



THE LOCAL VOICE FOR OUR FARMERS, RANCHERS, AND DAIRY PRODUCERS SINCE 2013 VALLEYAGVOICE.COM VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 1 • JANUARY 2024



Two Fresno County dog detector teams, Rufus and his handler Amanda Clark (left), and Brodee and his handler Kaitlyn DeMott (right), act as a line of defense against unwanted plant pests and diseases. (Photo: Natalie Willis/Valley Ag Voice)

# Central Valley Ag Commissioners Implement Pest Management Solutions

By Natalie Willis  
Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

During his afternoon training session, Rufus diligently sorted through a mixture of packages, easily detecting which unmarked boxes were carrying fresh produce without cutting the tape and looking inside — all he needed was his nose.

Two detector dog teams at the Fresno County Agricultural Commissioner's office work five days a week at various mail parcel terminals, including UPS, FedEx, and Amazon. Rufus' dog team — comprised of himself and his handler Amanda Clark — is California's only county-managed detector dog team.

Rufus' counterpart and best friend, Brodee — and his handler, Kaitlyn DeMott — are part of the California Detector Dog Team program, allowing

him to sniff out packages sorted through the United States Postal Service. According to Melissa Cregan, Fresno County Ag Commissioner, the dog teams are authorized to inspect packages under Memorandums of Understanding and supported by various laws and regulations.

“[The California Agricultural Commissioners and Sealers

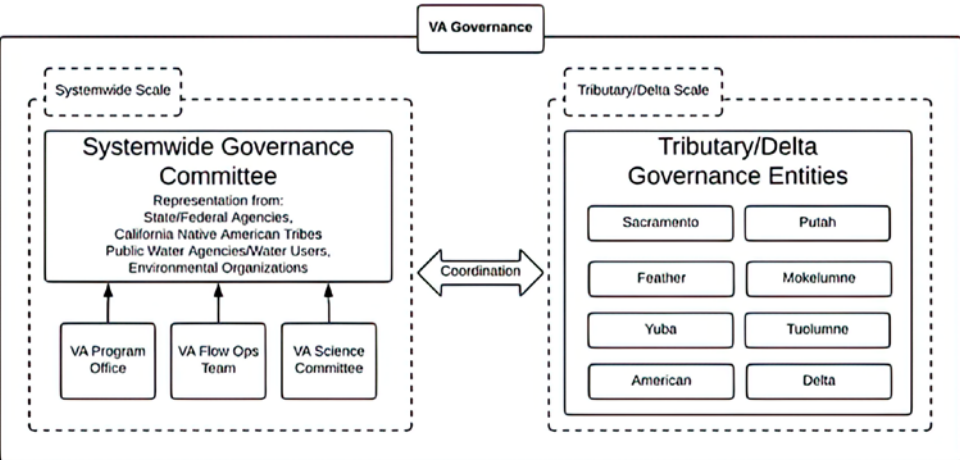
See **PEST MANAGEMENT** on PAGE 18

# The Involuntary Agreement

By Scott Hamilton  
President, Hamilton Resource Economics

Many of California's native fish species are in serious trouble. They face significant population decline with many species designated as endangered and several more whose status is pending. The State Water Resources Control Board decided to take on the issue under the umbrella of their update of Bay-Delta Water Quality Control Plan - a 6,000-page document, the executive summary of which is 66 pages. Comments on the plan are due January 19, 2024 (the draft staff report can be found at Bay-Delta Watershed 2023 Report | California State Water Resources Control Board). The prob-

lem is that the State Board only has one knob to turn — flow — specifically outflow to the ocean. The State Board's proposal is, simplistically, that 40% of the unimpaired flow of the tributaries to the Sacramento and San Joaquin Rivers should flow to the ocean. In a valley with highway signs already urging the governor to “stop wasting our dam water” the State Board proposal, at the very least, would add considerably more stress to agricultural and urban water supplies that are already unreliable. But worse than that, flows alone can't fix the fish problems. Native fish species are declining due to loss of habitat, contaminants, and introduced species like striped bass, largemouth bass, and inland silversides that prey on native species.



The proposed Governance Structure for the Voluntary Agreements, now the Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes (Graphic provided by Scott Hamilton, data utilized from The Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes).

See **INVOLUNTARY AGREEMENT** on PAGE 6

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# Water Digest: Battles Defining Local Agriculture

By Natalie Willis  
Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Agricultural water supplies continue to face hurdles in the Central Valley, ranging from a potential Tulare Lake groundwater basin probation to environmentalist-sought legal battles. Compiled with new state regulations on water rights and groundwater adjudication filing standards, farmers and ranchers in the San Joaquin Valley encounter yet another obstacle in supplying the nation's food.

The California State Water Board staff drafted a report in Oct. to inform its probationary hearing on the Tulare Lake Groundwater Subbasin in April 2024. In a press release, the SWB marked the Tulare Lake basin for deficiencies that “negatively impact infrastructure

and communities.”

The Department of Water Resources determined that the Tulare Lake Subbasin in Kings County and five other basins had inadequate Groundwater Sustainability Plans and thus required state intervention. Tulare Lake is the first of the six basins to be scheduled for a hearing.

Categories for determining inadequacy include the percentage of wells at risk of running dry due to over pumping. Tulare Lake's basin was reported to have 27 dry wells and an estimated 698 wells at risk of going dry during drought years.

“The intervention process is meant to support SGMA's primary goals, which are to protect groundwater supplies while also facilitating sustainable management at the local level. Our aim is to work with GSAs to improve

See **WATER DIGEST** on PAGE 4





# FARM BUREAU NEWS

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



## President's Message

**By Jenny Holtermann  
President, KCFB**

As the new year approaches, many of us may look for positive change or hope to try something new. We tend to make resolutions or commit to fundamentally changing something for the new year. I am not big on resolutions; it doesn't take long to forget what you committed to or give up on it altogether. Each year I try to pick a word that will follow me through the year — persistence, transparency, devotion. Something to inspire and challenge me.

My word this year for Kern County Farm Bureau and myself is transformation. I intend to transform the way KCFB looks at membership, outreach, and engagement, and how we bring you the resources you need. We have a transformative officer team that is committed, inspired, and motivated to work hard for our local agriculture community.

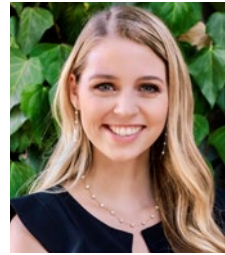
We recently had the opportunity to travel to the 105th California Farm Bureau Annual Meeting on December 3-6. I have been to 12 California Farm Bureau Annual Meetings, but this year was very different. Not only do we have a new officer team working hard for KCFB in amazing cohesion, but California Young Farmers & Ranchers awarded their committee of the year to our Kern YF&R. Timothy Collins, former Kern YF&R Chair and member of the KCFB Board of Directors, won the YF&R Discussion Meet and will be representing California at the American Farm Bureau Annual Meeting later this month in Salt Lake City, Utah. California Farm Bureau also elected new officers, including Shannon Douglass from Glenn County, the first woman President of CAFB. With these amazing accomplishments come new opportunities.

Change can be a hard thing to tackle. Change can be scary. Change can be intimidating. Many can look at periods of change as a transformation. We want to see something evolve and inspire us to commit to this change. If we don't follow through with the advancement that is expected, it can leave us with a sense of disappointment or withdrawal that can lead to a relapse back to the old ways. Change can often take time, and we can be impatient to wait.

We must commit to change to find the real transformation we are looking for. Nothing is going to happen overnight. You can rest assured that I am committed to the change Kern County Farm Bureau needs to succeed. To the change our agriculture industry needs. We are working hard behind the scenes to bring you that. We cannot keep going on like we have. Our agriculture community is hurting. Our industry needs change to push through the hard periods we are facing.

With the new year comes more regulation, new laws going into effect, and new political pressure. We are committed to helping you combat these issues and equip you with the resources you need. KCFB is tirelessly instituting workshops to provide you with the tools you need. I am dedicated to providing you with a transformative year. A year of new beginnings and change to help our agriculture community thrive. I am proud to be working with an officer team, like no other I have worked with in the past. We are a united voice that works in harmony and synchronization together. Together, we will transform our agriculture community for the better.

I hope you all had a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. Cheers to 2024.



## Executive Director's Report

**By Rachel Nettleton  
Exec. Director, KCFB**

As we enter the new year, the agricultural landscape in Kern County is undergoing a notable transformation. This shift is evident in the ongoing changes in technology, the growing emphasis on environmental sustainability, and the dedicated efforts of our local farming and ranching community. These changes set the stage for significant milestones, one of which was the groundbreaking ceremony that occurred in November for Bakersfield College's new Agriculture Sciences building. Much like the dynamic shifts within agriculture, this new facility represents a commitment to progress, education, and community development that provides students with the essential tools and knowledge to navigate the challenges of a rapidly evolving industry. This transformation is a sign of our ability to adapt and find smart solutions to these changes.

To further highlight this commitment, the Kern County Farm Bureau attended and actively participated in the California Farm Bureau's 105th Annual

Meeting last month. This yearly gathering brings counties across California together by fostering discussions on challenges and collaborative strategies for the future. The valuable insights gained from this meeting help equip the California Farm Bureau to advocate effectively at both statewide and national levels. With the support of educational institutions like Bakersfield College and CSUB, along with advocacy organizations, such as the California Farm Bureau, they stand as a representation of the symbol of progress and commitment to the future of farming.

Amidst these collaborative efforts, we are excited to be hosting our upcoming 18th Annual Spray Safe event this month. Uniting over 600 individuals committed to enhancing their knowledge of agricultural safety. Scheduled for Friday, Jan. 19th from 7:00 am – 1:00 pm at the Kern County Fairgrounds, Spray Safe provides attendees with a unique opportunity to delve into essential safety practices. This event is free for all participants, offering the opportunity to earn Continuing Education (CE) hours, with lunch included. For those interested in attending, please email [kcfb@kerncfb.com](mailto:kcfb@kerncfb.com).



The Kern County Farm Bureau participated in the groundbreaking ceremony of Bakersfield College's New Agriculture Sciences building. (Photo courtesy of Rachel Nettleton)

## VALLEY AG VOICE

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Articles or commentaries are not direct opinions  
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## Young Farmers & Ranchers



**By Christine Johnson  
Chair, Kern County  
Young Farmers  
& Ranchers**

Greetings and Happy New Year! I am honored to have been elected as the 2024 Kern County Young Farmers & Ranchers Chair. My

hope is to bring you a fresh perspective and a renewed sense of appreciation for young professionals in agriculture. Be encouraged that there are some very bright, hardworking young folks in our community who are on the verge of exciting careers in agriculture.

First, a big thank you goes out to Tim Collins, past Chair, who led the club for two years. Tim provided

a steady, reliable presence as our group navigated the post-Covid era. A longtime friend, Tim was my connection to the club several years ago. I first heard about YF&R through reading the Valley Ag Voice articles for several months, before following the group on social media. Soon, I recognized a few familiar faces on social media posts, so I reached out to Tim to find out more. The club's mission to promote agriculture and develop young professionals stood out to me, so I jumped right into the monthly meetings and volunteer opportunities.

Second, I would especially like to thank the Farm Bureau directors for their invaluable support of YF&R. Our club has benefitted from the generosity, hospitality, and encouragement of many of the board members and directors. Kern YF&R certainly prides itself on our positive relationship with our local Farm Bureau. We are so grateful!

The Kern County YF&R chapter would not exist without the help of a stellar group of leaders. Most of these folks have been on the executive team in prior years, so rest assured that behind the scenes, they will be working toward putting together some wonderful activities. Let me introduce you to the 2024 Executive Team: Katelyn Filkins, Vice Chair; Russell Todd, Secretary; Kelley Higgins, Treasurer; Christine Etcheverry, Farmers Market Chair; Cory Camp, Clay Shoot Chair; Matt Pandol III, Clay Shoot Co-Chair; Tim Collins, Social Media Coordinator, and past Chair.

In December, I had the opportunity to attend the California YF&R State Conference in Reno, Nevada along with three other club members. The event was held several days prior to the California Farm Bureau conference, which was a wonderful way to combine resources and overlap networking opportunities. It was a beautiful chilly weekend, but we had a full schedule of meetings, workshops, and tours. We heard from State

**See YF&R on PAGE 3**



# POLITICAL COMMENTARY: Farewell to a Leader in Central Valley Ag

By Valley Ag Voice Editorial Staff

With the loss of representation from Central Valley native and agricultural advocate Kevin McCarthy, California faces an uncertain future. Still, the groundwork so diligently laid out by the former Speaker has further cemented the foundation and history of the valley in its efforts to feed the nation and the world.

Throughout his extensive career, McCarthy was a champion for agriculture in our community. He contributed to crucial legislation and progress, such as the WIIN Act in 2016, which increased water exports to farmers, and the Friant-Kern Canal Project.

Upon his initial election as Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson expressed the Central Valley's sentiments best.

"As a former member of the House Agricultural Committee who hails from California's vital Kern County farming region, Speaker McCarthy has long been an advocate for farmers and ranchers in the Golden State," Johansson said. "He understands the importance of the nation's leading agricultural economy and its bounty of 'California-Grown' products, which feed America and the world beyond."

McCarthy's resume in Central Valley agriculture is extensive. While not every action for Central Valley interests was well-received, the congressman utilized his platform well to support local agriculture.

In 2007, as a member of the House Agricultural Committee, McCarthy spoke against flaws in the Farm Bill, which would include tax increases on American businesses. Pushback from the Democratic

majority rejected McCarthy's compromise to strip tax increases from the bill, but a clear line was drawn for the future development of the bipartisan bill.

Ten years later, McCarthy championed the Gaining Responsibility on Water Act to increase pumping and hasten the approval process of new water projects. The House of Representatives passed the GROW Act, restoring water deliveries to the Central Valley and preventing the government from requiring certain entities to relinquish their water rights for public lands.

McCarthy was also largely involved in the Friant-Kern Canal project under the Trump administration, which addressed critical repairs and improved upon surface water availability for farmers.

"The Tulare County Farm Bureau applauds President Trump, his administration, and our valley congressmen, especially Congressman McCarthy, for shepherding this project through the regulatory maze. As we all know, water is the engine that drives the San Joaquin Valley, and its availability affects ALL residents. Our water concerns continue, but this is a refreshing step in the right direction," John C. Guthrie, former Tulare County Farm Bureau president, said in a press release.

McCarthy's commitment to agricultural interests in the Central Valley cannot be overstated. The lack of representation for California farmers and ranchers is apparent, even more so with losing our largest champion. However, with the achievements that were made, agriculture leaders and workers in the Central Valley have a foundation to finish what was started — one person makes a difference, and we are thankful for the impact Congressman McCarthy made.

## YF&R Continued from PAGE 2

Assemblyman James Gallagher and California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson. Both encouraged us to continue the fight to protect farmers and ranchers through our efforts at the local level. I participated in a tour of the University of Nevada, Reno agriculture department. It was fascinating to hear from a professor about her research trials for breeding sorghum seeds. Specifically, she is working toward maximizing the protein content of the plant while adapting it to a hot western climate. We also heard about wildlife restoration practices in partnership with the efforts of conservation programs. The university's forward-thinking approach is attracting many young adults, and approximately half of the student base comes from California.

My favorite part of the weekend was the Awards Banquet,



From Left: Christine Johnson, Katie Verhoef, Timothy Collins, and Kelley Higgins at the California YF&R State Conference in Reno, Nevada accepting the Committee of the Year award on behalf of the 2023 Kern YF&R executive team. (Photo courtesy of Christine Johnson/KC YF&R)

where, to our surprise, Kern County was presented with a coveted award — the Outstanding Committee of the Year! What an honor to receive the award on behalf of the 2023 Kern YF&R executive team as a token for the past year's dedication and service. We finished off the evening's excitement with a bowling reception. But that's not all! The final day of the conference included the Open Discussion Meet competition, where Tim Collins competed in the Final Four to discuss challenges related to the agriculture industry. To our great excitement, Tim won and was recognized as the first state-wide winner from Kern County! Congratulations Tim! He will move up to compete on the national level in January. What an accomplishment.

Finally, our 2023 activities wrapped up in December with a festive Christmas party. This was a great opportunity to reflect on the club's accomplishments for the year and celebrate the friendships we've developed.

As we transition into a new year, please keep an eye out for announcements regarding our chapter meetings and events. Be sure to save the date for our 4th Annual Clay Shoot on March 16, 2024. If you would like to be on our newsletter list, please email kernyfr@kerncfb.com and don't forget to follow us on Facebook and Instagram. If you know of any young professionals between the ages of 18-35, please let them know about our group. And remember, you don't have to be a farmer or rancher to join. All we require is an appreciation for agriculture!

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Instagram: [@Kern\\_YFR](https://www.instagram.com/Kern_YFR)

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

Clay Shoot Sign-Up: [kernyfr.square.site](https://www.kernyfr.square.site)

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### TABLE GRAPES — \$25,500±/AC & \$26,500±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)

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

### PISTACHIOS, ALMONDS AND FARMLAND — \$37,829±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)

152.81± acres | Shafter City Limits and Sphere of Influence, Shafter Wasco Irrigation District, 2 Wells, Excellent Soils, Almonds & Pistachios in Full Production.

### ALMONDS — \$24,747±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)

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

### Almonds, Cherries and Solar — \$17,003±/AC (NEW LISTING)

156.68± acres | Shafter Area, Shafter Wasco ID Annexed Area, 1 Well, Solar, Productive Soils, Almonds and Cherries in Full Production.

### FARMLAND — \$12,000±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)

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

### WINE GRAPES — \$18,378±/AC

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

### DRY LAND — \$1,750±/AC

231.42± acres | Taft Area, West Kern WD Residential service, Recreational and Rural home site.

### ALMONDS — \$15,000±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)

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

### WALNUTS, TABLE GRAPES, PISTACHIOS — \$20,812±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)

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

### ALMONDS — \$12,548±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)

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

### ALMONDS — \$17,660±/AC (NEW LISTING)

906.8± acres | Wasco Area, Matador/Sunbird Ranch, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract and non-contract water, Well water, Productive Soils, and Young Almonds in production.

### ALMONDS — \$17,988±/AC (PRICE REDUCED)

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

### ALMONDS — \$18,261±/AC (NEW LISTING)

1,237.33± acres | Wasco Area, Portwood Ranch, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract non-contract water, 7 Wells, Productive Soils, and Young Almonds in production.

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# CarbonFrontier: A New Era for Kern County Energy

**By Randy Hoyle,  
Chief Carbon Solutions Officer, Aera Energy**

*Press release provided by Aera Energy*

At the center of California's agricultural heartland, Kern County's leadership in energy is accelerating the state's progress toward a lower-carbon future. Aera Energy's CarbonFrontier takes this to the next level.

CarbonFrontier is more than an energy project. It is a testament to Kern County's ability to adapt, innovate, and lead. As our first large-scale carbon capture and storage (CCS) project, it will harness the region's skilled workforce, infrastructure, and geological conditions to contribute significantly to the state's goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2045.

Located in a remote corner of the Aera's Belridge oil field, CarbonFrontier will deploy CCS technology to capture carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions from existing produced gas streams and other sources and inject it deep underground, away from drinking water sources for permanent storage.

The result? Massive reductions in carbon emissions — equivalent to offsetting the carbon footprint of 30,000 households per year.

CCS is a safe, proven technology in implementation around the world that captures CO<sub>2</sub> from

industrial processes and stores it underground. And CarbonFrontier is only the beginning.

Aera Energy's subsidiary Aera Federal has been selected by the U.S. Department of Energy to conduct a feasibility study on a direct air capture hub (DAC Hub), a process where CO<sub>2</sub> is directly captured from the atmosphere.

This is one of the first steps toward creating a Kern County "carbon park," which will allow businesses that are difficult to electrify, like heavy-duty transportation and manufacturing, to decarbonize their operations. We envision this will help create a new supply and storage economy with room to grow.

As pillars of the community, Kern County farmers are key to the region's future and continued leadership in the state. We look forward to partnering with you to bring these exciting projects online to help ensure all our neighbors thrive in the state's energy future.

Learn more and sign up for updates, including Aera Energy's Aeragram, visit our website at <https://www.aeraenergy.com/what-we-do/advocacy/>.

Randy Hoyle is Aera Energy's Chief Carbon Solutions Officer and oversees Aera's growing renewable and decarbonization business, helping to advance the development of carbon capture and storage and other emerging technologies.

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## Water Digest

*Continued from PAGE 1*

their plans so intervention is no longer needed," Eric Oppenheimer, chief deputy director for the SWB, said in a press release.

If the board determines to place the Tulare subbasin on probation, most groundwater pumpers will be required to report groundwater usage and pay state fees 90 days following the start of probation, according to the SWB. Concurrently, the five groundwater sustainability agencies overseeing the basin — Mid-Kings, South Fork Kings, El Rico, Southwest Kings, and Tri-County Water Authority — will be tasked with creating a new GSP within a year in order to terminate probation.

However, if the SWB does not find the plan acceptable, the probation may be extended, or it may trigger further state intervention, including the state board's implementation of its own plan. The probationary hearing is set for April 16, 2024, at 9:30 a.m. in the California Environmental Protection Agency Headquarters Building in downtown Sacramento. Participation is also available remotely.

### ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGY

Since the implementation of SGMA in 2014, environmentalists and agriculturalists have been at odds in determining where limited water resources should be allocated. Recently, the California Supreme Court rejected an appeal from the Westlands Water District requesting a permanent water contract with the Bureau of Reclamation.

The case Westlands Water Dist. v. All Persons Interested was a response to the district's request to draw water from the Central Valley Project through a permanent contract instead of the temporary agreements it has been operating under. The contract was issued in 2020 under President Trump's administration, but it was not enforceable until validation from a state court.

Opposition to the contract was raised by a coalition of Native Americans, fishermen, scientists, and conservation groups. According to a press release from the Hoopa Valley Tribal Council, the contract states that Westlands fulfilled its obligations and made full repayment, which the council deemed as false.

"Westlands Water District would not exist without the Trinity River's water. They have no surface water," Hoopa Valley Tribal Chairman Joe Davis said in the release.

The rejection of the contract comes a month after the water district met its goal of recharging 200,000 acre-feet of groundwater. Its new goal expects 275,000 acre-feet of groundwater recharge by February 2024.

"Farmers in Westlands cautiously recognize that the next drought is only a matter of time, and the district's robust recharge projects will provide a lifeline to hundreds of family-owned farms during periods of prolonged drought," Jeff Fortune, board president, said in a press release. "Updating our target after hitting our goal demonstrates that our farmers' commitment to sustainability extends beyond rhetoric. We are 'all-in' for building a more sustainable water future for the San Joaquin Valley."

Along with legal disputes against water districts and SGMA GSPs, environmental battles have taken root in the Kern River. According to reporting from SJV Water, 40% of water flowing from the Kern River through Bakersfield will be allocated for fish populations.

Following this ruling from Kern County Superior Court Judge Gregory Pulskamp, various ag districts filed a motion for reconsideration under claims that they were not afforded due process. SJV Water explained that the order takes an additional 180 cubic feet per second from water rights holders.



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# Ag Policies Taking Effect This Year



California Governor Gavin Newsom. (Photo: Sheila Fitzgerald / Shutterstock.com)

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

As the new year approaches, several finalized actions determined by Governor Gavin Newsom will go into effect in Jan. 2024 or later relating to water, pesticides, labor, and climate change.

## **WATER**

By Jan. 1, Assembly Bill 779 will go into effect, making procedural changes to the groundwater adjudication process. The bill introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Lori Wilson will require a given Groundwater Sustainability Agency to host a public meeting in the event of an adjudication filing.

AB 779's passing comes on the precipice of the controversial adjudication filing in the Cuyama Valley by the following plaintiffs — Bolthouse Land Company, Diamond Farming Company, Lapis Land Company, and Ruby Land Company. The legislation will make procedural changes to the adjudication process, mainly regarding public education.

Another water bill taking effect on Jan. 1 is Senate Bill 389, introduced by Democratic Senator Ben Allen. The State Water Resources Control Board will be able to investigate water rights claims under this bill.

The California Farm Bureau successfully advocated to amend the bill's parameters, maintaining that SWB must explain why it is requesting information along with attached evidence that has led to reasonable uncertainty of a water rights claim.

## **PESTICIDES**

Assembly Bill 1322 by Democratic Assemblymember Laura Friedman prohibits using pesticides with diphacinone — a rodenticide — in a wildlife habitat area. The legislation places additional duties on county agricultural commissioners to enforce the law.

Another pesticide bill bans the use of neonicotinoid pesticides by January 2025

for non-agricultural purposes. Democratic Assemblymember Rebecca Baur-Kahn introduced AB 363 to prohibit a person from selling or using a pesticide containing one or more neonicotinoid pesticides for non-agricultural use.

In a press release, Ag Council President Emily Rooney explained that despite non-agricultural specifications, the bill could impact agriculture as it does not align with the Sustainable Pest Management procedures and undermines the Department of Pesticide Regulation's science-based review of pesticides.

In the same vein, the governor signed AB 652, requiring DPR to establish an Environmental Justice Advisory Committee by Jan. 2026. The Ag Council expressed concern that the committee would disrupt and delay DPR's scientific evaluations, halting progress in developing pest management tools.

## **LABOR**

The minimum wage in California is increasing to \$16 per hour by Jan. 1 for all employers — regardless of the number of employees. All employers, including agricultural employers, must also implement a paid sick leave mandate providing five days — 40 hours.

SB 616 was introduced by Democratic Senator Lena Gonzalez and was amended from the originally attempted sick leave mandate of seven days — 56 hours. The legislation is effective Jan. 1.

## **CLIMATE**

Climate accountability will extend to businesses with over \$500 million in annual revenue under legislation introduced by Democratic Senators Henry Stern, Josh Becker, Lena Gonzalez, and Scott Wiener. SB 261 will mandate businesses to biennially prepare climate financial risk assessments on holdings and supply chain assets.

Another accountability law by Senator Wiener — SB 253 — will require businesses with over \$1 billion in annual revenues to track and report direct, indirect, and supply chain emissions.



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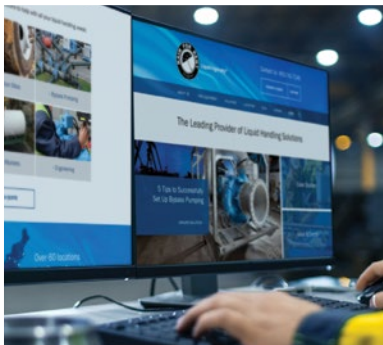
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# Delano-Based Facility to Bottle 2 Acre-Feet of Water Per Day

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Niagara Bottling LLC, a leading private-label bottled water company in the U.S., is constructing a \$160 million 420,000-square-foot building in Delano. The facility estimates roughly 120 full-time jobs.

## 2 ACRE-FEET A DAY

Roughly 650,000 gallons per day will be bottled from a city-owned source, a Delano city councilman told the Bakersfield Californian. One acre-foot of water is about 326,000 gallons, which can typically meet the annual needs of two average households in California, according to the Water Education Foundation.

## LOCATION

The facility is set to open next year at Schuster Road and South Lexington Street. Niagara Bottling maintains 41 operations nationwide,

including five California locations and its Diamond Bar headquarters.

## WATER DISTRICT

The Delano facility will be located near the Southern San Joaquin Municipal Utility District, which solely provides agriculture water service under contract with the U.S. Department of Interior, Bureau of Reclamation. Currently, SSJMUD's only source of irrigation water comes from the Friant-Kern Canal, part of the Central Valley Project.

Water for the bottling facility will reportedly come from a city-owned source. Delano city council members told the Bakersfield Californian that the operation will not affect other wells in the area, and a new water well will be constructed in the northern portion of the city to support the project.

## Involuntary Agreement

**Continued from PAGE 1** Recognizing the multiple stressors, and the expense and inadequacy of the State Board proposal, a group of water districts that included the Kern County Water Agency, worked with the Bureau of Reclamation and the Department of Water Resources to develop an alternative proposal — one that included both flow and non-flow measures. That process was known as the Voluntary Agreements Program, but as Jennifer Pierre, Executive Director of the State Water Contractors, pointed out at the fall meeting of the Association of California Water Agencies in November, there was really nothing voluntary about the process. The program name has since changed and is now referred to as “Healthy Rivers and Landscapes.” The Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes, as proposed by the water agencies, have five major components: flow measures, non-flow measures, funding, governance, and science. More information on that program can be found at Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes.

Essentially, all the contributing parties will provide more water to increase flows in rivers. Most of those flow increases will occur in the spring of dry, below-normal and above-normal years and generally provide an additional 800,000-acre feet of flow. Relevant for Kern is the loss of 50,000-acre feet per year from Friant Contractors and reduced CVP and SWP Delta exports of between 125,000 and 175,000-acre feet per year. Also, several water purchase programs, ranging from 150,000 to 235,000-acre feet per year in total, will make it harder and more expensive for water users to buy water when they are short. On the plus side, the proposal would eliminate the San Joaquin River I/E Ratio regulation — a measure that restricted export pumping to protect out-migrating salmon but was actually ineffective. Pierre also pointed out that the proposal provides no additional environmental flows in wet years since the rivers have adequate flows for fish in these year types. “Wet years” constitute around 30% of the water year types and diversion to groundwater storage in these year types is critical to achieving groundwater sustainability.

Non-flow measures have habitat restoration targets

that vary by watershed. The restoration projects include restoration of spawning habitat, rearing and floodplain habitat, use of agricultural lands (primarily rice) to increase food availability for salmon, instream habitat, tidal wetland habitat, and predator control activities. The projects are proposed to be phased in over eight years and involve 55,000 acres.

Governance for the program is structured around the principles of inclusiveness, collaboration, transparency, accountability to outcomes, consensus, informed decision making, efficiency, certainty and adaptability, and respect of rights authorities and obligations. Governance occurs at two levels which must be coordinated: system wide (the whole of the Central Valley) and tributary governance (the individual watersheds). Program participants will establish a Systemwide Governance Committee for implementation. The draft proposal looks to use existing governance organizations for the individual watersheds, to the extent possible.

The Science Program is designed to determine if the implemented actions are being effective and involves several goals: to inform decision-making, to track and report progress, to reduce management-relevant uncertainty, and to provide recommendations on adjusting management actions.

As stated on the California Natural Resources Agency website “Implementation of the agreements is estimated to cost \$2.6 billion, to be shared by water users and the state and federal governments. Water agencies will self-assess fees to support implementation of the agreements.”

If this program felt involuntary to the participants, it is likely to feel more so to the farmers who will involuntarily endure decreased water supplies and increased cost. Be that as it may, something had to be done and the State Board proposal was doomed to be ineffective. It is critical that river functions be restored, that floodplains are reconnected to the rivers, and that projects are implemented to improve survival of native fish. The Agreements to Support Healthy Rivers and Landscapes recognize the needs that must be met while trying to find the right balance between flow and non-flow measures. More water will now have to be recharged in wet years to achieve groundwater sustainability.



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daniel@jssalmonds.com

**William Oliveira**  
Grower Relations Manager  
**559-816-5000**  
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# Almond Acreage Continues to Spiral, Almond Board Finds Inspiration in AI

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

A tropical storm during harvest created an unfavorable outlook for Central Valley almond production, and acreage has declined for two consecutive years. A recent report from Land IQ to the Almond Board of California showed that roughly 74,000 almond acres were lost in 2023.

According to the report, this second year of reduction is an unprecedented trend since at least 1995. In a press release, Richard Waycott, president of ABC, explained that the analysis from Land IQ underscores a reduction in total acreage due to fewer new plantings and increased orchard removals.

“While the 1.37 million bearing acreage in 2023 set a new record, reflecting plantings in 2020 or earlier, the analysis indicates a potential decrease in bearing acreage in 2024,” Waycott said.

Orchard removals increased in 2023, reaching approximately 83,000 acres as of Aug. 31, compared to 60,400 acres in 2022. According to the report, 41,000 acres are classified as either stressed or abandoned.

Despite these concerns, the Almond Board of California continuously works toward innovative approaches to improve the industry. ABC collaborated with Tastewise — an AI-powered food trends prediction and intelligence startup — to boost its trade



(Photo: MikeFusaro / Adobe)

marketing program across the U.S. and Europe.

According to a press release from ABC, the data gathered from Tastewise will inform new product development, encouraging the use of almonds as a prominent ingredient.

“California almonds are a key ingredient helping brands and product innovators be ready for the future,” Harbinder Maan, associate director of trade marketing and stewardship at ABC said in the release. “With real-time data from Tastewise, we will be able to bring meaningful insights to food manufacturers with an increased accuracy and speed.”

Data from Tastewise highlighted several keywords for the consumer use of almonds, including fitness, energy, weight management, wellness, athlete recovery, heart health, and muscle function.

# 2024 Grant Opportunities for California Farmers

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The new year offers several opportunities for California farmers and ranchers to apply for and secure financial assistance as the industry faces ongoing challenges. Increased costs in almost every part of production, including a boost to minimum wage, have created another obstacle for Central Valley agriculture.

## DROUGHT RELIEF AND SUSTAINABILITY

The California Department of Food and Agriculture is offering drought relief grants to small and underserved producers in the state in amounts of \$1,000 - \$20,000 per farmer. Funding is expected to cover production and planting expenses, water cost increases, electricity costs, emergency irrigation system, well equipment upgrades, and well repairs. The program primarily targets smaller farms, with applications set to close on Jan 15.

The University of California’s Agriculture and Natural Resources education program opened a grant for projects that build the capacity of farming and food systems businesses. Funding is limited to California farmers, ranchers, and land stewards of all scales in transitioning to approaches that will build upon sustainable agriculture. UC ANR is also offering support for California’s rural, urban, and Tribal communities.

Proposals for the UC Sustainable Agriculture

Research and Education Program are due Jan. 9 by 12 p.m.

## FARM TO SCHOOL

Among other applicants, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s 2024 Farm to School Grants are open to agricultural producers or groups of producers to help increase the availability of local foods in schools. The program awards projects of 24 months in length up to \$500,000. Applications close Jan 12.

## PEST PREVENTION

Another CDFA grant targets pest and disease research for Pierce’s Disease and other common diseases in grapes. Funding support will go toward research and projects specializing in protecting vineyards, preventing the spread of pests and diseases, and creating sustainable solutions.

In the past, awards ranged from \$4,300 per year to \$383,000 per year, with most projects ranging from one to three years.

## NATIONAL YOUNG FARMERS

The National Young Farmers Coalition partnered with Chipotle to offer \$5,000 grants to 50 young farmers and ranchers to support developing careers in agriculture. This year will mark the last year of the Coalition’s Young Farmer Grant program.

Forty-five awards will go to businesses currently in operation, as well as five farm and ranch operations starting up in 2024. Applications for the Young Farmer Grant Program close on Jan. 15.

# 18th Annual Spray Safe Event Underscores Continuing Education

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The Kern County Farm Bureau is hosting its 18th annual Spray Safe Event on Jan. 19 at the Kern County Fairgrounds to bolster educational outreach to farmers and agricultural employees on safe pesticide techniques. While Spray Safe has been adopted by various counties in the state, a group of farmers in Kern County created the program to inform agriculture industry leaders of the safe application of spray methods and to create a networking environment.

According to Dan Palla, Spray Safe chair, the event serves as a unique opportunity to update growers on regulatory changes and keep workers in the field safe.

“Laws constantly change. So, growers need to be updated on laws, they need to be reminded on the things that they already should be doing and are doing,” Palla said. “Our laws are so rigorous, complicated and it takes reminding to remember all the rules and laws you’re supposed to obey, especially on pesticides.” Palla explained that the event is not limited



(Photo: John Nakata / Adobe)

to employers as roughly 75-80% of the event attendees are agricultural employees, and courses are taught in both English and Spanish.

Attendees will rotate to different stations in groups to hear from a different presenter on a

given topic, including different governmental organizations. The event offers continuing education credits for the Department of Pesticide Regulations and guest speakers will include DPR officials, California Highway

Patrol, and the fire department.

“There’s not a lot of room for accidents in agriculture. And pesticides, you know, laws are very specific. You are to spray these chemicals without getting it on you, only on what you want to spray it on...so it cannot leave the confinement of your property when you spray it,” Palla said.

If pesticides drift off the applicator’s property, swab samples can be taken off of other vehicles or clothing which will show a drift violation. Demonstrations for proper spray techniques will be showcased on various nozzles with water.

Palla emphasized the importance of staying informed on laws and regulations to keep from following behind or running the risk of citations.

“It’s kind of a strange thing...if you take a year off or a year or two off of educating yourself on the pesticide laws and the rules, you’re gonna get yourself in trouble,” Palla said. “They change rules, they change definitions. You never know what they’re gonna change. It’s a constant challenge to keep up.”

The annual event is free to attend and offers tri-tip sandwiches and donuts.



# Tulare County Continues Dairy Digester Project Amid Proposed End to Climate Crediting

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Dairy digesters are most prominent in California, hosting 227 projects that capture methane from 255 dairy farms and create renewable electricity, renewable natural gas, or hydrogen fuel. According to Dairy Cares, the state’s digester program achieves 22% of greenhouse gas reduction from all climate programs in the state, but it operates with 1.7% of the state’s funding.

Dairy operations with manure management facilities have the ability to earn carbon credits, allowing the credit owner to emit carbon dioxide or other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere with one credit allotting to one ton of GHG. This approach has been contested by environmental advocates who believe the methane-reducing projects could lead to larger dairies and increased emissions.

Some groups, such as the Center for Food Safety, refer to methane digesters as a Band-Aid fix to reducing agricultural emissions. Now, the California Air Resources Board is considering phasing out climate credits for dairy digesters in its effort to meet the Biden Administration’s goal of cutting methane emissions by 30%



(Photo: Ilia / Adobe)

compared with 2020 levels by 2030. CARB’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard 2023 Amendments report from Sept. expanded on this proposal to phase out methane crediting for dairy and swine manure and landfill-diversion pathways by 2040. According to an email from

Dave Clergen, public information officer for CARB, the staff has not formally proposed any updates to the LCFS regulation. “CARB will be posting a formal proposal for amendments to the LCFS in the coming weeks,” Clergen wrote.

Current information on staff proposals to phase out climate crediting for dairy manure is limited to preliminary workshops and other materials requesting public input in developing a formal regulatory proposal.

The preliminary amendments report explained that avoided methane emissions have low carbon intensity due to the amount of captured methane, which is turned into biogas. With California planning to phase out gas-powered cars, the proposal to phase out biofuel made from cow manure is indicative of a more regulated future.

**CALIFORNIA DIGESTERS**

Dairy digesters prevent GHG, such as methane formed in lagoons — holding ponds of manure in dairy facilities — from infiltrating the atmosphere. According to Alice Rocha, Ph.D. student at the University of California, Davis studying manure management systems, digesters can exist in different forms. Still, the most popular is a covered lagoon containing manure and urine from dairy cattle. Most systems utilize water to clean out barns, which also pull into the lagoons, so covering the lagoon creates a dairy digester as it creates an environment completely without oxygen.

See **DAIRY DIGESTER** on PAGE 16



## Almond-Specific Resources Now Available

To further support almond growers and allied industry partners, the Almond Board of California has partnered with UC ANR and other industry experts to develop almond-specific resources. These resources are available, free of cost. Scan the QR code below or visit [Almonds.com/GrowerTools](https://Almonds.com/GrowerTools) to view and order resources.

**Available Resources:**

- Almond Pest ID Cards
- Almond Disease & Nutrient Deficiency ID Cards
- Almond Weed ID Cards
- Introduction to Groundwater Recharge

- Guide to CA Almonds Variety & Grades Poster
- Cover Crop BMPs
- Irrigation Resources
- Nitrogen BMPs
- Salinity Management Guide

Scan the QR code to order you free resources today!







# Johansson Urges Support to Sustain Farms



California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson gives his address during the 105th Annual Meeting of the California Farm Bureau in Reno, Nevada. He called on lawmakers to reject policies that ask farmers and ranchers to be resilient in the face of unaddressed challenges. (Photo/Brian Baer)

**By Peter Hecht, Chief Editor of Publications, California Farm Bureau Federation**

*Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation*

California Farm Bureau President Jamie Johansson called on lawmakers to work to sustain agriculture into the future by securing water supplies and rejecting policies that merely ask farmers and ranchers to be resilient in the face of unaddressed challenges.

Speaking before the 105th Annual Meeting of the California Farm Bureau in Reno, Nevada, this week, Johansson outlined “extraordinary events that have put all California farmers and ranchers at risk.”

He pointed to impacts of a three-year drought that resulted in the fallowing of more than 1.2 million acres of productive farmland. That was followed in 2023 by atmospheric river storms and destructive floods that caused hundreds of millions of dollars in damages to California farmland and crops.

Johansson took issue with California’s failure to complete long-planned water infrastructure projects that could have stored water during wet years for use in dry ones and enhanced flood-control protections in years with heavy rains.

“While our members struggled, we faced administrations in Washington, D.C., and Sacramento who found it easy to blame it all on climate change,” Johansson said.

He took political leaders to task for simply declaring that “agriculture would have to do less to meet climate goals.”

Johansson said farmers and ranchers need supportive policies rooted in science, not politics. He said Farm Bureau remains committed to “defending the use of science on our farms, our waterways...and saving the next generation of farmers and ranchers.”

“I truly believe it must be Farm Bureau and our membership who leads the fight,” he said.

Johansson cited notable victories for California agriculture in 2023, including advocacy that led Gov. Gavin Newsom to sign an executive order that rolled back permitting requirements and bureaucratic red tape to allow farmers to divert floodwaters to recharge depleted groundwater aquifers.

As a result of the order, farmers were able to secure an

additional 40,000 acre-feet in groundwater recharge in the San Joaquin Valley last spring and summer, he said.

“For 13 years, California Farm Bureau and some of our partners have been pushing the (California) State Water Resources Control Board to allow our farmers to use their land to recharge aquifers,” Johansson said. “This year, our efforts finally produced results.”

Still, Johansson said it was regrettable that it took “an act of God,” including catastrophic flooding, to ultimately get action.

He said agricultural leaders additionally sounded the alarm as massive amounts of floodwater were allowed to flow into the ocean—uncaptured—during much of the 2023 storms.

He said farming interests pressured the administration to reduce water releases from dams in the state. Newsom responded by authorizing to maintain increased storage levels in the reservoirs.

“We haven’t always agreed with everything this governor has done,” Johansson said. “But it was a step that we should acknowledge.”

Johansson also applauded actions by the governor that fast-tracked Sites Reservoir, a planned off-stream water storage project north of Sacramento long advocated by the Farm Bureau.

But the Farm Bureau president expressed concern that California political leaders and policymakers continue to expect agriculture to live with water scarcity instead of striving to secure the necessary resources to sustain America’s largest food-producing state.

He took issue with water-supply curtailments for farmers and ranchers in the Scott and Shasta river watersheds that have continued despite 2023’s historic storms.

He also recalled when Farm Bureau organized a bus caravan to the state Capitol five years ago as California water officials contemplated water-supply restrictions and mandatory flows on the San Joaquin River and tributaries that would have resulted in “game over for agriculture” in the region.

“It was a desperate time,” Johansson said, noting the effort succeeded in staving off severe water-supply losses for farmers and ranchers.

Despite the importance of California’s agricultural economy, he said a common thread is repeated in

policy circles. It suggests that farmers and ranchers should simply adjust to a steady decline of agriculture in the state.

Johansson cited a 2022 report from the Public Policy Institute of California that declared “California’s farmers have shown an extraordinary capacity for adaptation to changes in prices, technology and the regulatory environment.”

Johansson said such conclusions imply that “we would simply once again be asked to be resilient.” He called that approach unacceptable for Farm Bureau and its members.

“After California’s multidecade practice of managing for scarcity, our vision became clear,” Johansson said. “California will not solve the issues of climate change by making farmers less efficient.”

During his address, Johansson recounted other key challenges that Farm Bureau has taken on in support of farmers, ranchers and the agricultural economy.

He pointed to a “crippled supply chain” and a port system that “all but melted down” during the pandemic and its aftermath. Farm Bureau responded by successfully pushing for federal legislation to upgrade ports and clear logjams that had stranded

California farm exports.

There was passage of state Senate Bill 505, which Farm Bureau sponsored. The bill expanded the insurance clearinghouse program of the California FAIR Plan, the state’s insurer of last resort, to allow commercial policies for farm properties to move back to the competitive insurance market, creating more insurance options. The bill followed earlier Farm Bureau-sponsored legislation allowing farmers and ranchers who were denied fire insurance coverage to access the FAIR Plan for coverage.

Farm Bureau also successfully defeated a state mill tax increase that would have raised costs to agriculture by \$50 million.

Johansson praised the signing of Assembly Bill 1016, which was inspired by a San Diego County farmer and Farm Bureau member. The legislation will expedite training and licensing programs so that more farmers may use drones for pesticide applications.

Johansson called the legislation the “vision of farmer-led solutions.”

“California and America respects the California farmer and rancher,” he said. “We simply have to stand up and be heard.”

## California Farm Bureau Recognizes Central Valley Ag Leaders

**By Valley Ag Voice Staff**

The California Farm Bureau boasted a series of recognitions to local agricultural industry leaders spanning Kern County to Stanislaus. Every year, the CFB highlights members from each county who continuously show their commitment to agriculture and the betterment of their local industry.

The 2023 awards were exchanged at the 105th California Farm Bureau Annual Meeting held in Reno this year, along with the California YF&R State Conference.

High school teacher and former chair of the Kern County Young Farmers and Ranchers, Timothy Collins, was highlighted as the winner of the California YF&R Open Discussion Meet for his dialog on the tools and programs necessary for young farmers and ranchers to gain access to capital and start their agricultural business.

Collins was one of several participants across the state in the YF&R competition tasked with exchanging their views and opinions on trending issues in the agricultural industry. According to a press release from CFB, Collins was awarded \$5,000 at the competition in Reno. He will go on to represent the state in the national contest at the American Farm Bureau Federation conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, Jan. 19-24.

The Kern County YF&R Committee also received the Committee of the Year Award. Stanislaus County’s YF&R Committee nominated Bill and Dana Power, owners of Power Services Inc. and Power Hydrodynamics Inc. in Modesto, for the CFB Hometown Heroes Award.

The Powers received the award during the conference for their continued support of the Stanislaus County Farm Bureau. According to a press release, the Powers, as farm bureau members, were recognized for their efforts to expand knowledge and educational



Timothy Collins (right) won the California Farm Bureau Young Farmers and Ranchers Open Discussion Meet. (Photo courtesy of Kern County Farm Bureau)

opportunities to the YF&R committee in Stanislaus by offering training in pumpkin and irrigation technologies.

“Bill and Dana are exemplary models of what it means to be advocates of agriculture while serving in a capacity that directly supports the longevity and future of farming operations,” Jace Neugebauer, member of the Stanislaus County YF&R Committee, wrote in the nomination.

Young farmers from Stanislaus and San Joaquin counties were also recognized and awarded prizes for their commitment to the California YF&R program. Mark Avilla, farm manager for family walnut orchards, received the YF&R Excellence in Agriculture Award for engaging with state legislators on agricultural issues, according to a press release. Avilla also received the Star Member Award for contributions to the county program.

The YF&R Achievement Award was given to San Joaquin County almond and walnut farmer Jacob Samuel for developing his family’s dried-fruit brand into a top seller for unsweetened cherries on Amazon.



# Grimmway and Bolthouse Drop Adjudication, Carrot Boycott Continues

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

In 2021, Grimmway and Bolthouse Farms jointly filed a groundwater adjudication in the Cuyama Basin, sparking backlash from local landowners and resulting in a carrot boycott. Both entities dropped from the adjudication, leaving four separate entities as the plaintiffs — Bolthouse Land Company, Diamond Farming Company, Lapis Land Company, and Ruby Land Company.

In October, Grimmway Farms shared a statement with the LA Times, stating that the adjudication

is different from a typical lawsuit where you have plaintiffs and defendants who are truly averse to each other,” Clifford said in an email. “Here, all water users in the basin must be named as a party to the adjudication so that they can establish their right to pump groundwater.”

Despite the two private farming companies’ withdrawal from the adjudication, Cuyama Valley landowners have doubled efforts to boycott carrots. According to Ella Boyajian, a local landowner, residents within the advocacy group Stand With Cuyama believe the private entities should utilize



(Photo: Alicja Neumiller / Shutterstock.com)

has compromised the goodwill and cooperation of the corporation’s involvement in Cuyama Valley.

“To that end, Grimmway Farms has decided to end its participation in the adjudication and filed a request with the court earlier this month to withdraw as a plaintiff in this case. Moving forward, we feel it more appropriate for the landowners to continue this discussion,” the statement said. “Our relationships with the residents of Cuyama are more important and valuable to us than this court case. We hope that all parties can work cooperatively going forward to achieve fairness, balance, and alignment as we address these critical water issues for all who live, work, and farm in this region.”

According to Daniel Clifford, vice president and general counsel for Bolthouse Land Company, there has been a misconception of the water rights adjudication since its initial filing.

“It is true that the complaint that was filed has water users and landowners in the Basin designated as ‘defendants’; however, a water rights adjudication

their influence to pressure the remaining plaintiffs to drop the lawsuit completely.

“The Cuyama community is responding to Grimmway and Bolthouse dropping from the groundwater adjudication — while they profess support for our community and commitment to sustainability as their reasons for dismissing, we feel this move is only a legal strategy or PR tactic,” Boyajian said in an email. “We remain resolute, and we are encouraging folks to join our carrot boycott by going carrot-free this Thanksgiving.”

In a prior interview, Boyajian explained that the carrot boycott, in its early phases, began to educate the community on the adjudication process and how their water rights may be affected.

“We are not trying to get rid of anybody in the Valley. You know, we wanna be neighbors,” Boyajian said. “But I think we felt a need to take this measure of a boycott against carrots because it felt like they turned their backs on this community process by filing the adjudication.”

## WHAT’S AN ADJUDICATION?

The adjudication filing came shortly after a mandatory 5% pumping reduction went into effect in 2021. According to Clifford, the primary function of the adjudication was to establish a legally enforceable water allocation for groundwater users to bring the Cuyama Basin into sustainability alongside existing California law.

“An adjudication is a collaborative process that will require the parties to meet and hopefully negotiate a solution that is acceptable to each of the groundwater users and the court,” Clifford said in an email.

Clifford noted that the court requires all water users to be included in an adjudication for accurate and sustainable allocation. Water use for single-family residences, considered minimis users with less than one acre-foot per year, will not be cut back.

However, in a prior interview, Das Williams, the first district supervisor for the county of Santa Barbara, explained that the adjudication placed a hardship on the majority of Cuyama Valley residents and instigated a small farmer versus large farmer battle.

“It’s really sad and, you know, I think the most evidence of that is that Bolthouse and Grimmway seem to be including the minimis users in the calculation. And that they are forcing people who really can’t afford to retain attorneys to defend their water rights,” Williams said.

Boyajian explained that the adjudication filing took many residents by surprise, as it came on the heels of the Cuyama Basin’s state-approved Groundwater Sustainability Plan required through the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

She noted that the Cuyama community created a committee to draft an almost 1,600-page GSP wherein Bolthouse and Grimmway had representation. According to Boyajian, residents were hopeful that the GSP would avoid an adjudication altogether.

“The hope of SGMA was that communities could create these GSPs and avoid adjudication because there are so many inherent inequities with adjudication. So, what was really shocking to our community is that we had this plan that was submitted to the state for approval two times. It was held for a vote, and the committee with representatives from Grimmway and Bolthouse voted to pass the plan,” Boyajian said. “And while the state was reviewing it and, you know, giving some feedback...They shocked everybody and filed this adjudication complaint.”

Bolthouse Land Company also had a representative on the GSA board who voted to approve the plan with an understanding that the board would receive information evaluating the entire basin to implement proper pumping reductions, Clifford explained.

“Currently, the pumpers with land located [in] one area of the Basin in the Central Management Area are the only pumpers that are being cut back. This temporary arrangement is not consistent with California law as it does not require any other landowner in the Basin to reduce their pumping,” Clifford said. “Scientists who have evaluated the hydrology and geology of the Basin have concluded that it will never reach sustainability so long as the reductions are not Basin-wide.”

According to Clifford, Bolthouse Land Company was transparent about the adjudication process

and held various voluntary outreach meetings with known groundwater users in the basin prior to the adjudication.

“The purpose of the meetings was to educate groundwater users concerning the adjudication process so that they would know what to expect. BLC representatives were on hand to respond to questions from groundwater users,” Clifford said.

Williams explained that he was informed of the adjudication a few days before it was filed.

“It was a big disappointment. It was not a surprise,” Williams said.

Through an adjudication, the court and an appointed watermaster determine the groundwater rights in the basin as well as who the water rights owners are, according to the California Department of Water Resources.

“The water expert is required to help them determine historical use because in an adjudication typically, a judge, a court will determine who gets what or whose right is to what based on historical use,” Boyajian said. “So, you have a system where Grimmway and Bolthouse, who have been the biggest perpetrators of overdraft in the basin, they can also claim the most historic use...these large, big pumpers tend to benefit in an adjudication.”

The initial goal of the GSP for the basin was to implement a glide path, that is, a gradual approach to implementing SGMA to provide water users time to adjust and prevent disruptions in the regional economy.

“There [are] two reasons why I advocated for a beginning of the cuts in our allocations. One is because if you spread the cuts over a larger number of years, they’re less severe,” Williams said. “But another reason was, you know, Bolthouse and Grimmway were proposing to delay that for a long time, and I believed that they were going to ask for adjudication anyway. And so having the cuts now, I suppose, may have precipitated them filing for adjudication earlier rather than later.”

Clifford explained that the adjudication process initiated by Bolthouse Land Company and others is not a new process, as 26 basins have adjudicated areas wherein a court determined the groundwater rights of all users.

“The adjudication does not seek to determine rights to municipal water service between any municipal water service provider and their retail water service customers. BLC, as a good steward of the land, understands that the amount of water used in the Basin must be reduced,” Clifford said. “BLC is not interested in ‘pumping the Basin dry’ as that [is] completely contrary to being a responsible landowner. BLC intends to remain a corporate citizen in the Basin for many decades to come, and intentionally destroying the aquifer is at odds with that reality.”

The adjudication remains ongoing, and a non-jury trial is scheduled for Jan. 8, 2024. The Cuyama Basin Groundwater Sustainability Agency filed a Notice of Intervention on Nov. 13 to become an official defendant in the case.

**Disclaimer: Bolthouse Land Company is an unrelated third-party company under separate and unrelated ownership from that of Bolthouse Farms. The remaining plaintiffs in the Cuyama Basin adjudication are separate entities from Bolthouse Farms and Grimmway Farms.**





Queensland fruit flies, native to Australia, have over 170 different host plants. (Photo courtesy of the University of California, Agriculture and Natural Resources)

# Exotic Fruit Fly Triggers California Quarantine

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

With huanglongbing disease carried by Asian citrus psyllids becoming increasingly prominent throughout Southern California, the state's citrus industry faces another potential threat from the Queensland fruit fly.

Two Queensland fruit flies were detected near Thousand Oaks, leading to a first-of-its-kind quarantine in the United States, covering 90 square miles. According to Hamutahl Cohen, the University of California Cooperative Extension entomology advisor for Ventura County, the Queensland fruit fly is unique in its ability to withstand different temperatures and conditions, making it difficult to control.

She noted that along with the Queensland fruit fly quarantine, there are six other active fruit fly quarantines in California, including the Mediterranean fruit fly, the Oriental fruit fly — which spans three quarantines — and the Tau fly. Cohen explained that fruit flies generally share the same characteristics in affecting host plants.

“What they do is they lay their eggs under the skin of the fruit, and then the egg hatches into a larva or maggot, which travels throughout the fruit and introduces decay organisms like bacteria that facilitate rot,” Cohen said. “They all have the same life cycle and are hard to control once the populations take root.”

In the past, fruit fly quarantines, as well as associated regulations, have been successful in eradicating fruit flies in California, Cohen explained, and the Mediterranean fruit fly has been eradicated multiple times since 1975.

The Queensland fruit fly has had substantial impacts on the citrus industry in Australia, with the Australian Department of Agriculture, Fisheries, and Forestry explaining that fruit flies cost the country hundreds of millions per year in control measures compiled with lost access to international markets.

While it boasts various host plants, the Queensland fruit fly poses a primary threat to citrus production in the state due to the equally concerning spread of huanglongbing disease.

“Citrus growers are already stressed because they

have to monitor for Asian citrus psyllid. They often have to do these area-wide treatments for Asian citrus psyllids depending on what region of California they're in,” Cohen said. “So, this is another possible threat on top of that, and that's why it's troublesome.”

The aptly named Queensland fruit fly is most prevalent in Australia from October to May and is known to target over 170 different fruits, vegetables, and plant commodities. In a press release, the California Department of Food and Agriculture explained that residents within the Ventura County quarantine area should not move any fruits or vegetables from their property.

“This has been a record year for fruit fly detections,” CDFA Secretary Karen Ross said in the release. “The stakes are high. Help us protect our commercial and backyard gardens from invasive fruit flies — please ‘Don't Pack a Pest’ when you travel, and don't mail packages carrying unmarked fruits and vegetables to California.”

CDFA is working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture and agricultural commissioners from Ventura and Los Angeles counties to implement a multi-tiered approach to eliminate the fruit fly and prevent future occurrences. If larvae or mated adult females are detected, officials will hand-remove the infected fruit or vegetable within 100 meters.

Properties within 200 meters of the detection will be treated with Spinosad — a natural soil bacterium that can be toxic to insects — to remove any live fruit flies. Traps are also incorporated and equipped with a pheromone lure and insecticide to attract and eliminate adult male Queensland fruit flies.

The spike in fruit flies and other invasive species is evident in California, but there is uncertainty over why the detections are becoming increasingly prominent. But Cohen explained that travel is one of the main pathways for fruit flies in California.

“That's why we often first find invasive species in urban and suburban backyards and not on farms,” Cohen said. “More Californians are traveling now that we are post-pandemic, which may have resulted in the movement of the fruit fly into California.”

Travelers entering the US are cautioned to visit [dontpackapest.com](http://dontpackapest.com) to ensure they are not bringing an invasive species home with them.



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# California Dairies Inc. Invests in Kern County

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

A new dairy bottling facility in Bakersfield, which broke ground in 2021, is proceeding through city reviews for a long-life milk plant — the first of its kind in Kern County. Valley Natural Beverages, owned by California Dairies Inc., will bring an estimated 350 quality jobs to the area.

CDI currently owns six co-ops in California, with its main headquarters in Visalia. According to Peter Ernster, general manager of Valley Natural Beverages, the dairy bottling facility is partnering with local Kern County dairymen to supply the raw materials.

“All the milk that’s currently in Kern County goes south to LA or north to one of our two plants in Tipton or Visalia — our two milk powder and butter plants,” Ernster said. “Really, what VNV offers would be an opportunity to have that milk made by dairies in the Kern County area and then be shipped and processed and shipped back out as finished product out in Kern County... most of the milk is gonna come within 10 miles of the plant, which is a tremendous amount of mileage saving compared to what any dairy from Kern County does today because there’s no raw milk processing in Kern County.”

The facility will produce various dairy products, including ultra-high temperature milk and other products such as cream, condensed, skim, and powdered milk. Ernster explained that producing shelf-stable milk comes with an opportunity to put



Equipped with the largest single evaporator-dryer in North America, the Visalia plant manufactures milk powder, butter and AMF, and is home to the corporate office. (photo: California Dairies Inc.)

on more mileage and ship the product further.

He noted that the plant’s location on 8801 Gosford, north of Taft Highway, is ideally located roughly 130 miles away from the port of Los Angeles and plays into the facility’s ability to ship long-life milk products.

“Having the milk be made in Kern County and stay in Kern County to be processed and then

shipped all over the world, that was one of the main focuses...this would be our most southern plant now. We used to have a plant in Artesia that we closed down a few years ago, and now we’ll have this plant in Bakersfield.”

## REUSING WASTEWATER

According to Ernster, the facility will be designed in phases, with the first stage amounting to 200,000

square feet, and the full build-out is expected to be north of 400,000 square feet. The location also provides access to water, power, wastewater, and well-established, responsible dairy farmers.

“The Kern County farmers are some of the most advanced dairy farmers in the world [in] their sustainability practices and their animal husbandry practices,” Ernster said. “It’s really a blessing for a division like VNV because we get to say we have some of the best milk in the world.”

He expanded on the facility’s plan to promote sustainability by reusing wastewater from the neighboring treatment plant for process water. Water is a necessary tool for the ultra-pasteurized process, and the ability to utilize wastewater — after multiple cleaning steps — will best employ available water resources without affecting surrounding farmers.

“But if you take a look at that water, it’s going somewhere else. It goes in the canal, goes down to LA, for all I know. But if we could take that water, use it for process water — not sanitary water — not for drinking fountains...we’ll be able to use that, and then it would just kind of recycle back in, back to that wastewater treatment plant across the street,” Ernster said. “You’d really have a multi-use water system, and we wouldn’t have to pump out of the aquifer, just be able to reuse as much of that water as possible in a way that’s not irrigation water for the plant or irrigation water for the farmer.”

The State Water Board will ultimately decide if Valley Natural Beverages can reuse the wastewater,

See **CALIFORNIA DAIRIES** on PAGE 13

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(photo: California Dairies Inc.)

California Dairies

Continued from PAGE 12

and Ernster explained that it's never been done before in Kern County.

The dairy facility also plans to utilize a vertical methane digester for wastewater, and the biogas it produces will feed into some of the boilers. While the produced renewable natural gas will not be enough to power a boiler completely, the wastewater that has been processed through the digester will ultimately be cleaner when it is sent back to the wastewater treatment facility.

"It's the right thing to do both environmentally, for environmental stewardship, but it's also the right thing to do for a business," Ernster said. "It adds value, it drives costs down, and drives efficiencies up. Why wouldn't you do that as a businessman? It just makes sense."

Another source of renewable energy would come from a separate piece of property owned by the company, which plans to establish a solar farm.

EMPLOYMENT AND DESIGN

The facility will lean heavily into automation, limiting the amount of manual labor and warehouse jobs, but it intends to create an opportunity for highly skilled workers. The industry 4.0 jobs that will be provided include the proper management of robotic systems, and on-the-job training will be extensive to maintain the equipment, Ernster explained.

"That was another reason why Bakersfield became important because you have Bakersfield College and you have Cal State University of Bakersfield, which have these great engineering programs, which really we hope will provide a lot of our labor and a

lot of our operators as well as engineers, as well as maintenance mechanics," Ernster said.

Retention will be a main priority for the facility, as skilled labor often translates to valuable labor.

"We're gonna have to maintain and retain those employees by keeping them paid in a matter that they want to stay for us," Ernster said. "Because they're gonna be highly recruitable, and so we're going to be training a lot of people that are going to be valuable to other people as well."

As a greenfield site, the plant was designed around the processes and flows in a straight line. Everything was built around a single flow to increase efficiency.

"Everything was built in that kind of straight line. We didn't want to make any left turns or right turns," Ernster said. "We wanted to make them as close together as possible to minimize milk runs because this process goes through steam sterilization. So, it's just not a clean in place...so the more pipe, the more tanks, the more everything you have, the more steam you need to be able to sterilize everything."

The building combines concrete tilt-up and Insulated Metal Panels with a 75-foot-tall automatic storage and retrieval warehouse. The design also features stainless steel milk silos and water silos.

Ernster explained that Valley Natural Beverages is meant to positively impact members of CDI's cooperative and other California dairymen by creating Class 1 milk to expand the existing pool of this high-quality product.

"Every dairyman will make more money based on this plan — they will get a higher milk check," Ernster said. "There's not a lot of investment going on in dairy in California, and this represents a very big investment, an intentional investment by CDI into California dairy."



(photo: California Dairies Inc.)

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# COMMENTARY: How Some Pesticide Policies Can Harm Food Security



Modern pesticides have provided safe and effective tools for California farmers. But restrictions that target whole classes of pesticides can threaten farmers' ability to meet global food demands. (Photo: Ag Alert)



**By Amrith Gunasekara,**  
**Director of Science**  
**and Research,**  
**California Bountiful**  
**Foundation**

*Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation*

In 2022, the Breakthrough Institute global research center advanced a concept called “deregulating abundance.”

The idea is that we have an abundance of tools and technologies that for various reasons—namely due to excessive regulation—are no longer “abundant.”

This is concerning when it comes to ensuring our food security. For example, we have

seen unneeded pesticide restrictions limiting valuable crop protection materials that have helped provide us with a safe, affordable, high-quality food supply.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and state regulatory bodies are tasked with evaluating and protecting against environmental, animal and human health impacts of pesticides used in homes, gardens and agriculture. That involves testing of new and existing pesticides to understand potencies and safe use in controlling pests that either bother us, harm us or harm our food supply.

Yet some environmental mandates have pushed regulatory agencies to set unnecessary limits on technologies that help us in everyday life and in protecting our food supply. It is arguable that the environmental agenda has gone too far in restricting tools

we need for food security, including our need to feed 10 billion people on Earth by 2057.

Modern science has given us the opportunity to deregulate abundance to ensure global food security and economic growth, even in the face of climate change.

Modern pesticide science can now mimic natural insecticides and their chemical structures to produce safe and useful materials for protecting crops. A good example is pyrethroids. Pyrethroids are derived from pyrethrins or pyrethrum, a naturally occurring chemical produced by the chrysanthemum plant and flower.

Pyrethroids are now a class of chemical pesticides that has gone on to become an important tool in controlling insect pests in agriculture and around the home. Controlling insect pests is critical for human health and protecting against insects that carry disease. Insect-damaged crops cannot be sold to consumers and must meet certain food quality standards to be sold at grocery stores.

These pesticides must be registered first with the EPA and state programs, including the California Environmental Protection Agency's Department of Pesticide Regulation. To be registered, the pesticide must be tested in a controlled laboratory or field setting for toxicity to microorganisms, animals and humans. If there are any toxicity issues other than for the targeted insects, the product does not get registered.

Yet, over time, regulations and restrictions on pesticide use have moved from targeting single products to whole classes of pesticides.

In California, that is resulting in efforts to restrict further use of pyrethroid pesticides, which have provided a safe and important tool for farmers.

California leads the nation in crop production, including the production of many of the nutritious crops we use in our salads. Taking pesticides away from growers is akin to taking cars away from people when they have to get to work. How will the job—or in this case, our food production—meet the demands?

Of late, the EPA has focused on restricting rodenticide use. Rodenticides control rats and mice that spread diseases in urban settings and are significant nuisances in agricultural systems. The restrictions undercut efforts to save water in California agricultural systems because unmanaged rodents chew on drip lines that carefully deliver water and fertilizers to root zones.

Our abundance of tools to effectively control pests is significant. Yet, with a philosophical approach that targets the use and application of whole pesticide classes under a guise of protecting the environment, regulatory agencies appear to be invoking European-style precautionary principles over actual, evidence-based scientific data.

Those precautionary principles hold that certain policies can be made simply based on a “potential” harm, even though scientific data can be collected to support or unsubstantiate the policies.

In the U.S., evidence-based science has thankfully dominated policymaking, even in liberal states such as California. But policies based on good science can be threatened by environmental agendas that wrongly target whole classes of pesticides.

As a result, deregulating abundance must be a critical piece of policymaking if we are to move forward with good science and technological tools that have allowed modern agriculture to thrive and that are key to their future.

Deregulating abundance to safeguard California farmers and ranchers responsible for America's most productive agricultural sector should be accomplished through critical evaluation by federal and state agencies. It should be based on science and free of bias or political agendas.

These technological developments have had profound and positive impacts. They can protect and enhance the future of agriculture and the natural habitat we all need to survive.



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# COMMENTARY: New Mandates on Transportation Take Effect In 2024



**By Katie Little**  
**Sr. Policy Advocate,**  
**California Farm**  
**Bureau**

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

California farmers and ranchers are no strangers to our continuing onslaught of state regulations. Now, as the New Year approaches, several new mandates that will take effect come from one agency alone: the California Air Resources Board.

CARB has been particularly busy enacting transportation policies called for by the Legislature and Gov. Gavin Newsom. The mandates affecting agriculture in 2024 stem from the governor's September 2020 executive order, which recognized impacts of climate change and the importance of transitioning to zero-emission vehicles.

Newsom directed the state to reach a 100% sales rate for zero-emission passenger cars and trucks by 2035 and 100% sales of medium and heavy-duty vehicles by 2045. Now, a trio of regulations aim to achieve those outcomes.

The Advanced Clean Fleet Regulation, or ACF, requires the phaseout of internal combustion engines in medium and heavy-duty trucks. This affects medium and heavy-duty vehicles, including tractors that weigh more than 8,500 pounds.

The ACF rules apply to fleets performing drayage operations, those owned by state, local and federal agencies, and high-priority fleets from companies that have \$50 million or more in gross annual revenues, or 50 or more vehicles.

The California Farm Bureau has raised concerns about this regulation, which requires that the vehicle fleets start phasing in zero-emission vehicles, or ZEVS, next year. The majority of our farmers and ranchers live in remote, rural communities that have limited access to vehicle charging stations needed to support this transition.

The time required to charge these vehicles—and the time needed to travel to charging facilities—could jeopardize timely delivery of farm products, adding to risks of food insecurity. There are also supply challenges, including shortages of ZEVS for purchase and the fact that many agricultural operations require specialty equipment or vehicles for which there is no zero-emission option.

There are exemptions from the rules for infrastructure and supply delays, although applying for waivers requires a lengthy process.

A second regulation approved by the air resources board—Clean Truck Check—seeks to ensure that heavy-duty vehicles operating in California are

well-maintained and repaired quickly when needed to reduce emissions.

The rule provides a level playing field for the businesses that operate these vehicles as it applies to heavy-duty vehicles both registered in California and out of the state. The regulation covers nearly all non-gasoline vehicles weighing over 14,000 pounds.

As of Oct. 1, those subject to the rule are required to enter their vehicles in the air board's Clean Truck Check database and pay an initial annual compliance fee of \$30 per vehicle by Dec. 31. Starting Jan. 1, all trucks driving in California will need proof of compliance to continue operating in the state.

Starting July 1, Clean Truck Check will require heavy-duty vehicle owners to conduct periodic emissions testing, similar to California's smog check program for cars. Periodic testing initially will be required twice yearly for nearly all vehicles in the program. Agricultural vehicles and California-registered motor homes are required to test once annually.

Lastly, new Small Off-Road Engines regulations, or SORE, are stirring some concerns in agriculture. The rules primarily apply to lawn and garden equipment with rated power at or below 25 horsepower.

Engines that use diesel fuel and engines that are used in stationary equipment, including standby generators, are not subject to SORE regulations. Additionally, federal law preempts states from regulating new engines that are used in construction or farm equipment with less than 175 horsepower.

But the SORE regulation directly impacts machine manufacturers. If they wish to sell products within California, they must produce zero-emission engines beginning Jan. 1.

Yet, even beyond 2024, consumers will be able to use any pre-2024 lawnmower, landscaping equipment or SORE-regulated equipment until the end of its useful life. Equipment owners can continue to repair these engines as long as parts and equipment are available. The SORE rules will apply only to new equipment being produced after Jan. 1.

Older model-year equipment will be allowed to be sold in stores until it is gone, then will be replaced by zero-emission equipment. Supplies of 2022 or 2023 engines may last well into 2024, depending on inventory and manufacturer demand for the products.

The purchase of gas or diesel-burning equipment manufactured out of state for California use is prohibited. Some out-of-state retailers may require identification to guard against selling noncompliant equipment in California.

The California Farm Bureau continues to express concerns to the Air Resources Board about these regulations and the obstacles they will create within our food supply chain.



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# Top 10 Most Common Pesticide Violations



(Photo: John Nakata / Adobe)

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation has several rules ranging from worker safety to drift, but mistakes in application and management are not entirely avoidable. Enforcement actions for a violation include civil penalty or disciplinary action, which can refuse, revoke, or suspend a permit. In order to combat the frequency of certain violations, DPR shared the Top Ten violations for 2022 for growers to avoid.

## NO. 1 – LABELING

The most common violation is the misuse of a pesticide against its registered labeling. DPR explained that “the label is the law,” meaning any inadvertent or blatant product misuse — such as not following application requirements or applying to a site or crop not listed on the label — will result in a violation.

## NO. 2 – PPE

The second most common violation is improper personal protective equipment required for any application activity. This violation extends to the maintenance, inspection, and cleaning of PPE to meet regulations.

## NO. 3 – CARE PLAN

The third violation is the lack of an emergency medical care plan in the case of an exposure. If an employer does not take an employee suspected of pesticide illness to a medical facility immediately or does not have the contact information of the facility posted at the worksite, they are in violation of the law.

## NO. 4 – REGISTRATION

The fourth prominent violation is the failure to register for pesticide use in the county. California requires any person who advertises, solicits, or operates a pest control business to be registered annually with their County Agricultural Commissioner.

## NO. 5 – RESPONSIBILITY

Not having the name of the person or company responsible on the service container or the signal word indicating the precautionary statement on the container is the fifth most common violation.

## NO. 6 – SIGNAGE

Growers must display application-specific information before any fieldworkers can enter a treated field, along with the date and time the application began and ended. Failure to post ASI is the sixth most common violation.

## NO. 7 – RECORDS

The seventh violation is the grower’s failure to maintain pesticide use records within the last two years for each pesticide at a central location accessible to the grower or Farm labor Contractor employees. Growers must display a copy of the Pesticide Safety Information Series A-9 leaflet and ensure pesticide use records are readily available.

## NO. 8 – HANDLING

Improper handler training is the eighth most common violation. It most often entails that the employer did not maintain training records within the last two years or the training did not include new pesticides being handled.

## NO. 9 – REPORTING

The ninth violation is failing to submit a pesticide use report to the county commissioner every month.

## NO. 10 – FLUSH STATION

The tenth most common violation for 2022 was not having an emergency eye flush station at the mix and load site when protective eyewear is required by pesticide labeling. A decontamination site must be located at the mixing and loading site within one-fourth of a mile from other handles.

Avoiding these top ten pesticide violations will go a long way in providing a safe work site for employers and their employees while also minimizing the amount of DPR oversight on their facility.

## Dairy Digester

Continued from PAGE 8

“The concept of using a digester is actually very old technology. Just the concept of allowing organic matter to break down in the absence of oxygen and that generation of gases is a pretty refined system,” Rocha said. “However, there has been a lot of research recently going into not necessarily putting more animal waste into a digester, but improving the yield of biogas coming from that digester so that farmers have an additional form of income.”

Captured gases may be injected into natural gas pipelines to power renewable natural gas vehicles. Compared to more carbon-intensive fuels, vehicles fueled by biogas require between 49% and 359% less carbon, according to a prior study by CARB.

Rocha explained that dairy digesters do not prevent emissions from occurring, but they do prevent them from reaching the atmosphere, offsetting roughly 2.3 million megatons of GHG emissions from the atmosphere. However, high initial costs have limited the number of operations able to support a digester project.

“However, the CDFA also has the dairy digester research and development project, which offers loans and financial assistance to farmers to help overcome that,” Rocha said. “If you can overcome the financial barrier, there are also the barriers and challenges of maintenance and management of an anaerobic digester

because you’re essentially managing a tiny nuclear reactor.”

As America’s dairy capital, California produced almost 23 million tons of carbon dioxide in 2020, a CARB report stated. Repurposing this into a sustainable approach, the state produced the equivalent of 21 million gallons of diesel fuel at the start of 2023 in renewable biofuel.

## LOCAL ACHIEVEMENTS

Tulare County, the national leader in dairy commodities, is also leading the state in cutting GHG emissions, reaching 56% of its 2030 pollution reduction goal with a new reduction of 592,131 metric tons in 2021.

In response to CARB’s proposal to phase out funding for dairy digesters, Tulare County Supervisor, and dairy farmer Pete Vander Poel, traveled to Sacramento to lobby for continued funding.

“We have seen the number of dairy digesters in partnership through the LCFS grow. We currently have 40 operational digesters, methane digesters, in Tulare County, and we have 12 that are permitted and being constructed. So, they are approved and ready to get connected,” Vander Poel said at the CARB meeting in September.

Vander Poel further explained that the program has had a significant impact on the quality of life for families on the dairy farm as well as surrounding residents. The CDFA has awarded Tulare County with \$78 million in funding for digesters at 50 dairies.

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# DPR Proposes New Regulation, Community Members Push for Pesticide Notification



A sunrise view of an aerial crop duster flying low over a farm, spraying a field of potatoes. (Photo: B. Brown / Shutterstock.com)

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

The California Department of Pesticide Regulation proposed a regulation to notify the public prior to applications of restricted material pesticides a month after requesting that a Bakersfield pilot be barred from application.

In Sept., DPR responded to complaints of various illegal drift incidents which “harmed at least one person and damaged property.” DPR went on to explain they sought a court order to bar the defendant, John A. Slykerman of Agra Fly Inc., from aerial pesticide applications.

“The California Department of Pesticide Regulation is taking immediate action against Slykerman and Agra Fly for their repeated illegal actions that have injured people and property,” DPR Assistant Director Ken Everett said in a press release. “DPR’s quick action is needed to prevent further egregious violations.”

Following these allegations, Judge Thomas S. Clark of the Superior Court of Kern County temporarily ordered the company to stop aerial pesticide application.

Now, DPR has proposed to build on existing regulations for restricted material pesticides by requiring application plans for an agricultural commodity to be submitted through a new statewide information system 24 hours in advance. Soil fumigant-restricted materials must submit information 48 hours prior to application.

The push for pesticide notification in Kern County has been ongoing since the implementation of Assembly Bill 617, which was established to reduce exposure in communities most impacted by air pollution.

Several community members within the AB 617 subcommittee appealed to the Kern

County Board of Supervisors in August to voice concerns over collaborative differences with Kern County Agricultural Commissioner Glenn Fankhauser.

“He has told us that he will not do the pesticide notification until more people get sprayed, and he feels that there is no justification to do so until more people are in danger or until more reports are made,” advocate Gustavo Aguirre said at the meeting.

However, Fankhauser told Eyewitness News that the pesticide notification is a statewide program and, therefore, not a local issue. He pointed to state planning for a notification website that should be ready by 2025.

“That’s not a state regulation, that’s not a requirement to let people know, but that’s what the state came up with, they’re working on it,” Fankhauser told Eyewitness News.



Bakersfield College faculty and staff hosted a groundbreaking ceremony for a new Agricultural Sciences Building. (Photo: Valley Ag Voice)

## Bakersfield College Breaks Ground on Ag Sciences Building

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

“This is an exciting day,” was echoed by various Bakersfield College faculty, staff, and students at the groundbreaking ceremony of the college’s new Agricultural Sciences Building.

The ceremony was held on BC’s main campus on Nov. 30, and according to the Associate Vice President of Instruction and Dean of Agriculture at BC, Jessica Wojtysiak, the building has been a long-awaited desire of the agricultural department.

Wojtysiak noted that several community supporters helped fulfill that desire and facilitated this approach to agriculture education.

“Our programs are on the cutting edge of science, and this facility will serve as a hub for innovative research and learning,” Wojtysiak said, “Our agriculture pathway students can choose from seven disciplines, including agriculture science, forestry, and natural resources, plant science, agriculture business, ornamental horticulture, mechanized agriculture, and food science and technology.”

The agriculture department at BC is made up of 14 fulltime faculty as well as several adjunct professors. Wojtysiak explained that the expanding program has been recognized as the fifth-largest department

serving Hispanic agriculture students in the nation.

Measure J, which was passed in 2016, has played a major role in advancements at BC, supporting development through a \$502 million bond.

According to Tom Burke, chancellor of the Kern Community College District, one of the top spending priorities for Measure J from the bond oversight committee was the Agricultural Sciences Building.

“When Measure J passed, we were required to form a bond oversight committee, and Mr. Steven Murray with Murray Family Farms volunteered to come onto our bond oversight committee,” Burke said. “From the first day of our bond oversight committee, every meeting, the first question to me from Steve was, ‘When are we breaking ground on the agriculture building?’”

Agricultural Department Chair Heather Baltis is hopeful that the new building will improve teaching methods, curriculum delivery, and contribute to student success. Students also shared their excitement for the new facility and the opportunities it will add to their major.

“I see this new building as a greenhouse for our dreams. It is here that students just like me will nurture our passion for agriculture and watch it grow into something amazing,” plant science major Jesus Rojas said.

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USDA-trained dog Brodee paws at packages to alert a required inspection. (Photo: Valley Ag Voice)

## Pest Management

Continued from PAGE 1

D.C. every year to educate lawmakers and meet with our various federal agency partners, and so one of the things that they really talked about was pest prevention in California and the threats to agriculture and the tools that we needed to protect that,” Cregan said. “So that’s kind of where the dog teams came up.”

Parcels carrying agricultural materials are inspected to ensure that invasive pests are not brought into the state. However, agricultural material is often shipped without a designated marking, leaving mail carriers unaware of the contents of that package.

The dog team alerts when they detect plant material from an unmarked package, allowing inspectors to check its contents and assess its risk concerning pests or diseases — USPS requires approval to inspect from the shipper, handler or through a search warrant.

Libby Ouellette, Fresno County deputy agricultural commissioner, explained that the difference in training between the two dog teams prevents Rufus — who was rescued out of Victorville, California — from

Association] send a delegation back to [Washington]

inspecting USPS packages.

“Brodee came from the National Detection Dog Training Center in Newnan, Georgia, and Kaitie had to go to a multi-week training there. So, he went through the formal USDA program and the benefit of that is he can go to post offices and do work there,” Ouellette said.

Statewide, dog teams have intercepted 966 plant pests, including Caribbean fruit flies and reniform nematodes, from July 2021 to June 2022.

### IMPENDING THREATS

Record rainfall and flooding in California this year brought in an influx of pests, threatening various state commodities ranging from fruits to nuts. Bob Hill, owner of B&D Pest Control Inc. in Madera, told ABC 30 that the increased moisture supplied an ideal breeding ground for various insects.

“Everything’s damp, mulch underneath the mulch is damp, underneath rocks and stuff like that is damp. So it’s just a perfect breeding ground for the insects,” Hill said.

One of the most significant threats to the state’s citrus

industry is the spread of the huanglongbing disease carried by Asian citrus psyllids. After the initial detection of HLB in Ventura County, various quarantine measures have been implemented throughout the state.

In a press release, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service expanded its list of quarantined areas for ACPs to several portions of the Central Valley, including all of Fresno, Tulare, Kern, and San Luis Obispo counties, in addition to 18 other counties in California.

Cregan noted that one Asian psyllid was detected last month in Fresno County but was not carrying HLB.

APHIS also expanded quarantine measures for three fruit fly quarantines — the Mediterranean fruit fly, the Tau fruit fly, and the Queensland fruit fly. The department, along with the CDFA and Ventura and Los Angeles county ag commissioners, began applying safeguard measures and restrictions on the interstate movement of articles to prevent the spread of these fruit flies to non-infested areas.

According to a recent study by the University of California Merced and Davis, despite various types of integrated pest management, such as mating disruption, biological control, cultural control, and insecticides, the economic losses from pests in the state remain high.

Three major pests — codling moth, peach twig borer, and oriental fruit moth — will likely increase with higher temperatures, according to the study. Jhalendra Rijal, UC Cooperative Extension integrated pest management advisor and co-author of the study, explained that these pests significantly impact specialty crops.

“These three pests are notorious for infesting most of the walnut, almond, and peach orchards of California, causing extensive damages by reducing quality of fruits and nuts,” Rijal said in a UC news release.

### COUNTY MANAGEMENT

While all counties fall under the CDFA’s detection trapping program, agricultural commissioners implement various strategies to mitigate harmful pests. Kern County works in close collaboration with the CDFA, according to Cerise Montanio, deputy director at the Kern County Agricultural Commissioner’s office.

“We also collaborate with stakeholders in various capacities. Pest detection traps are placed in residential neighborhoods (homeowners), orchards, vineyards, farms, packing houses, and at various institutions and facilities where host crops can be found,” Montanio said in an email.

She noted that there are slight variations within each pest detection program. Still, the CDFA maintains the protocols for each initiative, including time frames for

trapping and specific trap placement.

The commissioner’s office works with the state to develop delimitation projects through intensive trapping to determine a given level of infestation.

If certain thresholds are met, there may be systematic treatments made to mitigate the pest infestation. The primary focus for Kern County’s detection programs includes the Asian citrus psyllid, European Grapevine Moth, Glassy-winged Sharpshooter, and general pest detection for fruit flies. The county also maintains a contract to perform Phytophthora ramorum program enforcement activities, primarily in nurseries, to mitigate the spread of the disease that causes Sudden Oak Death, Montanio explained.

Like Fresno County, Kern inspects parcel facilities such as FedEx, UPS, USPS, On-Trac, and facilities with nursery stock as they are considered high-risk locations where pests may be traveling. However, Cregan explained that, unlike Fresno County, Kern does not currently have dog detector teams for these inspections as it has not been written into their MOU with USPS.

In 2023, Kern County detected several Glossy-winged sharpshooters, but Montanio noted that the county is already deemed as partially infested. The GWSS generally targets grapes and can cause plant diseases such as leaf scorch and Pierce’s Disease by transmitting a bacterium.

The county has also had five ACP detections to date in 2023 and has implemented several trapping and delimitation projects in the site area to suppress the insect.

The federal Farm Bill funds most plant pest and disease management programs in California under section 7721. Through this section of the Plant Protection Act, the USDA dispersed over \$70 million in funding for 350 projects nationwide.

With the 2024 Farm Bill delayed, the amount of funding allocated for section 7721 — including dog detector teams — is unknown.

“These teams are paid for primarily through federal Farm Bill money,” Cregan said. “California, every year, [enters] in — it’s a competitive grant process — and so they put in a request for funding for our dog teams in California. And so that funding amount can vary every year depending on how USDA scores those grants and how they divide the money.”

Still, Rufus and Brodee will continue their work, acting as a line of defense between invasive pests and the Central Valley. Good boys!

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# CENTERED on the Gospel



(Photo: manit / Adobe)

# A Question and Answer

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

“Bone cancer in children, what’s that about? How dare you, how dare you create a world in which there is such misery that is not our fault, it’s not right, it’s utterly, utterly evil. Why should I respect a capricious, mean-minded, stupid god who creates a world that is so full of injustice and pain? That’s what I would say,” Stephen Fry, an actor and comedian, said in an interview on RTE One’s *The Meaning of Life*.

The question that Stephen Fry, along with many others, poses here is more than the question of why evil exists in the world. Fry elaborated on his statement saying, "Atheism is not just about them not believing there is a god, but on the assumption that if there is one – what kind of God is he? It's perfectly apparent that he's monstrous, utterly monstrous, and deserves no respect whatsoever, and the moment you banish him, your life becomes simpler, cleaner, and more worth living, in my opinion."

The issue, in Fry's estimation, is that God is not worthy of respect, worship, or even acknowledgment, and if we lived as if He did not exist, we would be better off.

What, then, should the Christian's response to such a sentiment be? Fortunately, a response older than Fry is available to us — "Shall a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? He who argues with God, let him answer it," Job 40:1 (Crossway Bibles, 2001). We cannot pretend to know what God might have asked Fry if he were in Job's position, but we can ask several questions based on the framework Fry poses in his question.

First, Fry assumes that this world is exactly as God intends it to be. As if it is not constantly changing and shifting. This is, of course, absurd. Have we not all read, “Now is the judgment of this world; now will the ruler of this world be cast out,” from John 12:31; or “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come,” from 2 Corinthians 5:17? Clearly the world we live in is not a perfect world, and God never claimed it is. Since the fall of man in Genesis 3, there has been a process of reconciliation to bring about the proper order.

Second, Fry seems to make several moral distinctions

here. First that it is good that people live without suffering or pain and second that there is, indeed, good. However, there is no substantiation for these claims. He, clearly, cannot appeal to a higher authority to argue for what may or may not be good. So, how then does he decide what is good? The fact remains that outside of God, one cannot establish a rational, cohesive, objective system to determine what is good or not. Or, as Sam Harris pointed out in his book, “However, if evil turned out to be as reliable a path to happiness as goodness is. . . It would no longer be an especially ‘moral’ landscape; rather it would be a continuum of well-being, upon which saints and sinners would occupy equivalent peaks,” (Harris, 2012).

Thirdly, what does Fry do with the suffering of Christ? Is he under the presumption that God has not suffered? One of the most common responses to Fry was, “The god Fry doesn’t believe in, I don’t believe in either,” and this is true! Fry, instead of taking a serious crack at the question, props up a strawman of his own making to argue against. He doesn’t contend with the idea of a God who entered human suffering to be a sacrifice so that we may be reconciled with our creator. But this is the very God we believe in. This is the very thing that makes Christianity so special and unique.

I would ask Fry to imagine a god opposite of the one he described, one who does not allow for evil of any kind upon his creation, where suffering was never thought of, much less experienced. Would he be able to be a part of that world? The fact of the matter is none of us would be. We all would fall short of that standard. The world Fry wants would be void of life. Is that kind of world truly better than the one we have?

**Please pray with me.**

Thank you, Lord, for the life we have been given, the breath we take, and the world we experience. From sunset to sunrise, Your glory shines all around us. As we begin this new year, we ask for your continual guidance so we may conform more and more to your image. Let us love and live like you did. In Jesus' mighty name, we pray, Amen.

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

**Harris, S. (2012).** *The Moral Landscape: How Science Can Determine Human Values.* Black Swan.

# SAVE-THE-DATE

## FOR THESE AGRICULTURE EVENTS

With the new year, California's diverse agricultural landscape will host several events for farmers, industry professionals, and stakeholders, ranging from educational sessions to commodity-specific conferences. The next two months' line-up of events introduce technological innovations, networking opportunities, and industry insights that will help shape the trajectory of California agriculture this year.

**ENTERTAINMENT**

On Sat. Jan 6, The California Bluegrass Association is hosting Earl Scruggs' 100th birthday at Buck Owen's Crystal Palace, honoring the bluegrass legend and his partner Lester Flatt through a special tribute. Scruggs was born on Jan 6, 1924, and became an inspiration and innovator of bluegrass music, manipulating the music language with the help of his banjo. Doors open at 5 p.m., and the show starts at 7:30 p.m.

This centenary event is part of CBA's annual Great 48 — a four-day music gathering with workshops, concerts, and showcases at the Bakersfield Marriot Convention Center on Jan 4 - 7.

## EDUCATION

The Kern County Farm Bureau's 18th annual Spray Safe Event will reach over 700 agriculture industry professionals. Spray Safe will be held on Jan 19 from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. with opportunities to receive Continuing Education credits.

On Feb 6, the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources is hosting the 2024 Plant and Soil Conference in Fresno to provide insight into new scientific knowledge for plants, soil, and the environment. Certified crop and pest control advisers may attend to earn continuing education units. This year, the event will occur over two days, Feb 6-7, at the DoubleTree by Hilton Convention Center on 2233 Ventura Street, Fresno, CA 93721.

The 2024 North Valley Nut Conference is dedicated to tree nut growers and will take place Jan 31 from 7 a.m. to 12 p.m. at the Silver Dollar Fairgrounds in Chico, California. Attendees can attend for free and have an opportunity to earn up to two hours of continuing education through DPR and four hours of Certified Crop Advisor Credits.

## CONFERENCES & TRADE SHOWS

Registration for the much-anticipated World Ag Expo is open for Feb 13-15 at the International Agri-Center in Tulare. The Ag Expo is one of the largest agricultural trade shows, featuring over 1,200 exhibitors on 2.6 million square feet of space. The multi-day event will feature demonstrations, new products, seminars, and agricultural tours.

Agriculture industry leaders interested in artificial intelligence are invited to attend the Smart Harvesting Summit at the Rancho Bernardo Inn in San Diego from Feb 21-22. Attendees will learn how to lower costs while maximizing output, yields, and profits.

Pistachio growers will meet for the 2024 Pistachio Industry Annual Conference hosted by the American Pistachio Growers on Feb 26-28 in Monterey. The conference partnered with hotels for the annual conference, and reservations are available after registering for the conference.



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