



THE LOCAL VOICE FOR OUR FARMERS, RANCHERS, AND DAIRY PRODUCERS SINCE 2013

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# Central Valley Ag Faces New Regulations, Corporate Takeover

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

California's agri-business landscape is undergoing another regulatory shift after a series of bills were signed from Governor Gavin Newsom's desk. Some new laws, effective Jan. 2024, address water policy and minimum wage — significantly impacting agricultural production in the Central Valley.

Over 13% of the nation's agricultural production value

comes from California out of roughly roughly 27 million acres of cropland and 16 million acres of grazing land, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported.

According to the California Farm Bureau, rising labor costs have created a special challenge for farmers as the state employs the largest agriculture workforce in the nation. Coupled with a national net loss of 90,000 farms from 2007 to 2012, regulatory burdens continue to hinder family farm operations on both a national and state level.

As the state navigates these challenges, questions about the next generation of agriculture leaders, corporate takeovers, and increased regulations are gaining prominence.

## Corporate Future

California's role in meeting global production needs is often shadowed by state regulations such as the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, which is projected to take over a million acres of agricultural land out of production.

According to Brian Marsh, farm advisor at the Kern

County extension of UC Agriculture and Natural Resources, different areas of the Central Valley will be impacted more than others based on groundwater dependence.

"We're talking about this in a year where we have plenty of water it's weird. ...growers have invested a lot of money into their permanent crops. ...so when water is short, usually what happens is their annual crops are the first things that they will not plant," Marsh said. "I'm thinking once SGMA kind of settles in, and they're more used to the amount of water that they're gonna have access to, then I would see a change in permanent crop plants also."

See **CENTRAL VALLEY AG** on **PAGE 8**

# Groundwater Trading—Distraction or Puzzle Piece?

By Scott Hamilton  
President, Hamilton Resource Economics

Most groundwater agencies in the southern San Joaquin Valley are racing against time to present a defensible, unified groundwater sustainability plan to the State Water Resources Control Board to avoid being placed on probation. Having the State Board manage their groundwater basin imposes a new set of fees on farmers for administration and groundwater pumping.

While that essential effort continues, groundwater agencies and water districts face the very real challenges of achieving groundwater sustainability.

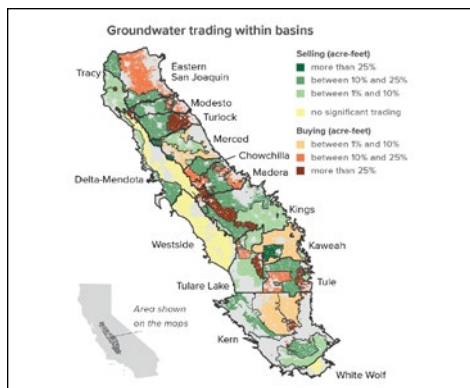
The easy solution for disaffected administrators in Sacramento is to hasten the repurposing of farmland. In that theme, the Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC) held a daylong conference in Fresno in September on "managing water and farmland transitions." PPIC presented "promising" options for repurposing farmland — solar development, water-limited (low water using) crops, upland habitat, recharged basins, and new housing. Those suggestions were caveated with thoughtful qualifications. Regardless, to some in the audience, it felt like the folks from Sacramento were out of touch with the realities of farming. Why should farmland repurposing be the first strategy to be presented publicly, and not the last?

The presentation in Fresno highlighted a larger study by PPIC: "The future of agri-

culture in the San Joaquin Valley." In that study, farmland transitioning is one element of a broader portfolio of actions to help achieve sustainability. The portfolio included: strengthening coordination across basins and sectors, making strategic investments in water and energy, promoting effective and responsible water trading, aligning regulatory and fiscal incentives with SGMA, and providing local, state, and federal financial incentives.

Absent any action, PPIC indicated the revenue loss associated with the retirement of farmland could be as much as \$8.7 billion per year, but that

See **GROUNDWATER TRADING** on **PAGE 9**



PPIC's estimate of the level of groundwater trading that may occur within subbasins. (Graphic: PPIC (2023) The Future of Farming in the San Joaquin Valley, Technical Appendix)

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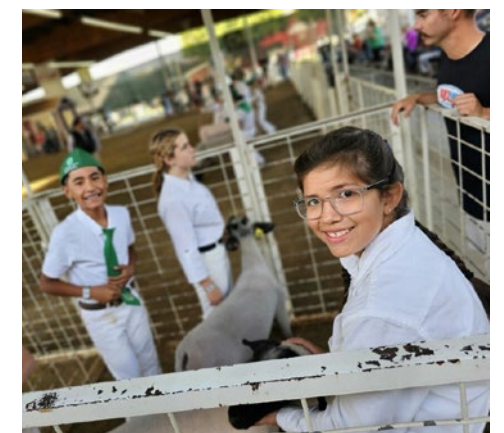
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# Auction Angels Supports Over 20 Student Exhibitors, Gives Back to Community

By Audrey Hill  
Feature Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

The Kern County Fair season came to a close in early October, leaving plenty to contemplate and commemorate from the Jr. Livestock Auction. With the departure of "Buyer 9," a widely known charity bidder, students were left financially uncertain ahead of the highly anticipated livestock auction. Enter Auction Angels — a new nonprofit organization in affiliation with the Kern Community Foundation, which raised around \$15,000 in donations in livestock purchases.

Over the course of two days, the nonprofit purchased five hogs, six goats and nine lambs — a total of 20 animals from 20 exhibitors. Exhibitors were



Ava Escobedo, and others in her show class, pictured with their lambs in a holding pen, a common perspective of top-class showman. (Photo: Laura Escobedo)

See **AUCTION ANGELS** on **PAGE 13**





# FARM BUREAU NEWS

*The United Voice of Kern County's Farming Community*



## President's Message

**By Jenny Holtermann**  
President, Kern  
County Farm Bureau

I am proud to be your newly elected President of the Kern County Farm Bureau. It is an honor for me to represent fellow farmers, ranchers, and agriculture businesses in our county. As a 4th generation farmer, I understand the issues and struggles we face head-on. My husband and I farm almonds alongside his family in Wasco and Shafter. We are impacted personally by the decreasing market prices, increasing input costs, and the lack of reliable water supply. Our family perseveres every day, despite our state and government throwing every curveball at us. At times, it seems like they want us to fail, they want us to sell — to give up.

I know all too well what happens when we don't receive the water we are contracted to receive. When theft occurs on our property, we are left to clean up the damage. When that final crop check comes, it doesn't cover our bills for the year. When Mother Nature has a mind of her own and throws you a hurricane at the beginning of harvest.

Farmers are eternal optimists though. I always say optimists to a fault sometimes. We always see a greener pasture, a higher market price on the horizon, or a way to keep ourselves positive. It is our optimism that gives us the fight to keep going. However, over the last several years, I have watched

neighboring farmers sell out, rip out fields due to lack of water, and overwhelm themselves with mental health issues.

Growing up, I watched my father struggle with the same issues we deal with today: labor, regulations, consumer perception, and irrigation demands. My great-grandfather settled in Chico in the early 1900s to farm. He found the same Mediterranean climate he was used to in Italy, with the fertile soil of California, to make home and establish our family roots. Those farming roots continued to grow with every generation from the passion and love for land.

Agriculture is a passion that has been passed down through our family heritage and something my children are already building as we live and work on our family farm in Shafter. Passion for agriculture keeps us all moving forward. It is when we lose our passion that the will for optimism fades as well. I strive to reconnect our family farmers with the passion they need to stay farming. I am excited and committed to building the Kern County agriculture community back up to the highs I know we all remember. Kern County Farm Bureau is here to help us rebuild. We can connect you to the resources you require to thrive. We can equip you with the tools you need to keep going. We can provide connections and contacts to the decision-makers. I look forward to working with you all to help our Kern County agriculture industry with these next steps.

I am excited to hold a strategic planning session for our Board of Directors for my first meeting as President. We will be working on new ways to bring you all the tools you need, how we can better equip our boots on the ground, and ways to enrich our relationships with the political decision makers. Together, our organization can grow to be better, stronger, and tougher agriculturists.



Kern County Farm Bureau president Jenny Holtermann (Right) and family pictured at their family almond orchard. (Photo: Holtermanns)



## Executive Director's Report

**By Rachel Nettleton**  
Exec. Director, Kern  
County Farm Bureau

With the end of the year soon approaching, I'd like to reflect on the fantastic evening we had at our 12th Annual Bounty of Kern County event in October. This event continues to be a true testament to our community's deep appreciation and shared passion for the agricultural industry. The success of this event was attributed to the collective effort from our local farmers, ranchers, and community supporters, as we joined together to celebrate the Bounty of Kern County.

As we move forward, we want to emphasize that the Kern County Farm Bureau is here to support our agricultural community by providing assistance and resources, but also to share education with our community through memberships, events, and various outreach initiatives.

Starting with memberships, we encourage those who are passionate about agriculture or want to deepen their understanding of the industry to connect with us. By exploring the Kern County Farm Bureau and the membership opportunities we offer, you are not only joining a community dedicated to the vitality of our local agriculture, but you will also gain access to a wealth of resources, educational programs, and networking events.

Whether you are a lifelong advocate for agriculture or someone eager to learn more, we encourage you to reach out and discover how a

### 2024 SAVE THE DATES

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MAR 20 - 21	FARM DAY IN THE CITY
APR 29	GOLF CLASSIC
JUL 15 - 17	TEACHERS AG SEMINAR
DATE TBD	SAVE WATER. DRINK BEER
OCT 5	BOUNTY OF KERN COUNTY

membership with us can benefit you as well as our community.

We invite you to email us at [KCFB@KernCFB.com](mailto:KCFB@KernCFB.com) — we are here to answer questions, provide information, and to help you become an integral part of our agricultural family.

Additionally, as we look ahead to 2024, we are thrilled to announce that our event dates have been set. These events will be a blend of education and enjoyment, where we will continue our mission of sharing the critical role agriculture plays in our everyday lives. We invite you to mark your calendars and join us in 2024!

We are excited about finishing the year strong and continuing to work together to make sure Kern County's agriculture thrives in the coming year.

## Young Farmers & Ranchers



**By Timothy Collins**  
Chair, Kern County  
Young Farmers  
& Ranchers

The Young Farmers and Ranchers have been busy this fall with several events as the weather finally cooled down. In September, we held a "Farm Meets Art" night where, after a wonderful dinner, we tried our hand at pottery crafting by making a bowl and vase. It made for a fun evening and a great bonding experience between our YF&R members. Thank you to Jennifer Gardiner for hosting us and sharing her artistic talents!

The Kern County Fair is always a big event for the ag community and especially for 4-H and FFA students showing animals. For several years, YF&R has been giving out ag grants to help support those local students' fair projects and animals, but this was the first year we met the students in person and

gave out the checks at the fair. It was encouraging to see what all their hard work had led to as they were busy prepping and showing their animals that day. After giving out a total of \$4,000 this year, we are already looking forward to supporting students again next year! Applications will go out in May.

Our YF&R has always enjoyed a great relationship with the Kern County Farm Bureau as a committee. Both us and the Farm Bureau continually benefit from the relationship. One of the main events we are involved with is the Bounty of the County annual dinner and fundraiser. During the event, we held a gun raffle with the proceeds benefiting YF&R. The Bounty is always a great time for YF&R members to volunteer and interact with the rest of the Farm Bureau and much of the ag community. As one of our members said in years past, "When I look out at everyone here, I see them all as potential employers."

Networking is so important in Kern County and especially in the local ag community. While talking to a member of the ag community recently, I found



YF&R members (left to right) Timothy Collins, Katie Verhoef, and Katelyn Filkins presenting an Ag Grant check to Isaiyah Garcia (middle left) at the Kern County Fair. (Photo: Kern County YF&R)

we both had similar stories of growing up without a close family member working in ag locally. Both of us wanted to avoid being stuck in an office and we found the local members of the ag community another reason to make a career in agriculture. Joining the Kern County Young Farmers and Ranchers is one of the best ways to get involved for 18-35 years olds working or interested in agriculture.

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



# OPINION: Apex Predators



The Cattleman's Corner

By Austin Snedden  
Ranching Contributor,  
Valley Ag Voice

Recently at our County Cattlemen's meeting, we heard from California Department of Fish and Wildlife representatives to discuss the wolf situation and its incursion further south into our state. Apparently, there is at least one wolf wandering around Tulare County. This one seems willing to set up shop in the area, different from the wandering wolf several years ago that vacationed on the Central Coast before wandering east and eventually ended up losing a fight with a vehicle on the Grapevine of Interstate 5.

The CADFW officials explained that if any of us cattlemen saw a wolf, we should report it to be tagged and monitored. No alternatives for management were given by the CADFW officials. I thought it would take longer than this for the wolves to get this far south, but it reminded me of several years ago when I attended a hearing when CADFW was considering listing the gray wolf as a California Endangered Species. The Hearing was held in the not so central location of Ventura, and one of the comment makers stated that she gave tours in Golden Gate Park, and it broke her heart to explain why the wolves were no longer there.

The sentiment of many regarding the wolf is a symptom of a greater illness affecting many and applicable to other parts of life. Apparently, what many of us have considered "natural instincts" are either not that natural, or something is happening to strip people of these natural instincts. Most of us in animal agriculture have an instinct toward animal husbandry that urges

us to protect and provide care for animals even beyond the obvious economic motives. The instinct toward animal husbandry doesn't even compare to the strong instincts that sensible people have for protecting their children or even defending innocent people that are not in their charge.

What we are seeing in state wildlife policy, and state criminal policy is a symptom of the same illness, allowing apex predators to expand their territory, and offering no plan for management. Whether it is the protection of the wolf, mountain lion, or bear — or the release of violent criminals from prison to walk among the productive innocent folks — there is something causing policy makers to lose their God-given instincts. I don't know if we can blame it all on a departure from nature and agrarian life, but I think a departure from nature and natural tasks may contribute to decisions that allow predators to become fortified and emboldened. Whether it is lack of predator management causing the deer population to collapse, or the release of felons to prey on innocent humans, a more urbanized society has created policy that defies natural instincts.

My solution to predator policy and California criminal policy is a good mother cow. Urbanites, and especially policy makers need to sit in the classroom under the instruction of a good mother cow. The good mother cow does not waste energy harassing the non-predators when she is tending her baby, but if a predator comes in the vicinity of her calf, she will defend with all she has. I think the observation of natural instincts has been lost to those trapped in the urban jungle, and they aren't influenced by nature to develop a proper worldview. Cows don't have perfect ethics, but when we have come to a point where I would trust a cow more than a human, it may be time for some folks to learn from the cows.



What we are seeing in state wildlife policy, and state criminal policy is a symptom of the same illness, allowing apex predators to expand their territory, and offering no plan for management. (Photo: Kara / Adobe Stock)

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### FARM, RANCH AND TRANSITIONAL USE PROPERTIES

<b>DELANO COLD STORAGE — \$5,900,000</b> 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.	<b>DRY LAND — \$1,750±/AC</b> 231.42± acres   Taft Area, West Kern WD Residential service, Recreational and Rural home site.
<b>TABLE GRAPES — \$25,500±/AC &amp; \$26,500±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)</b> 119.92± & 150.27± acres   Delano Earlimart Irrigation District, Lower Tule River Irrigation District, Quality Varieties, Productive Soils.	<b>ALMONDS — \$22,307±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)</b> 295.46± acres   Arvin Area, Arvin Edison WSD Contract Water, 2 Wells, Excellent Soils, Almonds in Full Production.
<b>PISTACHIOS, ALMONDS AND FARMLAND - \$42,530±/AC (NEW LISTING)</b> 152.81± acres   Shafter City Limits and Sphere of Influence, Shafter Wasco Irrigation District, 2 Wells, Excellent Soils, Almonds & Pistachios in Full Production.	<b>WALNUTS, TABLE GRAPES, PISTACHIOS — \$22,500±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)</b> 345.95± acres   Selma Area, North Fork GSA, Excellent Soils, Quality Well Water, Diversified Portfolio, Solar System.
<b>ALMONDS — \$27,500±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)</b> 155.73± acres   Wasco Area, 2 SOURCES OF SEMI-TROPIC WSD CONTRACT WATER, 1 Well, Solar, Class 1 Soils, Almonds in full production.	<b>ALMONDS — \$15,084±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)</b> 394.47± acres   Wasco Area, Semi Tropic non-contract water, 3 wells, 863.4±KW Solar System, Productive Soils, Almonds in full production.
<b>FARMLAND — \$12,000±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)</b> 156.96± acres   Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD non-contract water, 1 well, Productive Soils, and Perfect for permanent crops.	<b>ALMONDS — \$17,660±/AC (NEW LISTING)</b> 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.
<b>WINE GRAPES — \$18,378±/AC</b> 161.06± acres   Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD non-contract water, 1 Well, High-Density planting.	<b>ALMONDS — \$17,988±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)</b> 995.11± acres   Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract and non-contract water, 5 wells, Productive Soils, and Almonds in full production.
<b>VINEYARD — \$19,503±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)</b> 240.88± acres   Delano Area, Southern San Joaquin Municipal Utility District, Allison Table Grapes, Strong soils.	<b>ALMONDS — \$18,261±/AC (NEW LISTING)</b> 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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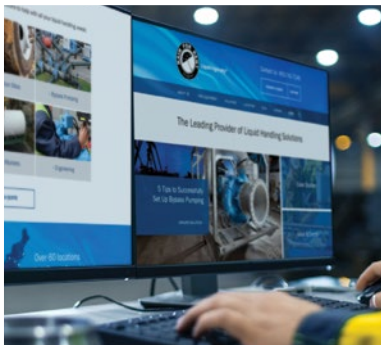


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# Unlocking Success



**By Dave Plivelich  
President & CEO,  
The Marcom Group &  
MarcomBranding.com**

In the dynamic business world, where competition is fierce and customer loyalty is paramount,

finding ways to stand out is crucial. One often overlooked yet incredibly effective method for achieving this is through the strategic use of promotional products. These tangible tokens of appreciation not only reinforce your brand identity but also serve as a powerful tool for fostering relationships with employees, clients, and potential clients alike.

## The Purpose of Promotional Products

Promotional products, often called swag or giveaways, are items imprinted with a company's logo or message. Their primary purpose is to promote a brand, raise awareness, and create a positive and lasting impression on the recipient. They are a tangible representation of your company's values, culture, and commitment to excellence.

**1. Building Brand Awareness:** One of the fundamental purposes of promotional products is to increase brand visibility. When your logo is emblazoned on a useful item, it becomes a constant reminder of your business, keeping it top-of-mind for your audience.

**2. Expressing Appreciation:** Promotional products serve as tokens of gratitude. Whether it's your dedicated employees, loyal clients, or potential clients you're looking to engage, these items convey your appreciation for their support and interest in your business.

**3. Strengthening Relationships:** By gifting promotional products, you create a tangible connection with your stakeholders. It's a way to say, "We value you, and we're here for you." These gestures go a long way in building strong, lasting relationships.

## Benefits of Promotional Products for Employees

Your employees are the backbone of your business and keeping them engaged and motivated is paramount. Promotional products can play a significant role in achieving this:

**1. Employee Morale:** Rewarding employees with branded items boosts morale and job satisfaction. Whether it's a branded coffee mug for their morning brew or a stylish company jacket, these items make them feel appreciated.

**2. Team Unity:** Matching company apparel or office accessories fosters a sense of unity among employees. It promotes a feeling of belonging to a larger community, reinforcing company culture.

**3. Employee Recognition:** Recognizing outstanding performance with a personalized promotional product can be a powerful motivator. It shows that their hard work is noticed and valued.

## Benefits of Promotional Products for Clients

# The Purpose and Benefits of Promotional Products for Employees, Clients, and Potential Clients

Your existing clients are your most valuable asset, and retaining their loyalty is crucial. Promotional products can help in this regard:

**1. Brand Loyalty:** Gifting clients with useful and thoughtful promotional products can strengthen their loyalty to your brand. It creates a positive association and makes them more likely to continue doing business with you.

**2. Word-of-Mouth Marketing:** When clients use your promotional items in their daily lives, they become brand advocates. They recommend your services or products to others, leading to valuable word-of-mouth marketing.

**3. Customer Retention:** Sending a token of appreciation on special occasions or anniversaries of your business relationship can help maintain and strengthen your client relationships over the long term.

## Benefits of Promotional Products for Potential Clients

Attracting new clients is a continuous endeavor for any business. Promotional products can help you make a memorable impression on potential clients:

**1. First Impressions:** When you meet a potential client, offering a well-designed and useful promotional product can leave a lasting positive impression. It sets the tone for a fruitful business relationship.

**2. Brand Recognition:** Your promotional items can help potential clients remember your brand when they need the products or services you offer. It's a way to differentiate yourself from competitors.

**3. Lead Generation:** Distributing promotional products at trade shows or events can be an effective method for generating leads. It encourages potential clients to engage with your business and learn more about your offerings.

## Choosing the Right Promotional Products

Selecting the right promotional products is crucial to achieving the desired impact. Consider the following factors:

**1. Relevance:** Ensure that the item is relevant to your business and aligns with your brand identity. For instance, a tech company might opt for branded USB drives or wireless chargers.

**2. Quality:** Invest in high-quality products. The durability and functionality of the item will influence how often it's used, prolonging its exposure.

**3. Target Audience:** Tailor your choice to the preferences and needs of your target audience. Think about what would resonate with them and enhance their daily lives.

**4. Design:** The design of the product, including your logo and messaging, should be aesthetically pleasing and clearly convey your brand's message.

**5. Distribution:** Consider how you'll distribute the items. Will it be at an event, through a

See **UNLOCKING SUCCESS** on PAGE 10



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# Ensuring HR and Safety Compliance

Article provided by FormForce

Maintaining HR and safety compliance is non-negotiable in today's fast-paced business environment. Regulations change, audits loom, and the safety of employees remains paramount. One often underestimated but essential aspect of compliance is document version control. Keeping track of previous versions of critical documents is a regulatory requirement and a practice that can save companies from legal liabilities, audits, and operational mishaps. In this comprehensive guide, we'll explore the importance of maintaining previous versions of documents for HR and safety compliance and why FormForce is the ideal solution.

## Understanding the Importance of Document Version Control

Document version control refers to the systematic management of different document versions, ensuring that the most recent, up-to-date version is readily accessible while maintaining a historical record of previous iterations. This process is particularly vital for HR and safety compliance due to several reasons:

**1. Regulatory Compliance:** Many HR and safety regulations require organizations to maintain records of policy changes, training materials, and safety procedures. Failure to do so can result in penalties, audits, and legal disputes.

**2. Audits and Inspections:** Government agencies and industry regulators often conduct audits and inspections to ensure compliance with labor laws, safety standards, and other regulations. A well-documented history of policy changes and training records can streamline these processes.

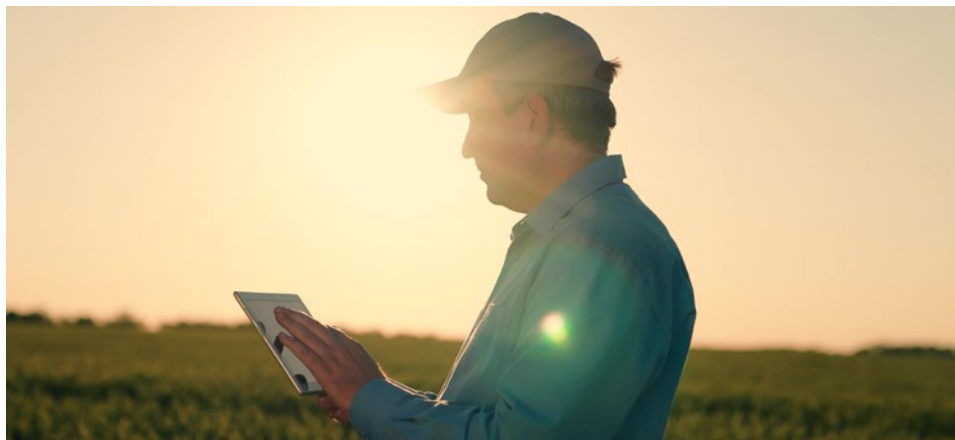
**3. Legal Protection:** In the event of legal disputes, having access to previous versions of documents can be crucial for defending your organization. It provides evidence of compliance efforts and can protect your company from liabilities.

**4. Continuous Improvement:** Maintaining previous versions of documents allows organizations to track changes over time. This information can be used to analyze the effectiveness of policies and make necessary improvements.

## Challenges in Document Version Control

Despite its importance, document version control

## Ensuring HR and Safety Compliance: The Critical Role of Document Version Control with FormForce



Access FormForce on mobile devices, ensuring your team can stay compliant even when on the go. (Super Fox / Adobe Stock)

can be challenging for many organizations. Some common challenges include:

**Manual Processes:** Many organizations rely on manual methods, such as naming files with version numbers or using paper records, which are prone to errors and inefficiencies.

**Collaboration Issues:** In a digital workplace, multiple stakeholders may need to collaborate on document revisions. Coordinating these efforts can be complex without a centralized system.

**Accessibility:** Ensuring that the right personnel can access the right versions of documents can be a logistical challenge, especially in larger organizations.

**Storage and Retrieval:** Managing a growing volume of documents, including previous versions, can strain storage systems and make retrieval time-consuming.

## Why FormForce is the Solution

FormForce, a comprehensive document management and version control platform, offers an ideal solution to these challenges. Here's why FormForce stands out as the go-to choice for maintaining previous versions of documents for HR and safety compliance:

**1. Centralized Repository:** FormForce provides a secure, cloud-based repository for all your HR

and safety documents. Accessible from anywhere, it eliminates the need for scattered storage systems.

**2. Document Versioning:** With FormForce, every document undergoes version control automatically. A new version is created when changes are made, and previous versions are archived for future reference.

**3. Collaborative Workflow:** FormForce supports collaborative document editing. Multiple stakeholders can work on documents simultaneously, with real-time tracking of changes and comments.

**4. Access Control:** Granular access control ensures that only authorized personnel can view or edit documents. You can define who can access current and previous versions, enhancing security.

**5. Search and Retrieval:** FormForce's powerful search capabilities make it easy to find specific documents or previous versions quickly, streamlining retrieval processes.

**6. Compliance Tracking:** The platform features automated compliance tracking, allowing organizations to monitor policy changes, employee training, and safety procedures. Alerts can be set to ensure timely updates.

**7. Integration Capabilities:** FormForce's platform enables consistent data export that integrates with applications like Excel, Tableau, and more, making it a versatile addition to your compliance toolkit.

**8. Mobile Accessibility:** Access FormForce on mobile devices, ensuring your team can stay compliant even when

on the go.

## Case Study: Real-world Benefits of FormForce

Let's look at how a company can leverage FormForce to overcome its document version control challenges and achieve compliance excellence:

**Challenge:** Let's take a medium-sized construction firm struggling with maintaining accurate and accessible versions of safety manuals and training materials. They face potential safety hazards and regulatory fines.

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# Dairy Dominates in Central Valley Commodities

**Top 3 agriculture counties see shift in crop value.**

**By Natalie Willis, Reporter,  
Valley Ag Voice**

In 2022, California's top agricultural-producing counties experienced significant changes in their crop values, particularly driven by the performance of their dairy industries. Tulare County emerged as the leading agricultural producer in the nation, surpassing Kern County with a 6.5% increase in crop value compared to the previous year, while Kern County experienced a 7% decrease.

The rivalry for the title of the number one producing county in the United States has primarily involved California's top agricultural counties: Kern, Tulare, and Fresno. Fresno held the top spot for three years before Kern County took the lead in 2021. However, in 2022, Tulare County claimed the top position with a record high of \$8.6 billion in crop value, approximately 11% higher than Kern County's \$7.7 billion, and 6% higher than Fresno's 8.095 billion.

According to the Tulare County Board of Supervisors, the three Central Valley counties account for 44% of total agriculture production value.



*Calf in the stalls of a dairy farm. (Sergey Ryzhov / Adobe Stock)*

## Got Milk?

The primary factor linking each county with an increased 2022 crop value is an efficient dairy industry — Tulare, Stanislaus, and King counties each named milk as the leading agricultural commodity.

According to Farm Progress, the first six months of 2022 saw fewer cows coupled with a decline in milk production, but the second half of the year countered with increased cow numbers and the

subsequent increase in milk production per cow. Milk production began eroding milk prices later in the year.

Long-term trends for U.S. dairy products include a steady increase in milk production as well as a consolidation of dairy farm operations, a USDA estimate explained. As the leading agricultural commodity in Tulare County, milk grossed over \$2 billion, a 37% increase from the prior year.

Stanislaus County also saw the benefits of stable milk production, replacing almonds as the top-valued commodity and increasing by 41% in total value due to Federal Milk Marketing Order prices. Milk, which accounted for 30% of Stanislaus County's total value, increased the county's total gross agricultural value by 5% compared to the previous year.

Similarly, King County's gross value increased by 10.7% from 2021. The agricultural commissioner, Jimmy Hook, cited the positive difference to the county's top commodity — milk. Milk products were also one of the only crops that rose in value for Kern County's 2022 agricultural year, increasing by roughly 38%.

## Fresno County

Fresno County's 2022 crop values reached \$8.095 billion, falling under Tulare County's \$8.6 billion. According to Melissa Cregan, Fresno County's agriculture commissioner, the gross production value was 0.12% higher than the prior year, but the county dropped to the second spot in national agricultural production.

"Fresno County's agricultural strength is based on the diversity of crops produced," Cregan said in an address to the Fresno County Board of Supervisors. "Included in the 2022 report are over 183 different commodities, 77 of which have a gross value in excess of 1 million dollars. Fresno County continues to supply the highest quality of food and fiber nationwide and abroad."

Grapes held the top spot in the county's commodity report, reaching a total gross value of \$1.24 billion. Almonds dropped to the second spot at \$1.14 billion, and pistachios remained third with a value of \$705 million.

Ryan Jacobsen, Fresno County Farm Bureau chief executive officer, explained that despite the increased

production from 2021, Fresno County farmers were facing a third drought year and decreased water allocations.

"The bounty of this year can easily make you forget what happened last year, but farmers did struggle once again," Jacobsen said at the board meeting. "It was a zero percent allocation on the West side as well as the first start of SGMA."

Despite these struggles, Fresno County reshuffled the leadership deck, placing Kern County as the third agricultural-producing county.

"It once again showcases that Fresno County is the agricultural capital of the nation and the world," Jacobson said. "Obviously, the productivity we have here is found in very few other places, and this is a time for us to celebrate all that we do have in our backyard."

## Kern County

Kern County crop revenue drastically reduced as a result of harsh weather conditions and increased water regulations. The top five commodities in Kern remain the same from 2021 — grapes, citrus, milk, almonds, and pistachios — but milk products replaced pistachios as the third commodity, according to the 2022 crop report.

Kern County Agricultural Commissioner Glenn Fankhauser told the Bakersfield Californian that he was unaware of the reason behind the revenue drop, but unfavorable weather conditions during the three-year drought shrunk California's total farmland.

The drought peaked in the Central Valley last year, resulting in extreme revenue losses with 1.3 million acres left unplanted, according to a study from UC Merced. Compounded with less acreage, crop losses due to weather events last year totaled \$21.4 billion.

Farmers also saw a reduction in water allotment from the state in 2022, leading to a combined 752,000 fallowed acres of irrigated farmland, the UC Merced study explained.

Surface water deliveries for 2021 and 2022 decreased by roughly 43% and resulted in increased groundwater pumping. Now, 12 basins in the Central Valley are in critical overdraft. The rainfall the state received this year is unlikely to improve groundwater allotments, John C Moore III told the Californian.



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# Fox News Host Headlines 'My Ag Nite' in Tulare

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Political commentator and Fox News co-host Jesse Watters will take center stage at "My Ag Nite" — an agricultural event to unite leaders in California's ag industry — on Nov. 2 at Tulare's International Agri-Center. JCS Marketing, a Fresno-based media company specializing in agriculture marketing, is hosting the gathering, which they claim to provide a unique blend of industry insights, networking, and a sense of community — all with a conservative touch.

According to Jason Scott, CEO of JCS Marketing, the event stands out as an opportunity to bring communities together that share common values and deep-rooted connections with agriculture. The evening event will feature an opening trade show, a social mixer, dinner, and a keynote speech by Watters.

"My two favorite things in life in my professional life are my country and agriculture. And so being able to join those two worlds together was really exciting, and that's kind of really the vision behind what we're doing is we're celebrating our country, and we're celebrating farming," Scott said.

As a Central Valley native, Scott explained the significance of bringing the agriculture community together to celebrate diverse commodities and

discuss industry politics. He noted that the awareness of the political side of agriculture is important to the industry's future, and Watters is able to provide a geopolitical discussion from a national and global perspective.

"If we don't get involved in the political side of what's happening in California agriculture, we're not going to have an industry," Scott said.

My Ag Nite expects attendance from various agricultural sectors, including tree nuts, dairy, cattle, poultry, permanent crops, and vegetables. Scott explained that this event is not for one commodity but for the large variety that is grown in the Central Valley, and the trade show will reflect that diversity.

"We'll have several exhibits with different types of technologies — fertilizers, chemicals, inputs, irrigation — we'll have a large variety of different types of exhibits. And have a mixer and trade show from 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.," Scott said. "That'll allow everyone an opportunity to network, to talk to each other, to learn from each other — talk about new technologies and what's new and exciting in agriculture."

According to Scott, there are no set plans to make My Ag Nite an annual event, but he is hopeful for the connection, education, and celebration the night will bring.

"Some of these farmers have been multiple-generations — their parents or their great-grandparents



Jesse Watters headlines 'My Ag Nite.' (Photo: JCS Marketing)

have come in as immigrants and have built a place for themselves in the farming community. Being able to celebrate our freedom and being able to choose and be part of the agriculture community is important," Scott said. "There's a big pocket that share conservative values [and] we don't have a lot of opportunities to do that as an industry, so this is kind of a night where we can come together and celebrate those types of similarities and interests."

Scott expects tickets to sell out with a cut-off of

1,000. To attend My Ag Nite, visit the website at [MyAgLife.com/MyAgNite](https://MyAgLife.com/MyAgNite). Tickets start at \$150 and include access to the mixer, trade show, dinner, and Jesse Watters' keynote speech.

#### Agenda:

**4 P.M.–6 P.M.** Registrations, Social Mixer, and Trade Show

**6 P.M.–7 P.M.** Dinner

**7 P.M.** Keynote Speech by Jesse Watter, Fox News Anchor

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# Central Valley Ag

**Continued from PAGE 1** Small farms in the Central Valley will face a bigger hit from SGMA and other regulations than larger, corporate farms will, Marsh explained. A study from UC’s Giannini Foundation of Agriculture Economics explained that the average corporate farm in California has more acreage and higher sales than the average partnership or individual proprietor farm — most individual proprietor farms cannot compete in terms of water usage labor costs, and other competitive outputs.

“If a farm has a lot of acres that are not planting all their acres, then they can use that water for the acres that they do have planted,” Marsh said. “For a smaller farm, the same percentage draw down of acreage would be the same, but that could impact them significantly — they’re doing 10 acres, and they only now have five. That’s a big difference from someone who manages 1,000 acres and now is working on 500.”

This highlights a growing trend in California’s agricultural landscape, which points to a decline in the number of farms since the 1970s. The drop-off in U.S. farms slowed in the early 80s, and a recent survey showed 2.0 million U.S. farms in 2022, down from 2.20 million in 2007, according to a report from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Similarly, farm acreage continued to decrease with 893 million acres in 2022, down from 915 million acres 10 years earlier. Corporate farms, however, have been on a steady incline since 1974, according to the UC study.

The California Department of Agriculture noted that

95% of farms in California are family-owned, while non-family corporations make up roughly 1.3% of total farms — the remainder is operated as cooperatives and various other institutions. Of these, the UC study claims that 80% of California corporate farms are classified as family-held corporations.

Large farms with over \$1 million in sales before expenses account for 3% of all farms but 47% of the value of production, according to the USDA Economic and Research Service. Almost every industry in California’s agricultural landscape has felt this shift, most notably of which are dairy farms.

Dairy is one of the top commodities in the Central Valley, with recent crop reports from Kern, Tulare, and Fresno counties showing the industry’s prominence in total gross value. However, as dairy farm families continue to supply a growing demand for dairy products, the number of dairy farms in California has decreased by 94% within the past 70 years, according to a report from Dairy Cares.

While the county crop reports show the total value of agricultural products in the Central Valley, they do not account for the cost of production, marketing, transportation, or other output costs, which have increased as a natural response to greater regulations.

Labor costs, for instance, rose again in October after a series of minimum wage bills were signed from Governor Newsom’s desk, including an increase to \$20 an hour for fast food workers and \$25 an hour for the healthcare industry. Even though these changes do not directly affect agriculture, when the minimum wage goes up, it sets a new standard for other businesses — corporate farms are better equipped to meet that challenge.

## Evolving Industry

Recent innovations in the way California meets global production needs have surfaced as a respite against increased labor, production, and input costs. According to Clay Freeman, agriculture education coordinator for the Kern High School District, automation will continue in its pursuit to lessen labor burdens.

“The agricultural industry is very innovative, and it’s always growing in the direction of trying to do more with less,” Freeman said. “There are resource issues with regard to water and land, and being cognizant of the environment, but labor seems to be the biggest one, and we’re just trying to be more efficient.”

New ag-tech innovations have emerged as a combatant against rising production and labor costs, driving the next generation of farming in the Central Valley.

Along with regulatory bills, Newsom signed Assembly Bill 1016, which allows greater access to drones for pesticide applications to farmers. Jamie Johansson, president of the California Farm Bureau, explained that this bill will ensure that more farmers have access to precision technology, a growing necessity in modern practices.

“With aerial spray technology within reach of all farmers for the first time, this will help them save on crop protection costs by allowing drones to target affected areas instead of entire fields,” Johansson said in a press release. “Drone use can also replace backpack spray and ground-based delivery systems with remote technologies, which protects our agricultural employees from close contact with pesticide applications.”

Other automation technologies also hope to lessen the decreased agricultural workforce, and many are eager to

see new innovations in action. Michael Marsh, president and CEO of the National Council of Agricultural Employers, told Agri-Pulse Communications that the speed and cost of new technologies will determine whether producers stay in business.

“I don’t think technology adoption can come quickly enough and low cost enough to keep some of these legacy family farming operations in business,” Marsh said.

Still, the interest in agricultural pursuits has never wavered in Kern County, according to Freeman. Agriculture education in the district is evolving to meet the industry need for ag-tech, and the best innovations and practices are being added to the curriculum. Industry partners are paired with KHSD’s agricultural education programs, providing insight into current industry trends, needs, and technological innovations.

“They’re probably going to do some cross-curricular training with a program in drone operation,” Freeman said. “And so that’s some of the technology that’s out there with precision ag, which has to do with utilizing our resources more effectively...and being able to isolate and observe crops in real time with much less invasive approaches.”

The next generation of ag leaders in Kern County will be equipped in education, but Freeman also emphasized the importance of adapting to new technologies in order to co-exist with corporate operations.

“That family farm is where we really see the heart and soul of our industry, and so those generational farmers that come out of that family farm, they, in turn, become the leaders of our industry because they have such passion for it,” Freeman said.

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### Groundwater Trading

*Continued from PAGE 1* loss could be mitigated by the implementation of the proposed portfolio. PPIC placed significant emphasis on groundwater trading to minimize economic losses associated with SGMA compliance, and they analyzed potential benefits at two levels – with subbasins (intra-basin), and between subbasins (inter-basin). The benefit of groundwater trading has met some skepticism among water district managers. What district would allow water to be moved outside of its boundaries during a deficit? The same question could be asked at the GSA and subbasin level. The impact of SGMA, many thought, would be to greatly reduce the incentives for water transfers – the opposite of what PPIC was promoting. And without the mitigating benefits of water transfers, the economic and social consequences of SGMA could be severe.

Groundwater transfers was one of the topics on the agenda at a recent Technical Work Group meeting of the Water Blueprint. Districts and GSAs are beginning to explore moderated groundwater transfers. Within-district transfers provide flexibility to growers particularly as cropping patterns change. Moving up a level, many groundwater models have documented and estimated the subsurface movements between GSAs. Is it not advantageous for the entity receiving groundwater inflow to cover the costs and get a credit for it, while the district with groundwater outflow earns revenue for improving its facilities? If so, it seems groundwater transfers may have a role to play.

Numerous cautions were suggested by participants both in Fresno and in the Technical Working Group. Groundwater transfers should not occur in a way that would exacerbate unsustainability. In particular, water transfers should be implemented to help reduce subsidence, and monitoring should occur to prevent water quality and water level impacts on community wells.

Tulare Irrigation District, in considering a policy for water transfers, proposed the adoption of a set of principles. These principles encompass several key aspects, including flexibility, adaptability, transparency, avoiding harm, equity and inclusion, and a unified basin-wide strategy. The flexibility principle would provide water users with the adaptability needed to comply with new regula-

tions and respond to changing water availability. In parallel, adaptability focuses on promoting adjustments in practices, rules, and procedures as conditions change, based on the experience of market participants and the emergence of new information. Transparency is another key element, emphasizing the need for visibility and comprehensibility in the development and conduction of market activities. This principle also extends to the availability of accurate water usage data and the timely reporting of water market activities. The “do no harm” principle seeks to anticipate and avoid adverse impacts on water users and uses, potentially including the delineation of “no-buy” areas to prevent issues. Equity and inclusion call for the development of the water market through an open process that incorporates a diverse array of potential market participants and other interested parties, with a focus on simplicity in implementation. Finally, the proposal emphasizes the importance of a one basin-wide strategy, designed to create a common framework accessible to all GSAs operating within the subbasin.

At the scales PPIC envisioned, the mitigation provided by water trading was relatively small. PPIC projected the loss of up to 871,000 acres of irrigated farmland in a scenario that considered full implementation of SGMA, future climate change and the implementation of future environmental regulations. That loss of farmland was projected to be reduced by 5% and 8% under intra-basin and inter-basin scenarios respectively. Water trading had more success mitigating employment impacts. That full impact scenario also had job losses of 48,000. These were reduced by 30% and 37% under intra-basin and inter-basin trading respectively. The full impact scenario projected revenue losses of \$8.7 billion per year. These would be reduced by 29% and 34% respectively.

Are those benefits attainable? PPIC reported that 1.5-million-acre feet (maf), mainly of surface water, is traded annually in California and that, in 2018, 16 maf of water was applied to crops in the San Joaquin Valley. The quantity of groundwater proposed to be traded under PPIC’s intra-basin scenario was not readily apparent in their 2023 report, but from their Figure A13 (reproduced in the graphic below) intra-basin trading amounting to 800,000-acre feet/year might be in the ballpark. To put that in perspective, based on the information reported in groundwater sustainability plans, the subsurface groundwater flows between subbasins in the San Joaquin is in the order of 2.4 maf/year, suggesting the PPIC estimate is not unreasonable.

Water trading, including groundwater trading, is likely to become an increasingly important tool to help achieve groundwater sustainability. Not all areas are conducive to groundwater recharge, but groundwater flows occur within and between subbasins throughout the Valley. California’s Department of Water Resources is focused on groundwater sustainability at the subbasin level. That should create an incentive for water users in each subbasin to work together. Through mutually beneficial trading and investments, significant improvements in groundwater sustainability appear possible providing another piece to a complex puzzle.

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# Tree Nut Thieves Strike Again in LA

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association announced that the tree nut industry suffered another cargo theft involving a load of walnuts bound for Los Angeles in October. The association was not able to provide further details but urged members to be cautious of fake pickup drivers.

“This is a sophisticated crime,” CCGGA wrote. “Please be proactive and prepared. The last time this hit, more than 40 loads of tree nuts were stolen.”

Due to high market value and durability, California’s tree nuts are notoriously suitable for black market trade. Almonds and pistachios were in Kern County’s top five agricultural commodities in 2022, and numerous outbound loads of tree nuts are heading out of the Central Valley.

The CCGGA and Western Agricultural Processors Association developed a series of recommendations and deterrent measures for California growers:



Ripe almonds on a tree branch. (Photo: Vikakurylo81 / Adobe Stock)

- All pick-up appointments must be made at least 24 hours in advance and require: Pick-up number, Driver’s name and license number, and Trucking Company Name
- Verify paperwork upon arrival
- Take photographs of the driver, truck, and trailer
- Take photographs of license plates and VIN#
- Take thumbprint of driver
- Post warnings at truck entrance
- Install high-definition surveillance cameras
- Utilize GPS tracking devices

## Kern County Fair Honors Long-standing Ag Leader Poncetta

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The Kern County Fair honored David Poncetta of Poncetta Farms and Livestock at the Person of the Year dinner. The Poncetta family has been integrated into Kern County’s agriculture industry for the past century, with Poncetta taking over the family farm in Pumpkin Center roughly 29 years ago.

The Kern County Fair Board of Directors unanimously voted for Poncetta to receive the 2023 award, honoring his legacy in local agriculture and livestock shows.

According to Poncetta, receiving the 2023 Person of the Year granted an unexpected feeling of satisfaction, but his mission in agriculture has never been for recognition — it has been targeted at the agricultural education of children in his community.

“The agriculture industry has always been my life, and I wish that more people would reach out and assist those kids that are less fortunate or don’t have the means to be involved fully in agriculture and give them the opportunities to be successful in a world that can guide them to a successful future,” Poncetta wrote in an email.

Poncetta was raised on the same family farm he leads today, but back then, it was a dairy and row crop farm. After his father took over the farm in the 1960s, it transitioned into a beef cattle operation, sparking Poncetta’s interest and participation in 4-H and FFA cattle shows at the fair.

As an agricultural leader, Poncetta’s interests span from protecting family farm interests in

the county to educating the next generation. He noted that state regulations hinder the agricultural industry in California, and the farmer’s mission to feed the country requires tremendous sacrifice.

“I see the future of agriculture in our county getting more regulations and harder for people to get involved unless they are born into it or married into it,” Poncetta said. “The industry fights every day to survive and take care of everyone, but it’s not welcoming for new people as they have to struggle to survive. Corporation farming has changed everything for the way that things are done in this county.”

As Poncetta explained, the regulatory challenges facing California’s agricultural industry have significantly impacted small farmers, but his recognition as the 2023 Person of the Year highlights the county’s dedication to its long-standing institutions.



David Poncetta (right) was honored as the 2023 Person of the Year at the Kern County Fair. (Photo: Chelsey Roberts / Kern County Fair)



Citrus leaves infected with the Asian psyllid. (Photo: Citrus Pest and Disease Prevention Program)

## Ventura County Orders Citrus Quarantine

### Citrus pests decrease production in California.

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The California Department of Food and Agriculture ordered a quarantine for over 101 miles in Ventura County two weeks after the detection of Huanglongbing disease in an Asian citrus psyllid cluster. HLB was detected in two citrus trees on a residential property in Santa Paula.

The disease was detected from plant material from one orange and one lime tree on the property near the initial sample detection of an HLB-positive psyllid. According to Hamutahl Cohen, Entomology Advisor with the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Department, when HLB was detected in Florida, it spread rapidly.

“I previously worked as an extension agency with the University of Florida IFAS Extension,” Cohen said in an email. “Due to HLB, orange yield in Florida decreased about 40%. In addition to causing low fruit yields, HLB results in fruit that tastes less sweet.”

Cohen noted that following low fruit yields, Florida growers shifted away from growing citrus in favor of other crops.

The detection in Santa Paula prompted the removal of the infected trees as well as a mandatory survey within 250 meters of the find site. The quarantine prohibits the movement of all citrus nursery stock, host plants, or plant parts out of the area, but movement of commercially cleaned and packed citrus is allowed according to the CDEA.

The initial detection of the insect was found in an area adjacent to many citrus orchards, and there

is no cure for the HLB disease. Growers in that region will likely spend more time and resources to monitor and treat orchards for ACP insects, Cohen explained.

“Infection with HLB results in shoot and leaf yellowing, malformed seeds, small fruits, and will ultimately kill the tree,” Cohen said. “All types of citrus, including lemons, which are frequently grown on the coast, are vulnerable.”

The CDEA implemented a treatment program to reduce ACP infestations in citrus trees and, in partnership with the USDA and local agricultural commissioners, are pursuing a strategy to control the spread of HLB.

Along with a potential outbreak of HLB, the California citrus industry had an unprecedented year in terms of pest and weather damage, according to a press release from California Citrus Mutual. Reports from its Pest and Disease Task Force indicated that some growers experienced exterior fruit scarring on roughly 80% of individual blocks, primarily affecting naval.

However, visual and aesthetic effects do not affect the interior fruit quality, taste, or texture, CCM explained. Regardless, “fancy fruit” with minimal external scarring will be a premium commodity this season, according to the press release.

Excessive rainfall also encouraged a higher level of Thrip insects that affected production yields. The CCM Marketing Committee estimated that the navel crop will be 8% to 15% under the previous season’s production due to thrips, and the mandarin and lemon crops will be down 5%.

“It’s been an extremely challenging pest season for citrus growers,” CCM President Casey Creamer said. “The industry did its absolute best in trying to control this unprecedented thrips season. Growers bear that cost while also facing the reality that the pest pressure will result in decreased returns in the marketplace.”

## Unlocking Success

*Continued from PAGE 4* mailing, or as part of a special promotion?

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Several freshly harvested round bales of raw pima cotton ready for processing. (Photo: Valley Ag Voice / Archive)

# Cotton Crop Suffers 11.4% Decline Amidst Lygus Infestation, Tulare Lake Flooding

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Faced with an abnormally wet year, California cotton is down 11.4% from last year's crop, making the U.S. cotton crop its smallest since 2009-2010. Growers faced a particularly hard year in pest management, with lygus plaguing the industry during the "worst year it's ever seen," according to a report from AgNet West.

Roger Isom, president and CEO of the California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association, told AgNet that damage from lygus was most severe in areas of Kern, Kings, Fresno, and Merced counties.

"I've been told at least three fields – one in Merced County and two in Fresno – were completely abandoned," Isom said. "They said, 'Look, we haven't even gotten into the aphid and whitefly season or the cost of defoliation, and I'm already going to lose money. So, I'm walking away from it.'"

Lygus problems were expected due to a long, wet winter, allowing them to move into the valley and into cotton, Ian Grettenberger, assistant cooperative extension specialist at UC Davis, told AgNet. Managing the pest proved difficult for growers due to a lack of effective materials —

According to Isom, the CCGGA board saw reports of up to 12 sprays for lygus as well as costs ranging

from \$30 an acre to \$300 an acre to control the pest. "If you're using materials for lygus that are very disruptive of natural enemies, that means that any aphids or whiteflies that are already in the field or that are moving into the field may have a very hospitable place to land," Grettenberger said. "They can reproduce very quickly and not have their offspring eaten by natural enemies that are in the field."

All cotton production in the U.S. is down 9% from 2022, according to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service. Total Upland cotton production is also down 9%. California's production dropped to fewer than 100,000 acres as a result of flooding in Tulare Lake, drastically reducing the national supply of Pima cotton. Production is down 24% percent from 2022 at 356,000 bales as most of the land that would have been planted with Pima was underwater, according to Valley Public Radio.

According to Brian Marsh, farm advisor at the Kern County extension of UC Agriculture and Natural Resources, several factors led to the decline in cotton acreage, chiefly the partial loss of the USDA price support package.

"There's less of a safety net," Marsh said. "There's still gonna be some Pima cotton acreage in California, but there's a limit to how much Pima cotton can be marketed or has been marketed, so there's kind of a natural marketing cap on that acreage."

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# Rooster's Honky Tonk Revives Bakersfield as 'Nashville West,' Supports Local Artists

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

A new honky tonk is breathing life back into Bakersfield — the heart of the Central Valley's agricultural hub — through the nutriment of vibrant, local artists. Rooster's Honky Tonk, founded by David Brust, is setting the stage for a country music revival, re-establishing Bakersfield as "Nashville West."

"I think Bakersfield and Kern County is really hungry for a honky tonk," Brust said. "For a place people can go and listen to some live music, dance, have some good drinks and feel safe and comfortable."

Brust's mission is clear — bring back the city's identity as "Nashville West," and nurture the unique connection between agriculture and country music.

"You know, agriculture and country music go together like peas and carrots. They're one and the same," Brust said. "The life of a farmer and growing things is a major theme throughout country music, and it's part of what makes America, America."

Bakersfield and Kern County's agricultural community is one of the largest producing areas in the world, Brust explained, and the symbiotic relationship between farming and country music underscores the importance of having a haven for the genre.

"I think what sets Rooster's apart is our dedication to reviving country music and doing it in downtown



Opening night at Rooster's. (Photo: David Brust / Rooster's Honky Tonk) Bakersfield," Brust said.

The honky tonk is investing in an advanced sound system with the help of a talented sound engineer to help achieve this goal. Rooster's saw two acts from Nashville in its opening week, and Brust noted that becoming a mid-week stop for newer acts is one of the music hub's intentions.

Along with hosting new country music artists across the nation, Rooster's hopes to play a crucial role in supporting local artists. Creating a safe place for that community is among Brust's aspirations.



Rooster's Honky Tonk is open Wednesday-Saturday with four nights of live music. (Photo: David Brust / Rooster's Honky Tonk)

"We have a strong music scene and such incredible artists — they all know what's going on with each other, they all know who's playing where and not playing," Brust said. "It really is a community, and we're just a small part of that community...giving them an opportunity to showcase it in a place like ours is not only important to our community but it's also important to the artists to give them a place where they can get together."

Within the year, Brust hopes to invite songwriters

across all genres to a songwriter's festival for new talent to perform on Rooster's stage. He noted that calls have come in from artists and groups around the United States, ready to come play at Rooster's.

The response from the community has also been overwhelmingly supportive, Brust explained.

"Our opening night far surpassed anything that my partner and I thought would happen. The amount of people that came out to support our honky tonk and country music in Bakersfield was awe-inspiring," Brust said.

Lauren Appleton, Rooster's booker and lead singer for local band The Appletons, has played an essential role in the honky tonk's success with bands. Brust explained that Appleton's connections and assistance aided in his vision — to create a foundation for emerging artists. He also acknowledges the dedication of his staff who pulled together a great opening night.

As Rooster's Honky Tonk continues to make its mark on Bakersfield and revive Nashville West, Brust's long-term goals remain ambitious for both his business and the community.

"I would love five years from now to have some major act performing at Mechanic Bank Arena and to say that when they were getting started, they had played at Rooster's," Brust said. "What I would like to see is several more people or several more groups doing what we're doing. I would love to see 5,6,10 more honky tonks open up in Bakersfield and do what we're doing and truly make this Nashville West."

Rooster's Honky Tonk is open Wednesday-Saturday, located at 1531 19th Street.

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Auction Angels

*Continued from PAGE 1* mostly FFA students from outlying areas in Kern County. While the meat will largely be donated to foster youth, some will be used for a donator’s dinner event, celebrating all those who supported Auction Angels, and the rest will be donated to members of the community as baskets with meat cuts and vegetables. Auction Angels plans to expand its impact, and next year the goal is to have exhibitors submit applications to streamline the auction process.

Here is some feedback from exhibitors and parents who became a part of the Auction Angels family this year:

Angel Ochoa is a junior at Foothill and this is his second year showing a goat at the Kern County Fair. Although he never saw himself as someone raising livestock before the program, Ochoa has become very passionate about animals.

“Showing gives me some kind of work ethic. I just apply it to anything else I do, like something basic - say cleaning the backyard. Before, I would just not want to do it. I just wanted to sit down, and now since I started showing, I just – I just had that ethic,” Ochoa said. “I go to the farm every day and go and work with my animal. It is kinda like the same thing. I just go outside and go clean the backyard. Everything is done and it is good. [Showing] has just got me there.”

After high school, Ochoa wants to attend UC San Diego to study marine biology.

Jaylyn Tun has been showing for 4 years. This year, she showed two lambs with Golden Valley FFA.

“I never grew up around [animals or livestock], but high school came around and I remember I would see people on TikTok – or when TikTok was Musical.ly – you know people would post stuff like that and I would just be like ‘That’s so cool. I want to do that,’” Tun said. “I remember asking my ag teacher how I can do this and then it just went from there. Ever since, I just can’t stop doing it. It’s so fun and I love it so much. It just kind of became my passion.”

Tun is a senior at Golden Valley and wants to become a veterinarian, study agriculture business, or become an ag teacher. She is in the application process for Cal Poly, SLO, and UC Davis for their pre-veterinary program. She expanded on her favorite part of showing at the Kern County Fair, explaining that the FFA program teaches valuable and formidable life lessons.



Ava Escobedo selling her lamb off to Audrey and Laura Hill of Auction Angels with a handshake and a thank you. (Photo: Laura Escobedo)

“The experience that you get out of it, and the lessons you get — because it does teach you a lot of things. I feel like it has definitely taught me a lot about responsibility, a lot of time management, money management — just everything in general,” Tun said. “You have to be really, I don’t want to say it in a bad way, but you kind of just have to be on it. You know what I mean? You can’t start it and just give up. You have to keep going and just try your best and it’s all worth it in the end.”

Jade Gonzalez Montenegro is a part of Mira Monte FFA where she kept her lamb before auction. This year is her last year as she transitions from high school into college. Over the summer, when working with show livestock is crucial, Gonzalez Montenegro worked a part-time job, took classes at BC, and still managed to prioritize her show lamb. She was out



Jade Gonzalez Montenegro and her lamb in the show ring where she placed third in market. A crowd of students and parents alike gather behind to watch the show. (Photo: Amayrani Chavez)

with her lamb roughly 8 hours a day on weekends, 4 to 5 hours on weekdays, and put all the money she made from her job into her lamb. Gonzalez Montenegro is in the application process for Fresno State and UC Davis for the pre-veterinary track.

“[Showing] is something definitely that I recommend for kids in FFA to experience. At first, I was also iffy about it since my very first year I went through an animal attack. I had to put my lamb down sadly and I had to basically start brand new in a month and a half before fair,” Gonzalez Montenegro said. “It was very hard to try to catch up to where I was, but overall, the experience was like memories that you won’t make in other ways, especially having a bond with an animal. The sad part is letting them go, but the memories you make are definitely once in a lifetime. You experience something very different.”

Altogether, exhibitors come from various backgrounds with a wide range of experiences — some had been a part of their schools breeding programs, and others created their own breeding programs. Some drove an hour and a half to the fair every day or came on a school bus. Many had no background in working with animals. Almost all talked about how many friends and connections they got to make, and every exhibitor was grateful and felt deeply connected to the experience that the Kern County Fair livestock barns provided them.

Thank you to all the donators who aided in the future of FFA and 4-H students and giving back to the local community. Not only is Auction Angels grateful, but all exhibitors and parents are grateful for the generosity shown this year.

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Mantis Ag Technology's Smart Cultivator features machine vision guided side shift. (Photo: FIRA USA 2023)



FIRA USA offered agriculture industry leaders an opportunity to view the latest innovations. (Photo: Richard Green Photography / FIRA USA 2023)

# Ag Robotics Event Marks Industry Future

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

In its second year, FIRA USA hosted 1,700 participants in Salinas from 40 states and over 30 countries for a multi-day ag robotics event. This is the only three-day event for autonomous farming and ag robot solutions according to its website.

Jointly organized by the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources, Western Growers Association, Fresno-Merced Future of Food, and French association GOFAR, the event featured over 35 robots and autonomous solutions.

FIRA USA also hosted 50 panelists to discuss education and career pathways, regulations and safety, grower feedback, and machine maturity. Panelists included Central Valley institutions such as Grimmway Farms.

According to Western Growers, harvest automation is a \$5 billion annual opportunity for

the specialty crop industry. FIRA USA offered innovators an opportunity to showcase new technologies, apply for start-up investments, and compete in the Farm Robotics Challenge.

## Local Demos

While the event featured various international exhibitors, several U.S.-based products demonstrated awareness of national agriculture practices and offered efficient solutions to a decreasing labor market.

One company, Mantis Ag Technology, is based in Salinas Valley and is invested in attainable solutions and reliable service to the local agriculture community. At the event, Mantis showcased its Smart Cultivator which features a machine vision guided side shift to maintain cultivator alignment without having to follow planter passes or remove sprinkler pipe.

Another U.S.-based company began in 2022 as a solution for weeding and utilizes AI learning

technology, computer vision, robotics, and lasers to reduce weed control costs by 80%. Carbon Robotics' technology is used by growers such as Grimmway Farms and Cal-Organic. The company's LaserWeeders reportedly increase crop yield and quality as well as providing safer working conditions for farmers.

Monarch, headquartered in Livermore, California, also demonstrated their technology at the event, with the MK-V Tractor at the forefront of self-driving automation. The 100% data-driven tractor was engineered as a solution to the labor shortage and boasts its ability to work into a given farm's current ecosystem with less than two hours of training.

## Start-Up Investments

FIRA USA also offered an opportunity for start-up companies to pitch autonomous agricultural solutions to potential investors. The estimated growth for agriculture robotics is 100% between 2022 and 2025, and FIRA attracted investors

around the world.

After their pitch to investors, 12 start-ups were selected for an award:

- Orbiba Robotics
- SeedSpider Inc
- Grain Weevil Corporation
- Sami Agtech Inc.
- Exobotic Technologies
- AVL Motion
- L5 Automation Inc
- Muddy Machines Ltd
- Nature Robots
- Green Robot Machinery (GRoboMac)
- Ullmanna
- TRIC Robotics

## Robotics Competition

UC ANR also announced the launch of its 2024 Farm Robotics Challenge at the event. The competition, organized by UC ANR, Farm-ng, F3 Innovate, and AI Institute for Next Gen Food Systems will take place in January 2024.

According to a press release, the annual event invites teams of students across the United States to create innovative solutions for real-world farming challenges. The competition is open to all universities, colleges, and 2-year colleges in the nation.

"The Farm Robotics Challenge is not just another competition; it's a transformative experience designed to cultivate the next generation of leaders in agricultural technology," Gabe Youtsey, chief innovation officer of UC ANR and VIN founder said in the press release. "By participating in this challenge, students are not only showcasing their technical skills but also contributing to a larger mission—advancing sustainable and efficient farming practices for the future. We're incredibly excited to see the solutions that these young entrepreneurs will bring to the table."

The competition is split into three categories — autonomy, artificial intelligence, and attachment. Teams must submit a proposal by Nov. 15 in order to be considered in the competition, and judging takes place on Sept. 6, 2024.

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# Governor Newsom Signs Multiple Ag Bills

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Governor Gavin Newsom signed multiple bills in October, finalizing several key pieces of agricultural legislation. The governor completed his legislative period on Oct. 13, one day before the deadline. Among over 1,000 bills that were sent to his desk, the governor vetoed 14.9% but passed multiple bills addressing pesticide usage, water rights, labor, and climate emissions.

## Pesticides

Despite pushback from the Ag Council, Newsom signed Democratic Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan's AB 363 on neonicotinoid pesticide usage. In his approval letter, Newsom explained that the Department of Pesticide Regulation is instituted to protect people and the environment by regulating their use of neonicotinoids.

While the bill is targeted at non-agricultural users, the Ag Council stated that the legislation was not communicated with the agricultural community prior to its passing and undermines DPR's science-based research on pesticides.

Another pesticide bill signed into law requires the DPR to establish an Environmental Justice Advisory Committee to make recommendations for the department's decision-making and policies. However, the Ag Council explained that DPR currently takes over four years to register new products even after approval from the EPA, and AB 652 would further disrupt new products aimed at pest management.

## Water Rights

Multiple water rights bills were considered in California this year, but Newsom approved Senate Bill 389 to allow the state to investigate even the longest-standing water rights claims.

**"Among over 1,000 bills that were sent to his desk, the governor vetoed 14.9% but passed multiple bills addressing pesticide usage, water rights, labor, and climate emissions."**

The bill, introduced by Democratic Senator Ben Allen, authorizes the California State Water Board to investigate water rights claims and take action against unauthorized users.

After initial pushback from the California Farm Bureau and other water stakeholders, the bill was amended to establish due process requirements as well as a requirement for the board to explain information requests.

## Labor

Despite opposition from the California Chamber of Commerce, Governor Newsom signed a sick leave expansion bill — SB 616 — into law, increasing paid leave to five days. In a press release, Cal Chamber president Jennifer Barrera claimed that many larger businesses in the state already offer more than three days of paid sick leave, but small employers are not able to absorb this cost.

"Small businesses are crucial to our local communities and the overall success of our economy," Barrera said. "Continuing to add costs to their price of doing business creates a threat to California's long-term competitiveness."

## Climate Action

Following Climate Action Week in New York, Newsom reiterated his platform on climate legislation and pledged to sign several key bills. Senate Bill 253 — which requires businesses with over \$1 billion in annual revenues to track and report any direct, indirect, and supply chain emissions — was signed on Oct. 7.

In the signing letter, Newsom stated that the implementation deadlines are infeasible, but his administration will work with the bill's author to address potential issues.

The governor also signed SB 261 into law, mandating businesses with revenues over \$500 million to prepare a climate financial risk assessment on holdings and supply chain assets. Some amendments were made to delay reporting requirements to 2026 and require reports every other year instead of annually.

# Ag-Tech Competitions Tackle Small Farm Technology Gap



A drone surveying a field. (Photo: Marcin Jucha / Adobe Stock)

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Agriculture technology is becoming increasingly important for improved efficiency and output, but the adoption of ag-tech products is slow, according to a global ag-tech adoption survey. However, data from the National Venture Capital Association's Venture Monitor indicated that ag-tech startups received \$6.1 billion in venture capital investments in 2020 — roughly a 60% increase over 2019.

As a leader in ag-tech adoption, the U.S. is offering several incentives for new technological innovations in 2024, with a notable geographic focus on the Central Valley.

## Small-Scale Technology

One innovation challenge in California is targeted at improving efficiency for small farmers and invites all potential innovators to attend regardless of age or qualification. The Community Alliance with Family Farmers is accepting applications for the 2024 Small Farm Innovation Challenge until November 15 — tech-based innovations for small-scale agricultural operations are eligible to receive up to \$10,000.

Ag-tech applicants are required to introduce solutions for small-scale farm operations that will promote local food economies in California. The challenge offers three separate categories — DIY, software, and hardware. Guidelines for each category are included on the application website.

One winner from each category is selected to represent the small farm agricultural sector. An award ceremony will take place at the Small Farm

Tech Expo in Fresno, California, in March.

## Farm Robotics

The University of California's Agriculture and Natural Resources Department opened applications for its Farm Robotics Challenge for teams of students from universities and colleges in the U.S. to tackle real-world farming challenges. The VINE organizes the competition, an initiative of UC ANR, as well as farm-ng, F3 Innovate, and the AI Institute for Next-Gen Food Systems.

This year, the competition opened a new division for two-year colleges to participate. Small-farm applications are the targeted audience for this year's competition, as well as the integration of robotics into agricultural research.

In a press release, UC ANR chief innovation officer Gabe Youtsey explained that the competition is intended to cultivate the next generation of leaders in agricultural technology.

"By participating in this challenge, students are not only showcasing their technical skills but also contributing to a larger mission — advancing sustainable and efficient farming practices for the future," Youtsey said. "We're incredibly excited to see the solutions that these young entrepreneurs will bring to the table."

The competition offers various award categories, including grand prize, elegance in design, complexity, and small farm solutions. Team formations must be submitted by Oct. 31, and proposals are due by Nov. 15.

## Farm Bureau Innovation Challenge

The American Farm Bureau Federation announced its top 10 teams in the 2024 Farm Bureau Ag Innovation Challenge, spotlighting start-up companies with an emphasis on advancing agricultural technology.

UAV-IQ Precision Agriculture is the only finalist out of California. Veteran-owned and operated, the company provides drone-based solutions for biological pest control. Its BioDrop innovation releases beneficial insects and mites throughout commercial farms.

Each semi-finalist was awarded \$10,000 and has the potential to increase their total at the AFBF Convention on Jan. 19. The final four teams will compete again for up to \$50,000.

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# End of Legislative Session Brings Changes for Farmers

By Caleb Hampton, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

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A number of new state laws are set to impact California farmers in the coming months after Gov. Gavin Newsom ended the legislative year Saturday by signing a flurry of bills.

“Each legislative session is a whirlwind, full of twists and turns, last-minute changes, high-impact decisions and careful negotiations, and this year was no different,” said California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson.

The Farm Bureau sponsored three bills signed by Newsom within the past couple of months. Those bills relate to regulations around using drones for aerial applications on farms, commercial property insurance options in fire-prone regions and the accidental take of endangered species on farms and ranches.

Assembly Bill 1016, introduced by Assembly Member Reggie Jones-Sawyer, D-Los Angeles, authorizes California’s Department of Pesticide Regulation to modernize the certification process for farmers to use drones to spray pesticides and beneficial biological treatments on farms.

The bill passed the state Assembly and Senate with unanimous bipartisan support and was signed by Newsom earlier this month.

Currently, farmers who wish to use drones to spray pesticides must navigate what they say are burdensome requirements that were created before drones existed.

To use drones for commercial aerial applications, farmers must obtain a license from the Federal Aviation Administration. Then, they need to get a special exemption to apply pesticides using drones weighing 55 pounds or more. Accomplishing these



Dome of the California State Capitol building. (Photo: Sundry Photography / Shutterstock)

steps often takes upwards of six months.

Afterward, farmers need to get a journeyman pilot’s license. In California, DPR rules require applicants for that license to apprentice for a journeyman pilot for a year. With only a handful of journeyman drone pilots in the state, that usually means apprenticing for a fixed-wing or helicopter pilot to be allowed to fly a drone.

“That makes little sense,” said Al Stehly, a San Diego County farmer. Stehly initiated the push for legislation around agricultural drones after seeing the technology’s benefits and encountering regulatory hurdles. Farmers across the world have supported the use of drones to improve worker safety, lower costs, conserve water and increase crop yields.

“We think the technology, in 10 to 20 years, is going to be significant in this state,” said Chris Reardon, director of government affairs for the California Farm Bureau. “We’re excited about this bill.”

In September, Newsom signed Senate Bill 505, which was created to improve commercial property insurance options for people who have struggled to access coverage due to the impact of wildfires.

Over the past several years, many farmers have had their property insurance policies non-renewed due to the increasing prevalence of wildfires in California.

The cancellations have threatened farm businesses. Without insurance, business owners, similar to homeowners, are generally ineligible for the loans they need to purchase properties along with the structures and equipment their businesses require.

As a result, some farmers sought coverage under the California FAIR Plan, the state’s insurer of last resort, which is funded by a levy on insurance companies. The FAIR Plan gives farmers an option. But its policies, intended to be temporary, are expensive and do not provide comprehensive coverage.

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

SB 505, introduced by state Sen. Susan Rubio, D-Baldwin Park, will add commercial policies to the FAIR Plan clearinghouse so that they can re-enter the competitive market and get better insurance coverage.

Farmer advocates are hopeful the new law will complement regulatory changes announced last month by California Insurance Commissioner Ricardo Lara intended to win back the business of several

major insurance companies that stopped or limited their writing of new policies throughout the state earlier this year.

California will loosen some regulations in exchange for a commitment from insurance companies that they offer coverage to property owners in fire-prone areas and help depopulate the FAIR Plan.

AB 606, introduced by Assembly Member Devon Mathis, R-Visalia, and signed by Newsom last week, extends the sunset date for an agricultural exemption from laws regarding the accidental take of endangered species. The exemption was set to expire in January. It has been extended to Jan. 1, 2029.

“It basically means that if for some reason you accidentally run over an endangered species in the process of doing your job, you’re not going to receive a violation,” Reardon said. “It’s important that we have those protections.”

Johansson emphasized the California Farm Bureau’s success in working with lawmakers across the political spectrum and from different communities in California to shape the three bills and get them signed into law.

“It is important to note that while Assembly Member Mathis represents farm country, Sen. Rubio and Assembly Member Jones-Sawyer come from urban Southern California and still saw how helping agriculture helps their constituents who eat the bounty California farmers and ranchers produce,” he said.

In addition to these new laws, this past spring Newsom issued a series of executive orders temporarily exempting diversions of floodwater for recharge from state permitting requirements. Those executive orders were made permanent this July with the signing of a budget trailer bill.

“Farmers throughout the state took advantage of these opportunities to use their fields to replenish groundwater basins, and we understand that hundreds of thousands of acre-feet were successfully stored underground this year,” Johansson said. “There is no question that this year has been a resounding success for agriculture.”

## Farmers, Tribes Weigh in on River Flows for Salmon

to prevent the extinction of coho salmon.



Scott River and Shasta River watersheds. (Photo: Scott Valley Agriculture Water Alliance)



By Christine Souza  
Assistant Editor,  
Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from California Farm Bureau Federation

Farmers, ranchers, tribal members and others who rely on water from the Scott River and Shasta River watersheds turned out last week to offer insights to state officials considering an emergency regulation to set minimum flows on the tributaries.

The gathering at an informational workshop on Oct. 6 in Sacramento came in response to a July 1 petition by the Karuk Tribe, which asked the California State Water Resources Control Board to use its emergency powers to set permanent minimum instream flows

In August, the water board directed staff to return with a plan to adopt interim flow measures to support salmon. It also asked farmers, tribes and other interested parties to work together to develop plans for long-term restoration of the salmon fishery.

Yurok Tribe senior biologist Michael Belchik offered details about the state of the fishery in the Scott River and Shasta River. He noted the Yurok Council this year “decided to cancel the entire fishery” due to low population numbers.

“It was the first time since time immemorial that nobody was fishing on the river,” he said.

Agricultural representatives talked about impacts felt by farmers and ranchers during the past few years of drought and emergency curtailments.

Curtailment of water rights in the two Klamath River tributaries has been in place since May

See **FARMERS, TRIBES WEIGH IN** on NEXT PAGE



Farmers, Tribes Weigh In

*Continued from PREVIOUS PAGE* 2021 when Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a drought emergency. Though the drought is over, the curtailment order continues. It limits surface-water diversions and groundwater pumping, while prioritizing minimum flows to protect threatened coho and other fish.

“We have belly-scraping years, too, and there’s been quite a few of those lately. These dry years—they’re hard on all of us,” said Scott Valley rancher Theodora Johnson, a founder of the Scott Valley Agriculture Water Alliance. “We can’t always just keep turning down the dial on agriculture and expect us to survive. I hope everybody’s keeping that in mind as we look at all these different scenarios.”

Gary Black, a restoration and conservation consultant who farms along the Scott River, said “the agricultural community in both watersheds is very serious about the condition of fisheries, and our responsibility and role of those fisheries.”

He added, “What’s happened over the last 25 years of farming with salmon is we’ve become very educated about what fish need.”

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration fisheries biologist Jeff Abrams described stressors to salmon and steelhead, including poor water quality and flow barriers. He told workshop participants the National Marine Fisheries Service “recommends flows return to a more natural hydrograph that aligns with life history requirements and supports our parameters for healthy coho, chinook and steelhead populations.”

Participants in the workshop discussed “local cooperative solutions,” known as LCS, that have allowed water rights holders the opportunity to propose alternatives to curtailments under the drought emergency regulation.

Black suggested that the state base flow reduction levels on water-year type and encouraged the agency to offer producers other options, such as a bigger shift to early-season irrigation. Instead of ordering cuts in agricultural pumping, Black said officials could require a percentage of acres stop receiving irrigation after a certain point in the season, similar to past LCS measures that have included 30% cuts in groundwater consumption.

Black also asked that a restriction on stock water be eliminated if fishery needs are met.

“Water rights holders in the Scott and Shasta valleys would like to see some changes to the regulations, but we’re not proposing a total rewrite,” Black said.

Siskiyou County farmer Brandon Fawaz of Etna said he has some ideas that might work better than the LCS that is part of the existing drought emergency regulation.

“In my personal LCS, I have about 400 acre-feet of water available in September. It would make sense to have the option to move that to earlier in the year,” Fawaz said. “If I want to use it in July or June, let me do that. That could be a fine-tuned tweak that would make it better.”

To assist with his farm water management, Fawaz said he subscribed to private services that provide remote-sensing data of his fields.



The workshop included discussion of OpenET, an online platform that uses satellites or remote sensing to estimate on-farm water use. But Fawaz said the technology is not ready.

“OpenET shows more water use on that field in 2022, when it was dried up and killed, than it does prior to that when it was irrigated,” he said. “This is not a tool that can be used today to help regulate us or to guide other interests in their goals.”

Others spoke of the need to work together on solutions.

Sari Sommarstrom, a retired watershed consultant and a founder of the Scott Valley Agriculture Water Alliance, provided fish population data for the Scott River. She suggested that different

interests relying on the watersheds use shared fact-finding methods. “If we can’t get to the same type of expectations, we’re never going to get to success as a group, which is what problem-solving is about,” she said.

Fawaz also called for cooperation. “I don’t know how to craft a regulation, and you don’t know how to run a farm,” he said, “so we’ve got to figure out how to kind of marry those two together.”

Erik Ekdahl, state water board deputy director of water rights, said he looks forward to engaging further. He said staff will compile the information and feedback and develop a timeline for next steps.

In the coming weeks, he said the board would like to meet for an in-person session in Siskiyou County

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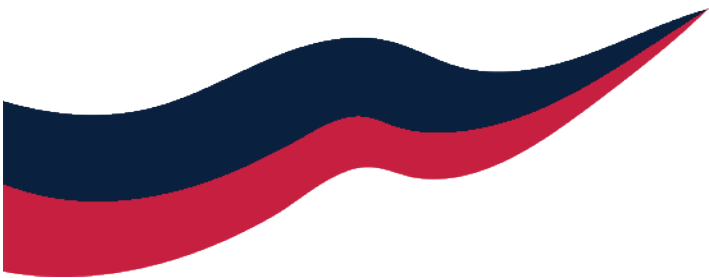
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## The Power of a Promise



God will keep His promises. (Photo: ljeab / Adobe)

**By Joshua Stevens**  
Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

All scripture may flow from the simple phrase “But God.” However, it is held together by the knowledge that God will keep His promises. If we did not believe that God would be able to follow through and do the miraculous things He claims He is capable of, then we would not have scripture. In fact, we see such doubt throughout scripture.

“But Caleb quieted the people before Moses and said, ‘Let us go up at once and occupy it, for we are well able to overcome it.’ Then the men who had gone up with him said, ‘We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we are.’ So, they brought to the people of Israel a bad report of the land that they had spied out, saying, ‘The land, through which we have gone to spy it out, is a land that devours its inhabitants, and all the people that we saw in it are of great height. And there we saw the Nephilim (the sons of Anak, who come from the Nephilim), and we seemed to ourselves like grasshoppers, and so we seemed to them.’” **Numbers 13:30-33**

Numbers 13 takes place after God had shown his power in setting the Israelites free from slavery. God led them out of Egypt and provided a way through the wilderness, and now Israel stands at the edge of the promised land (**Numbers 13:1**). Do these people who had just seen the Lord work in such marvelous ways continue to hold onto the promise that was given to them — that the Lord will deliver them this land?

No. Instead, they grow fearful of the Canaanites, and they begin to complain. Wishing to have stayed in Egypt or die on the way to the promise land rather than be killed by the people who inhabit it (**Numbers 14:1**). It is not that the Israelites are fearful for no reason either. It’s not as if there is a simple bump in the road or slight inconvenience that leads to this fear. No, they had been brought to a fertile land where they envisioned being able to live freely and prosper. Yet they find themselves having to displace mighty warriors who outnumber the small nomadic people of Israel (**Numbers 13:33**).

Still, even seeing this image first hand Caleb attempts to rally the nation. To remind them of the promise a righteous and sovereign God had given them. Attempting to encourage the Israelites to trust in what God has given them. The nation, however, does not listen. Though Israel will eventually claim the promised land, it will be years later, and almost all who stood in the assembly that day would not live to see the promised inheritance.

While the story of Israel’s exodus is well known, we can sometimes miss the simple applications that affect our lives. In today’s world, we see tragedy after tragedy unfold: natural disasters, wars, disease, famine, drought, terror. It is nearly impossible to look around and not see the abject evil devouring everything in sight. Sometimes, it can feel hopeless, particularly when that evil hits close to home or we feel powerless to help.

For many Israelites, we can imagine this is how they felt — being brought to a promised land by God who showed faithfulness time and again — then to send out strong and brave men only to hear reports of fear and trepidation from the promised land. Giving in to the voice of the many who despair is easy. It is important to remember the voice of the few who remind us of the promises so that we would have hope. We worship a sovereign God who does not allow evil to go unpunished. Instead, we have a God who continuously intervenes in our lives to give us every opportunity to be united with Him, and reminds us of His promises.

“Likewise, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God, all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” **Romans 8:26-28**

Will you pray with me?

Lord, thank you for your steadfastness, the patience you have with us, and the love you continuously shower us with. Help us to fight despair with hope, keep our eyes on the kingdom to come, and the purpose you have for our lives. Let each of us be a light to those in our lives, and give us the courage to stand on the daily opportunities we have in our lives to share with others the good news of reconciliation with You.

In Jesus’ name,  
Amen.

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## KERN COUNTY WILDLIFE PROFILE: THE WHITE PELICAN



White pelicans. (Photo: Moose Peterson / MoosePeterson.com)

The white pelican, or *Pelecanus erythrorhynchos*, is a striking and graceful water bird native to North America. These magnificent birds are recognized by their white plumage and distinctive long, flat orange bills, which they use for their remarkable fishing technique. With an impressive wingspan ranging from 9 to 10 feet, white pelicans are among the largest bird species in North America.

They are typically found in freshwater habitats, such as lakes, rivers, and marshes, where they employ cooperative fishing behavior. In groups, they work together

to encircle fish in shallow waters and then scoop them up in their large throat pouches. This unique feeding strategy distinguishes them from their brown pelican relatives, which primarily dive for their prey.

During the breeding season, white pelicans form colonies in remote areas, often on islands or secluded lakes, where they build nests out of sticks and reeds. Their populations range from interior regions of Canada and the northern United States to some western U.S. states and Mexico. In the non-breeding season, they migrate south to the southern United States and Central America, following the availability of food.

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