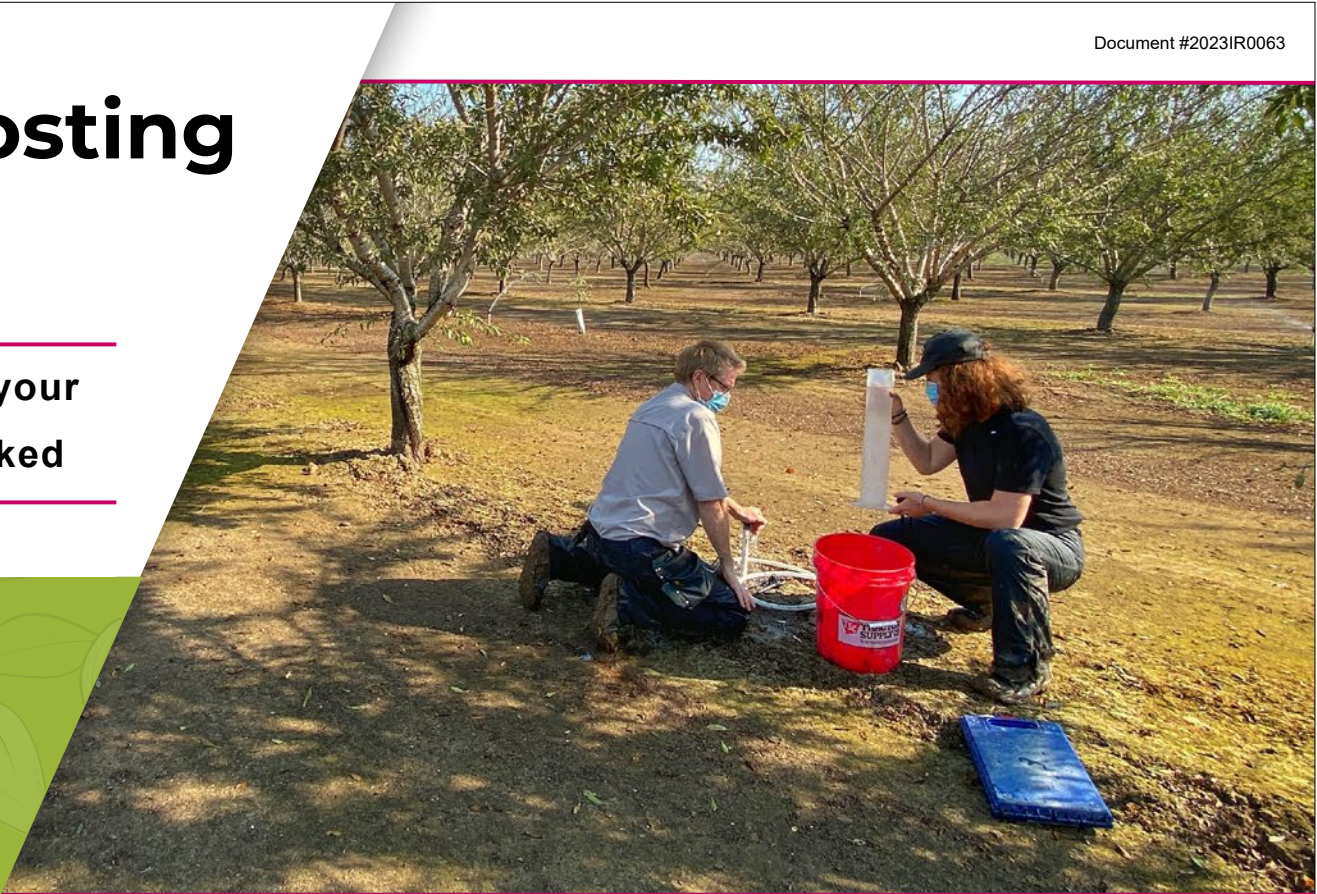
but it is incremental. Though some parts of vertical coordination are inevitable, we must ensure that the independence of our sector is represented in this endeavor toward vertical integration. The two largest beef breed associations in the U.S., Angus and Hereford, recently reviewed applications to register animals having a gene edit. Genetic companies and several breeders were looking to snip the DNA and remove or replace the trait with the form of this trait these parties found more desirable. Both of the traits submitted to these respective breed organizations were traits that can be selected through traditional breeding. The board of directors for each of these breed organizations voted to table the discussion of whether gene edited animals would be allowed to be registered. These issues and the fact that labs are already working on gene edits, spawned much industry discussion.

In a world with lab-created meat, a discussion about a genetic lab working with retailers and packers to bypass breed associations and a producer's genetic preferences to develop lab-created seed stock that becomes industry standard, doesn't sound that far-fetched. Cattle producers have done a great job working on genetic improvement as well as improvements in animal handling and efficiency. We need to keep working, but we also need to ensure that we are the ones steering our sector of the industry. Pounds and profit are extremely critical when we talk about an industry, but what good are pounds and profit if our neighbors and colleagues start dropping off? The corporate model for a healthy industry is pounds and profit, but if the ultimate goal is to keep ranchers ranching, we need to advocate for a healthy industry in pounds, profit, AND people.

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BRAKE FOR HARVEST

DRIVE WITH CAUTION AROUND HARVEST AREAS

Holloway's #BrakeForHarvest Campaign Aimed at Improving Road Safety for Harvest Workers

Social Media campaign warns drivers to use caution while driving through ag regions busy with harvest crews and equipment.

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

Holloway Agriculture has started a #BrakeForHarvest public service announcement campaign this harvest season, warning drivers to use extra caution while driving through



(Photos courtesy of Brian Milne, Holloway Agriculture)

agricultural areas where harvest machinery and crews are busy working.

"On behalf of our growers, harvest crews and ag partners, we'd like to remind rural residents that while our ag workers follow strict food, farm and harvest zone safety standards, you also play a critical role in harvest worker safety on our roads," Holloway writes on the campaign webpage.

"August and September are a busy time on our farms, and our rural roads are dusty and bustling with farm crews and harvest machinery. Harvest season also coincides with our children going back to school, so please slow down while driving in agricultural areas, put your phones down while driving, pay extra attention when crossing intersections or busy harvest zones, and let's keep all of our farm workers, residents

and children safe out there."

The concept for the PSA campaign came about while Holloway Ag Operations Manager Alex Parson was driving across the Central Valley enroute to an orchard removal project he was managing, when he noticed heavy equipment operators having a hard time making the turn on to a ranch while residents on a busy street sped past dangerously.

"Harvest is a busy time of year for our growers and their harvest crews," Parsons said. "There's dust in a lot of areas. The trailers, heavy machinery and harvesting equipment aren't made for the roads. They're made for harvest, on our local farms.

"A lot of this equipment is oversized, and slow on the road, so we're hoping the campaign helps increase driver awareness and improves harvest crew safety during this busy time of year."

Holloway asks those in the agriculture industry and beyond to reshare and support the #BrakeForHarvest campaign during the harvest season running through October.

Social media followers and other ag vendors are welcome visit hollowayag.com/brakeforharvest for more information and to download #BrakeForHarvest logos, example social media posts, and photos of harvest machinery moving on our local roadways.

Good luck to all of our growers and thank you to all of our harvest crews and partners this harvest season. Be safe out there!

Learn more about the #BrakeForHarvest campaign at hollowayag.com/brakeforharvest.



Ag Solar Investments Ramp Up; Agrivoltaics Supported in Senate

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The increasing influence of renewable energy on the farming industry has entered legislation in the U.S., with Senators passing two bills this year for priority solar projects. Agrivoltaics utilizes land for agriculture and solar energy generation, wherein livestock graze around solar panels.

The Senate bills—the Pollinator Power Act and the Agrivoltaics Research and Demonstration Act—would form a relationship between solar panels and agricultural resources. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the relationship creates a symbiotic cooling environment with shade reducing the amount of evaporated water in the soil and the water vapor from plants increasing panel efficiency.

Renewable energy projects are at the forefront of the Biden Administration's push for zero-net emissions by 2050. Agrivoltaics, according to the U.S. Department of Energy's Solar Futures Study, can increase land productivity by 70%.

INVESTMENTS

By 2050, ground-based solar will require roughly 0.5% of land in the contiguous United States—agriculture occupies almost 43% of the lower 48 states' surface area, according to the USDA.

As California's leader in solar and wind energy production, Kern County was granted \$33 million from the Department of Energy to support various low-carbon projects. However, the various projects included in the funding agreement do not include agrivoltaic research.

The DOE also introduced \$8 million in funding for the Foundational Agrivoltaic Research for Megawatt Scale program in projects across six states. Less than 2% of solar energy projects in the U.S. are co-located with crops, according to the Department of Energy.

Recent funding allotted to Pitzer College in Claremont, California by the Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research will prioritize regenerative farming practices combined with solar energy production. According to an FFAR press release, the research team received over \$1 million in funding to assess the impact of agrivoltaics on crop production, soil health, and economic benefits.



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Harvest Season: Assessing Crop Stress and Soil Health During this Critical Period

Monitoring soil samples now can help growers better prepare for post-harvest activities.



While harvest is top of mind, experts stress the importance of monitoring soil moisture and taking samples to prepare for post-harvest cultural practices. (Photo by Brian Milne, Holloway Agriculture)

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

Harvest is in full swing in the Central Valley, and our crops are loaded up after a wet year and mild growing conditions.

That said, during harvest many of our crops are as stressed as they get during the season as growers cut back on irrigating to get in and out of the field with harvest crews and machinery.

In permanent crops such as almonds, experts stress the importance of irrigating as soon as possible after harvest and to manage the soil profile properly throughout the fall, as depriving trees of post-harvest irrigation can significantly affect the following year's production. Numerous UC Cooperative Extension studies have shown a significant reduction in bloom density, fruit set and load, and kernel yield when post-harvest irrigations are cut.

"Moderate stress during this period will have little effect on subsequent year's nut numbers," UCCE tree fruit and nut researcher David Goldhamer writes, "but severe stress during bud differentiation has been found to dramatically reduce fruit set the following spring."

Before the dust settles this harvest season, Holloway's agronomy team also suggests growers take soil samples to determine the nutrients their ground is lacking after

maximum crop removal for the season. This is especially important following a wet year, when applying soil amendments and fertilizers was difficult, and other nutrients may have been leached from the root zone.

"It all starts with what the soils are telling us," Holloway CEO Brian Maxted said during a Soil Health Seminar at World Ag Expo earlier this year. "When someone comes to us and asks, 'How much compost, or gypsum, or should I put this NPK on?' We say, 'Well, what are your soils saying?' Science should dictate what your farm needs."

Holloway's Director of Agronomy Steve Lenander agrees, noting he uses September soil samples and hull samples, combined with July tissue samples, to identify nutrient deficiencies in the soil and crop.

"Now is a great time to get your soil samples done, while crews are busy harvesting, so you make the right recommendations when you're ready to apply amendments," Lenander said. "Right now, the crop isn't taking up nutrition at this point. You can get those new soil samples, compare them with your July tissue samples, and previous soil samples, to make more-educated decisions for 2024."

And with a late harvest and lots of talk of an El Niño on the horizon, that window to get post-harvest soil amendments on could be another tight one this year.

"Planning is the key," Lenander concluded. "This past year, we saw a lot of rain, so some growers weren't able to get amendments on until it dried out well after the new year. Taking soil samples now makes sure all of our bases are covered...let the soils drive your decision making."

Learn more about Holloway's agronomy services, soil amendments and orchard redevelopment services at hollowayag.com/growmore2024.



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SoCal Edison Hires Goats to Prevent Wildfires

The utility company will clear 15 acres of brush from surrounding powerlines.

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Over 400 goats from Chasin Goat Grazing took to the hills of Sierra Nevada to mitigate vegetation near SoCal Edison powerlines. The goats worked through roughly 15 acres in August, grazing green and dry vegetation to minimize wildfire threats.

This year marks the third season the power company has utilized goats in its Wildfire Mitigation Plan as they are able to navigate the rough terrain and leave a minimal impact on the environment.

“As you can see, the goats are made for this,” Sarah Hendrix, senior utility arborist at SoCal Edison said.

According to an article by SoCal Edison, goats are uniquely suited to clear brush efficiently while single-handedly reducing vegetation density in future years. A team of herders and guard dogs will remain on site with the

goats as they work to reduce wildfire risks.

“They wake up in the morning about sunlight daybreak. They get up, eat till about 10 or 11, then take a nap maybe an hour or two, then they eat a little more, then take another nap,” Chase Cianfichi with Chasin Goat Grazing told Your Central Valley.

Goat grazing allows SoCal Edison to target specific plant species and minimize ground disturbance for a cost-effective approach to brush mitigation, according to the 2023-2025 Wildfire Mitigation Plan released in March. The project plans to expand to future service areas in the coming years.

The updated mitigation plan was preceded by a lawsuit issued against SoCal Edison in Feb. by the city of Hemet for involvement in the Fairview Fire last year. The city claimed the utility company failed to trim the surrounding brush around its electrical power lines properly.



Southern California Edison initiated a brush mitigation project near Shaver Lake. (Photo: Courtesy of SoCal Edison)

According to a letter from SoCal Edison’s Claims Investigations Senior Advisor Bernice Cordero, the investigation revealed two areas of interest in the Fairview Fire, one of which was located near an SCE pole line. Cordero explained that the power line exhibited signs of damage.

“It is not known when this condition occurred or if these materials were impacted by the circuit activity that occurred on September 5, 2022, or whether they contributed to the ignition of the Fairview Fire,” Cordero wrote. “While the damage to SCE facilities has not yet been tabulated, SCE identified 26 poles that required replacement.”

In 2022, SoCal Edison issued documentation for connection to four wildfire incidents.

Water Politics

Continued from PAGE 1

Paul Gosselin explained, primarily pertained to sustainable management criteria.

The criteria included the assessment of sustainability indicators, minimum thresholds, undesirable results, measurable objectives, and sustainability goals. Each GSP must also include a description of the monitoring objectives for the basin as well as its development and implementation.

State intervention is triggered by 4 primary events according to the State Water Board—the entire basin is not covered by a GSA, the basin is in critical overdraft, DWR fails the basin’s GSP, or the basin has significant surface water depletions.

In 2022, DWR rejected 12 critically over-drafted basins, providing 180 days to correct deficiencies and submit their basin plans. “While six basins addressed these deficiencies, the other six did not make significant progress,” Gosselin explained. He noted that one basin had multiple plans, but they did not use the same data and methodology.

DWR has now made determinations for 46 basin plans, with a total of 40 approved.

The intervention process will occur in addition to local management and continued involvement from the DWR, Gosselin explained. The State Board will temporarily manage the six basins’ groundwater resources until the GSAs create an adequate GSP.

According to Gosselin, DWR will remain involved with the six basin plans as they undergo state intervention. DWR also plans to implement outreach programs for the small agriculture industry alongside the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

“It’s probably more important to get involved than during the planning process because now it’s being implemented,” Gosselin said. “The rubber is hitting the road, and this is where growers and all community interested should be at the table.”

There is no set date for the implementation of these outreach programs.

WATER RIGHTS

Soon after SGMA was passed in 2014—the first-ever groundwater regulation in California—various political agendas began vying for water control. The politically waged war has broader implications for Central Valley farmers, specifically those with senior water rights.

“Politics are the biggest factor in all this and whichever influence the politicians will go—which is always the money,” Brunni said. “You know, over the years you just kept watching them take away your livelihood, and they all started with the water.”

California’s State Water Resources Control Board began efforts to curtail pre-1914 surface water rights as part of a drought emergency regulation. According to a report by CalMatters, the board accused a small water system at the edge of the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta of ignoring a curtailment order. However, it was ultimately declared that the board lacked authority over senior water rights holders.

Currently, Assembly Bill 1337 represented by Democratic Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, passed the state assembly in May and is awaiting a Senate hearing. AB 1337 would assert control over senior water rights holders and grant the State Water Board authority to curtail diversions from rivers and reduce agricultural diversions in drought years.

Despite several lawsuits waged against the State Water Board by the City of San Francisco as well as other senior water rights holders, actions to limit agriculture water use have strengthened.

Brunni recalled listening in at water district meetings wherein farmers threatened lawsuits against state regulations.

“I remember the attitude of the state was, ‘You can say that all you want, we’re going to do what we’re going to do,’” Brunni said. “So, you start to see the dynamics form—the state really does have the ability to do whatever they want.”

FARM, RANCH AND TRANSITIONAL USE PROPERTIES

DELANO COLD STORAGE – \$5,900,000 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 – \$1,750±/AC 231.42± acres Taft Area, West Kern WD Residential service, Recreational and Rural home site.
TABLE GRAPES – \$25,500±/AC & \$26,500±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 119.92± & 150.27± acres Delano Earlimart Irrigation District, Lower Tule River Irrigation District, Quality Varieties, Productive Soils.	ALMONDS – \$22,307±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 295.46± acres Arvin Area, Arvin Edison WSD Contract Water, 2 Wells, Excellent Soils, Almonds in Full Production.
PISTACHIOS, ALMONDS AND FARMLAND - \$42,530±/AC (NEW LISTING) 152.81± acres Shafter City Limits and Sphere of Influence, Shafter Wasco Irrigation District, 2 Wells, Excellent Soils, Almonds & Pistachios in Full Production.	WALNUTS, TABLE GRAPES, PISTACHIOS – \$22,500±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 345.95± acres Selma Area, North Fork GSA, Excellent Soils, Quality Well Water, Diversified Portfolio, Solar System.
ALMONDS – \$29,994±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 155.73± acres Wasco Area, 2 SOURCES OF SEMI-TROPIC WSD CONTRACT WATER, 1 Well, Solar, Class 1 Soils, Almonds in full production.	ALMONDS – \$18,457±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 394.47± acres Wasco Area, Semi Tropic non-contract water, 3 wells, 863.4±KW Solar System, Productive Soils, Almonds in full production.
FARMLAND – \$12,000±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 156.96± acres Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD non-contract water, 1 well, Productive Soils, and Perfect for permanent crops.	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 (PRICE REDUCED) 995.11± acres Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract and non-contract water, 5 wells, Productive Soils, and Almonds in full production.
VINEYARD – \$24,000±/AC (NEW LISTING) 240.88 Delano Area, Southern San Joaquin Municipal Utility District, Allison Table Grapes, Strong 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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California Cropland Value Up 3%

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

California cropland is valued at \$15,880 per acre, and farm real estate is marked at \$12,400 per acre, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Land Values 2023 Summary. California leads the Pacific region in farmland and building value—the average value per acre of farm real estate multiplied by the land in farms—at \$288 million.

Nationwide, farm real estate value is up 7.4% from 2022 at \$280 per acre. Farmland value has grown exponentially since reaching a record high in 2022, with California seeing a 23% increase since 2020.

Farm real estate represents 84% of total farm sector assets for 2023, while non-real estate assets account for inventories of crops, animals, purchased inputs, and machinery.

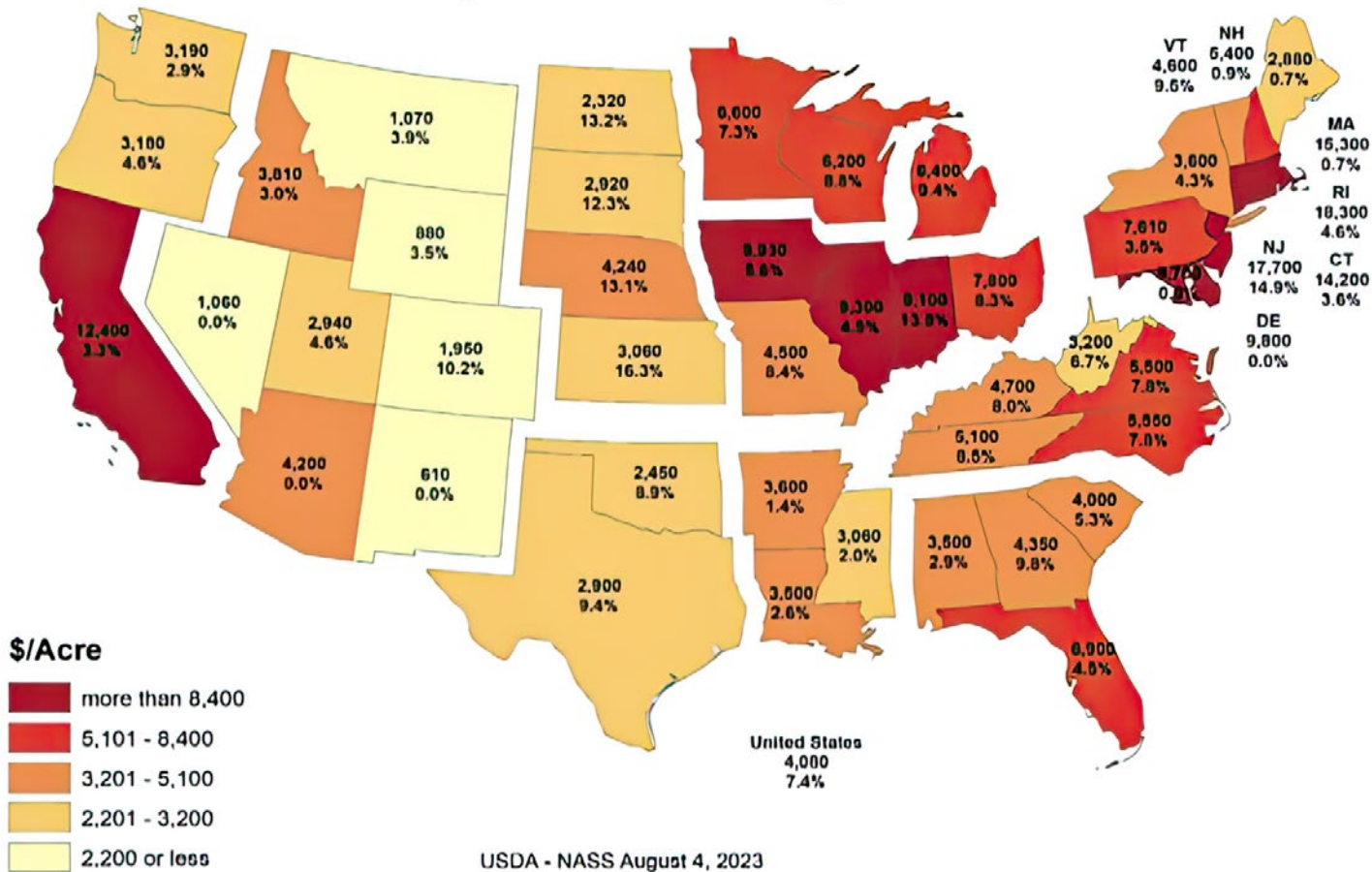
The trend in farmland value began a steady increase in 2018. According to a USDA report that year, land values were expected to rise more quickly than debts. The current difference between farm sector assets and total debt is expected to rise by \$3.51 trillion this year.

The gross value for all agricultural commodities in Kern County was over \$8 billion in 2021, with a cropland average of \$13,860 per acre. According to the Agriculture Commissioner's office, Kern's 2022 annual crop report will be released in September.

Roughly 75% of California's irrigated land—estimated at \$18,600 per acre—is located in the Central Valley. According to Kern County's assessment roll, farmland is rated high in secured property assessments, but several acres are under agriculture preserves.

2023 Farm Real Estate Value by State

Dollars per Acre and Percent Change from 2022



USDA - NASS August 4, 2023

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Study Recommends Phased Increase of the Mill to Ensure Sufficient Funding for DPR Programs and Sustainable Pest Management

The mill, a fee paid by pesticide retailers or manufacturers when a pesticide is first sold in California, has not increased in nearly two decades; state-funded study documents need for fee increase to address long-term department funding needs.

2023-24 state budget provides immediate funding to begin to address the department's most urgent needs.

Press Release Provided by the Department of Pesticide Regulation

SACRAMENTO – The Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) today released the results of an independent study designed to evaluate the department's main funding source, the mill fee. The study examined proposed structures and rates to provide long-term sustainable funding that would allow DPR to continue to fulfill its mission and incentivize sustainable pest management.

To accelerate the transition to sustainable pest management in California, the 2021-2022 state budget funded an investment in the independent Mill Assessment Study to assess the long-term funding needs for the department. The study found that DPR is critically underfunded, which jeopardizes its ability to continue to operate foundational programs that protect people and the environment from pesticide risks. The study also found that the department lacks funding to support the development and implementation of safer, more sustainable alternatives for effectively managing pests, including bacteria, rodents, insects and weeds, in agricultural, urban and wildland settings.

To help ensure long-term, stable funding for the department, the Mill Assessment Study recommends a phased-in increase of the mill – from the current \$0.021 for every dollar in sales, up to \$0.0339 per dollar in sales. The study also recommends the consideration of a future tiered mill structure to support and incentivize sustainable pest management.

Over the last several decades, the department has added and expanded essential programs to address the risks and impacts of pesticide use on people and the environment, incorporate new technologies for studying and monitoring pesticide risks, and engage with communities impacted by pesticide use – but the current mill assessment has not increased in nearly 20 years. Since 2013, the department has been operating with a structural imbalance.

Critically, the 2023-24 state budget provides \$1.9 million in immediate funding to begin to address the department's most urgent funding needs for pesticide registration and evaluation and strategic planning and initial implementation of the Sustainable Pest Management Roadmap, and to study fumigant pesticide alternatives.

Adequate, stable, long-term funding is essential for the department to scientifically and efficiently evaluate pesticides for safe use in California; monitor pesticides in air and water; track reported human

health impacts; consider of emerging science related to pesticide risks; mitigate pesticide-related risks; and enforce pesticide use laws and regulations that keep workers, communities and the environment safe. An efficient registration and evaluation process is essential to address changing pest pressures and efficacy of current and future pest management tools and resources.

“This study highlights the urgent need to provide short- and long-term funding for the department to continue to improve protections for people and the environment and ensure the availability of safe, effective pest management tools,” DPR Director Julie Henderson said. “The way pests are managed impacts human health and the environment. The department needs effective long-term, stable funding to ensure pest management approaches across the state protect people and the environment and support agriculture, community well-being and our wildlands.”

In January 2023, a group of diverse stakeholders released the Sustainable Pest Management Roadmap for California to chart a course for pest management approaches in California that address human health and equity, consider broader environmental factors, support community well-being, and safeguard the future of our agricultural and food supply sector. The recommended mill increase would provide needed long-term support for foundational department work and fund the accelerated statewide transition to sustainable pest management. The increase would also fund pesticide-related programs at the California Department of Food and Agriculture and the pesticide enforcement programs on a local level that are implemented by county agricultural commissioners.

“To truly build a healthy and safe California for all, we must transition to sustainable pest management and decrease our dependence on high-risk pesticides. That includes ensuring DPR has adequate, long-term funding to expedite the registration of safer tools and improve its evaluation of currently registered pesticides,” said CalEPA Secretary Yana Garcia. “DPR plays a vital role in protecting human health and the environment from potential pesticide exposure, but it needs additional resources to continue to fulfill its mandate and move forward with the implementation of the Sustainable Pest Management Roadmap.”

See DPR's website for more information on the mill study.

Collaboration Continues

Continued from PAGE 1

Recently the Bureau of Reclamation sought to develop a new unified plan for the Valley and granted \$1 million to the California Water Institute, based at Fresno State, and the Water Blueprint to develop that plan over the next two years. While the Bureau engaged in previous planning efforts, these were developed pre-SGMA and were not focused on achieving groundwater sustainability for each basin. The new plan requires accurate identification of future water needs at the local level, assessment of how much additional high flow water, if any, can be realistically captured and stored, and projections of the conveyance facilities necessary to move the high water from its source to new storage facilities. Consideration of community needs, including water quality and reliability, as well as environmental needs will be featured in the plan. The plan is expected to identify a series of new projects, operating in conjunction with one another. If the plan is acceptable to the Bureau, feasibility studies on the individual projects will commence. A finding of feasibility opens the door to federal funding for the projects.

On a parallel path, the San Joaquin Collaborative Action plan (CAP) also seeks to identify a water solution for the Valley. This effort contains a broader group of constituents with more diverse interests but essentially

the same goal. Five caucuses are engaged in the effort: water districts, farmers, communities, local government and environmentalists. If the CAP can agree on a solution, it would carry broader political support which normally translates into increased funding for water projects.

In continuing its effort to move forward, the CAP set year end goals that fall into four categories: safe drinking water, sustainable water supply, ecosystem health, and land repurposing/demand reduction. The water supply goals mirror the Bureau's objectives for the Valley in terms of understanding diverse needs and identifying projects to capture high flow water from Valley rivers and the Delta without adversely impacting the environment.

Are all these disparate planning efforts necessary? Would the efforts be more effective if merged? The dynamics of these groups in funding and their ability to stay the course vary, and therefore their ability to succeed varies. Perhaps it is strategic to bet on more than one horse. Regardless, there are a lot of people trying very hard to understand the water needs of the Valley and to work with others to develop a practical solution. That, in itself, is encouraging.

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Backlog At Harvest May Affect Tomato Crop

By Christine Souza
Assistant Editor Ag Alert

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As California growers harvest this season's processing tomato crop, there is concern that canneries could struggle to keep up with a backlog of fruit deliveries.

Yolo County farmer Bruce Rominger, board chairman for the California Tomato Growers Association, said growers are worried about risks to fruit that can't be processed right away.

"A cannery might say, 'I'm going to contract with growers to bring me 200 loads per day,'" Rominger

season, he said, they are telling growers they do not plan to accept more tonnage than was contracted.

Yerxa said many growers in the Sacramento Valley expect harvest to continue into October, a risky time due to the potential for wet weather. He said he and other growers insured the crop against rain damage "to make sure that we are protected."

"With all the September loads being pushed to October," he added, "the problem we really foresee is if we have a fall rain—a big one—and we can't get the crop out."

The state's tomato processors contracted 12.7 million tons of processing tomatoes this year, and acreage is estimated to be 254,000, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture processing tomato report

just to get the transplants in and the bed prep before you even get any kind of a crop off."

Fresno County farmer Don Cameron said his diverse farming operation makes "processing tomatoes a regular part of our program every year, organic and conventional."

He said the record prices for processing tomatoes are welcome because "our costs just continue to rise, and I think growers need to be in the upper (price) range to be profitable growing this crop."

"Our yields over the last five, 10 years have essentially flattened out," Cameron added. "But this year is going to be an exception, at least in the southern part of the state where the yields have been very good."

Costs to produce processing tomatoes increased substantially in the past six years, according to a July study by researchers at the University of California and UC Cooperative Extension farm advisors. A 2023 cost analysis for growing processing tomatoes

in the Sacramento Valley and northern delta found that farmers face surging production costs, including for water, labor, fuel and fertilizer.

Rising expenses translate to costs of close to \$6,000 per acre to plant, grow and harvest processing tomatoes, the study found. That is a 76% increase from 2017.

In discussing demand for processing tomato products, which are used in staples such as sauces, ketchup and salsa, Montna said the sector experienced an increase in demand during the COVID-19 pandemic. "We are now seeing a post-COVID world still adjusting to what the new normal is going to be," he said.

"With inflation, you're seeing people make different choices in the store," he added. "But there's a reliability and a sense of comfort that when you buy our product, you can have something that tastes good, and you feel comfortable feeding your family."

(Christine Souza is an assistant editor of Ag Alert. She may be contacted at csouza@cfbf.com.)



California tomato processors contracted 12.7 million tons of tomatoes from growers this year, according to an estimate by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. The state's top producing counties are Fresno, Merced, San Joaquin and Kings. (Photo by Caleb Hampton)

said. "Well, now all of a sudden, there's 400 loads that need to be harvested. So the concern is we're all jammed up, and some tomatoes sit in the field too long and get rotten."

After three years of drought, heavy rains left tomato fields wet and muddy through spring, disrupting planting of processing tomato transplants, which continued through May.

"It was raining like crazy in March, so nobody could really get in and plant. We didn't plant until about April 12, so we were basically three weeks to a month late," said Rominger, who also grows rice, nut crops, sunflowers, wheat, corn and seed crops. "We have more tomatoes scheduled to be harvested in October this year than we ever have before because of the late spring."

To adjust for a bottleneck of trucks arriving at canners, which run 24-hour days during harvest, Rominger said some growers may be encouraged to harvest early when tomatoes are a little green. Under contracts with processors, Rominger explained, growers usually agree to deliver a certain tonnage during specific weeks to keep a consistent flow of tomatoes moving into canneries.

Colusa County farmer Mitchell Yerxa, who also farms processing tomatoes in Sutter County, said he usually begins harvest in early July. This year, it began a month later.

"This looks like one of those years where we might actually hit our full tonnage before we even get to the end of the season," Yerxa said. "So it will be interesting to see if the canneries decide to take the tomatoes or not."

In years of low yields, Yerxa said canners would accept an additional 10,000 or 40,000 pounds. This

released May 31. Fresno County remains the state's top processing tomato region with an estimated 62,300 acres, followed by Merced, San Joaquin and Kings counties.

Despite the planting delay, wet weather has meant improved water allocations for San Joaquin Valley farmers. Growers who rely on water from the federal Central Valley Project and State Water Project received 100% of their surface water allocations—a relief after three straight drought years with limited or zero water supplies.

Mike Montna, president and chief executive officer of the California Tomato Growers Association, said more tomatoes were planted as a result, though the late timing of the water allocations meant this did not apply universally to growers.

"Last year, after the price was settled, we saw fuel and fertilizer really shoot up and eat into a lot of the increase we saw the prior year, and then we saw lower yields," he said. "This year, to get the acres we needed, the price had to be attractive enough vs. other commodities."

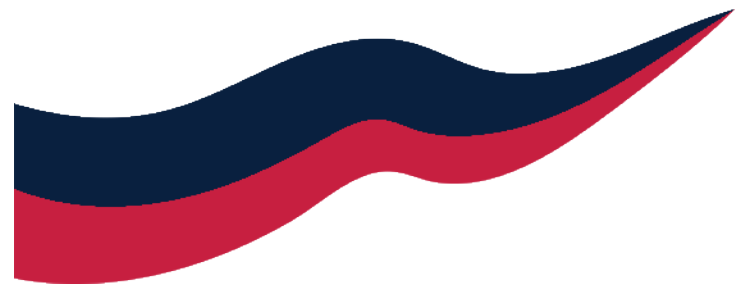
With tomato processors needing to replenish shrinking inventories, Montna said, canneries offered growers higher contract prices to encourage increased plantings. For 2023, CTGA announced a record price agreement with processors of \$138 per ton for conventional tomatoes and \$190 per ton for organic tomatoes. That is up from last year's price of \$105 per ton for conventional and \$165 per ton for organic tomatoes.

"It really comes down to a supply-and-demand situation where you have to incentivize growers—the few that do it—because it's a huge input-cost crop," Yerxa said. "You spend upwards of \$1,000 per acre



California tomato processors contracted 12.7 million tons of tomatoes from growers this year, according to an estimate by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture. The state's top producing counties are Fresno, Merced, San Joaquin and Kings. (Photo by Caleb Hampton)

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A Dangerous Pest Poses a Threat to Central Valley's Commercial Citrus

By the Citrus Pest & Disease Prevention Program

A dangerous pest called the Asian citrus psyllid (ACP) is often found this time of year in Kern County, posing a serious threat to Central Valley's commercial citrus. The pest can spread a deadly citrus tree disease called Huanglongbing (HLB), and growers in Kern County should be on high alert.

There is no cure for HLB and once a tree is infected it will die. While HLB has not yet been found in Kern County, ACP populations have historically increased between August and October in previous years. Growers should remain vigilant for signs of the pest by inspecting their citrus trees regularly and following ACP treatment recommendations to prevent the devastating disease from entering Central Valley's commercial groves, potentially ending the long tradition of citrus in this region and leaving thousands without work.

In anticipation of the fall spike in ACP detections and following the higher-than-normal ACP detections last fall and earlier this spring, The San Joaquin Valley ACP/HLB Area-wide Task Force is recommending a coordinated treatment be applied in commercial citrus orchards east and south of

Bakersfield in late summer/early fall (mid-August through mid-September) to prevent ACP populations from building on the fall foliar flush.

Past coordinated treatments in the county have been successful in suppressing ACP populations. By participating in this late summer/early fall treatment, Kern County can greatly reduce the number of psyllids, and thus reduce the risk of HLB being transmitted to commercial citrus.

While these actions may require additional resources, the cost to manage the ACP is far less than any potential costs or loss to the industry should HLB take hold throughout our state. To keep Kern County's citrus flourishing for years to come, we all must work together in the fight against this pest and disease.

If you suspect ACP in your orchard, please notify the California Department of Food and Agriculture Pest Hotline at 1-800-491-1899. For questions, contact Kern County Grower Liaison Judy Zaninovich at jsleslie@msn.com or 559-730-8691.

For more information on the ACP, HLB and ACP treatments, visit CitrusInsider.org. Together, we can save Kern County's citrus.



Adult Asian Citrus Psyllid



Adult Asian Citrus Psyllids




Asian Citrus Psyllid Nymphs




Waxy Tubules Produced by Asian Citrus Psyllid Nymphs



New citrus tree leaf flush where Asian Citrus Psyllids can often be found. Photos courtesy of CPDPP.



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COMMENTARY: Legislation May Clear Way for Farmers to Use Drones



By Al Stehly
Chair, Rural Health
Department, CFB

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from the California Farm
Bureau Federation*

In my San Diego County vineyard one day, I watched as my employees carried 60-pound backpacks loaded with chemicals. They trudged up and down hills, avoiding rocks and gopher holes while applying pesticides with mist blowers to protect my winegrapes.

There must be a better way, I thought.

I watched a video of Chinese farmers spraying rice with a drone and realized there was. According to market research, agricultural drone use, including for pesticide applications, is surging in the Asia-Pacific region. Drones offer a precise, targeted delivery system for farmers when helicopters or fixed-wing aircraft may be neither efficient nor cost-effective.

Besides being a farmer, I have been a licensed pesticide applicator for more than 35 years. I wanted to use this new drone technology, too. I wanted my employees to ditch their heavy backpacks and maintain distance from chemical applications.

So, I began a process I thought would be easy: getting a permit to use drones to administer pesticides.

But my three-year journey navigating Federal Aviation Administration licensing procedures and California Department of Pesticide Regulation rules revealed one obstacle after another. My frustration led me to seek help from the California Farm Bureau, of which I am a member, to pass legislation to help farmers access this beneficial technology. We are now close to achieving our goal.

A special license from the FAA is required for anyone operating a drone for commercial purposes. To use a drone weighing 55 pounds requires another FAA exemption. For me, that exemption alone took six months to be approved. Meanwhile, I'm still waiting to hear from the FAA on my drone license and a written test date.

Perhaps most exasperating has been my effort to

secure a California journeyman pilot's license, which can allow a qualified pesticide applicator with FAA authorization to apply crop-protection chemicals with a drone.

State DPR rules require an applicant to work as an apprentice for one year while logging 50 hours of experience under a journeyman pilot. Currently, there are only seven journeymen drone pilots in the state. Alternatively, that means finding a fixed-wing or helicopter pilot to apprentice under. That makes little sense. Drone pilots should be trained by drone pilots.

About two years ago, realizing this important technology was being hampered by outdated regulations, I approached California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson for assistance. Farm Bureau began a determined effort to craft a bill and find a sponsor. Peter Ansel, a senior policy advocate, took on the issue with passion.

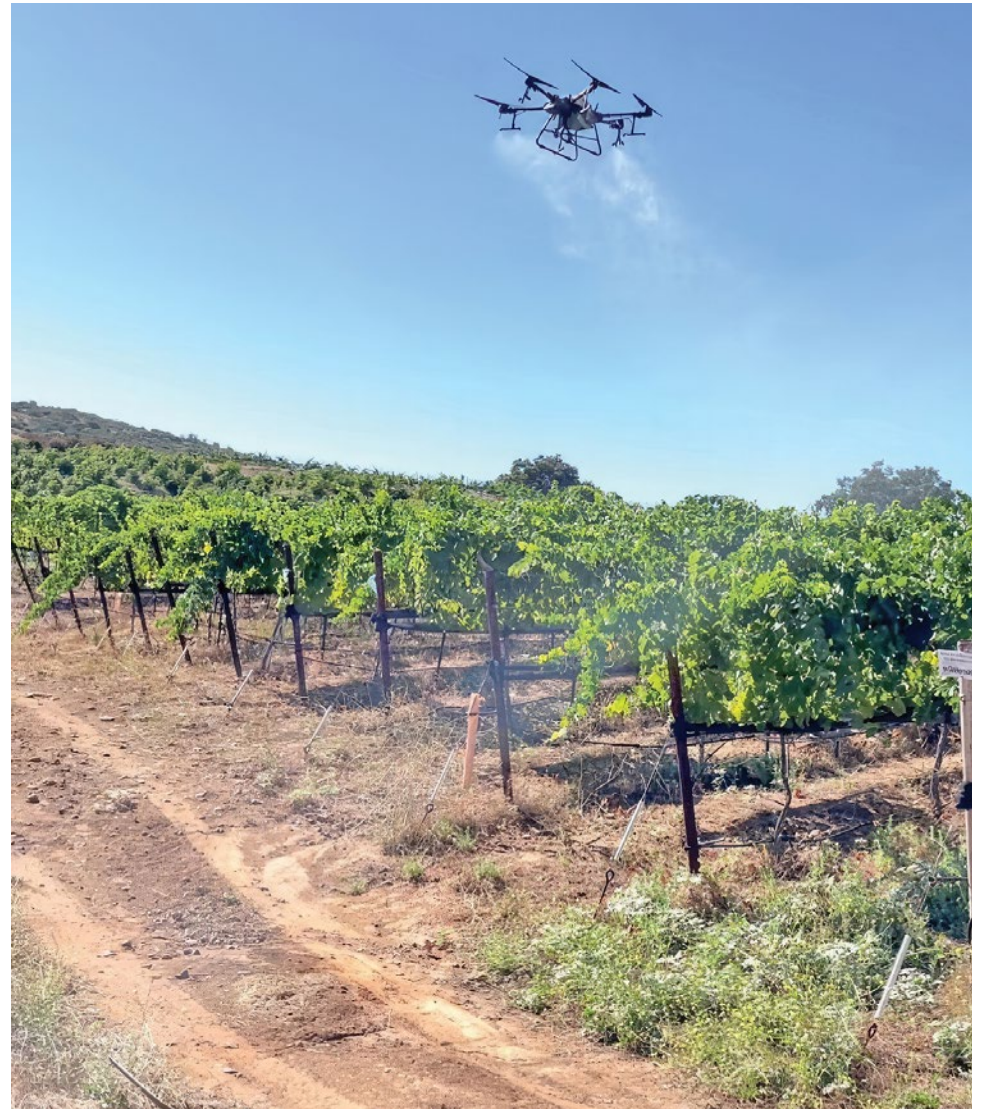
Our first legislative attempts bogged down amid the pandemic. This year, Farm Bureau began working with state pesticide regulation officials and Assembly Member Reggie Jones Sawyer, D-Los Angeles, who agreed to carry Assembly Bill 1016. The bill gives DPR a path to modernize pesticide applicator credentialing requirements by creating training programs for drone aerial applications.

I started this journey in hopes drones could make pesticide applications safer and easier for my employees. Now the more I talk to farmers about drones, the more ideas I hear for additional uses in agriculture. For example, a nursery grower asked if he could use a spray drone to whitewash greenhouses, thus reducing the risks of having to do the job using ladders and scaffolds.

To promote understanding of AB 1016, California Farm Bureau sponsored a field day at the University of California, Davis, to demonstrate the safe and accurate technology of spray drones. More than 30 regulators attended, and their enthusiasm for the legislation was encouraging.

Some University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources drone experts in attendance noted it is even difficult to get licensed to conduct studies using this technology.

Ansel has helped organize a robust coalition of regulators, educators and farm groups as supporters



A drone applies pesticides to wine grapes. The technology can target applications to crops, keeping employees at a distance, but licensing requirements have been burdensome for farmers. (Photo by Alysha Stehly)

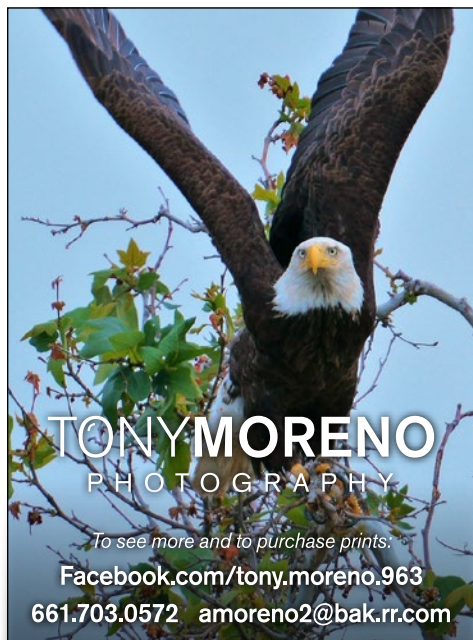
of AB 1016. As the bill gained momentum, universities and community colleges took notice. Orange Coast College in Costa Mesa is now creating an associate science degree in unmanned aerial systems, with an emphasis on aerial applications from drones.

AB 1016 has to date cleared four state Assembly and Senate committees, as well as the full Assembly, without a single "no" vote. As the process nears the finish line with more work to be done, I am glad I raised the issue and proud of the way California Farm Bureau recognized its importance and crafted a plan

to take this on.

Farmers deserve access to technology that safeguards agricultural workers and enhances our food production. Our work on drones is just one step in removing regulatory barriers and making possible a better farming future.

(Al Stehly, who grows avocados, citrus fruit and winegrapes in San Diego County, chairs the rural health department for the California Farm Bureau. He may be contacted at Al@StehlyGrove.com.)



TONY MORENO
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Hannah Amick and her duroc Ammo pose for her sponsor letter at the West Bakersfield 4-H Swine Leader's house. (Photo taken by Shurie Amick)

Kern County Fair

Continued from PAGE 1

rabbits, alpacas and llamas are hauled in with accompanying students, parents, grandparents, and more supporters every year.

Hannah Amick, a high school senior and an excellent example of the dedicated youth found throughout the livestock barns, is in her 12th year of showing livestock at the Kern County Fair. Amick has been hard at work with her 4-H club, West Bakersfield 4-H, for the majority of the year. She spends roughly 1 to 2 hours a day working with her pigs and goats. Over the past 12 years, Amick has shown almost every animal apart from cattle but admits that pigs have always been her favorite.

The 4-H program has also deeply imbedded itself into the business community, engaging local businesses in sponsorship opportunities. Hannah visited roughly 30 business fronts and plans to engage even more before the fair. She explained it is hard to pin down how much she's accumulated in sponsorship because of the new online format the fair switched to, but she knows she has secured at least \$110.

"Showing has actually increased my love for animals because if you would've asked me 12 years ago when I was 5 or 6, when I started showing animals, I wanted what every kid wanted. I think I wanted to be a firefighter at first, and then it went to doctor, and as I got older, I started realizing I had this passion for animals," Amick said. "That's when it kinda pushed me, like I want to work with animals more, and I've juggled between going to college and becoming a vet tech or becoming a

judge so I could go back to fairs even though I'm not showing, but still be able to participate in it."

Amick later stated that she graduates from high school in December of this year and plans to attend night classes at Bakersfield College in order to work with her livestock for next year's shows during the day. She plans to become a registered veterinary technician.

Livestock shows at the Kern County Fair remain an essential part of the agricultural industry by bringing kids, and even supporting or interested adults, face to face with livestock. They also represent the origins of the county fair as most fairs started as a way for the community to show off their animals and compete with their neighbors.

Today, the Kern County Fair has grown to encompass so much more than livestock exhibits. It's a place where folks can relax and connect, where businesses can grow, where friends can be made, and ideas can be shared.

Here is a quick look at what else is to come at the 2023 Kern County Fair:

A free concert by Rodney Atkins will kick off the fair on Wednesday, the 21st, at the Budweiser Pavilion. Every night after will offer a different free concert, such as Blue Oyster Cult and La Mafia. The Grandstands will host the Monster Truck Show on Friday the 22nd and Saturday the 23rd, and the official PRCA Rodeo will be held on Friday the 29th and Saturday the 30th. Lastly, the livestock auction will take place September 28-30.

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Largest Table Grape Breeder Enters Raisin Market

IFG utilizes Dried on Vine processes to reduce labor costs.

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The largest table grape breeder, International Fruit Genetics, introduced itself into the raisin market with a newly patented Dried on Vine variety—Rais-one. According to Dustin Hooper, the commercial manager for raisins at IFG, Rais-one is uniquely suited to reduce labor costs and streamline the pruning process.

“With Rais-one, and this is kind of like the first variety in our line of raisin varieties, we’re focusing on varieties that have a tendency to DOV on their own without cutting canes, so that’s one major [labor] saving,” Hooper said.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture requires the moisture level for raisins to be dried down to 18%. Hooper explained that the process of drying, pruning, and harvesting raisins is labor intensive as growers cut the cane, move it to a certain area on the vine for air and sunlight exposure, tie the vine off, and lay the grapes out to dry.

Rais-one was bred with characteristics to withstand spur pruning and machine harvesting, according to Hooper, significantly cutting down labor costs.

“[It’s] maybe like \$400 an acre just to cut the canes or more depending on labor availability... so, it can be a pretty substantial cost per acre just to get that one part done to start the drying process,” Hooper said.

For the last 20 years, IFG focused on breeding a variety of table grapes, but in the last three or four years, the fruit breeder created a program to explore traits that are desirable in raisins. Hooper explained that several factors are considered in breeding new raisin varieties, including flavor, color, wrinkles, and storage life.

“It’s a long-term holding product...you’re not just processing it and sending it out the door next week,” Hooper said. “A year from now, we may pull it in and then send it off to be processed into food service...you have to make sure it’s ready to do that, and a lot of varieties are not.”

While IFG raisin varieties are being grown for consumers, most are intended for value-added products such as breakfast bars. The company has 25 other raisin varieties being tested at Fruitworks—IFG’s research and development headquarters.

According to Hooper, the plan is to end up with three to five DOV varieties. He explained that IFG has welcomed grower input in order to create varieties that will be sustainable and marketable.

“We don’t want 25 varieties out in the raisin industry because it’s just too convoluted for all the growers, and then nobody’s going to know what to plant... we want the growers to be involved in that—we don’t want to be over here in a silo just making things that we think will work,” Hooper said.

With Rais-one set to hit the market in 2024, the remaining test varieties will continue to be evaluated and tested. IFG hosted a Raisin Field Day on Aug. 14 at Marthedal Farm.

Three Central Valley growers have been working with IFG, growing test blocks of the Rais-one variety. Jon Marthedal from Marthedal Farms holds the main test block, estimated at two acres, with both trellis and rootstock trials.

In a press release, Marthedal Farms farm manager Austin Hubbel explained that the DOV process has shown positive results and allowed for reduced labor input.

“For the first time in years, we are able to alleviate several arduous processes that used to take so much time and energy,” Hubbel said. “Additionally, the quality of the IFG’s raisins will allow growers to stay competitive in an ever-changing world market.”

Dwayne Cardoza of Dwayne A. Cardoza Ranches, Inc. planted test rows as well as five acres of Rais-one in 2023 and another five for commercial production. Michael Kazarian from R.K. Limited also planted a test row with five additional acres of Rais-one for commercial production.



Photos courtesy of IFG

While there are no current market projections, Hooper expects to see tangible results by next year. He explained that IFG is committed to the raisin market and connecting growers to opportunities for a better profit.

“We’ve really seen a big drop in acreage in the

raisin market, and I’m not saying we need a huge amount of acres back,” Hooper said. “But if we do some good, value-added varieties that can reduce the labor, reduce the input, [and] still give them a good bottom line, I think we can redevelop some of what’s left and really have some excitement in the market.”

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Bee Education is All the Buzz: Local Nonprofit Sponsors Community Garden

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

As the bee population continues to decrease in the U.S., one Bakersfield family revamped efforts to spread agriculture education and the importance of pollinators through a start-up nonprofit—Bee Day Events.

According to Holly Kuntz, founder of Bee Day Events and former beekeeper with Kuntz Family Farms, the nonprofit's first major project will support Vista West High School with a community garden.

Although there is no set date, the nonprofit plans to host a paint night fundraiser for the project before its implementation in the Fall.

Bee Day Events began in June 2022 as a natural succession to the Kuntz family's agricultural education initiative. Kuntz explained the personal value of spreading agriculture education as she did not have a connection with where food came from until her husband, the son of a grape farmer, showed her the intricate world of agriculture.

"He drove me through the vineyards to show me the difference between the table grapes and the juicing grapes, and I had no idea that there was even a difference," Kuntz said. "So, I became kind of fascinated with it at that point."

The Kuntz family's introduction to bee education



Bee Day Events hosts an annual fundraiser to support agricultural education. (Photo courtesy of Holly Kuntz) and awareness started with the discovery of a beehive on their property.

"My daughter was like, 'I want to keep them,'" Kuntz said. "She would sit out there and just watch the bees all day. Then she comes in so excited about 'Oh, I saw white pollen and purple pollen on their legs'... so we just kind of started learning

of bees to the ecosystem.

Upon receiving several requests to speak in classrooms, Kuntz moved to cover the cost of each visit through an annual Bee Day fundraiser. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Kuntz began donating funds from Bee Day to the Teacher's Ag Seminar as well as the Kern County Young Farmers and Ranchers to support various FFA chapters.

Soon after, Kuntz officially instated Bee Day Events as a nonprofit organization dedicated to spreading agricultural education. Vista West High School will be the first of several projects to deepen students' understanding of agriculture.


"This is something we have to do. People don't know how important these bees are. They don't know about their anatomy—like you don't focus on that. You learn about a frog and a butterfly in school...you don't really learn about everything else," Kuntz said.

so, it can be a pretty substantial cost per acre just to get that one part done to start the drying process," Hooper said.

For the last 20 years, IFG focused on breeding a variety of table grapes, but in the last three or four years, the fruit breeder created a program to explore traits that are desirable in raisins. Hooper explained that several factors are considered in breeding new raisin varieties, including flavor, color, wrinkles, and storage life.


"It's a long-term holding product...you're not just processing it and sending it out the door next week," Hooper said. "A year from now, we may pull it in and then send it off to be processed into food service...you have to make sure it's ready

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Nearly \$1 Million In USDA Grants Will Support 3 UCSC-Led Agricultural Technology Projects

By Emily Cerf
Engineering Writer and Media Relations Officer

Press Release Provided by UC Santa Cruz

Three UC Santa Cruz research teams led by engineering faculty will pursue innovative agriculture technology projects with the support of seed grants from the United States Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI).

Faculty and student researchers will work in interdisciplinary teams to create new technologies that address important agricultural and environmental needs. Each project was awarded \$300,000 in funding over a two-year period, for a total of \$900,000 in funding among the projects.

These grants build upon UCSC's long history of thoughtful leadership in agroecology and sustainable

food systems, marked by a recent \$10 million grant, and will further Baskin School of Engineering priorities of developing technology for societal benefit.

Better leaf wetness sensors for crops

Lead Principal Investigator: Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering (ECE) Marco Rolandi

Co-Principal Investigators: Professor of Environmental Studies Gregory Gilbert, Assistant Professor of ECE Colleen Josephson

When plants get wet, they are at risk of developing disease, limiting crop output in agricultural settings and potentially causing ecological damage in the wild. The team of researchers are continuing to develop sensors that use a biomimicry approach to provide better measurements of leaf wetness than what current state-of-the-art technology can provide.

These fairly inexpensive sensors can provide

measurements for any leaf type which can help guide disease forecasting and improve crop management. The researchers envision them as an extremely helpful tool for both large and small organic farms. With this funding, the team will focus on optimizing their leaf sensors for commercially relevant crops such as strawberries, fava beans, spinach, and maize (corn).

Microbial sensors for monitoring soil health

Lead Principal Investigator: Assistant Professor of ECE Colleen Josephson

Co-Principal Investigators: Pat Pannuto (UC San Diego), George Wells (Northwestern University), Neal Blair (Northwestern University)

The soil microbiome is an important aspect of overall soil health, yet we don't currently have an easy way to monitor the activities of this microbiome in real time. "Mud batteries," also known as microbial fuel cells, generate electrical signals in response to microbe activity in the soil. The power output of the batteries fueled by bacteria could give clues to the health of the soil – a lower output might indicate that the soil is not a healthy environment for the crops that are planted in it.

This project focuses on the development of a new way to gain insights into soil health by monitoring

the electrical output of these microbes, alongside other environmental conditions. Josephson's team will use this funding to advance the development of mud battery-based soil sensors.

Guidance for using autonomous vehicles to monitor sensors on farms

Lead Principal Investigator: Assistant Professor of ECE Steve McGuire

Co-Principal Investigator: Assistant Professor of ECE Colleen Josephson

Sensors on farms can serve a variety of purposes, such as temperature and soil moisture monitoring. These sensing systems can improve how farmers allocate resources on the land and reduce environmental damage. However, the costs associated with building out infrastructure to fully implement dense sensor networks are an expensive barrier to entry. This project focuses on improving the link between soil modeling and sensor data sampling, paving the way for a farm with a large number of sensors out of which only a few might be read at any given time.

McGuire's team will leverage autonomous aerial and ground vehicles to enable future agricultural methods based on gathering data from sensors more effectively. These data are then fed back into soil modeling to form a complete picture of the ecology of the farm, leading to improved decision making. As a result of this work, the team will develop fundamental technologies for precision agriculture to improve agricultural outcomes while reducing resource usage.

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Kern County Fair Exempt from Prop 12

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Ahead of the Kern County Fair, 4-H and other youth programs are preparing livestock for exhibition. Despite the freshly implemented Proposition 12—which establishes minimum space requirements based on square feet for calves raised for veal, breeding pigs, and egg-laying hens—all fairs are exempt from these minimum confinement standards.

According to Dawn Stornetta, livestock supervisor for the Kern County Fair, all fairs are exempt from Prop 12, but the processing facilities and the people that raise them must be in compliance.

"Unfortunately, the government still hasn't figured out how they're gonna enforce it because that would take millions of dollars to hire people to do it," Stornetta said.

Students who exhibit livestock are required to ensure that the breeding animals were raised in a Prop 12 facility. In order to show compliance, all market swine

exhibitors turn in a self-certification form signed by the breeder under their entry.

Stornetta explained that the form is only for animals that are resales.

In order for a breeding pig to be Prop 12 compliant, its enclosure must have a minimum of 24 square feet of usable floor space. According to an article by AgAlert, the rule does not apply to hogs sold custom slaughtered for private buyers, but the paperwork may become overwhelming.

Chris Garmon, deputy manager of the Monterey County Fair, told AgAlert that it will not be too intensive for their fairgrounds given the limited amount of market swine exhibitors.

"It's going to be a lot of paperwork, but it's not going to be as bad as it sounds," Garmon said. "But then again, my fair doesn't have a lot of pigs," unlike larger fairs such as Kern County's, he added.

Kern County Fair Launches KC Farm

Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The first annual KC's Farm Summer Camp took place in July for 40 transitional kindergarten to 6th grade students. The camp, founded by Valley Oaks educator Lorri Roberts and local farmer Pam Brunni, serves as an educational initiative the Kern County fairgrounds plans to host year-round.

The KC Farm was built in 2018 with the help of Grimmway Farms as a push for more agricultural-centered education. Upon the farm's completion, the COVID-19 pandemic occurred, derailing the camp's plans.

According to Chelsey Roberts, marketing specialist for the Kern County Fair, although the pandemic briefly paused the KC Farm, the implementation of the educational outreach program has been in the works for several years.

"Where we're located, not only in Kern County [which is] obviously the number one [agriculture] place in the U.S., but where we're at in Bakersfield, it doesn't have a huge educational component...a lot of kids here don't understand where their food comes from or even what agriculture is," Roberts said.

The two-day camp will run twice this week from July 24-25 and July 26-27. Despite the short timeframe, activities include dairy and

beef education, making ice cream in a bag, learning about pollinators and more. The first day of camp featured a farm-to-table activity where students picked vegetables from the garden to make pico de gallo.

According to Lorri Roberts, the overarching goal is to create a free, year-round camp for student field trips as well as implementing weekend and evening classes for children, adults, and teachers.

Roberts also explained that they will be launching "Field Trip in a Box" for teachers to bring back to their classroom.

"The field trips in a box will be everything from a bean-baby where they get to plant a little bean in a bag and take care of it and chart its growth, to an incubator with fertile eggs," Roberts said.

As a full-time teacher, Roberts has dedicated evenings and weekends to the project and continues to grow with the idea she had almost 23 years ago in college. She plans to distribute the field trip in a box lesson plans after the annual Kern County Fair.

"My master's thesis was on a field trip to the fair—bringing ag to the classroom," Roberts said.

Roberts explained that they ran a practice



The Kern County Fairgrounds launched the KC Farm Camp for TK-6 grade students. (Photo: Valley Ag Voice)

test for the summer camp last month, hosting 1-day camps for 15 children of friends and family members. She emphasized the importance of the KC Farm to equip the next generation with agricultural knowledge.

"On school days, when the kids are walking around with the adults, [I hear] the adult telling the kids 'Oh, look here, this is where

we get our milk,' and they're pointing to a beef steer," Roberts said. "Kern County is the number one agricultural county in California—1 in 4 jobs in Kern County are ag related...yet there are no state standards for agriculture in education in California for K-8. And not all of our high schools offer ag classes, only a few of them."



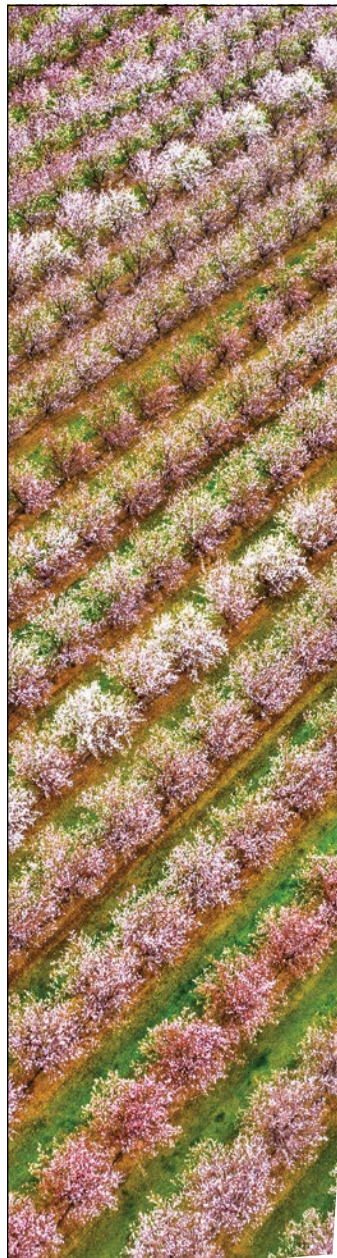
SAVE KERN COUNTY'S CITRUS

A dangerous pest called the Asian citrus psyllid (ACP) is often found this time of year in Kern County, posing a threat to Central Valley's commercial citrus industry. The psyllid can spread a fatal citrus tree disease called Huanglongbing (HLB) as it feeds from tree to tree. HLB has no cure. Once a tree is infected it will die.

Citrus industry members must stay vigilant for the ACP to keep Kern County's citrus flourishing for years to come. **Learn more about how to protect Kern County's citrus at CitrusInsider.org.**



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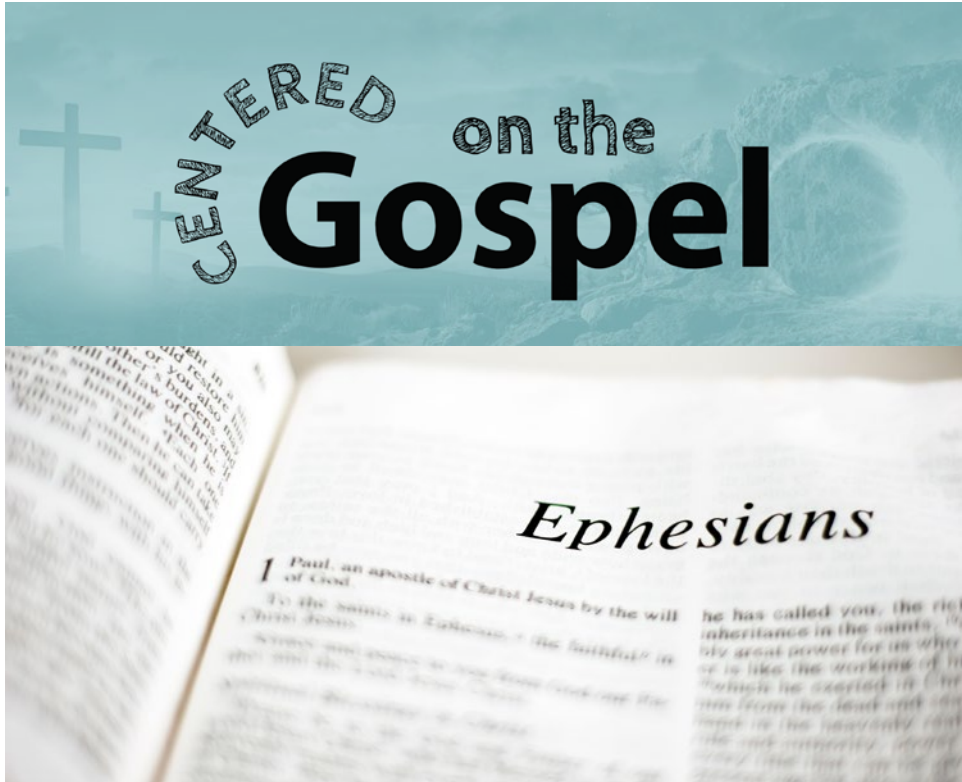
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Ephesians 2:4-7, But God

By Joshua Stevens
Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

“But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.” (Crossway Bibles, 2001)

But God. Two words that can sum up the entirety of scripture. The whole of the gospel is held together with these two words. Remember from last month that Paul spent the first three verses in this chapter reminding all of us that we are unrighteous, sinful, children of wrath, following only our fleshly desires. Then he transitions to “But God.” God who saw us in our iniquity and sin still loved us.

But God, who in His mercy created a path for salvation through Jesus Christ, by whom all Christians are saved and redeemed in Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

But God, who did not let us dwell or suffer in sin and did not leave satisfied just creating a path of redemption for us gave His only son to the earthly ministry that brought us into right standing with the Father for the purpose that we might be shown His grace.

For those of us who grew up in the church, we can, at times, get numbed to the ideas

of mercy and grace. These 7 verses in the second chapter of Ephesians do an excellent job of reminding us of mercy’s greatest meaning. An action of pity that assumes need on the part of the person receiving it. However, Paul doesn’t use mercy here as an action, no he uses it to describe God. God is rich in mercy, and why is he rich in mercy? Because of His love for us.

It is a steadfast reminder to all those who read that the gift of salvation is not a flippant thing that God decided to give us one day like a friend dropping some coffee off for you. It is more than a reminder of the depraved sinful state that we once lived. It is to show everyone that God motivated by His love for us and having no lack of resources (mercy) gave to us a path to salvation that we do not deserve, cannot earn, and wouldn’t even be able to comprehend without “But God.”

The first half of this chapter is not just to humble readers it is to exalt God, who intervened in each of our lives so we could be saved and enter into a relationship with Him. I hope this reminder finds you all well.

Will you join me in prayer? Father, thank you for your great mercies, for the plan you made and implemented to save and sanctify us to you. Regardless of what comes, may we all say, yet I will rejoice in the LORD; I will take joy in the God of my salvation. GOD, the Lord, is my strength; he makes my feet like the deer’s; he makes me tread on my high places.

In Jesus’ name, we pray,
Amen.

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

KERN COUNTY WILDLIFE PROFILE: Ring-necked Duck



(Photo by Moose Peterson / MoosePeterson.com)

One well-known duck species that you might see around the Kern River is the ring-necked duck (*Aythya collaris*). This is a medium-sized diving duck that is commonly found in North America. Adult male Ring-necked Ducks have a dark glossy black head, a distinctive white ring around their bill, and a gray body with subtle speckling. The female ducks are more subdued in color, with brownish-gray plumage and a smaller, less conspicuous white eye ring.

They are typically found in freshwater habitats such as lakes, ponds, rivers, and marshes. During migration, they might also be spotted in coastal areas. These ducks are diving ducks, which means they feed by diving underwater to forage for aquatic vegetation, small fish, crustaceans, and aquatic insects. They can dive underwater for several seconds to feed and can completely submerge and often forage in groups.

Ring-necked ducks, like other migratory birds, breed in northern regions of North America and then migrate south for the winter to areas with open water.

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