Kern County Ag Feels the Pinch as Land Values Drop

By Natalie Willis
Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Despite the recent 2023 Land Value summary from the U.S. Department of Agriculture showing that agriculture land value increased by 7.4% from 2022, Kern County’s ag land value remains on a steady decline. This decline has a marked peak in 2014 — the year the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) took over management of groundwater in the San Joaquin Valley portion of Kern County. SGMA provides the State Board with the authority to limit groundwater pumping, levee fees to cover the costs of their management, and to assess well use fees. That scenario should strike fear into the hearts of hardworking farmers. It is government intervention and restrictions on everyday farming operations. And unlike water districts led by landowner-elected directors who share the same concerns as water users, farmers will have very little influence over the decisions of the State Board’s groundwater managers. It is a prospect where Sacramento-based regulators likely view groundwater users as poorly behaved children. “When SIGMA was implemented, it actually took probably six months for the market to realize what was happening. Six to 12 months,” Mike Ming, Accredited Rural Appraiser and owner of Alliance Ag, said. “We reached a high of about $15,000 per acre for a district and lands in Kern County, and since then, it’s just been a steep decline down to somewhere around $100 an acre.”

In comparison, the USDA report shows that U.S. farm real estate value — a measurement of all land and buildings on a farm — averaged $4,080 per acre in 2023, up $280 from 2022. Cropland value increased by roughly 8% and pasture value increased 6.7%. The annual report is meant to provide a broad scope of the overall health of the national agriculture industry, but Ming explained that the ag economy is generally regionally specific.

“I mean we went from 3% to 8% loans in 12 months which is a shock,” Ming said. “I think there’s areas of the ag economy in the United States that are doing just fine… but I think that in California, because we do a lot of different crops that are not done across the United States, we’re feeling it a lot harder than say the Midwest.”

Declining commodity markets and increased interest rates have distinctly affected national agriculture, but ag value in midwestern states such as Iowa and Kansas have remained steady. California may not be seeing the same bottom line as commodity prices and interest rates are coupled and anchored by water restrictions.

NO WATER, NO VALUE
“Water is the key for every model that’s run now in the acquisition of agricultural properties, and it’s going to be that way going forward. Even more scrutiny is going to be placed on the water supply, the water resources that property has,” Ming said.

Staring Down a Third Strike

By Scott Hamilton
President, Hamilton Resource Economics

The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA) has presented a new and different set of challenges for water leaders. Achieving groundwater sustainability and thereby protecting the future of agriculture in Kern County will be hard. The Kern subbasin is now facing its third strike. Strike one was when DWR found its Groundwater Sustainability Plan to be incomplete. Strike two was when DWR deemed the revised plan as inadequate. The third strike confronting water leaders now is the possibility of the subbasin being put on probation — a condition where the State Water Resources Control Board takes over management of groundwater in the San Joaquin Valley portion of Kern County. SGMA provides the State Board with the authority to limit groundwater pumping, levee fees to cover the costs of their management, and to assess well use fees. That scenario should strike fear into the hearts of hardworking farmers. It is government intervention and restrictions on everyday farming operations.

And unlike water districts led by landowner-elected directors who share the same concerns as water users, farmers will have very little influence over the decisions of the State Board’s groundwater managers. It is a prospect where Sacramento-based regulators likely view groundwater users as poorly behaved children who need discipline. Some farmers in the Valley are contemplating legal action to prevent restrictions on groundwater pumping. However, even if they are successful, that does not make the numerous problems of groundwater overdraft go away. Without sustainable groundwater management, farmers will continue to drill deeper, more expensive wells and pump from greater depths until they cannot afford to pump, or the groundwater is gone. What is the path forward? Certainly, it requires the development of a new, pragmatic, and comprehensive water management plan for the subbasin that eliminates concerns with prior plans. That work is underway, led by Kristin Pittack of Rincon Consulting, the subbasin point of contact. But the develop-

EPA’s Draft Herbicide Strategy Faces Criticism

Over 200 agriculture groups oppose the agency’s early mitigation strategy.

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The Environmental Protection Agency is expected to release its 2024 Herbicide Strategy this year, enforcing regulations for agricultural pesticide use to protect endangered species. Opposition to the EPA’s herbicide strategy in favor of protecting listed species has arisen from farmers throughout the nation as the strategy proposes early mitigations for 900 species and critical habitats.

Its strategy is a mixture of population-level protections with a menu of mitigation options to lower the exposure of listed species to ag chemicals through spray drift, runoff, and erosion.

The EPA’s rationale for early mitigation before completing consultations with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is to efficiently utilize their resources in the consultations, thereby expediting their road to compliance.

The draft framework for the strategy was released in July and opened to public comment for 45 days. Rather than focusing on specific herbicides and species, the EPA proposed developing a multi-chemical, multi-species approach in compliance with the ESA’s requirements.
President’s Message

By Jenny Holtermann
President, KCFB

As the new year begins, we look at the new regulations and laws that are facing us. Hopefully, by the time you are reading this, you will have received your full update on how to tackle the new year. I have always found it helpful to look back at how far we have come in the previous year. This can help us further grow and understand the progress we have made.

Recently, the California Farm Bureau published the “By the Numbers Annual Report.” We have hard copies of this report at the Kern County Farm Bureau office; we are happy to provide you with it. It was a challenging year for farming, coming out of nearly three years of drought conditions. No one was able to predict the magnitude of the storms and flooding we faced in 2023. There are areas of our state and rural communities that still haven’t recovered. The Tulare Lake looks like it might just be a permanent lake yet again. The storms brought devastation to rural communities and the Farm Bureau was able to assist in securing $160 million for agriculture businesses impacted by the storm, as well as $95 million allocated in statewide support. Much of this was for temporary lake yet again. The storms brought devastation to rural communities and the Farm Bureau was able to assist in securing $160 million for agriculture businesses impacted by the storm, as well as $95 million allocated in statewide support. The Bureau was able to assist in securing $160 million for agriculture businesses impacted by the storm, as well as $95 million allocated in statewide support.

Through the storms and atmospheric hurricanes, we were able to capture and store significant amounts of water. Our state could have done better, but locally, I am proud of the farmers and water districts for their fast-acting ability to take advantage of the available water. Just look at the Kern Water Bank — their ability to bank over 61,000-acre feet of water far surpassed the capacity of Lake Isabella. Banking water through private projects, water district projects, and joint ventures is our future to be able to access more water. We were able to show the state just what we are capable of when provided with water. We must continue this momentum and share our abilities with Sacramento and DC.

Part of my mission these next two years is to share the stories of Kern County agriculture and the remarkable things we can do. If you came to the Bounty of Kern County you heard me talk about one of my favorite quotes, “Don’t let the shoes on carpet, tell the boots on the ground what to do.” Through your engagement and advocacy, we can get our boots on the carpet to share our story. For far too long we have let the shoes on the carpet tell our boots on the ground what to do.

In 2023, the Farm Bureau attended 123 governmental affairs committee meetings, 71 regulatory hearings, and countless legislative visits and meetings. In the last three months alone, your Kern County Farm Bureau board of directors and officer team has signed multiple letter campaigns, sat face-to-face with all our elected officials, and led three legislative farm tours bringing our elected officials to our family farms to hear the stories of our agriculture community. This is only the beginning. We know your boots on the ground are busy trying to keep farming. We are here to help you, protect you, equip you and prepare you to farm for the future. It is the transformation we must make together.

Executive Director’s Report

By Rachel Nettleton
Exec. Director, KCFB

The Kern County Farm Bureau is eagerly anticipating our 40th Annual Farm Day in the City event that has been educating our youth about agriculture for four decades. This event will take place at the Kern County Fairgrounds on Wednesday, March 22nd and Thursday, March 23rd from 8:30 am to 1 pm. The goal for this event is to provide 2nd – 4th grade elementary school students with hands-on, immersive experiences that focus on agriculture. Agricultural education is crucial in hopes to address common misconceptions among young students about the origins of their food. Many children believe their food only comes from the grocery store and that chocolate milk comes from brown cows. This event serves as a valuable opportunity to instill a deeper understanding of agriculture in our community starting at an early age.

During Farm Day in the City, students will engage with exhibits and presentations on diverse agricultural topics, including farm machinery, the variety of crops grown in the valley, animal agriculture, and other agriculture-related topics. Knowledgeable members of the local agricultural community will be on hand to share their insights and expertise by showcasing examples that are understandable to our youth.

This event is open to all 2nd – 4th grade students, including those from public, private, and homeschool backgrounds. Given the limited capacity for each day, schools are urged to submit their registration forms as soon as possible to secure their spot. As the famous saying goes, “It Takes a Village.” The success of this event relies on the support of our diverse agricultural community. If you have been an exhibitor in the past or are interested in participating this year, visit our website at kerncfb.com/farms-days-in-the-city. For those looking to contribute further, whether through an in-kind donation or sponsorship opportunity, you can also visit our website.

Join us in celebrating 40 years of Farm Day in the City, where we continue to educate and connect our youth to agriculture and its role in our everyday lives. Please email kcfb@kerncfb.com if you have any questions.

Young Farmers & Ranchers

By Christine Johnson
Chair, Kern County Young Farmers & Ranchers

Whether you realize it or not, you are impact- ing the next generation. For better or worse, your current attitudes and assumptions are shaping the way you interact with young people. Some choose to ignore the younger generation, citing the entitled attitudes and self-absorption that often characterizes young adults. Yet others dig deeper and see the energy, vitality, and positive impact cultivated within young adult groups such as the Young Farmers & Ranchers. I am convinced that partnerships between generations have the potential to foster innovation and mutual encouragement. My personal interactions with those at the Kern County Farm Bureau over the past several years support this conclusion. May I humbly suggest that it is the duty of older, seasoned individuals to mentor the next generation. Here are three reasons why it is a worthwhile endeavor:

1. While the term “mentor” may invoke the image of a formal setting, I believe that it simply implies intentionally directed personal encourage- ment. This may look like a conversation, phone call, text or taking the time for lunch. Here’s an idea: Share any professional development books, articles or podcasts that have helped you over the years. You may discover more common goals than you realize.

2. Let me assure you that you have the wisdom and skills necessary. Even if you do not consider yourself eloquent, outgoing or tech-savvy, others can learn from you. Have you ever navigated through a market downturn? Have you ever faced difficult financial choices or worked through legal or business decisions? Have you ever resolved an employee conflict? Others can learn from these expe- riences. Ask a young person what challenges they are currently dealing with in their career. Chances are you can point them in a helpful direction. Here’s a hint: Young professionals want to know how to grow in their career, deal with co-worker challenges, navigate the vast web of financial decisions, and balance work and personal life.

3. Expect mutual benefit. Young folks are more intuitive than you may realize, and likely there’s something they can help you improve. Millennials and Gen Z have grown up with technology — something they can help you improve. Millennials and Gen Z have grown up with technology — something they can help you improve. Millennials and Gen Z have grown up with technology — something they can help you improve. Millennials and Gen Z have grown up with technology — something they can help you improve.

The Kern Young Farmers and Ranchers Club is a great opportunity to support young people in agriculture. The success of this event relies on the support of our diverse agricultural community. If you are interested in staying updated on the latest activities of the Kern Young Farmers & Ranchers Club, please email or reach out to us! Be sure to save the date for our 4th Annual Clay Shoot at Five Dogs Range on March 16, 2024. Please consider sponsoring a station or team.

Tickets and sponsorship information can be found at https://kernyfr.square.site. We are always grateful for the support of our members and sponsors.

Email: KernYFR@KernCFB.com
Facebook: KernYFRCornrnersClayShootSign-Up; kernyfr.square site

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OPINION: Cash Cow

By Austin Snedden
Ranching Contributor,
Valley Ag Voice

Every business owner, regardless of industry, dreams of a more passive income, cash flow with less labor, and financial inputs. The cattle business is no different, sometimes we are not sure if we own the cows, or if the cows own us. There will no doubt be times when the ranching operation gives much more than it takes, and sometimes it takes more than it gives. With weather, economics, and varying cycles of cattle sector leverage, there will always be a fluctuation of unforeseen down times as well as unforeseen times of success. Since we can’t control the weather or the economy, and have very little control over what segment of the industry has leverage at any given time, we must focus on the things we can control.

For our region, coming out of multiple years of drought — God willing it keeps raining — most folks are dealing with a rebuilding phase. Ample grass and cattle prices that benefitted the cow-calf sector creates a lot of incentive to build numbers. But attempting to rebuild at a faster than normal pace can create some inefficiencies in your factory (cowherd). In order to take advantage of market sector leverage, creates a lot of incentive to build numbers. Additional replacement heifers, the fastest way to build numbers is to keep open cows — cows that didn’t bring a calf to the branding fire — or by purchasing cows. The downside to these two options in the long run, is that there is a good chance you are keeping or adding an animal that has suboptimal fertility. Although rebreeds may go on to be great cows, there is no way of knowing whether she missed a calf because of suboptimal fertility, suboptimal mothering instincts, or something that was no fault of her own. Besides the obvious downside to keeping a less efficient animal, there is also the risk that you will be propagating future females that are biologically, or genetically predisposed to have suboptimal fertility, mothering instincts, or later developing sexual maturity, and these females may end up in your replacement pen in years to come.

With a strong market, and ever-increasing fixed costs, I encourage every producer to responsibly grow their cowherd to match their forage resources. If you are open to suggestions from someone most likely dumber than you, I would tell you to not outgrow your garage resources in a race for numbers because additional feed and supplementation will eat your bottom line. When you achieve your comfortable carrying capacity, call hard based on fertility first. This will put you in a position where you are propagating the most efficient animals and building a cowherd predisposed to optimal fertility and mothering instinct, placing you in the strongest position for the next environmental or economic cycle. Lastly, source bulls for your cows that come from a herd pushed hard for efficiency and fertility, regardless of breed. Ranching is challenging enough, make sure you build a herd of cash cows that work for you, and not the other way around.
Almonds Face Potential Recession, Industry Remains Optimistic

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The 2023 Almond Board Conference highlighted production trends and the outlook for the industry. Clarice Turner, President, and CEO of the Almond Board of California explained that the almond industry has a history of adapting to oftentimes volatile market values.

“What is it that can accelerate our rebound from these cycles?” Turner said. “In most cases, it was innovation and farming and packaging, in that case, and of course a better macro environment and, as Mother Nature smiles on us, a decent crop.”

The state of the industry for 2023 has faced adversity from higher inflation rates and unfavorable weather conditions. According to economist David Magaña from Rabobank, high-interest rates have a notable effect on economic growth prospects, but some estimates for 2024 show that year-by-year variations will remain in positive territory and a soft landing is possible.

Still, the past few seasons have been challenging for almond growers, and other estimates are not as positive.

“But I’ve seen some other estimates for the US economy that are not so optimistic,” Magaña said. “There is a light probability that in the first half of 2024, we see a recession, not too deep and hopefully not too long.”

Magaña explained that the industry’s future will not look grim forever, and it is only a matter of time before the market turns more favorable.

“I’m still optimistic about the future of the industry in the long run,” Magaña said.

On a global scale, almonds have been faring reasonably well, with the Almond Board grading the industry at a B average overall in tariffs and technical issues. In relation to tariffs, the industry saw a positive change when India’s retaliatory tariffs were lifted and the UK, and Philippines tariff suspension was requested. However, retaliatory tariffs for China and Turkey remain.

Removing the trade barrier in India has already positively influenced the market, with the value of U.S. almond exports expected to reach $1 billion in 2024. Overseas markets are becoming increasingly prominent in the success of almond operations in California. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, two-thirds of the state’s almonds are exported and remain a crucial factor for California producer revenue.

The USDA’s Foreign Agricultural Service will be vital for almond exporters to open and expand markets. Recently, FAS identified new market opportunities in Italy and Bulgaria which is expected to grow the industry by millions of dollars.

FAS is working to increase the market size to fulfill the USDA’s goals of diversifying the international market for American farmers.

Superior Court Judge Approves Fong’s Congressional Bid

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

A Sacramento Superior Court Judge ruled that Assemblyman Vince Fong can run for the 20th Congressional seat. After his Congressional bid was rejected by California Secretary of State Shirley Weber, Fong filed a lawsuit to reverse the decision. The hearing was held on Dec. 28 at 1:30 p.m. Judge Shellyanne W.L. Chang presided over the case, ruling that Fong’s name will appear on the November ballot. The argument presented against Fong’s inclusion in the ballot cited California Election Code 8803(b), which states that candidates are prohibited from “filting for more than one office at the same election.”

However, the argument did not persuade the court as the language of 8803(b) should not be read in isolation and is ultimately inapplicable to Fong. Plainly, the court ruled that it can not be used as a reason to preclude him from the primary ballot for Congress.

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Newsom’s Budget Proposal Gives $33 Million to DPR

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Gov. Gavin Newsom introduced his 2024-25 state budget proposal, reflecting $18.4 billion in budgetary reserves including the $11.1 billion in the Rainy-Day Fund. The budget also approved a $33.3 million increase in funds and 117 new positions at the Department of Pesticide Regulation.

This increased funding comes predominantly from an increase in the pesticide mill fee responsible for roughly 80% of DPR’s funding. Further, in 2021 Newsom proposed a $2.6 million statewide pesticide notification system project which has since been unveiled by the California DRP.

The notification system has been adamantly opposed by the California Cotton Growers and Growers Association as well as several other agricultural organizations and farmers. CCGA president Roger Isom explained that the regulation should be limited to those impacted by the application itself, not open to any person who wishes to sign up.

The regulation requires application plans for an agricultural commodity to be submitted through the statewide information system 24 hours in advance, while soil fumigant-restricted materials must submit information 48 hours beforehand.

Along with increased funding to DPR, Newsom’s budget plan includes funding to combat the current fruit fly threat to agriculture. In a press release, California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass explained that the $22 million provided to combat the fruit fly invasion is appreciated.

“We appreciate Gov. Gavin Newsom recognizing the importance of investing $22 million to combat the fruit fly invasion and protect our state’s critical farming economy,” Douglass said. “We also hope the governor and the Legislature will ease regulatory burdens affecting farmers and ranchers producing our food supply. And just as our farm families must balance their budgets, we hope our political leaders recognize that it is time for California to get its fiscal house in order as well.”

Third Strike

Continued from PAGE 1

The Kings subbasin, which developed an acceptable groundwater sustainability plan and thereby was one of the few subbasins in the southern San Joaquin Valley to avoid the risk of probation, developed a realistic estimate of their overdraft early in the SGMA process and divided that shortage between their GSAs in a mutually agreeable, but not likely comfortable, manner. From that clear articulation of the problem, the GSAs knew their responsibility and could begin to develop realistic plans to address the problems.

This is a difficult process. Once the consultants generate the data regarding a realistic estimate of the overdraft in the subbasin, that data needs to be used to gain knowledge and understanding, and from that shared understanding there is a possibility of trust.

The generation of trust and the will to work together are essential if a solution to this shared problem is to be developed.

Kern County has a long history of great water leaders. From the earliest days of Miller and Haggin, that leadership has not been without controversy. The leaders tackled very big issues with outcomes that have determined the fate of the county. In more recent decades, water leadership has required the coming together of groups with shared interests, despite in some cases, also having long running grievances. The development of the Friant Division of the Central Valley Project and the formation of the Kern County Water Agency were very significant events where water leaders came together to make decisions and commitments that would fundamentally alter the future of the county. In more recent years, the county saw the development of collaborative projects like the Pioneer Project, the Kern Water Bank and numerous other water banking programs that have improved the reliability of water supply for the county. Collaboration makes solutions possible. Better up!
CARB Postpones Enforcement of Zero-Emission Trucks

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The California Air Resources Board will not be enforcing reporting requirements for high priority and drayage fleets under the Advanced Clean Fleets rule, which went into effect this year. Prior to the postponement, the California Trucking Association filed a formal complaint on Dec. 16, explaining that the rule violates the Constitution's Commerce Clause.

CARB is concerned that, in their efforts to reach zero-emissions by enforcing standards on high priority and drayage fleets, CARB represents a vast overreach that threatens the security and predictability of the nation's goods movement industry.

The postponement of the regulation came on Dec. 27 through a letter to CTA. CARB requested a redemption waiver from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency on Nov. 17 and has agreed not to enforce the ACF regulation until the waiver is granted or the EPA determines a waiver is not necessary. If CARB is granted either option, enforcement of the regulation is expected to continue.

CARB initially approved the ACF regulation in Oct. to implement a gradual transition toward zero-emission medium and heavy-duty vehicles as part of Governor Gavin Newsom's goal to fully transition all trucks that travel across the state to zero-emissions technology by 2045.

Once fully enacted, the ACF regulation will affect growers with $50 million or more in gross annual revenue or who own, operate, or control 50 or more vehicles of 8,500 lbs. As such, several growing operations in the Central Valley will fall under the regulation as High Priority Fleet.

With the current postponement, no preventative measures are in place to restrict the addition of new internal combustion engine vehicles. The board will also not enforce the “Useful Life” rule which requires model trucks 17 years or older to be removed from service.

Herbicide Strategy

Continued from PAGE 1 specifically on the use of weedkillers.

Roughly 226 ag interest groups and businesses such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture argued that the strategy is overly complex and poses a costly burden on producers. During the comment period, the USDA explained that the herbicide strategy conveys a complex approach to pesticide application that has major implications for farmers and ranchers.

“USDA believes that EPA can protect species and minimize adverse consequences to growers and will be more effective at doing so if sufficient public discussions and engagement opportunities are provided. And we believe many agricultural stakeholders will struggle to make sense of and comply with the complex mitigations described in the framework,” the USDA’s letter said.

The main issue for growers is that the EPA’s framework calls for mitigation measures and “efficacy points” rather than identifying specific requirements to follow. This makes the process of implementing conservation practices tailored to specific regions or crops arduous and expensive.

INTO THE FRAMEWORK

As a result of the Endangered Species Act, the EPA has faced scrutiny from environmental groups for not meeting its requirements in due time, resulting in a long history of legal battles. So, the overly complex herbicide strategy was released to meet the ESA’s requirements and avoid future lawsuits.

With court-mandated deadlines looming over the EPA, the framework it released attempts to encapsulate every region’s pesticide usage and needs with a one-size-fits-all strategy rather than exercising compliance through an individualized pesticide and species approach.

Mitigation strategies include grassed waterways, cover crops, soil incorporation, and water retention systems. However, growers with fields over 1,000 feet away from listed species habitats may be exempt from runoff or erosion mitigation.

Drift mitigation strategies mainly focus on spray drift buffers, the size of which is dependent on application equipment and the level of species impact. Other strategies for runoff and erosion mitigation would assign a value to the chemical, crop, and the listed species in question.

The California Farm Bureau also filed comments with the agency, explaining that the state leads in agricultural production with more than 400 commodities.

“People across the country and around the world rely on California agriculture, as its local economies throughout the state,” CFFB said. “Our growers face unique pest challenges that require complex, time-sensitive decisions about how to protect their crops, while also protecting natural resources and human health. They do this while facing the strictest regulations in the nation.”

The farm bureau also noted that the draft framework does not offer any “mitigation menu options” that are relevant to California growers.

Throughout the 1.12 thousand comments submitted to the EPA, the common consensus is that the strategy is too complex, costly, and imposes significant regulatory burdens for millions of U.S. agriculture producers.

The Center for Biological Diversity also commented on the framework and is notably one of the original plaintiffs who sued the EPA for non-compliance.

“In a few years, there will be an herbicide, fungicide and insecticide strategy in place, and multiple other programmatic frameworks in place as well. What happens when a farmer wants to apply an herbicide, fungicide, and insecticide at the same time? It’s just going to start to get really complicated really quickly,” CBD wrote.

As the EPA reviews multiple public comments, the release date of a formal herbicide strategy is unknown.
Empowering Women in Agriculture, CWA’s Impact

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

In the heart of Central Valley’s agricultural landscape, a group of remarkable women is making strides in the traditionally male-dominated field of agriculture. Lorna Roush, former president of the California Women for Agriculture, is a fifth-generation farmer and shares her family’s long-standing history with agriculture, dating back to 1886.

Roush joined CWA at the behest of her mother when she took the reins of Schultz Ranching—her family’s almond, wine grape, and pistachio operation. She emphasized the importance of generational continuity in farming and revealed her diverse roles, from office management to overseeing safety on the ranch.

Roush’s generational background and dynamic role in her family operation showcase the multifaceted nature of women’s contributions to the agricultural sector. She joined the Central Valley Chapter of CWA shortly after taking over the office.

“I went in actually not knowing anybody and that was different, but it’s a very unique group of women to where you always feel welcome,” Roush said.

The group was formed to promote awareness of legislation and improve agriculture education, but Roush explained that CWA is open to all women from any industry.

“We have women from all aspects of industries and what we try to do is give confidence,” Roush said. “We get them knowledge, we educate them and give them opportunities to speak out and be confident when they go into, you know, speaking arrangements or one-on-one conversations.”

Nanette Simonian, current president of the Central Valley Chapter, further explained that legislative advocacy is a main point of focus for the group. Members of CWA visit the state legislature in May every year to advocate for necessities needed to stay farming as well as opposing bills that seek to harm it. The group also advocates in Washington, armed with a list of bills to discuss and explain the agricultural perspective.

“You have to talk and visit with the legislator you’ve got to be able to have friendships on both sides of the aisles...[because] I think a lot of legislators don’t understand farming,” Simonian said.

Like Roush, Simonian grew up in agriculture with her father’s family owning a vegetable farming, rotational crop operation, and her mother’s background in dairy production.

“I like to say I was born into it...it was in my blood to be on the production side of ag,” Simonian said.

She began college as a political major before switching to agronomy and plant science, which had become like second nature throughout her life. Simonian explained that the ag industry is seeing increased amounts of women in the industry, a stark contrast from being one of two women in the classroom.

“When I was starting out in the industry, there might have been a handful of us, maybe eight of us out in the industry — and this is back in the late 80s early 90s — now there’s a whole bunch of us out there,” Simonian said. “So, the climb of women into the ag field has been tremendous in my lifetime. I’ve seen it across the country, and it’s really made a big shift.”

Roush added that groups like CWA and others such as the Farm Bureau and Western Growers understand that women can perform just as well as men. The proper education and confidence will carry them far in the industry.

“I walk in with confidence, educated, and if I’m not educated, I ask,” Roush said. “That is something these groups like California Women for Ag have built — that confidence to not be afraid to ask and give your opinion and speak out. Once that happens, the doors start opening.”

Organizations like CWA play a crucial part in empowering women and advocating for the industry’s interests. As women continue to make significant contributions to agriculture, their impact on the industry’s future is undeniable.
CA Overtime Law Hinders Farmworker Income

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

After California passed agricultural overtime law AB 1066 in 2016, farmworkers earned $6 million to $9 million less than they would have made without the legislation. According to a study by Alexandra Hill, UC Cooperative Extension specialist and assistant professor in UC Berkeley’s Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, AB 1066 led to sizeable decreases in weekly working hours and earnings, which employers were forced to restrict to avoid paying higher overtime rates.

The law, implemented on Jan. 1, 2022, requires any work performed by California crop workers that exceeds 12 hours in one day to be compensated for twice the regular pay rate. Prior to its passing, California ag workers received overtime pay for working over 60 hours per week, but the new law changed overtime to over 40 hours.

Hill’s research found that the law may not benefit the workers it aimed to protect as it results in lower pay, and workers with families depending on the lost income to cover living expenses may need to look for additional employment opportunities.

“At one extreme, if individual worker hours and wages remain unchanged after the laws are implemented, workers would benefit from higher incomes for the same time at work,” Hill said. “At another extreme, if employers reduce hours to remain below the new thresholds, worker incomes could fall, making workers who value the extra income more than additional leisure time worse off.”

In the years following the phase-in of this overtime law, agricultural employers followed suit in reducing worker hours, hiring additional workers, and investing in technology. Meanwhile, workers who used to earn higher weekly earnings decreased by roughly one-third, and most workers have shifted to lower earnings from $400 to $500 a week.

“Too put these earnings changes in context, the 2020 California minimum wage for larger employers was $14 per base hour or $21 per overtime hour. This implies that a $100 decrease in weekly earnings would occur with a reduction of seven base, or five overtime, hours in a week,” Hill said.

Before the law was passed, employers expressed concerns that the new law would not only hinder farm production but would ultimately hurt their employees. A study conducted by Highland Economics predicted that AB 1066 would reduce farmworkers’ incomes and farm production — thereby harming the economy.

Hill noted that the decrease in average wages might be a positive change for those who desire more leisure time and could also improve workplace safety. Still, it is a detriment to workers who depend on the additional income.

A similar law was enacted on Jan. 1 in New York, increasing overtime pay for any work over 56 hours, a decrease from 60 hours last year. The law will utilize a similar “phase-in” process until reaching the overtime threshold limit of 40 hours by 2023.

New York farmers have expressed concerns over this law and have already begun reducing farmworkers’ hours.

Fortifying Businesses Against California’s Legal Storms

Provided by FormForce, Inc.

The Legal Landscape

In the ever-turbulent realm of California’s employment laws, businesses face a relentless onslaught of legal challenges. The state’s stringent labor regulations have set the stage for a battlefield where companies are besieged by labor disputes, wage theft allegations, and the daunting specter of class-action lawsuits. This high-stakes environment has been exacerbated by recent court decisions, further intensifying the scrutiny on employers.

The PAGA Factor

A significant element in this legal fray is the Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA). This legislation has shifted the dynamics of employment law, empowering employees to file lawsuits for labor code violations not just for themselves but on behalf of their peers, turning individual grievances into collective legal crusades. High-profile cases like Williams v. Superior Court and O’Connor v. Uber Technologies, Inc. underscore the financial gravity of PAGA, with settlements reaching millions and casting a long shadow over corporate bank accounts.

The Strategic Defense

Amidst this formidable landscape stands FormForce, a robust digital fortress designed to safeguard businesses from the legal tempest. This comprehensive document and business management solution serves as a beacon of compliance, delivering a suite of tools that fortify a company’s defenses on several fronts.

Compliance Reinforcement

FormForce acts as the first line of defense, ensuring adherence to labor laws with meticulous tracking of employee hours, break management, and payroll records—key factors in mitigating wage theft claims.

Streamlined Communication

Recognizing that information is a powerful ally, FormForce enhances internal dialogue, enabling swift and effective dissemination of company policies and updates, thus ensuring a well-informed workforce and transparent compliance efforts.

Accountability Enhancement

With FormForce, accountability is not left to chance. It provides the means to monitor employee performance, document training, and maintain comprehensive records, thereby arming businesses with the data needed to repel accusations of negligence or malpractice.

Protection Against PAGA

In the minefield of PAGA litigation, FormForce is an indispensable shield, maintaining records and compliance that are critical in deflecting PAGA claims and the associated financial penalties.

The Path Forward

The narrative is clear for California’s employers: the integration of FormForce into their operations is not just beneficial; it’s imperative. As a paperless, cloud-based solution, FormForce not only aligns businesses with current regulations but also establishes a robust culture of compliance. It’s a proactive step towards inoculating against the unpredictable waves of litigation, ensuring that a company’s legal diligence is as strong as its commercial ambitions.

As businesses chart their course through California’s challenging legal waters, FormForce stands out as the ultimate protector—equipping them with the necessary arsenal to confront the battleground of employment litigation and emerge not just unscathed, but triumphant.

Don’t leave your business exposed to the legal storms—fortify with FormForce.

For more information and a demo, visit FormForceNow.com
20th Congressional Candidates on Central Valley Ag

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

With the 2024 March primaries quickly approaching, the Valley Ag Voice sent questionnaires to the candidates of the 20th and 22nd Congressional districts to discuss policy stances for the agriculture industry.

Candidates David Giglio (R), Marissa Wood (D), and Kyle Kirkland (R) shared their views on agriculture and water access in the valley.

David Giglio,
20th Congressional candidate

“I am the only candidate in this race who has a detailed and comprehensive plan for a long-term solution to the West’s ongoing water crisis. I intend to work alongside President Trump to build national support for solving this crisis so that we can utilize national defense funding to ensure all aspects of the plan are implemented. I plan to be a constant advocate for our farmers and ranchers and use my office as a bully pulpit to educate the nation on why protecting California’s agricultural industry is something that every American should care about. Doing so is a matter of national security.”

“One of my top priorities will be introducing legislation that would allow Congress to reassert its authority over the EPA. Unelected and unaccountable bureaucrats should not have the power to unilaterally draft and enforce rules and regulations that hamper the ability of our farmers to do their jobs. Congress must codify the Trump Administration’s interpretation of the WOTUS rule to reign in the EPA.”

Kyle Kirkland,
20th Congressional candidate

“Agriculture is vital to our economy, our quality of life, and our national security. We must create policies that support agricultural businesses, helping them to thrive and pass on their legacy to future generations. Washington does not understand the needs of the farm community - I do. I will fight to reduce suffocating government regulations along the Delta so that less waste is dumped into the water and the need to “flush” said waste out to the sea is minimized.”

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See CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES on PAGE 9

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See CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES on PAGE 9

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 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!
so that when issues arise, we can work together.

“I will work towards improving water storage and delivery systems to ensure efficiency and reliability. I am committed to fighting for policies prioritizing agricultural water needs, ensuring that our farms have reliable access to the resources crucial for our crops and cattle. I understand the importance of streamlining regulations to make them more farmer-friendly and ensuring our voices are heard loud and clear when making decisions. My goal is to ensure that we not only preserve our rich farming heritage but also strengthen it for future generations.”

“Our land is our legacy, and taking care of it is as essential as yielding crops from it. I understand the delicate balance we must maintain between nurturing the environment and meeting our agricultural needs. I believe in problem-solving, and this includes finding practical and sensible solutions that safeguard our natural resources while ensuring our farms remain productive and competitive. I am committed to advocating for policies that strike this balance effectively—policies that recognize the importance of our environment but also acknowledge the realities of farming.”

Marissa Wood, 20th Congressional candidate

“Water is a top priority for the Central Valley. Water shortage issues extend beyond the drought. The devastating wildfires plaguing the state demand we build up and manage our water storage capabilities to meet the needs of individuals, families, farms, and businesses. Equity and accountability are essential for all governing water agencies. The idea that one can profit from our shared resource of water is a large part of the problem. All stakeholders, farmers (family and corporate) and rural communities must have an equal voice in the allocation of our water.”

“I am well aware that the agricultural production from the Central Valley literally feeds the world. I intend to keep lines of communication open and to solve the issue. I always tell my students that while I am an excellent teacher, I do not know everything. Together we will find the answer. I would never profess to know everything about agriculture issues here in the valley, but I will promise, as I do with my students, to work together to find our answers.”

“I know that the use of pesticides most times carries a negative connotation. As I have lived through the use of pesticides I know that when applied correctly and with accountability to regulations, they do not harm the environment and the local community members.”

TOP CONTENDERS

Two top contenders for the 20th district — Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux and Assemblyman Vince Fong — missed the deadline for the Valley Ag Voice questionnaire.

Sheriff Mike Boudreaux, 20th Congressional candidate

Sheriff Boudreaux detailed his thoughts on water policy through his campaign website.

“Over the course of the last 30 years, Washington, Sacramento, and radical environmental allies have repeatedly developed policies to worsen droughts afflicting the San Joaquin Valley and short-change our community during heavy storms by letting water flush out into the ocean rather than capturing it for use by our farms and communities.”

“I support reducing barriers to the construction of additional dams and reservoirs, increasing investment in water capture technologies. I also support renewing the key provisions of the Water Infrastructure Improvements for the Nation (WIFIN): Act of 2016 to ensure that Federal water managers are using the most cutting-edge science to guide decisions of when to pump water south of the Delta to our Valley.”

Assemblyman Vince Fong, 20th Congressional candidate

The assemblyman’s campaign website also details his stance on water policy in the valley.

“The Central Valley is highly regarded as the world’s most productive agricultural region because historically, we have been able to provide abundant, affordable water to irrigate millions of acres of farmland.”

“Unfortunately, misguided environmental laws have routinely chosen to value small fish over farmers and communities. These laws have routinely chosen to value small fish over farmers and communities. These laws have made the difficult situation much worse, and recently passed regulations by the state to regulate groundwater will create even further challenges in the future.”

“Agriculture is the foundation of our Valley’s economy and I have been fighting for over a decade to roll back restrictions that threaten to dry up our farms and devastate our economy. As an Assemblyman, I will continue this work in Sacramento to restore common-sense priorities and get our community the water it needs.”

Secretary of State Finalizes Central Valley Candidates

A look at who’s on the ballot for 2024.

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Following the Sacramento Superior Court’s decision to follow Assemblyman Vince Fong on the ballot for both the 32nd Assembly district and 20th Congressional district, the secretary of state released the final candidate list.

Several candidates from the Central Valley are vying for local and federal seats, which have a distinct impact on local agriculture.

CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES

The state’s agriculture industry has a large stake in Congressional elections as these legislators are primarily responsible for drafting and approving farm bills. Local representatives have an opportunity to expand crop protection, water rights, and other valuable legislative actions to improve the lives of Central Valley farmers.

REP. 20TH DISTRICT

After former Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy resigned from Congress, the 20th district seat opened, bringing in a slew of seasoned and novice politicians. Central Valley voters will choose from 11 candidates come March 5.

The finalized candidate list includes:

• Private Security Guard Andy Morales (D)
• Central Valley Assem. Vince Fong (R)
• Teacher Marisa Wood (D)
• Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux (R)
• Farmer and Businessman Stan Ellis (R)
• Small Business Owner Matthew Stoll (R)
• Business Owner Kyle Kirkland (R)
• Mayor/Broker/Contractor Kelly Kulikoff (R)
• Business Owner Alexandra Macedo (R)
• Board Dir. and Scientist Ben Dewell (No Pref)
• Businessman T.J. Esposito (No Pref)

REP. 21ST DISTRICT

For voters in the 21st Congressional District — which includes parts of Fresno and Tulare counties — options are limited to the incumbent and an opponent.

• Incumbent and Farmer Jim Costa (D)
• Valley Business Owner Michael Maher (R)

REP. 22ND DISTRICT

Senator Melissa Hurtado will challenge current representative David Valadao and two others for the 22nd seat, covering parts of Kings, Kern, and Tulare Counties. Each candidate has a unique connection to agriculture, ranging from direct involvement in the industry to policy influence.

• Incumbent/Congressman David Valadao (R)
• Senator Melissa Hurtado (D)
• College Teacher & Former Assem. Rudy Salas (D)
• Rancher/Businessman Chris Mathys (R)

ASSEMBLY CANDIDATES

California assembly members have a unique opportunity to advocate for agricultural initiatives and push bills toward the governor’s desk. Committee members of the California State Assembly on Agriculture also have the ability to investigate and study any bills relating to agriculture, chemicals, commodities, and commissions.

DISTRICT 31

There are two candidates for the 31st Assembly district, encompassing a large portion of Fresno County.

• Mayor of Lindsey Hilpoltz A. Cerros (D)
• Education Board Trustee Ruben Macareno (D)
• Labor Organizer Angel Ruiz (D)
• Business Owner Kevin Salinas (R)
• Senator Melissa Hurtado (D)

DISTRICT 32

The current incumbent for the 32nd Assembly seat, Vince Fong, is unopposed.

DISTRICT 33

Following Assemblymember Devon Mathis’ decision not to seek re-election for his final term, five candidates are running for the 33rd Assembly district, which includes Fresno, Kings, and Tulare Counties.

• Mayor of Kingsburg Joe Rice (D)
• Farmer David Fluhart (R)
• LA County Commissioner Ricardo Ortega (D)

DISTRICT 34

Assemblyman Tom Lackey is running for re-election in the 34th district which includes areas of Kern, Los Angeles, and San Bernardino Counties.

• Assem. and Family Doctor Jasmeet Baines (D)
• Sm. Business Owner Alexandria Macedo (R)

KERN COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

Local county supervisors also significantly impact local agriculture by overseeing certain programs and annually approving a budget for the Agriculture and Measurement Standards. The Kern County Board of Supervisors plays an important role in agriculture and farming practices and has the authority to appoint the agricultural commissioner.

FIRST DISTRICT

• Incumbent Philip Peters
• Kern Board of Education Trustee Mary Little
• Farmer David Fluhart

FOURTH DISTRICT

• Incumbent David Couch
• Delano City Council Veronica Cruz Vasquez
• Delano Vice Mayor Salvador Solatorio-Ruiz
• Wasco Vice Mayor Alex Garcia

FIFTH DISTRICT

• Incumbent Leticia Perez
• District Dir. for 35th Assembly, Kimberly Salas
• Paramedic Darren Amos
• Businessesman David Abbasi
**By Valley Ag Voice Staff**

The race for the 22nd district seat includes incumbent Congressman David Valadao (R), Chris Mathys (R), Senator Melissa Hurtado (D), and Rudy Salas (D).

**Congressman David Valadao, 22nd Congressional candidate**

“I’ve introduced the WATER for California Act and will continue to push for reliable water access for our farms and rural communities. The WATER for California Act would require the Central Valley Project (CVP) and State Water Project (SWP) to be operated consistent with the 2019 biological opinions, ensure CVP and SWP water stakeholders receive the water they contract and pay for, provide eligibility for funding for the Shasta Enlargement Project, and reauthorize the successful surface water storage project program from the WIIN Act. The House has passed this legislation as part of the FY24 Energy and Water Appropriations Bill, and I will continue working to move this legislation forward.”

“Our farmers are some of the best stewards of our environment, and they know better than most how to implement smart conservation practices that allow food to safely and consistently stock our grocery store shelves. We must take necessary steps to reduce pollution, ensure clean air and water, and protect our environment for future generations so that we can promise a healthy, food-secure future to our children and their children to follow.”

“As Congress’ only dairy farmer, I have firsthand experience with the kinds of issues our agriculture community faces. My team and I have regular meetings with stakeholders in our agriculture industry and an open line of communication with many of the farmers, ranchers, and producers in our district. Last year, I brought both the Agriculture and Natural Resources Committees to the Valley to give our farmers a seat at the table and make sure their voices were heard not just by me, but by members from across the country.”

**Chris Mathys, 22nd Congressional candidate**

“As a cattle rancher, I understand the needs and concerns of farmers and ranchers. I will support and sponsor legislation that represents the concerns and needs of our agricultural community.”

“The Sustainable Groundwater Management Act has been a detriment to our farmers and has generated unnecessary bureaucracy and regulation. Framers should take priority when it comes to access to water. We were here first and should not be penalized due to residential development. Our water must stay here in the valley and not be sold or transferred to support new subdivisions.”

“Consumer demand requires quality agricultural products. In order to make this happen we must have full access to herbicides and pesticides. We are competing with foreign countries where there are no regulations and we cannot afford further restrictions on pesticide use. Farmers and ranchers are far better protectors of the environment than the government ever will be.”

**OTHER CONTENDERS**

Senator Melissa Hurtado and former Assemblyman Rudy Salas missed the deadline period for the questionnaire.

**Senator Melissa Hurtado, 22nd Congressional candidate**

On her campaign website, Hurtado highlighted her stance on water policy.

“Melissa Hurtado understands that a clean and reliable water supply is essential for Valley families and our agricultural economy. She is running for Congress to improve our water delivery systems and ensure safe and dependable water supplies. In the State Senate, Melissa won $200 million to repair California’s water conveyance canals that deliver drinking water to communities and sustain the state’s leading agricultural economy.”

“(Melissa) co-authored and helped shape the Safe and Affordable Clean Drinking Water Act and secured $15 million to address failing water systems to deliver safe and clean drinking water to communities in the southern Central Valley. Senator Hurtado also worked to obtain $130 million in yearly state funding to secure safe drinking water in our most vulnerable communities.”

“In Congress, Melissa Hurtado will build on her record as a fierce advocate for the Valley who can deliver real results to improve the Valley’s water supplies.”

**Rudy Salas, 22nd Congressional candidate**

Rudy Salas also detailed his priorities on his campaign website.

“Rudy Salas secured funding to construct new clean water wells across the Central Valley and fought for the historic $7.5 billion water bond that invested entirely in water infrastructure.”

“David Valadao may say he’s good on water, but he voted against bringing millions of dollars for clean water infrastructure to the Central Valley. Over 900,000 Californians don’t have access to clean drinking water.”

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**Farm Flock Losses Climb as Avian Flu Outbreak Spreads**

**By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert**

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

Despite on-farm biosecurity efforts to protect the state’s poultry flocks, outbreaks of a highly contagious strain of avian influenza have spiked markedly this winter, leading to the destruction of millions of birds to try to contain the deadly virus.

Mounting losses from the disease have devastated impacted farms, which are required to euthanize entire flocks to prevent spread. Since the H5N1 virus first surfaced in the U.S. in 2022, nearly 80 million birds across the nation have been destroyed, driving up prices of eggs, chicken and turkeys as production plummeted.

But until last fall, the disease appeared to have left California poultry farms relatively unscathed compared to farms in states such as Iowa, America’s largest egg producer. But recent outbreaks at commercial poultry farms in Merced and Sonoma counties have stoked fears of a worsening spread in the Golden State. (Photo by California Farm Bureau Federation)
Outbreak Spreads
Continued from PAGE 10

this time, with more than 3.78 million birds destroyed so far between the two regions.

“We’re still trying to put out a wildfire here,” said Scott Weber, an owner of Petaluma-based Sunrise Farms. The Sonoma County egg producer has been grappling with impacts of the virus since late November, having been forced to euthanize all its birds.

Weber said the farm has tried to keep all employees working during the cleanup process, which he expects will continue for months. But with production at a standstill, he acknowledged the farm may need to lay off some of its workforce, even though “we’re trying our best not to do that.”

He said it remains unclear how the farm contracted the virus, noting “we’ve done everything we can” to keep it out.

Avian influenza is introduced primarily by wild birds such as waterfowl and shorebirds, which can carry the virus but not appear sick. Infected birds shed the virus into the environment through their feces and secretions. Domestic poultry can catch AI directly from infected birds or indirectly through contaminated water, feed, clothing and equipment.

First identified in Europe in 2020, the H5N1 strain of the virus has circled the globe with outbreaks in 67 countries on five continents. In the U.S., the disease ripped through some of the largest poultry farms in the Midwest and East Coast, sending egg prices to record levels in 2022 and early 2023.

To protect commercial flocks, State Veterinarian Annette Jones has asked producers to keep their poultry indoors through June, including certified organic layers and meat birds that are required by law to have outdoor access.

Sonoma County egg farmer Tiffany Holbrook, whose birds are raised on pasture, said she will not be moving her chickens indoors, though she continues to practice strict biosecurity. That includes not allowing people onto the pasture and changing her boots and clothes whenever she goes out there.

She said she recognizes her farm remains susceptible to AI, as infected birds could land on the farm’s chicken coop or eat from her birds’ feeder, passing the disease to her flock. “I just stay vigilant as much as possible,” Holbrook said.

Jones said most of the farms impacted by the current outbreak have been “very biosecure.” Still, the disease has been “popping up like popcorn around the state.” With California’s last confirmed AI finding as recent as Dec. 28 in Marin and Sonoma counties, the state remains focused on controlling spread and eliminating the virus, she said. State epidemiologists will work to better understand the outbreak in the coming months. It remains unclear if the virus itself has become more virulent, if it is more prevalent in the environment or if there were breaks in farm biosecurity.

“We hope to find the answer with more study,” Jones said. “But sometimes we never get the answer to that important question: Was it bad luck or is there something that can be fixed to prevent future introductions of virus?”

Weber of Sunrise Farms expressed frustration that even though a new vaccine for AI is available, poultry producers do not have access to it. The vaccine is being used in a trial on the California condor to protect the endangered bird. Weber said his farm already vaccinates its birds for other diseases and that vaccinating for AI would be “a better solution than trying to fight an invisible wildfire.”

Jones said use of the AI vaccine, which is regulated by USDA, remains “complicated,” though there are “very active national discussions on the topic, and influenza control experts continue to look at indications for use.”

Maurice Pitesky, a poultry specialist and expert in highly pathogenic avian influenza at the University of California, Davis, said vaccines are likely part of the solution, but they’re not a panacea. He said not allowing the AI vaccine for poultry appears to be more of a political decision than one based on science. “This is an example of where the science is ahead of the policy and economics,” he said.

With millions of waterfowl arriving in California each fall during migration season, Pitesky said it’s clear poultry farmers need to do more than what they’ve done for years. He said biosecurity methods alone—including fencing, foot baths, vehicle washes and employee training—have not been sufficient to keep out AI.

“The reality is, if you have high waterfowl abundance around your farm and there’s AI in those waterfowl, there’s just no way that that physical operational barrier is good enough to prevent exposure and infection,” he said. “We need to think outside the barn.”

Pitesky is trying to get more farmers to also use prediction tools such as the Waterfowl Alert Network, a software subscription service that gives daily notifications to producers when waterfowl are close to their farms. Having this information, he said, would allow farmers to be more strategic about their biosecurity.

He compared the tool to weather forecasting that tells farmers when a storm is coming. If farmers know where high numbers of waterfowl are roosting, for example, they could deploy water cannons or blasters or change the habitat around the farm to push birds away.

Pitesky applied for a USDA grant that would allow the tool to be offered to producers on a pilot basis. Pitesky said his hope is for these types of technologies to be subsidized completely by the government to encourage producers and other stakeholders to start using them.

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“We’re dealing with an existential issue for the commercial poultry industry, not just in the U.S. but globally,” Pitesky said. “(Poultry) is our primary source of animal protein, and we’re losing millions of birds a year if we keep on continuing down the same path.”
Healthy Reservoir Levels Offset Scant Snowpack Depths

By Christine Souza
Assistant Editor
Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

Unlike early 2023, when nonstop atmospheric river storms built a deep Sierra Nevada snowpack, replenished depleted reservoirs and flooded parts of California, snowfall and rain is sharply diminished so far this year. But state water officials say there is plenty of winter left to accumulate more snow and precipitation.

California Department of Water Resources State Climatologist Michael Anderson said accumulation of snowpack has just begun, pointing out that half the state’s annual precipitation typically occurs during December, January, and February.

“It’s really still too early to determine what kind of year we’ll have in terms of wet or dry,” said DWR Snow Surveys Manager Sean de Guzman. “There can be so many things that happen with our storm systems between now and April, when we should see our peak snowpack.”

Recorded on April 1, the state’s peak snowpack data is used in modeling by DWR to determine the amount of runoff the state can anticipate when snow melts in the spring and summer. The snowpack supplies about 30% of the state’s water needs. “What we’re interested in is how much water is in the snowpack,” de Guzman said.

Glenn County farmer Mike Verschagin, who farms almonds and prunes in Orland, said he remains optimistic about the coming water year, especially with reservoirs at or above their historical capacity due to snow and water accumulated in 2023. DWR reported that statewide reservoir storage is about 115% of average.

“As far as water supply this year, it is way too early to know what our allocation is going to be, but the positive thing is our water comes from Shasta Reservoir, and the reservoir level is above normal,” said Verschagin, who serves as board president of the Orland-Artois Water District, which received 100% of its contracted water supplies last year. “Compared to two years ago (during the drought), it is a much better situation. As long as they conserve the supply and don’t just release it out of the dam, there should be enough water for a decent allocation.”

A north-of-delta water contractor of the federal Central Valley Project, Orland-Artois Water District receives 33,000 acre-feet of water annually and serves about 29,000 acres. As of Monday, Shasta Reservoir—the largest CVP reservoir—was at 69% of its 4.5 million-acre-foot capacity, or 115% of average, according to DWR.

Most other reservoirs remain at above-average levels. Lake Oroville, the principal reservoir for the State Water Project, was at 69% of its 3.5 million-acre-foot capacity, or 128% of average. San Luis Reservoir, a south-of-delta reservoir shared by the CVP and SWP, stood at 57% of its 2 million-acre-foot capacity—88% of average.

Fresno County farmer Justin Diener of Red Rock Ranch in Five Points, which grows grain, garlic, tomatoes, cotton and almonds, said the water outlook is positive.

“This year, things look a lot better just on a relative basis because of the amount of water that is in storage in the reservoirs,” said Diener, who is on the board of directors for Westlands Water District, a CVP water contractor. “It’s not raining as much as it did last year, but our reservoir storage is in a much better position.”

The CVP portion of available water stored in San Luis Reservoir, a joint state-federal reservoir, he said, is about 80%.

“For us on the west side, when there’s a strong, wet year, the following year we usually have a good water year, plus a moderate or average 40% to 60% allocation,” Diener said. “We’re in a good a position.”

With water in San Luis Reservoir, Diener said he was able to prepare for the growing season.

“We have kept the same crop setup, where we’re growing quite a bit of grain and garlic because we will have water to some degree,” he said.

“We don’t (yet) know how much water we’ll have into May and June, but it won’t require as much to finish those crops.”

Even with a 100% water allocation last year, Westlands Water District farmers fellowed 198,700 acres, or about 35% of total acreage, according to the district’s 2023 crop report. The fellowed acres, Diener said, is likely due to timing of the allocation announcement. Since precipitation came late last year, many farmers did not have the opportunity to line up as many crop contracts by the time the full allocation was announced in late April.

“In our area, a lot of the preparatory work and obtaining of contracts to grow crops takes place in the fall,” he said.

Looking ahead, state water officials announced last week that extreme weather events highlight the need for Californians to prepare for flood risk. DWR noted it is working with emergency response partners and reservoir operators to prepare flood infrastructure.

As part of this effort, farmers hope to take advantage of flood flows for groundwater recharge, such as in 2023, to replenish aquifers, which are required to reach sustainability by the 2040s under the state’s Sustainable

See HEALTHY RESERVOIRS on PAGE 13
California Irrigation Districts Agree to Conserve 643,000 Acre-Feet for Lake Mead
Farmers compensated for not farming.

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

On Wed., the Biden Administration announced a series of agreements with water districts and tribes — primarily in California — to use less water in return for $295 million. The conservation agreements expect to save up to 643,000 acre-feet in Lake Mead rather than allowing flows down to users below the Hoover Dam.

According to a news release from the U.S. Department of the Interior, California agencies involved in the agreement include the Coachella Valley Water District to save up to 105,000 acre-feet through 2025, as well as an agreement with the Quechan Indian Tribe to save up to 39,000 acre-feet.

The Imperial Irrigation District also agreed to save 100,000 acre-feet in 2023. Water from the district irrigates almost half a million acres of farmland in the Imperial Valley. Farmers in the district that conserve water will be compensated $776 per acre-foot.

Additional agreements with the Palo Verde Irrigation District, the Bard Water District — in cooperation with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California — and a second agreement with the Coachella Valley Water District are expected to be finalized in the coming weeks.

Agriculture will face another setback in production with the new conservation agreements. Bart Fisher, president of the Palo Verde Irrigation District, told Politico that nearly 30% of agricultural land will be fallowed in his region of California, near the Arizona border.

“But if we can stabilize the river...it is worthwhile because it secures our own water future,” Fisher said. The agreements are part of 21 water conservation contracts by the Biden Administration, with federal compensation allocated from the Inflation Reduction Act.

During the signing, Reclamation Commissioner Camille Calimlim Touton explained that the agreements are part of a collective effort to address water management challenges within the Colorado River Basin.

“Addressing the drought crisis requires an all-hands-on-deck approach and close collaboration among federal, state, Tribal, and local communities,” Touton said.

Current investments in the Colorado River Basin include $281 million for water recycling projects, $233 million in conservation funding for the Gila River Indian Community — which includes $83 million for a water pipeline — over $73 million for infrastructure repairs on water delivery systems, $71 million for 32 drought resiliency projects, $50 million to improve infrastructure over the next five years, and $20 million in small surface and groundwater storage.

Healthy Reservoirs
Continued from PAGE 12

Groundwater Management Act. Vereschagin said last spring and summer, growers in his district took advantage of available floodwater for groundwater projects.

“Our records show that we have made a difference,” Vereschagin said. “We did the recharge, and hopefully we can continue in the future because we have a long way to go to get back to historical levels.”

Similarly, Westlands Water District “implemented several programs to encourage growers to recharge groundwater, both for the benefit of the collective district and of individual growers,” Diener said. The district recharged more than 200,000 acre-feet since last March, he added.

“Hopefully, we’ll get 275,000 acre-feet to 300,000 acre-feet (of recharge). If we do that, going forward on our SGMA plan, we’ll have multiple years of sustainability in terms of averaging out the years we pump a lot and years we don’t pump or pump a moderate amount,” Diener said. “This is a real tool that we’ve been successful in using to move our groundwater basin more quickly towards sustainability.”

The next DWR survey at Philips Station is scheduled for Feb. 4.
Top 10 Products for 2024 World Ag Expo

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Ahead of the 2024 World Ag Expo on Feb 13-15, the Top 10 New Products were announced. The new products submitted for the contest showcase a variety of ag solutions from tractor protection to high-tech devices.

AMIGA V7

The Amiga V7 is an electric 1.3HP platform developed by Farm-ng that allows producers to haul, tow, spray, and apply compost amongst other essential roles. Amiga is highly versatile and can be configured to a wide set of farm tools. Along with an intelligence platform with open API, the Amiga V7 performs precision steering and weeds the same plots it seeded earlier in the year with minimal operator intervention.

ELECTRIC GUSS

Electric GUSS, the autonomous electric herbicide orchard sprayer, is the first of its kind and allows a single user to operate up to eight GUSS machines using a laptop computer. GUSS utilizes LiDAR, GPS, cameras, and other features to autonomously drive through an orchard at any time of day.

SHARK WHEEL SWIFT

The Shark Wheel SWIFT by Shark Wheel Agriculture is an irrigation tool invented to solve all wheel issues in center pivot irrigation. The wheel eliminates flat tires, solves rutting, has 60-second repairs, increases yields, and reduces soil compaction. The center pivot leaves a DNA helix footprint in the soil — the front wheel pushes soil right-left-right and the rear wheel pushes left-right-left.

BURRO GRANDE

Burro Grande is a fully autonomous, AI-powered robot with computer vision, a 5,000 lb. towing capacity, and a 1,500 lb. pallet scale carry capacity. If paired with Atlas — Burro’s online route creation platform — growers can construct, manage, and share routes across their fleets.

OLIVER COLIBRI

A Sutton Ag Enterprises creation, the Oliver Colibri is the only mechanical weeder for high-density weeding applications. With automated camera technology, the product targets the exact position of a crop and places sawtooth blades between seed lines. The Colibri can be used on row spacings 1.75 inches and up.

EZ CUT SEAL REMOVER

The EZ Cut Seal remover safely removes seals from most chemical containers without getting debris into the spray or sprayer. EZ Cut can hold up to 25 seals and features an ejection tool to dispose of the seals without touching the chemical.

STANDARD PTO KIT

The Standard PRO Kit designed by Tractor Protection Products offers protection for the PTO-driven implement and tractor shaft. The kit eases the process of hooking up a PTO-driven implement to the tractor shaft and is suitable for all operation sizes, crops, and locations.

SHOCKWAVE X

The first autonomous tree shaker, Shockwave X, is driverless with no LiDAR or GPS. The machine is outfitted with a deck for shaking pistachios and allows continuous movement. 100 Vision-based autonomy allows the Shockwave X to work in heavy dust and zero cell service conditions.

Top 10 Products for 2024 World Ag Expo

1. AMIGA V7
2. ELECTRIC GUSS
3. SHARK WHEEL SWIFT
4. BURRO GRANDE
5. OLIVER COLIBRI
6. EZ CUT SEAL REMOVER
7. STANDARD PTO KIT
8. SHOCKWAVE X
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U.S. organic produce sales reached $22 billion in 2022. In 2023, sales of organic berries, prepackaged salads, lettuce, onions, and tomatoes saw gains compared to the previous year. (Photo by California Farm Bureau Federation)

Demand Grows for Organic Produce, Despite Inflation

By Bob Johnson, Reporter, Monterey County

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

The prospects for organic produce remain strong in these inflationary times, according to leaders of some of the largest grower-shipper operations. Market strength varies, however, depending on which commodities growers are trying to sell.

“The category is going to grow based on consumer demand,” said Nishan Moutafian, vice president of production at Driscoll’s in Watsonville. While organic berry growers enjoy strong demand, organic vegetable growers find demand varies depending on the product.

“We feel there is a lot of opportunity on the value-added side,” said Joe Pezzini, senior director of agricultural operations at Taylor Farms in Salinas. “The value-added side will continue to grow; it depends on innovation. The commodity side is flat.”

Moutafian and Pezzini agreed that maintaining all up less than 4% year over year, while sales of organic celery, squash and peaches were down. Taylor Farms already has a value-added program in place, but shippers that are relatively new to the value-added category must navigate questions of how to invest.

“During COVID, we saw a huge jump in value-added products,” said Briana Giampaoli, organic category manager at Merced County-based Live Oak Farms in LeGrand. “We’re looking at more value-added products, but it requires risk at first to learn what equipment to buy.”

Live Oak Farms grows and ships large volumes of tomatoes and peppers.

Moutafian and Pezzini agreed that maintaining a reliable supply 12 months of the year is essential for strong sales. “The majority of consumers who buy organic are making that choice in the store,” Moutafian said. “Reliability is key to getting good placement in the produce department.”

Growers need cooperation of seed companies if they are to provide a steady supply of organic produce. “In some commodities, like spinach, a lot of effort has been put into disease resistance,” Pezzini said. “In some other commodities, we need the seed companies to put more emphasis on disease and pest resistance.”

Driscoll’s breeds its own berry varieties and conducts trials on organic ground to test disease resistance. “Our breeding for disease resistance is an important part of what we do at Driscoll’s,” Moutafian said.

Cooperation with other innovators is important if organic produce is to remain competitive, producers said. “It’s worth it to take the time to let the innovators integrate with your operation,” Giampaoli said. “It will pay off.”

Western Growers has made it a priority in recent years to serve as a facilitator between technological startup firms, farmers who are willing to host trials and investors who are able to help small firms scale up their more promising ideas.

During its annual Ag Sharks competition, Western Growers gives startups a chance to compete before a panel of growers and investors. The prize is investment capital of at least $250,000.

The three finalists in the 2023 competition included a company with a mobile biochar unit that can produce the soil amendment at a fraction of the cost. Another was a software company that can automate the process of producing reports required by regulators and buyers. The third was a firm producing material that protects fruit from sun, heat and wind damage by strengthening the cuticle, or microscopic layer encompassing the fruit.

Despite inflationary pressure, the recent trend in organic produce sales has been promising. Walt Dufllock, senior vice president of innovation at Western Growers, said the organic sector enjoyed $60 billion in sales nationally in 2022, $22 billion of that in produce. There has been a $10 billion increase in sales over four years, he noted.

He also pointed to demographic factors that should help the organic produce market in the next few years. “Millennials and Gen Z are starting to build their families, and they prioritize health,” Giampaoli said. “We need to make sure consumers retain their confidence in the organic label,” Moutafian said. “If the consumer is going to spend that money, they want it to be for something they really want to eat. There is going to be more demand, and my job is to figure out how to supply that.”
USDA Opens Risk Coverage Enrollment for 2024 Crops

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced that agricultural producers can now enroll in the Farm Service Agency’s Agriculture Risk Coverage and Price Loss Coverage Programs for the 2024 crop year. Both programs were authorized under the 2014 and 2018 federal Farm Bill. Under the one-year extension of the current Farm Bill, producers can make or change elections and enroll in the ARC or PLC programs to maintain future protections against market fluctuations.

The enrollment deadline is March 15, 2024, and those who miss it will maintain the same election as 2023 for farm commodities. In a press release, FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux explained that the programs will not be changed from previous years under the Farm Bill extension.

“These programs provide critical financial protections against commodity market volatilities for many American farmers so don’t delay enrollment. Avoid the rush and contact your local FSA office for an appointment because even if you are not changing your program election for 2024, you still need to sign a contract to enroll,” Ducheneaux said. Producers can choose to enroll in ARC-County or PLC for crop-by-crop protection or ARC-Individual to protect the entire farm. While election changes are optional, ag producers are required to enroll through a signed contract each year — producers with multi-year contracts will continue for 2024 if no election change is made.

Elevate Your Brand: Harness the Power of an External Marketing Agency’s Diverse Expertise

By Dave Pivelich, CEO
The Marcom Group

In the fast-paced world of modern business, standing out from the competition is more important than ever. For marketing departments or associates tasked with catalyzing their brand to new heights, partnering with an outside marketing agency can be the game-changer you need. Here’s a compelling look at why leveraging external support can lead to unparalleled success.

A Kaleidoscope of Expert Talent
When you enlist the services of an outside marketing agency, you tap into a reservoir of diverse talent. These teams are not just collections of marketing strategists; they are seasoned ecosystems comprising SEO experts, content creators, social media gurus, data analysts, and critically, experienced graphic designers. These creatives bring a visual edge to your campaigns, translating complex ideas into visually compelling narratives that resonate with your audience. A graphic designer’s nuanced touch can turn a good campaign into a great one, ensuring that your brand’s message isn’t just heard, but also seen and remembered.

Immediate, Agile Responsiveness
Bypass the slow-moving wheels of corporate bureaucracy by collaborating with an agency that thrives on responsiveness. External marketing agencies prioritize client needs with an on-demand ethos, ensuring that you are not just another ticket in a corporate queue. This means quicker turnaround for your projects, timely adaptations to market trends, and a marketing strategy that moves at the speed of your business.

Streamlined, Integrated Marketing Solutions
In the intricate dance of marketing, coherence and consistency are key. An outside agency acts as a maestro, orchestrating all aspects of marketing harmoniously under one roof. From the analytical rigor of market research to the artistic flair of graphic design, every piece is choreographed to work in concert. This not only saves time but also ensures your branding is unified across all fronts, delivering a message that’s consistently powerful.

Access to Advanced Tools and Innovative Approaches
Agencies are hotbeds for the latest in marketing technology and innovative strategies. They provide you with advanced tools and analytical capabilities that could be cost-restrictive or complex to manage in-house. With their finger on the pulse of the latest design trends and marketing innovations, agencies give your brand the edge it needs to cut through the noise.

Cost-Effective Quality
Harnessing the full suite of an agency’s services often presents a more cost-effective solution than building a similarly equipped team in-house. Agencies bring economies of scale, with seasoned graphic designers and marketing professionals who can produce high-quality work efficiently. This expertise comes without the overhead costs associated with full-time staff, making it a smart financial move for businesses aiming to maximize their marketing budgets.

The Winning Edge: Professional Graphic Design
Incorporating experienced graphic designers into your marketing strategy can transform the visual impact of your brand. These designers don’t just beautifully; they strategize, ensuring that every visual element is purpose-driven and aligns with your marketing goals. From logo design to multimedia campaigns, they create the visual stories that will captivate your audience and leave a lasting impression.

In essence, an outside marketing agency is not just a service provider; it’s a strategic partner that elevates your brand with a plethora of skills, rapid responsiveness, and creative firepower. Leverage this partnership to ensure your brand doesn’t just compete but dominates with a distinct and unforgettable presence in the marketplace.

About the Author
Dave Pivelich, the CEO and founder of The Marcom Group Incorporated, has been at the forefront of innovative marketing solutions since the agency’s inception in 1998. With a holistic approach that traverses all marketing mediums, Dave’s leadership has cultivated a powerhouse team of branding designers, project managers, and technical administrators, each bringing a wealth of experience and creativity to the table.

The Marcom Group has carved out a distinguished place in the industry, known for its collaborations with some of Kern County’s most esteemed brands, including Aera Energy and the City of Bakersfield. His agency’s work, characterized by a blend of artistic vision and strategic execution, continues to define the marketing narrative for clients like Golden Empire Transit, Rain For Rent, Kern EDC, and the Kern County Department of Human Services.

For more info, visit TheMarcomGroup.com.
land values in the state have become more volatile as SGMA threatens groundwater pumping, and less water results in cash flow consequences.

This is especially apparent in Kern County water districts where values have steadily decreased since SGMA. Alliance Ag’s report shows that open farmland in state districts such as West Kern Water District declined by roughly 58%. In areas not served by district water — white lands — value decreased 9% to 16% annually since 2015.

Whereas other areas of farmland in the nation have seen strong 2023 farm incomes and high land value levels. Recently, DTN hosted its virtual Ag Summit where farmland specialists expressed a general optimistic outlook on farmland values for next year.

Howard Halderman, President of Halderman Farm Management based in Indiana, explained that there were exceptional yields in the fall.

“For the remaining commodities, aside from milk production, citrus production has maintained its value while the market is declining for almonds and pistachios, which each require significant amounts of water.”

According to Ming, farmers looking for answers to the declining market hurting their bottom line should turn to row cropping until the market stabilizes.

“Let’s sit tight,” Ming said.

**LOOKING FORWARD**

The future of farming in the Central Valley may mean greatly reduced acreage, Ming explained. Studies have shown that California farmland has been shrinking for some time. Almond acreage has been especially impacted, with a reduction of 74,000 acres in 2023, according to the Land IQ 2023 Standing Acreage Final Estimate.

Buyers of ag land are generally keen on what the real water allocation is to that property, and given the substantial reduction in pumping capacities, California’s land value is not comparable to other agricultural states.

“If they’re State Water Project…they’re probably 30% to 35% reliability long-term average, that they can expect if they get contract water.”

He emphasized the proper management of water districts as a key to a forward-looking ag industry.

“I just think that it’s really going to come down to the best water, and the best land, and the best run water districts,” Ming said. “I don’t think SIGMA is going to pass, it’s going to be real and it’s going to have teeth.”

Still, the future of farming in the valley is not all that grim. Those who have been farming for multiple generations have gone through depressions like this, Ming said. California farming families are notorious for coming out stronger and better despite the adversity faced by the government, the market, and even the weather.

“We are the breadbasket of the United States and the world. We can hold onto that fact and just understand that we are going through a compression of ag acres,” Ming said. “We need to be farming as efficiently as possible in the right water districts.”

And the right water districts, according to Ming, are the ones with the most water.
Heaven

By Joshua Stevens
Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

If someone were to come to you with the following list: real, communal, perfect, everlasting, hopeful — what would come to your mind? Would you immediately jump to the thought of heaven? From time to time, it seems as though our vision of heaven is watered down from its glory. Simply stated as “being in the presence of God forever and ever” while true and wonderful sells short the vision for heaven given to us by God.

For what good does it do a Christian today to think of what may await in heaven tomorrow? Here is an observation by CS Lewis: “If you read history, you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next...”1 Now, look to the Lord’s prayer, “Pray then like this: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven’” (Matthew 6:9-10).2 So, we see for the Christian to keep our minds on heaven is to focus on the goal of bringing forth Christ’s Kingdom to earth; it is the hope we carry with us that we will see heaven (John 14:2-3); it is where we belong (Philippians 3:20).

Heaven is real. More than a place where the saint’s spirits inhabit after our death, it is a place we will see and feel. Christ set this example for us after his resurrection, “Then he said to Thomas, ‘Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.’” (John 20:27). 2 Thomas touched our Savior and felt where his side and hands were pierced. In this glorious physical body, Christ ascends into heaven, where soon we will be, too. A place where our feet can touch the ground, our eyes will see, and our ears can hear, a place where our physical delights will not only be available but enhanced, where hiking the peaks of heaven’s mountains or running through the fields will not make us grow weary or tired. Our hearts’ pure pleasures will be in heaven in the enjoyment of God. In this place, after our final resurrection, we will be healed from ailments; there will be no disease or injury. In a glorified body with all physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds healed, the saints will be forever and ever singing with the angels in perfect communion with the one true God.

Heaven is communal. In the West, we tend to privatize our experiences and desires. Such is the same when we consider heaven. However, heaven is a place where all the saints will join in a multiplying joy for all eternity. Figuratively bouncing off heaven’s walls as our hearts grow in love and happiness, Jonathan Edwards preached a sermon, entitled Heaven: A World of Love,3 in which he states that in heaven, we will each obey the golden rule perfectly, and as such, because we love perfectly, we will experience twice the happiness and joy when we see a loved one in heaven and so will they upon seeing us. Each of our joys has doubled since you are both loving the other as yourselves, so this will continue in a multiplication.

Heaven is everlasting. More than eternal and without end, heaven will never cease to amaze and astonish the saints. No matter how deep we go, we will always be more; no boredom will ever wash over us, for there will always be more of God to explore. Heaven is eternal, and the saint’s sanctification will be complete; thus, there is no worry of sinning and falling into ruin again. Forever with God, the saints will be completely satisfied and rejoicing with all of our creation, singing the praises of our glorious God.

Will you pray with me?

Dear Lord,

Thank you for the hope you have given us. Thank you for the opportunity to share in eternity and invite others to do so, for the chance to play a role in your wonderful plan. Thank you for the life you have given us. Let us walk boldly forward, proclaiming the gospel you have shown us and running the race well and true.

In Jesus’ name,

Amen.

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