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THE LOCAL VOICE FOR OUR FARMERS, RANCHERS, AND DAIRY PRODUCERS SINCE 2013 VALLEYAGVOICE.COM VOLUME 14 • ISSUE 3 • MARCH 2024

National Fallout of California's Ag Regulations

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

As the global agricultural leader with over 400 commodities, California has a major influence over the nation as a trendsetter in policy and regulation. In theory, when the Golden State adopts regulatory standards, other states follow closely behind.

David Vogel, a retired UC Berkeley professor, termed this idea of the Golden State's sovereignty over the nation as the "California Effect."

"The California Effect is this notion that when a large

state like California enacts a standard, a production or product standard which could affect agriculture, then it's likely to have broader implications firmly outside the state to other states," Vogel said. "So, basically it's about California's broader impact on policies and in other jurisdictions which includes states and the federal government."

The California Effect has been well-studied since the theory was conceptualized, but it remains relevant to the global economy, specifically in agriculture. For instance, shortly after California approved overtime regulations for agricultural workers, Washington,

New York, and Oregon followed suit.

When the U.S. Supreme Court upheld Proposition 12 — an animal welfare regulation that establishes minimum space requirements for breeding pigs — the nation's top pork-producing states adjusted practices to continue exports.

The history of California's control over U.S. agriculture is long-established, and state regulations meant for in-house farmers have broader implications for agriculture producers throughout the nation.

While a law strictly enforced in California, Prop 12 has larger implications for pork producers throughout

the nation. The state accounts for roughly 15% of the nation's pork consumption but imports 99.87% of its pork products.

The U.S. Supreme Court upheld the proposition in May, ruling that states have the authority to pass laws on meat sold in the state which subsequently requires products produced outside of the state to comply. Thus, the 24-foot space requirement on all pork imported to California directly regulates how the pork industry in other states operates.

According to Daniel Sumner, UC Davis professor
See NATIONAL FALLOUT on PAGE 5

National Academies Re-engages in Delta Science Issues

By **Scott Hamilton**
President, Hamilton Resource Economics

The operators of the State and Federal water projects are in a very difficult position. They are mandated to meet several important and often conflicting objectives including water supply and environmental enhancement. In trying to operate to meet competing objectives they have

two big problems: one is identifying trustworthy science, and the second is sociology.

Frequently in Delta science, a situation emerges referred to colloquially as "combat science" where the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation receives a study from one group with one agenda presenting one result, and a different group with the same data presenting contradictory results. With few on the Bureau's staff sufficiently qualified to deter-

mine what represents the best available science, the Bureau is left in a quandary.

The quality of the science employed on Delta issues varies. Errors are too frequent. Use of univariate analyses that omit more relevant covariates, compelling conceptual models not supported by the data, confounding misuse of conventional terminology, and incomplete use of the scientific process — all of these errors have led to the implementation of inappropriate management actions.

There is much at stake. On one hand is the very

survival of species and on the other, jobs and water supplies to support the hopes and dreams of tens of millions of people and one of the largest economies in the world. People are passionate on both sides, and rightly so, but the Bureau is stuck in the middle. Whatever they do, one side is going to be unhappy. Passion turns into rage and then the litigation begins. But judges are not adept at working through complicated science issues.

Resource management in the Delta has been somewhat dismal. Despite 30 years of effort and resources, the biological goals identified in the Central Valley Improvement Act have not been met, the condition of numerous listed species

See DELTA SCIENCE ISSUES on PAGE 6

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World Ag Expo Underscores Water Education and SGMA Compliance

By **Valley Ag Voice Staff**

For years, water woes have plagued growers in the Central Valley. From decreased groundwater allocations and critically over-drafted basins to flooded acres in 2023, farmers and ranchers have tirelessly worked to secure the future of their land and basins. While the 2024 World Ag Expo in Tulare, California, highlighted this plight, it also showcased vast improvements in recharge efforts and addressed challenges with SGMA compliance.

According to Aaron Fukuda, General Manager

of the Tulare Irrigation District and Mid-Kaweah Groundwater Sustainability Agency, several projects are underway to improve groundwater sustainability in Tulare.

The Mid-Kaweah GSA, in partnership with the cities of Visalia and Tulare as well as the Tulare Irrigation District, has been at the forefront of innovative water recharge, stormwater capture, and groundwater sustainability projects despite looming probation on Tulare Lake.

Current projects include roughly 1,300 acres of recharge basins, ranging in size from 15 acres to 150 acres at each site. One of their flagship projects — the Okieville Recharge Basin — is

See SGMA COMPLIANCE on PAGE 13



FARM BUREAU NEWS

The United Voice of Kern County's Farming Community



President's Message

**By Jenny Holtermann
President, KCFB**

California grows more than half of the nation's fruits, nuts, and vegetables. Kern County rivals Tulare and Fresno for the top agriculture-producing county in the State and Nation. We do all of this with the strictest and most comprehensive pesticide program in the world. The California Department of Pesticide Regulations (DPR) oversees the sales and use of all pesticides in California and tasks the Agricultural Commissioners to carry out enforcement at the county level. Ag Commissioners monitor restricted use permitting, use of local conditions, environmental monitoring, and community outreach. Many will tell you that pesticide usage and availability to California farmers is the firmest and most stringent set of rules and laws.

This isn't good enough for some. DPR recently joined forces with the California Environmental Protection Agency (CalEPA) and the California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) to formulate the Sustainable Pest Management plan. SPM's course of action is to accelerate a statewide system to transition all agriculture, urban and rural community to essentially eliminate pesticide use of what they deem "high risk" pesticides and adopt a safer pest control practice. The roadmap establishes a state-level prioritization process of pesticides to eliminate by 2050. DPR outlines their main goals as "prioritizing pest prevention, coordinating state-level leadership, investing in building sustainable pest management knowledge, improving California's pesticide registration process and bringing alternative products to market, and enhancing monitoring and data collection." So much of this is already

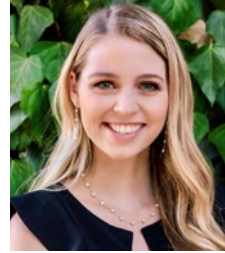
being done, but now the working group's tasks to come up the plan have very little to no agriculture or farmer representation and much more environmental justice and activist involvement.

Integrated Pest Management (IPM) is a common cultural practice by California farmers based on science and what tools work effectively in those given environments to minimize pest pressures. We are already using IPM and the most sustainable methods possible to grow food. In a state as regulated as California, we have already been forced to use less inputs. Not to mention, why spend more money on materials if we don't have to?

Just how are they going to implement this plan? DPR is proposing a \$12 million tax increase to fund the SPM program by adding \$54 million dollars to the DPR budget by the tax on these "high-risk" pesticides. If they could clearly define the "high-risk" pesticides, I think it would be interesting to compare this list with the chemicals and pesticides being applied to imported food. As we all know, when stricter rules are imposed on California farmers, there is a trend to jump the border and grow the same thing elsewhere with less rules. Look at asparagus or even avocados, how much is being grown in Mexico and southern countries, all while less acres are being planted and harvested in California.

DPR has a residue testing program to sample domestic and imported produce for intolerances. My issue with this sampling is that it is done at wholesale and retail outlets, distribution centers, and farmers' markets. When it makes it to these outlets, it is already being consumed. Testing should be done at the ports of entry and state borders, as the food is entering the country. If DPR could take their "enhancing monitoring and data collection" to the imported products that we know have much more residue and chemicals uses, that would be better use of that mill tax. We know that California produces the safest and most regulated food in the world, yet our government continues to impose harsher rules on us. All the while continuing to allow imported food to enter this country and our state with chemicals that they have banned us from using.

I challenge you to reach out to DPR and voice your opinion. Better yet, I challenge you to reach out to your assembly members and let them know your opinion on SPM. Our state assembly and senators must vote on the DPR budget and SPM tax. If ten of our readers reached out to their assembly members, that would be ten more boots on the ground, not letting the shoes on the carpet tell us what to do.



Executive Director's Report

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

As California's agricultural heartland, Kern County plays a strong role in our nation's food production and distribution. From sprawling fields of crops to bustling ports that ship California-grown products worldwide, the agricultural landscape of Kern County is a vital component of our state's economy and sustenance. Whether you are directly involved in the production of food, foliage, or simply appreciate the bounty that graces your table, becoming a member of the Kern County Farm Bureau offers numerous benefits and opportunities to engage with and support this essential industry.

KCFB serves as a cornerstone for agricultural advocacy, education, and community engagement. One of the primary advantages of having a membership with KCFB is the access it provides for individuals and businesses to have their voices heard. By joining KCFB, members become integral participants in shaping the future of our local farms and ranches.

Education is another piece of our mission. Our members gain access to a wealth of resources, workshops, and training programs designed to enhance skills and knowledge for individuals as well as organizations. From best practices in farming techniques to navigating complex regulatory landscapes, KCFB equips our members with the tools they need to thrive in a dynamic agricultural environment. Additionally, educational outreach efforts extend

to schools and our community to help create a deeper understanding and appreciation for the important role agriculture plays in our daily lives.

Public policy advocacy plays a large role in the Farm Bureau's activities as well. Through proactive engagement with policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels, KCFB advocates for policies that support the interests of Kern County's agricultural community. Through this advocacy, members can influence legislation and regulatory decisions that directly impact their livelihoods. Whether it is advocating for water rights, labor policies, or other regulatory burdens, the Farm Bureau serves as a powerful voice for our agricultural industry.

Membership through the Kern County Farm Bureau also opens doors to networking and collaboration opportunities. Through regular meetings, events, and gatherings, members have the chance to connect with fellow farmers, ranchers, industry experts, and stakeholders. These interactions foster a sense of camaraderie and solidarity within the agricultural community, paving the way for knowledge sharing, mentorship, and collective action.

Becoming a member of the Kern County Farm Bureau offers a variety of benefits and opportunities for individuals and businesses. Whether you are a producer, a consumer, or simply someone who values the bounty of the land, membership with the Kern County Farm Bureau signifies a commitment to preserving and promoting the agricultural legacy of Kern County and beyond. To sign-up or to learn more, email kcfb@kerncfb.com.

Young Farmers & Ranchers



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

The Young Farmers & Ranchers group began the year with our annual Basque

Crawl in January. While in recent years, we tend to park rather than crawl, this is always one of our most well-attended socials of the year. We met at Woolgrowers and saw a lot of new faces. It was also great to reconnect with folks we hadn't seen in a while. The Basque family-style meal is always a hit and reminds me of the way that Bakersfield truly feels like a small town with a family-friendly atmosphere. Have you ever noticed that when you eat dinner out on Friday night in Bakersfield, you always run into someone you know?

After dinner, our meeting recapped some recent events, and we were able to secure some volunteers for our upcoming Clay Shoot fundraiser. Additionally, we focused on two of my goals for this year: encouraging attendees to become Farm Bureau members and strengthening our partnerships with local colleges. Becoming a Farm Bureau member offers benefits such as discounts to supply stores and newsletter updates from the California Farm Bureau with topics including legislation and news. There are two membership options for young professionals in agriculture. Those who are in college (age 16 - 25) and studying an ag-related major can sign up for a \$25 annual membership. Anyone else within the 18 - 35 age range can purchase an annual membership for \$105. Some within our group ask their employer to sponsor them, knowing that this is a wonderful professional

See YF&R on PAGE 3

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Articles or commentaries are not direct opinions
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Members of the Young Farmers & Ranchers enjoying a meal at Woolgrowers during the Basque Crawl in January. (Photo: Christine Johnson/YF&R)

YF&R Continued from PAGE 2

development opportunity. While we do not require membership for our group, we hope that everyone sees the value in supporting the organization. On a local chapter level, we wanted to implement some benefits of our own, so a few of our socials this year will offer a reduced price for Farm Bureau members. Similar to past years, we plan to help cover the cost for Farm Bureau members within our group who attend the annual state-wide meeting in December.

In January, we participated in the Cal State Bakersfield Ag Night and co-sponsored the men's and women's basketball games with the Farm Bureau. This is yet another way for us to support the agriculture efforts in our community. Go Runners! If you are interested in joining our group or are a college student studying agriculture, please reach out to me personally. I would love to brainstorm ways that we could be more involved in local college campuses.

In February, we toured the Regional Occupational Center (ROC), where YF&R member Tim Collins teaches diesel mechanics. The school offers various career and technical training programs for high schoolers, including livestock management, metal fabrication, construction, culinary arts, and drone operation. Students obtain college credit, plus the added benefit of real-life experiences. ROC is an amazing resource, especially for agriculture operators looking to hire young talent. This little-known gem of Bakersfield certainly deserves some attention, so we were grateful for the tour opportunity.

By the time this article is printed, YF&R will have had our second social for the year - a

Condors hockey game. Our group reserved an ice-front suite to enjoy a popular Bakersfield tradition. Go Condors!

Finally, we are anticipating our 4th Annual Clay Shoot coming up on March 16th at Five Dogs Range. This fundraiser helps sponsor YF&R events and enables us to give several thousand dollars every year toward student agriculture scholarships. This is one of my favorite YF&R events to volunteer at — the drive up to Woody is beautiful in March and participants are always enthusiastic. I'm usually the one running around taking photos to document the teams and sponsorship signs.

This fundraiser would not be possible without our sponsors! It is amazing to see the community's support of our efforts and we are humbled by the generous donations. Sponsors can choose between a station or meal/drink sponsorship. And don't forget the raffle items! Last year we had over sixteen raffle baskets, in addition to a special gun raffle. From local brewery merchandise to cookie baskets to nut assortments to gift cards, you're sure to find something of interest at our raffle. Even if you're unable to participate, please consider donating a raffle basket.

We anticipate another successful Clay Shoot and hope you can join in some way. Please reach out to our group to find out more, or see the links included on our website and shown below.

Clay Shoot tickets and sponsorship information can be found at <https://kernyfr.square.site>.

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PISTACHIOS, ALMONDS AND FARMLAND - \$32,439±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 152.81± acres Shafter City Limits and Sphere of Influence, Shafter Wasco Irrigation District, 2 Wells, Excellent Soils, Almonds & Pistachios in Full Production.	WALNUTS, TABLE GRAPES, PISTACHIOS – \$20,812±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 345.95± acres Selma Area, North Fork GSA, Excellent Soils, Quality Well Water, Diversified Portfolio, Solar System.
ALMONDS – \$24,747±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 155.73± acres Wasco Area, 2 SOURCES OF SEMI-TROPIC WSD CONTRACT WATER, 1 Well, Solar, Class 1 Soils, Almonds in full production.	ALMONDS – \$12,548±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 394.47± acres Wasco Area, Semi Tropic non-contract water, 3 wells, 863.4±KW Solar System, Productive Soils, Almonds in full production.
Almonds, Cherries and Solar – \$17,003±/AC (NEW LISTING) 156.68± acres Shafter Area, Shafter Wasco ID Annexed Area, 1 Well, Solar, Productive Soils, Almonds and Cherries in Full Production.	ALMONDS – \$17,660±/AC (NEW LISTING) 906.8± acres Wasco Area, Matador/Sunbird Ranch, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract and non-contract water, Well water, Productive Soils, and Young Almonds in production.
FARMLAND – \$12,000±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 156.96± acres Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD non-contract water, 1 well, Productive Soils, and Perfect for permanent crops.	ALMONDS – \$17,988±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 995.11± acres Wasco Area, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract and non-contract water, 5 wells, Productive Soils, and Almonds in full production.
DRY LAND – \$1,750±/AC 231.42± acres Taft Area, West Kern WD Residential service, Recreational and Rural home site.	ALMONDS – \$17,261±/AC (PRICE REDUCED) 1,237.33± acres Wasco Area, Portwood Ranch, Semi-Tropic WSD Contract non-contract water, 7 Wells, Productive Soils, and Young Almonds in production.

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Photos by Austin Snedden

OPINION: More Tax, More Trash



The Cattleman's Corner

By Austin Snedden
Ranching Contributor,
Valley Ag Voice

Illegal dumping has become extremely widespread. Drive anywhere in Kern County and you will find dump sites of trash, tires, furniture, and appliances. And I don't mean stuff thrown out of a motorist's window — this is stuff loaded, transported, and specifically dumped. This is not a top-tier issue when it comes to public safety or our economy, but it is a legitimate eyesore and community pride issue that can be addressed. There are simple steps that the County and municipalities could take to alleviate some of this issue. Yes, we will always have selfish dirtbags that have no problem making their problem someone else's, but providing an open door, no barrier avenue for them to dump would eliminate the lion's share.

I am complaining and addressing a primarily aesthetic issue, not usually my passion, but as property taxes consistently increase to address this issue, and simultaneously landfill and transfer sites continue to nickel and dime people doing the right thing, it makes your skin crawl as a taxpayer and property owner when you pass these third world looking dump sites. The bad guy in this situation is the person doing the illegal dumping, I am not

blaming the Board of Supervisors, however, they appear to be blaming us.

There is the potential for a \$1,000 fine for littering, I have never seen anyone get fined for littering, nor have I heard of anyone getting fined for littering. However, I have seen people get fined at the gate of the landfill for not having their load covered. Additionally, I have seen people get fined under the pseudonym of a fee for bringing drywall, lumber, tires, etc. Moreover, I have seen people get fined in the form of a property tax increase to address illegal dumping. It is simple — when you are a money-hungry government agency, you go after the ones who will pay, it just so happens they are the ones that are not the problem and often are the ones whose property is the victim of these dumpers.

At some point, we need to review our policies in place to see if the desired result is being accomplished. Although the issue of selfish people dumping is not our biggest problem, it is a snapshot of government failures. If you pour more resources toward a problem and it gets worse, you are essentially double taxing your constituents. Not only are the productive citizens paying for the additional resources that were dumped, but they are also paying in the form of experiencing the increased problem. The trap politicians fall into is the false narrative that all problems are solved by taking in more money and spending more money, in the meantime creative problem-solving becomes a side note.

There are bigger, more complex issues where

the tax and spend more strategy has clearly failed, such as homelessness and education, but this one is simple. One of the solutions to illegal dumping is to tax less. For every tire that a landfill charges for, there is one being dumped on a roadside, farm field, or ranch. For every measly fine that the landfill charges for an uncovered load, there is a load being dumped in the country by someone who didn't want to get nickel and dimed. What is the cost to the County of sorting a tire at the dump compared to sending a prevailing wage employee in a vehicle out to pick one up on the roadside? Yes, the blame is on the morons illegally dumping, but when dealing with people whose ethical compass is a little wimpy, policy must be in place that makes the right path the easiest path. Make dumps and transfer sites free for everything below commercial-size loads. Max out hours and availability of all landfills and transfer sites within reason (my site is open 4.5 days a week). The sorting is getting ridiculous. If you want to sort it, fine, but mandates mean we get it unsorted out in the country when they choose to avoid the sorting mandates at the dump. It won't be a complete fix because disrespectful people will always exist, but it is the worst it has ever been, and a no-barrier avenue will alleviate the issue. We have tried the tax, fine, fee, and spending to no avail, let's try removing the disincentives and see what happens.

Newsom's 'Salmon Strategy' Prioritizes Fish Runs

Dam removals are underway in California.

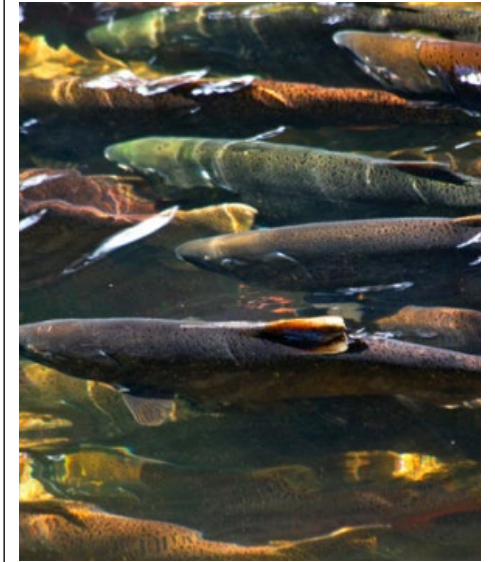


Photo: Shutterstock

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Governor Gavin Newsom released California's first strategy to restore the salmon population in January, calling for dams to be torn down in favor of improving passages for migratory salmon. The blueprint outlined several key actions including removing barriers to salmon migration, restoring and expanding habitats, and protecting water flows in critical times.

"We're doubling down to make sure this species not only adapts in the face of extreme weather but remains a fixture of California's natural beauty and ecosystems for generations to come," Newsom said in a statement.

In its entirety, the California Salmon strategy includes six priorities and 71 actions. The Newsom Administration and legislature have spent \$796.4 million in the last three years to restore the salmon populations.

Alexandra Biering, senior policy advocate at the California Farm Bureau, told Ag Alert that while most farmers would be glad to have a thriving salmon population, the state's goals are not sustainable for their operations, and many of the outlined strategies require participation from water rights holders and private landowners.

Still, the state has begun deconstructing four hydroelectric dams on the Klamath River as well as two other Siskiyou dams — Iron Gate and Copco 1. Minimum flows have also been placed on the Scott and Shasta Rivers to protect the salmon population.

National Fallout

Continued from PAGE 1

of agriculture and economics, California is not a leader in the hog industry, making it an ideal starting point for this regulation.

“The Humane Society and others would like to do this [in] lots of places, and they picked California, one because we have a proposition system, and two, nobody in California knows anything about the hog business,” Sumner said. “If you were in Iowa doing this, you know somebody’s grandfather or Uncle Fred or somebody who has 1,000 hogs, it’s a little harder to say, ‘Well, we’re gonna tell farmers how to do this.’”

Several agricultural groups and pork industry professionals have opposed the law, explaining that it violates the U.S. Commerce Clause in the Constitution which has historically granted Congress the ability to regulate commerce.

“We are very disappointed,” Scott Hays, president of the National Pork Producers Council said in a statement. “Allowing state overreach will increase prices for consumers and drive small farms out of business, leading to more consolidation.”

UNITED STATES OF CALIFORNIA

Vogel explained that California is an established leader in environmental health and safety regulations, and, as a large market, other governments elect to comply with those standards. Leading in climate change initiatives and policies has extended to the agricultural industry, specifically within the past year.

In Oct., Governor Gavin Newsom approved two climate action laws, aptly titled the “Climate Accountability Package,” requiring large corporations that do business in California to disclose greenhouse gas emissions as well as biennially release a climate-related financial risk report.

Due to its implications for businesses outside of the state’s regulatory power, several agricultural and business groups filed a lawsuit against California for violating the First Amendment by compelling compliance and seeking to regulate outside of the state’s jurisdiction.

Along with the implications of a California monopoly on national regulations, the broader impact on the agricultural economy could extend beyond the notion of “As goes California, so goes the nation.” Utilizing Prop 12 as an example, Sumner explained the likelihood of other states not only complying with California’s standards but enacting their own.

“[It’s] not just that other states will do what California did...they’ll adjust to that, but if Michigan has one law and set of regulations, and Florida has a different one, and Massachusetts is different, and Ohio is different, and Washington state...then when I go to the slaughter when I have my sow operation and I have my thousand pigs, I’ve got to be treating them in 14 different ways,” Sumner said.

At that point, the hog industry in the Midwest may prefer a single, federal animal welfare law, Sumner noted.

The Central Valley supplies 25% of the nation with fruits, nuts, and various other food products. Yet, state legislators who are far removed from the inner workings of the agriculture industry are ultimately the deciding influence on practice standards as well as imports and exports.

Fourth-generation Kern County farmer Jason Giannelli explained in an email that governmental overreach poses a detriment to the food supply chain.

“Nothing we do as humans will change the climate. Politicians who claim they can change the weather by taxing people more and destroying economies have a god-like complex and should not be in power,” Giannelli said. “In the 70s, they were telling us it was global cooling, and we were going to run out of oil. We all know they were wrong, but what policies were

passed and not repealed based on those predictions? Problem is, people in power are not held accountable for their bad decisions.”

However, according to both Sumner and Giannelli, the silver lining is that California is not the global leader it believes itself to be. Sumner referenced national newspapers with bold headlines claiming that “people are moving out of California” — some publications have called it the “California Exodus.”

“California used to think it was the leader of the pack and everybody followed us,” Sumner said. “[But] given that we’ve got higher prices, higher unemployment, all kinds of other problems in California, there are few states saying ‘Gee, we want to be just like those guys.’”

Giannelli echoed this sentiment, stating that California is not a political leader.

“The rest of the states look at our policies as destructive,” Giannelli said. “Look at the mass amounts of companies leaving this state for other more business-friendly states — agriculture companies moving to Arizona and Florida to grow vegetable crops because regulations are not hindering their businesses.”

While the California Effect is seen in the national agricultural economy, such as through Prop 12 implementation and growing dissent for the Climate Accountability Package, the primary issue is the local ramifications on Central Valley farmers.

California agricultural regulations, including the overtime law for agricultural workers, limits on water usage, and environmental policies, have impacted agriculture by increasing the cost of doing business Giannelli explained.

“We need to stand together as an industry and take a stand and say, ‘No more,’” Giannelli said. “Look at the farmers in Europe — they protested back, and the government realized their policies were hurting their food production. It might take something that drastic to change hearts and minds.”

FINDING SOLUTIONS

Rather than belaboring the continuous cycle of harmful regulations, local farmers and ranchers can take part in several points of advocacy. For instance, the California Farm Bureau successfully advocated to amend Senate Bill 389 which would have given the State Water Board authority to investigate water rights claims at will without evidentiary support.

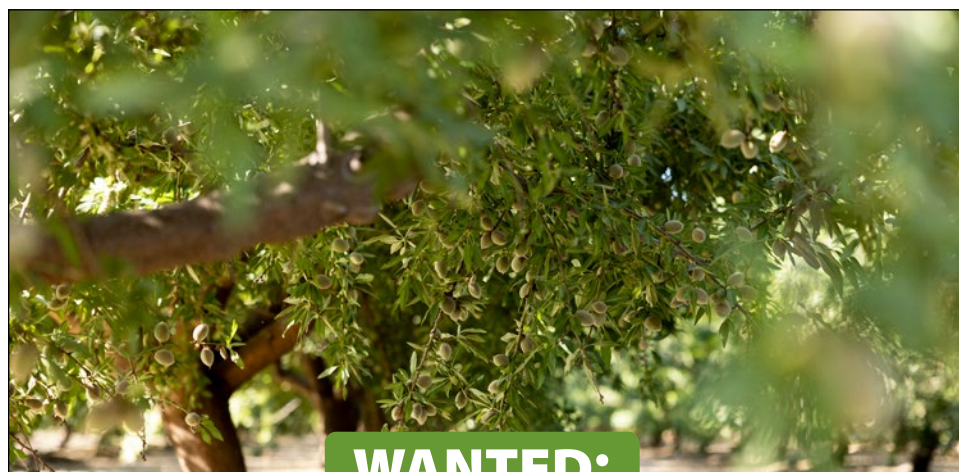
In a prior interview, Senior Policy Advocate for CFBB Alexandra Tollette Biering explained that the bureau called for the SWB to utilize an information order on a water rights claim, additionally requiring the board to explain the request’s validity with attached evidence.

The amendments pushed by the Farm Bureau changed SB 389 into less of a threat to agricultural water rights holders by altering the nature of the bill from enforcement to an amendment of the original water code, clarifying the SWB’s existing power to collect information.

“What we ended up doing was working with them to set certain thresholds and certain requirements that the water board had to meet in order to ask about a water rights claim,” Biering said.

Along with advocating on a state level, local organizations such as the Kern County Farm Bureau provide farmers with a platform to address regulations affecting their bottom line. A newly implemented program, “tailgate talks” is put on by KCFB, connecting agricultural community members to influential stakeholders with a platform to address prominent issues.

The future of agricultural production in the Central Valley lies in the hands of farmers, regardless of what politicians believe.



WANTED:

Growers looking for excellence in almond processing.

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The temperature control devices at Shasta Dam allow water of different temperatures to be pulled from different depths to meet downstream temperature requirements. Credit: Sacramento River Task Force.

Operation	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep
Hydrologic Forecast			*	x	x	x	x	x	x			
Releases for Senior Water Rights	x						x	x	x	x	x	x
CVP Allocation					x	x	x	x	x			
Temperature Management Plan							*	x				
Storing Inflow												
Releases from Storage												
D1641 MRDO, EC, & X2												
Redd Maintenance & Spring Pulse	Fall Flow Stability						Spring Pulse					
Winter-Run Egg Incubation												
Delta Smelt Summer & Fall Habitat												AN & W

Delta Science Issues

Continued from PAGE 1

continues to worsen, and water supplies are half of what water contractors were promised and paid for. Now, the Bureau has turned to the National Academy of Sciences to help resolve the science issues. The working arm of the National Academies in the National Research Council (NRC) appoints committees to work on the most difficult issues facing the U.S. Government.

In this case, the panel is made up of 18 scientists, half of whom are from California and the others from across the nation. The Committee is led by Dr. Perter Goodwin, who recently retired as head of the University of Maryland’s Center for Environmental Science. The initial charge for the Committee is very narrow, focused on just a few issues: Old and River flow management to protect salmon and delta smelt from entrainment at water project pumps, Shasta cold water pool management, and management of Delta flows to enhance summer and fall habitat for delta smelt.

The Shasta cold water issue concerns the management of cold-water releases on the Sacramento River. The Sacramento River has four different runs of salmon that use the river at different times. Salmon, particularly at young life stages, are very sensitive to water tempera-

tures. In large reservoirs, the water settles into layers with the cold water staying low in the reservoir and the warm water near the surface. Shasta Dam is equipped with flumes that allow water to be drawn from different levels of the reservoir. Reservoir managers can draw water simultaneously from different levels to try to meet downstream temperature requirements for salmon, while maximizing the number of days the requirements are met. But in many years, there is simply not enough cold water to meet all the demands.

Entrainment issues are a little more complicated. Both the state and federal projects have mechanisms to divert fish to salvage facilities before they reach the pumps. But many fish are eaten before they get to the facilities, and the fish diversion facilities themselves are not fully effective. As a result, endangered fish are killed as a result of exporting water from the Delta. The fish agencies restrict pumping during the first half of the year in the hope that fish can better escape the zone of influence of the pumps. This action is effective in reducing entrainment, but, on average, those protections cost around one million-acre feet per year. When the NRC last considered this issue a decade ago, they thought an engineering solution may be possible to reduce entrainment without large water supply impacts. Water contractors have been

working on that solution with the next step being the implementation of a demonstration project in the Delta, but lack of funding has hampered progress.

The summer and fall habitat is one of those combat science issues. On one hand, some scientists think that more outflows expand the area of water with suitable salinity conditions for delta smelt. Others argue that the smelt needs more food in summer and moving the low salinity field downstream to Suisun Bay does not help because food supplies in that area have been depleted since the invasion of the Asian Clam in 1986.

The NRC Committee met in Sacramento for a briefing on Delta Issues on Jan. 30-31 and toured the Delta on Feb. 1. The long-term operations of the SWP and CVP are being reviewed as part of new biological opinions. The Committee’s perspective on the science will be very helpful. A report from the Committee is expected in the fall of 2025.

Timeline for many of the operational requirements of Shasta Reservoir. MRDO = minimum required Delta outflow; EC = electrical conductivity; AN = above normal water year type; W = wet water year type. Source: USBR Long-Term Operation – Initial Alternatives, Appendix L, Shasta Coldwater Pool Management. 2022.

California’s Battle Against Oriental Fruit Fly and Avian Flu Escalates

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

California’s fruit and poultry industries are facing serious production strains due to two distinct, flighted adversaries — the Oriental fruit fly and migratory birds.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture is preparing a large-scale fruit removal in Southern California to mitigate the presence of Oriental fruit flies. Meanwhile, poultry owners in the Central Valley are taking precautions to prevent the spread of avian influenza.

Over 2,000 homeowners in San Bernardino County will have fruit removed from their trees by CDFA officials in an effort to eradicate the invasive Oriental fruit fly. Citrus trees, as well as other fruit-producing plants in the Redlands area, will be removed through February according to a CDFA press release.

“If left unchecked, the Oriental fruit fly could become permanently established and cause billions of dollars’ worth of losses annually, which would significantly impact California’s food supply,” the release said.

According to Bodil Cass, UC Riverside Cooperative Extension specialist, the estimated economic cost of the fly ranges from \$4 million to \$176 million in crop losses, pesticide use, and quarantine requirements.

Residents in the fruit-removal area have been cautioned not to remove fruit themselves or move produce from their property.

Along with mounting concerns of a fruit fly invasion, the avian flu is spreading at an alarming rate, impacting four commercial flocks, 2 backyard flocks, and 1,662,660 birds in the last 30 days. Since the avian flu outbreaks began roughly two years ago, the USDA has spent over \$1 billion to compensate farmers for lost flocks as well as to mitigate the spread of the disease.

The bird flu is primarily transmitted by migratory birds such as ducks and geese, which carry the virus and quickly spread it through droppings and nasal discharges. The current outbreak has resulted in nearly 82 million slaughtered birds — primarily egg-laying chickens — in 47 states, the USDA reported.

“I think this is an existential issue for the commercial poultry industry. The virus is on every continent, except for Australia at this point,” Maurice Pitesky, a poultry expert at the University of California, Davis, told the Associated Press.

Pitesky urged poultry owners to take necessary precautions to prevent their birds from encountering waterfowl. However, if birds cannot stay confined, he recommends keeping up good sanitation practices as well as the continuous monitoring of flocks.



Gum balls in a range of colors — from gold to amber to burgundy — are characteristic of aerial *Phytophthora syringae*. (Photo: Alejandro Hernandez/UC Davis).

Wet Winter Heightens Potential Almond Disease Outbreak

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

An unusual disease outbreak is afflicting California almonds on top of an already tumultuous market. *Phytophthora* — a soilborne microorganism that causes root and crown rot on tree bases — was detected in mid-February of 2023 and has since spread across the state.

According to Florent Trouillas, UC Cooperative Extension Specialist in fruit and nut pathology, heavy rainfall and mounting El Niño conditions may bring a recurring outbreak of aerial *Phytophthora*, casting serious implications on the almond industry.

Once established, it can infect a wide variety of crops, but it mainly impacts California almonds. One species of the disease — *Phytophthora syringae* — is of particular concern due to the unprecedented outbreak last winter fueled by the atmospheric rivers.

While the disease is rare, Trouillas noted that outbreaks of the disease are generally associated with El Niño years, and recent and persistent rain across the state should put growers on alert.

“It was found statewide – meaning in every almond-producing county – and disease incidence in orchards ranged from 10% of the trees infected to 75%,” Trouillas said.

The disease does not kill the tree, rather it causes branch dieback which results in

additional work and expense. When coupled with already high labor costs, the expense of treating *Phytophthora* becomes a daunting financial feat.

According to research from the 2023 outbreak, the *Phytophthora syringae* strain attacks cuts caused by pruning, effectively infecting young shoots on almond trees without any wounds.

“This was really the first time we had seen widespread evidence of infection on the twigs,” Trouillas said.

Thus, growers are advised to prune in dry weather as pruning shortly after rainfall increases the likelihood of infection. Cankers and gumming are characteristics of an infected tree, with the pattern and color of the gum balls being essential to properly diagnosing this *Phytophthora* strain.

If gum balls are found, generally in mid-February, growers can contact their local UC Cooperative Extension advisor to confirm if the tree is infected.

“It is super critical for growers that, whenever they see gumming, not to assume that it is this aerial *Phytophthora* because there are many other diseases that can cause gumming on the tree,” Trouillas said.

Upon a confirmed diagnosis, growers may be advised to apply a compound to control the infection and be provided with various curative treatment options.

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Farmers Regroup After Storms Batter State



A driver crosses floodwaters from the Sacramento River that submerged a road near farms in Colusa County last week. Storms toppled almond trees in nearby Glenn County, damaged avocado orchards with mudslides in Santa Barbara County and challenged vegetable growers in Imperial County. (Photo: Department of Water Resources)



By Christine Souza
Assistant Editor
Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

With a respite from stormy weather, farmers

say they are surveying for any damage and waiting for the ground to dry so they can access fields and orchards to make repairs or do other practices.

Historic and deadly storms that brought two weeks of rain and powerful winds to California led to mudslides, flooding and widespread power outages and related evacuations. A state of emergency was declared for eight Southern California counties.

In Santa Barbara County, farm manager Sheldon Bosio of Goleta-based Terra Bella Ranches said three mudslides affected about 40 avocado trees or about half an acre, which is half of what was lost from mudslides caused by storms last year.

“We farm a lot of hillsides, so a terrace will break from saturated soil, and then it moves and takes out the avocados below,” Bosio said. “The avocado trees at the top of the hill, where the majority of the weight (from the mud) was, those got buried, but the trees at the bottom are salvageable.”

He estimated it may cost \$10,000 for large equipment to repair the terrace road, plus labor to replace irrigation infrastructure and remove mud and brush from the groves.

As for the avocados on the trees, Bosio said the fruit hasn’t yet reached maturity.

“I don’t know of anybody that has started picking, because with the rain, it’s hard to get a crew in to pick, so everybody is waiting for things to dry out,” Bosio said.

Steve Pinto, purchasing director for Salinas-based Markon Cooperative, which supplies produce to food service, said crops such as strawberries and cilantro in Ventura County were impacted by excessive rains.

He noted flooded fields meant strawberry farmers had to cancel or postpone production.

“Large-stemmed strawberries have been the biggest industry challenge for Valentine’s Day orders due to weather this year,” Pinto said, noting Markon can source product from other growing regions and doesn’t anticipate supply gaps.

For the state’s winter vegetable crop, which transitioned to the desert growing region last fall, Imperial County farmer John Shaw raised concerns of crop mildew. He noted grounds were already wet from earlier rains when the recent storm dumped more moisture.

Shaw, who grows conventional and organic produce in Holtville, said the weather hasn’t disrupted harvest in his area. To minimize market disruptions, he confirmed that shippers packed orders in advance of the storms to supply customers.

Tulare County citrus farmer Matt Watkins, director of farm and field operations for Bee Sweet Citrus in Fowler, said the rain that hit the southern San Joaquin Valley is nothing close to the widespread flooding the region experienced last year.

Last March, water overtopped creek banks while reservoir releases flowed down rivers to the Tulare Lake bottom.

“Because we haven’t really got the bull’s-eye on us in these atmospheric rivers, we haven’t had those major releases, so we’ve been lucky so far,” Watkins said. “It’s a good amount of rain but nothing like last year.”

Citrus growers reported some weather impacts, Watkins said, such as a brief delay in picking navel oranges and some “quality issues like splits and different things that develop clear rot.”

“Where we farm in San Luis Obispo, we had excess rain, so it is really wet, and we’ve had some small trees with their first crop that tipped over from the weight of the fruit, the wind and the wet, wet ground,” Watkins said.

In Kern County, where winds exceeded 60 mph,

almond grower Jenny Holtermann of Wasco said winds toppled 100 of her almond trees.

“Almonds are shallow rooted, so that is why we plant them against the wind. But this storm came the opposite way, so it didn’t play in our favor,” Holtermann said.

Holtermann said replanting depends on the age of the trees.

“If an orchard is 20-plus years old and you lose trees, you’re probably not going to replant,” Holtermann said. “But if an orchard is 15 years old, then you would probably replant because you’d get another 10 to 15 years out of them.”

She said she must wait for drier conditions to do anything about the downed trees, adding tree removal will be expensive.

Glenn County almond grower Mike Vereschagin said he lost about 200 trees that were on older rootstock when winds knocked them over.

“It was a loss but wasn’t as bad as I was expecting compared to other years,” Vereschagin said. “When we had those big storms back in 2008, it was strong, 60-mph winds, and that year, I lost more than 6,000 trees.”

Once he is able to access the affected orchards, Vereschagin said he will clear the trees and brush.

In addition, wet conditions make it challenging for beekeepers who are moving final honeybee colonies into orchards to pollinate the almond

crop during bloom.

Even with farming challenges caused by the storms, farmers say they are grateful for the winter weather, which adds water to the state.

“We haven’t had to pay for irrigation for a while, and Lake Cachuma is at well over 90%, so that is the net benefit,” Bosio said of the Santa Ynez Valley reservoir.

“It is heartbreaking when you tend to orchards and then something happens that is out of your control, and you’ve got to start over,” he said. “But the overall benefit of the water negates the damage.”

Imperial County farmers, who rely on the Colorado River, Shaw said, have decreased water use significantly due to the rain. He said the storms increased the elevation in Lake Mead and Lake Powell.

“California is pretty resilient, and the farmers are resilient. But we need to strike a balance,” Shaw said. “If we had more water storage, it would certainly minimize the issues of farming and water supply, even to the cities.”

State and federal water officials said the past few weeks of storms were warmer than average, producing rain rather than snow at higher elevations.

The statewide Sierra Nevada snowpack, which was at 73% of average as of Monday, supplies about 30% of the state’s water needs.



Photo: alenamozhjer / Adobe Stock

New Census Shows Alarming Loss of Family Farms

Press release provided by the American Farm Bureau Federation

New agriculture census data released by USDA is cause for concern as the number of farms operating in the United States and the number of farm acres have both fallen significantly. The 2022 Census of Agriculture reports 141,733 fewer farms in 2022 than in 2017. The number of farm acres fell to 880,100,848, a loss of more than 20 million acres from just five years earlier.

“The latest census numbers put in black and white the warnings our members have been expressing for years,” said AFBF President Zippy Duvall. “Increased regulations, rising supply costs, lack of available labor and weather disasters have all squeezed farmers to the point that many of them find it impossible to remain economically sustainable.

“Family farms not only help drive the economy, they allow the rest of the nation the freedom to pursue their dreams without worrying about whether there will be enough food in their pantries. We urge Congress to heed the warning signs of these latest numbers. Passing a new farm bill that addresses these challenges is the best way to help create an environment that attracts new farmers and enables families to pass their farms to the next generation.”

While it’s encouraging that the number of beginning farmers increased, the latest census numbers show the number of farmers over the age of 65 is outpacing younger farmers. Almost 1.3 million farmers are now at or beyond retirement age, while just 300,000 farmers are under the age of 35. AFBF has long-established policies supporting beginning farmers, including through farm bill programs focused on new and beginning farmers.

Ag Groups Take on CA Climate Regulations



Governor Gavin Newsom at Climate Week in 2019. (Photo: Wikimedia Commons)

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Agriculture and business groups are suing California over two climate disclosure laws signed by Gov. Gavin Newsom in October. Coined as the Climate Accountability Package, Senate Bills 253 and 261 require large U.S. companies doing business in California to report greenhouse gas emissions and climate-related financial risks.

The American Farm Bureau Federation, Western Growers Association, the California and U.S. Chambers of Commerce, and the Los Angeles County and Central Valley Business Federations jointly filed the lawsuit in the U.S. District Court for the Central District of California.

These climate disclosure laws will be enforced upon businesses in the state and those wishing to do business with California.

SB 253 applies to entities within the U.S. with a total annual revenue greater than \$1 billion and do any business in the state. The California Air Resources Board will develop regulations for these businesses to publicly disclose GHG emissions annually in three scopes. Scope 1 refers to direct emissions that the business owns or controls, while scope 2 and 3 refer to indirect emissions that the business does not directly own or control.

Travis Cushman, deputy general counsel for the American Farm Bureau Federation, told The Packer that Scope 3 reporting requirements impose a nominal financial burden on American farmers.

“Scope 3 reporting requirements pose an existential threat to America’s Small and medium-sized farmers, risking a future where only the largest farms can survive,” Cushman said. “AFBF will fight to protect agriculture from Scope 3 data gathering and record keeping, whether it comes from California, the [Securities Exchange Commission], or elsewhere.”

Further, president of the California Chamber of Commerce, Jennifer Barrera explained that the new climate laws are not cost-effective and will not have a notable impact on climate change.

“Compelling businesses to report inconsistent and inaccurate information unnecessarily places them at risk for enormous penalties,” Barrera said in a statement.

The lawsuit also alleges that the bills violate the

First Amendment by compelling companies to issue a charged, speculative statement to conform behavior to the state’s political agenda.

“Both laws unconstitutionally compel speech in violation of the First Amendment and seek to regulate an area that is outside California’s jurisdiction and subject to exclusive federal control by virtue of the Clean Air Act and the federalism principles embodied in our federal Constitution,” the lawsuit stated.



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Presentations and videos from The Almond Conference 2023 are now on YouTube!
This year’s conference sessions featured a wide range of topics including:

• State of the Industry:	This session offered a full picture of the current global, agricultural and almond industry economics and trends.
• Building Global Demand for California Almonds:	This session delved into the current macro trends influencing consumer purchase decisions, providing specific examples of how the Almond Board is actively driving demand both presently and into the future.
• Grower Breakfast Session: Understanding Funding Opportunities:	This session provided more information on grants and incentives, directly from experts.

The variety of information shared at The Almond Conference continues to benefit the almond industry year after year. Scan the QR code to watch all sessions from The 2023 Almond Conference.



COMMENTARY: Mentoring Program to Assist New Farmers, Ranchers



As the most productive farming sector in the nation, California will soon depend on a new generation of farmers. The Expanding Our Roots program aims to prepare beginning farmers and ranchers for success.



By Amrith Gunasekara
Director of Science
& Research
California Bountiful
Foundation

*Reprinted with permission
from the California Farm
Bureau Federation*

On Feb. 21, online enrollment will begin for a new program to help prepare the next generation in California agriculture.

The California Bountiful Foundation, the science, research, and education arm of the California Farm Bureau, has secured funding to offer a mentoring program for 400 beginning farmers and ranchers.

The Expanding Our Roots program will connect beginning and early-career farmers and ranchers with one to ten years of experience with mentors who have worked for more than a decade in farming and ranching. Two hundred participants will be trained in 2024.

The goal of Expanding Our Roots, a first-of-its-kind program in California, is to help ensure agricultural sustainability and food security well into the future. The U.S. Department of Agriculture has awarded \$1 million in grants to the California Bountiful Foundation to support this effort. Half of the program participants must be specialty crop growers. As per funding requirements, primary consideration will be given to military veterans and socially disadvantaged farmers and ranchers.

Agriculture in California and nationally faces the challenge of an aging farming population, with many farmers and ranchers nearing

retirement. These agricultural veterans and their mid-career peers have a vast array of knowledge and life experiences not found in textbooks, classrooms, or other academic pursuits.

Their experiences come through built relationships, through learning from doing, and from trial and error on the farm and ranch. Our farmers handle challenges as complex as developing unique nutrient management plans or irrigation water schedules tailored to specific social types and crops. They are knowledgeable about market opportunities and maximizing food production to meet demand.

But for beginning farmers and ranchers, learning through trial and error may translate to financial risk, which can put upstart farms and ranches in peril.

This is at the heart of the Expanding Our Roots program—connecting beginning agricultural producers with seasoned professionals familiar with established methodologies and emerging agricultural technologies.

How can we help beginning farmers and ranchers who are already farming reduce their risk of doing business? One way is to provide them with mentors—someone they can trust and who has been down the pathway of exploring new markets and farming and ranching approaches. The mentor has already dealt with the risks. They can impart knowledge to help position the new generation that will soon guide our agricultural future.

The funding secured through grants by the California Bountiful Foundation will financially compensate mentor farmers and ranchers who provide valuable expertise and

training through Expanding Our Roots. By serving as mentors, they will share California's agricultural heritage and legacies for others to follow.

Mentoring is used in business and finance and by numerous organizations to promote knowledge transfer, increase profitability and ensure future growth. For California agriculture, this means sustaining and expanding America's most productive farming and ranching sector to meet the needs of our growing population.

Beginning farmers and ranchers who enroll in Expanding Our Roots will be provided with four annual one-day workshops at no cost, thanks to funding awarded to the program. The workshops will be held throughout the state. There will also be online opportunities for attendees to participate remotely.

The workshops will provide insights on regulations for farming and ranching in California. Participants will learn about financial incentives, including grant opportunities that can help them fund conservation management practices and climate-smart agriculture. They will be exposed to resources from the University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources and UC Cooperative Extension.

The Bountiful Foundation is partnering in Expanding Our Roots with the California Farm Bureau, 54 county Farm Bureaus and the Black Agriculture Working Group, with assistance from Michael O'Gorman, founder of the Farmer Veteran Coalition. To sign up for a Feb. 16 webinar and learn more about the program, visit californiabountifulfoundation.com.

The effort integrates well with existing programs such as the California Farm Bureau's Young Farmers & Ranchers program. YF&R provides opportunities to develop leadership skills through involvement in Farm Bureau at county, state, and national levels. YF&R members represent the diversity of farmers and ranchers across the state. We hope that many participants in YF&R programs at the state and county levels will seek to participate in the Expanding Our Roots program.

California is the nation's most productive agriculture sector and is critical to our food security. As longtime California farmers and ranchers prepare to pass the torch to the next generation of agriculturists, we believe our beginning farmers and ranchers will meet the challenge. Through Expanding our Roots, they will get a valuable head start.

(Amrith Gunasekara, Ph.D., is director of science and research for the California Bountiful Foundation, an affiliate 501(c)(3) of the California Farm Bureau. He may be reached at agunasekara@cbbf.com.)

Important UC ANR Resources for CA Farmers

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The University of California Agriculture and Natural Resources Department is a valuable resource for local farmers and ranchers. Along with credible, data-driven studies, UC ANR offers educational workshops and innovative solutions to common problems in the Central Valley.

COST AND RETURN STUDIES

In partnership with UC Davis, UC ANR posts cost and return studies, showcasing a broad range of commodities produced in California. Cost and Return studies contain valuable information regarding the costs of production of a given commodity from operating costs, monthly and annual costs, establishment costs for perennial crops, and other costs associated with operating a farm.

The UC Cost and Return Studies website has over 3,500 studies that have been maintained and archived since the 1930s. Cost studies are valuable resources for farmers, researchers, bakers, USDA agencies, rural land appraisers, and several other sectors of the agriculture industry. According to their website, the most important feature of the studies is the objective information it offers from members of the industry and established experts.

Cost studies can be sorted by commodity, production region, or county within California.

RELEVANT RESEARCH

UC ANR also engages in timely research based on local issues facing the California agricultural industry. For instance, as the avian flu outbreak continues to cause concern among poultry farmers, the UC Cooperative Extension created a poultry health application.

The mobile UC Community Chicken app offers information for raising healthy chickens, containing six educational modules. The modules provide information on health assessments, nutrition, vaccination, biosecurity, bird behavior, and husbandry.

Users can also communicate directly with UC experts and other poultry owners through the chat and feedback buttons.

UC ANR also posts frequent research publications, free to view and download. Visit the UC ANR website for the publication catalog and other educational features.

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CA Almond Board Announces 2024 Leadership Class

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The Almond Board of California announced its 2024 leadership class for 18 professionals to help secure the future of the almond industry. Class members come from diverse industry backgrounds including growers, processors, sales representatives, sustainability specialists, company executives, and pest control advisors.

Bayer Crop Science is sponsoring the 2024 class of 18, chosen from over 50 applicants. According to an ABC press release, the class offers an opportunity to connect with industry leaders and expand upon leadership skills.

“We have had so many great participants through the years, and this 2024 class is simply outstanding,” Rebecca Bailey, ABC senior specialist said in the release. “This program helps great people become great leaders and our industry continues to see the enormous benefits from 15 years of ALP. We have no doubt these 18 people will continue to be great assets and advocates for the almond industry.”

Bailey explained that several past Almond Leadership Program class members now work in ABC workgroups, committees, and the Board of Directors. Beginning in 2009, the class graduated 226 industry members.

Members of the 2024 class will continue to work at their jobs but have the opportunity to immerse themselves in all aspects of the industry including activities in global marketing, production, nutrition research, and food safety.

Erik Stanek, 2024 class member and sustainability specialist with Blue Diamond Growers explained the importance of networking and remaining connected to professionals in various sectors of the almond supply chain.

“Industry challenges are not solved in a silo. For me, ALP offers an opportunity to build meaningful relationships that can lead to actionable solutions,” Stanek said. “The program helps lift the entire industry.”

The class is guided by volunteer mentors, many of whom are past ALP graduates. Along with networking opportunities, members will learn the impact of social, economic, environmental, and regulatory issues and work toward a yearlong, self-directed project centered on improving the California almond industry.

Like previous years, class members plan to raise over \$25,000 in scholarships for California FFA students interested in pursuing agriculture in college.



Almond Board of California 2024 leadership class (Photo courtesy of the Almond Board of California)

2024 ALMOND LEADERSHIP CLASS

Members of this year’s ALP class include:

Ziv Attia of Bakersfield and Phytex; Andy Barahate of Kerman and Central California Almond Growers Association; Gurajan Brar of Madera and Brar & Son Farms; Matthew Brocato of Fresno and Phytex; Mark Cavallero of Madera and Sierra Valley Almonds; Zachary Days of Patterson and Cal Coast Almond Processing Inc.; Mallory Dodds of Fresno and Gowan USA; Ryan Hackett of Modesto and Gold Leaf Farming; Brandon

Heinrich of Modesto and B&M Orchards; Amanda Hernandez of Hollister and TriCal Inc.; Victoria Lee of Sacramento and Blue Diamond Growers; Sutter Long of Corning and Bayer Crop Science; Antonio Lopez of Woodland and Yocha Dehe Wintun Nation; Ryan McCoon of Escalon and Cultiva; Edgar Perez of Modesto and American AgCredit; Jeevan Sandhu of Yuba City and Wilbur Ellis; Erik Stanek of Sacramento and Blue Diamond Growers; and Delaney Woolwine of Fresno and Harris Woolf California Almonds.



Kern County Young Farmers & Ranchers 4th Annual Clay Shoot

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Joji Muramoto, a soil scientist and agroecologist at the University of California, Santa Cruz, visits a Bay Area farm as part of a project to study no-till organic cultivation. Muramoto is the first organic production specialist for the UC Cooperative Extension. (Photo: Erin Foley, Center for Agroecology, University of California, Santa Cruz)

As Organic Sector Thrives, Research Seeks to Catch Up

By Bob Johnson, Reporter, Monterey County

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

California leads the nation in organic agricultural production, accounting for more than \$14 billion in organic sales and 36% of the U.S. organic market in 2021.

Yet research has lagged behind the exponential growth of organic farming in the state.

Now that trend may be changing, thanks to an increasing focus on supporting organic studies and information sharing.

In 2020, the University of California system opened the Organic Agriculture Institute to facilitate development of organic research and extension programs.

The institute's launch came a year after UC Santa

Cruz elevated soil scientist and agroecologist Joji Muramoto as the state's first UC Cooperative Extension organic production specialist. Muramoto has conducted extensive research on soil-borne disease management in organic vegetable production. (See related story on Page 11.)

Darryl Wong, executive director for the UC Santa Cruz Center for Agroecology, said the center is working to connect farm-level findings of organic growers with the more specialized studies performed by academic researchers.

"Farmers do action research that starts with what happened in the field; epistemic research takes it to the question of how and why it happened," Wong said. "To move organic forward, we need to balance these two research approaches."

With organic studies drawing increasing funding interest, researchers and growers are looking to identify potential study areas that are best connected

to day-to-day challenges of organic farming.

"Soil health, water and pest management are at the top in our preliminary survey of growers," said Shriya Rangarajan, postdoctoral researcher at the UC Organic Agriculture Institute.

Rangarajan said many organic farmers have relied on getting information from other growers because of a lack of organic farm advisors and research.

The institute is attempting to coordinate the sources of information about organic agriculture scattered throughout the UC and Cooperative Extension systems and identify the most important knowledge gaps.

The institute was launched with an initial \$500,000 endowment from Clif Bar & Co. and \$500,000 in matching funds from the UC Office of the President. In 2022, the California Department of Food and Agriculture awarded \$1.85 million to help the UC system increase technical assistance for organic farmers.

Without an established network of Cooperative Extension advisors with expertise in organic production, many growers had developed a knack for searching on their own for specialists to advise them, said Larry Jacobs, president and co-founder of Jacobs Farm del Cabo, a Santa Cruz-based organic producer.

"Find people who are knowledgeable, hook them in, support them, and don't give up," Jacobs suggested during a panel discussion in Monterey called "Understanding Evolving Production Challenges for Organic Growers."

Rangarajan said economic realities can be particularly important for new or smaller organic farmers.

"Transitional growers have additional challenges accessing capital and markets," Rangarajan said. "There is a consolidation on the buyer side, and that affects prices. We need to expand the scope of organic research to include ag economists and nutritionists."

In 2020, the Organic Farming Research Foundation surveyed more than 1,100 certified organic and 71 transitioning-organic farmers and ranchers across North America about their production systems, soil-health management practices and pressing production challenges.

According to survey results published in 2022, 67% of organic growers identified controlling weeds as a prime challenge. Managing production costs was cited by 59%, and 48% said soil fertility and crop nutrition was a challenge.

Jacobs, who farms 400 acres of organic culinary herbs, stressed the importance of organic research and expertise.

At the Monterey panel session, he described working with a CDFA biological control unit to help solve a squash bug problem.

He said he found the answer to nematode management in tomatoes was a combination of using more tolerant varieties and rotating into mustard as a biofuel crop that also served as a biofumigant for the soil.

Jacobs' organic research interests extend far beyond California's borders. He has searched for experts who could help control fruit flies on organic hard squash in Tanzania.

He said organic growers face unique crop-production challenges because they rely on biological solutions, which don't draw the same research attention and corporate funding for studies as do chemical formulas used in conventional agriculture.

"There are better biological solutions, but no one is making money off them, so nobody is pushing them," Jacobs said. "Organic research has been a neglected tool for a long time, but that is starting to change."

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Congress Addresses H-2A Farm Wage, Rates Increase by 5%

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

In response to mounting concerns about rising agricultural labor expenses, 75 Congressional members petitioned the House and Senate appropriations committees to prohibit any H-2A wage increase from Jan. 2023 levels.

The letter, submitted on Jan. 11, expressed concerns over the annual adjustment of the Adverse Effect Wage Rate by the U.S. Department of Labor. In 2024, national labor rates for H-2A workers are expected to increase to \$17.55 per hour, marking a 5% increase from 2023.

However, the AEWV varies by region, and due to California's already high labor rates, agricultural employers will pay \$19.75 per hour.

"Meanwhile, producers in Canada pay closer to \$11 per hour for fieldworkers, or even approximately \$1.50 per hour in Mexico. This uneven playing field greatly disadvantages our domestic producers," the letter stated.



(Photo: F Armstrong Photo / Adobe Stock)

The Department of Labor's executive order went into effect on Jan. 1, but lawmakers are adamantly proposing to freeze the H-2A wage rates in upcoming funding legislation. Increasing the AEWV further inflates input costs such as energy and fertilizer as well as transportation and housing expenses for guest workers.

According to data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, for every \$100 spent on production, roughly \$10 goes toward labor, and 15% of total cash expenses go to hired farm labor. Further, more labor-intensive industries, such as specialty crops, already spend nearly 40% of total cash expenses on labor.



Growers learned agriculture safety and how to properly apply chemicals at the Kern County Farm Bureau's 18th Annual Spray Safe event. (Photo: Valley Ag Voice)

Kern County Farm Bureau Teaches Growers to 'Spray Safe'

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Kern County Farm Bureau's 18th Annual Spray Safe Event kicked off at 7 a.m. on Jan. 19 with an ag trade show featuring products such as GUSS and Ag Spray Equipment. At the event, over 600 attendees learned proper agriculture safety when applying pesticides.

In a prior interview, Spray Safe chair Dan Palla explained that growers and employees must maintain their knowledge of agriculture safety and stay updated on regulatory challenges.

"Laws constantly change. So, growers need to be updated on laws, and they need to be reminded of the things that they already should be doing and are doing," Palla said. "Our laws are so rigorous, complicated and it takes reminding to remember all the rules and laws you're supposed to obey, especially on pesticides."

A majority of the attendees are agricultural

employees, Rachel Nettleton, executive director of KCFB explained. Spray Safe presents an opportunity for the agriculture industry to learn about the safe application of chemicals and new regulations through workshops and presentations in English and Spanish.

Attendees were split into groups and rotated through different stations to hear from various organizations, such as the Kern County Fire Department, Highway Patrol, and the Department of Pesticide Regulations.

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

At the end of the learning sessions, KCFB hosted a raffle item giveaway with various prizes, including wallets, catering gift cards, laptop cases, and more.



Stacie Ann Silva (far left), principal owner of Altum Aqua Logic, and Aaron Fukuda (left), General Manager of the Tulare Irrigation District and Mid-Kaweah GSA, participate in a guest panel on SGMA at the 2024 World Ag Expo. (Photo: Valley Ag Voice)

SGMA Compliance

Continued from PAGE 1 nearing completion and is designed not only for groundwater recharge but also to provide drinking water for the Okieville community.

The GSA has also adopted several linear recharge basins that convert creeks that run through cities such as the Packwood Creek in Visalia.

"We put in five automated check structures that create five pools of water in the creek and it percolates water immensely," Fukuda said. "We lose about 50 cfs or 100 acre-feet per day in that channel through the city, so we're converting Cameron Creek, which is just south of Packwood Creek, into that same system."

Fukuda highlighted the willingness of growers in Tulare County to engage in discussions about groundwater allocations and work toward solutions in unfavorable conditions. In response to the drought and grower concern in 2022, an emergency ordinance was implemented, measuring groundwater pumping through evapotranspiration.

While placing a maximum allotment cap on groundwater pumping was not ideal at the time, 2023 essentially turned this action from a restriction to an incentive. Fukuda explained that growers applied water strategically, leading to historic diversions and potentially establishing a groundwater market.

"In 2023, when we had the wet year when we were announcing a flood release, we were asking for help, for people to take water because we had water coming out everywhere, the growers understood that if they over-applied water in the wintertime, it's just gonna percolate into the ground and they were gonna get a credit," Fukuda said. "It's the same thing as your online bank — you have a savings account, a checking account, and maybe some other special account and you put money in, and you take it out."

Essentially, some growers put so much groundwater credit into the ground that they can sell it to those who do not have enough.

Despite innovative efforts to enhance groundwater sustainability, SGMA compliance remains a minefield for many Central Valley growers, GSAs, and irrigation districts. According to

Stacie Ann Silva, principal owner of Altum Aqua Logic, the most common misconception about SGMA is that it is not a big deal.

"I would argue that it is the most significant piece of water legislation in over 100 years and is going to fundamentally change how we operate agriculture properties, how we operate our water rights system, and kind of how we move through the transition to sustainability is going to alter most aspects of agriculture," Silva said.

In her presentation at the World Ag Expo, "Implementation and Implications of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act," Silva explained that roughly 500,000 acres are estimated to be out of agricultural production by 2040 due to water supply issues.

Nearly all those acres will be in the Southern San Joaquin Valley due to severe overdraft.

To reach sustainability, GSAs develop sustainability plans, which include projects and management functions such as recharge projects, groundwater markets, land fallowing, and repurposing.

The risk of not reaching sustainability entails the State Water Board taking control of an inadequate basin.

"[GSAs] care a lot about the things that you guys care about, and they are making very tough decisions that they know will impact themselves and their neighbors, and they make them with the understanding of the impact of those decisions," Silva said. "I'm sure the people that work at the State Water Resources Control Board are very kind [but] they do not have that same perspective. They do not have the local perspective, and that is what you lose if, as a GSA, you fail to meet the requirements set forth by those agencies."

While SGMA compliance is daunting, both Fukuda and Silva encouraged growers to take control of their future.

"And farmers, if they all got together collectively, it could be a pretty powerful voice of reason and solutions...SGMA has created a world of the 'haves' and 'have-nots' — guys that have surface water [are] the haves, and the guys without surface water [are] the have-nots," Fukuda said. "What I would advocate for growers to do is to take their future into their hands, sit down with their local leaders, and have a discussion."

Almond Industry to See Significant Rebound



Aubrey Bettencourt, President of the Almond Alliance, presented the global economic outlook for the agriculture industry at the 2024 World Ag Expo. (Photo: Valley Ag Voice)

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

A strong rebound in almond prices is expected over the next 12 to 18 months. In a new five-year almond outlook report by RaboResearch Food and Agribusiness Group, researchers anticipate an ongoing recovery in the global demand for almonds and record increases in production, domestic and export shipments.

According to Aubrey Bettencourt, President of the Almond Alliance, cautious optimism characterizes the almond industry's outlook for 2024, and the recovery from 2023 is well underway.

"Let's embrace that we didn't get the shipments out in 2023 that we wanted to, we carried in more than we had anticipated, we didn't meet our goal for getting that carry-in reduced...I think 2024 is kind of a digging in your heels and restructuring to try to start crawling and digging our way out," Bettencourt said.

The hits that the almond industry took in 2022 and 2023 — from tropical storms to decreased exports — are expected to drive ending stock to the lowest level in four years. With lower carry-in anticipated in 2024, the Rabobank report explained that the multiyear impact on the market is clearing a way for price stabilization at stronger levels.

California's almond industry, which accounts for roughly 80% of global almond production, will play a critical role in determining the state of almond markets. Bettencourt explained that the Almond Alliance works closely with the Almond

Board of California which primarily works toward market and product development around the world.

"We have an opportunity to see some things move up, especially if you know, maybe the Fed lowers the interest rate — the dollar gets a little weaker — that should open up some buying activities and a little more movement on the global consumption side," Bettencourt said. "We're starting to make the turn, but we are still in a recovery period."

INDUSTRY OUTLOOK

The almond industry took several hits last year, ranging from a tropical storm to decreased exports. According to the report, limited water availability, elevated input costs, logistical disruptions, rising inflation, and interest rates contributed to the challenging almond market over the past three seasons.

Adding to that, 2023 brought several production hurdles such as flooding, pollination issues, and insect damage.

The U.S. almond industry is reliant on international shipments, the report explained, and domestic almond shipments are expected to reach a new record in the 2025-2026 year, with an average estimate of 821 million pounds.

Reductions of Indian tariffs are fueling export growth while strong marketing efforts will continue to support almond demand. The Almond Alliance is working with growers, offering technical assistance, securing grants, and assisting farmers in disaster programming.

The organization represents nearly 90% of hullers and shellers in California and engages with growers through committees and "tiger teams" focused on specific issues.

"We want to see more engagement with our growers. I think the almond community needs more outlets for that," Bettencourt said. "So, we're trying to provide that by providing almost like a Starbucks — a third place — for growers to get not only resources but to also have a voice in the process."

Despite positive trends, the report explained that the almond industry still faces significant risks from geopolitical tensions, logistical concerns, and energy price volatility. An increase in competition within the tree nut space will also add to the complexity of the industry's outlook.



Leadership Farm Bureau Class Announced for 2024

Press release provided by the California Farm Bureau Federation

Nine agricultural professionals have been chosen for the California Farm Bureau's 2024 Leadership Farm Bureau program.

Leadership Farm Bureau class members will participate in a 10-month educational and development initiative that prepares them for leadership roles in Farm Bureau and agriculture. The program includes 250 hours of instruction, with seminars on key issues affecting California farmers and ranchers and agricultural businesses.

Program participants will learn about government and legislation, media and communications, public speaking and team building. They will also attend lobbying sessions in Sacramento and Washington, D.C., and meet with lawmakers and administrative and regulatory officials.

Members of the Leadership Farm Bureau class include:

- **Ben Abatti III** of Imperial County, a third-generation farmer who grows alfalfa, sugar beets, wheat and other forage crops in Holtville.

- **Alex Arroyo** of Monterey County, general manager of King City Transplanting in the Salinas Valley.

- **Tanya Brouse** of Butte County, a

program coordinator for the Butte County Farm Bureau who also works with the Butte Agriculture Foundation.

- **Sy Honig** of Sutter County, a third-generation farmer, owner of Honig Farms and a pest control advisor.

- **Jackie Kennedy** of Glenn County, founder of Knaughty Farms Olive Oil and office manager for a family farm growing olives, rice and walnuts.

- **James Moller** of Shasta County, a seventh-generation cattle rancher and a manager for Driscoll's Inc. focusing on strawberry nursery production.

- **Rachel Nettleton** of Kern County, executive director of the Kern County Farm Bureau and a marketing and communications professional.

- **Harsimerdip "Harry" Sidhu** of Sutter County, a vice president of First Northern Bank in Yuba City who grew up on his family's fruit and nut farm.

- **Danielle Vietti** of Tulare County, a vice president at AgWest Farm Credit in Tulare who specializes in dairy financing.

The California Farm Bureau works to protect family farms and ranches on behalf of more than 26,000 members statewide and as part of a nationwide network of 5.8 million Farm Bureau members.





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New Census Shows Cattle and Sheep Industries Continue Steep Declines

Press release provided by R-Calf USA

BILLINGS, Mont., – The release of the 2022 Census of Agriculture by the Department of Agriculture reveals that two agricultural industries vital to the economic well-being of Rural America, particularly western Rural America, are in steep decline.

The new cattle and calves census shows America lost nearly 107,000 beef cattle farms and ranches during the past five years, representing a loss rate of over 21,000 cattle producers per year. It also shows the U.S. beef cow herd has declined another 2.5 million cows, representing an 8% reduction in the beef cow herd since 2017, and resulting in the smallest beef cow herd in decades.

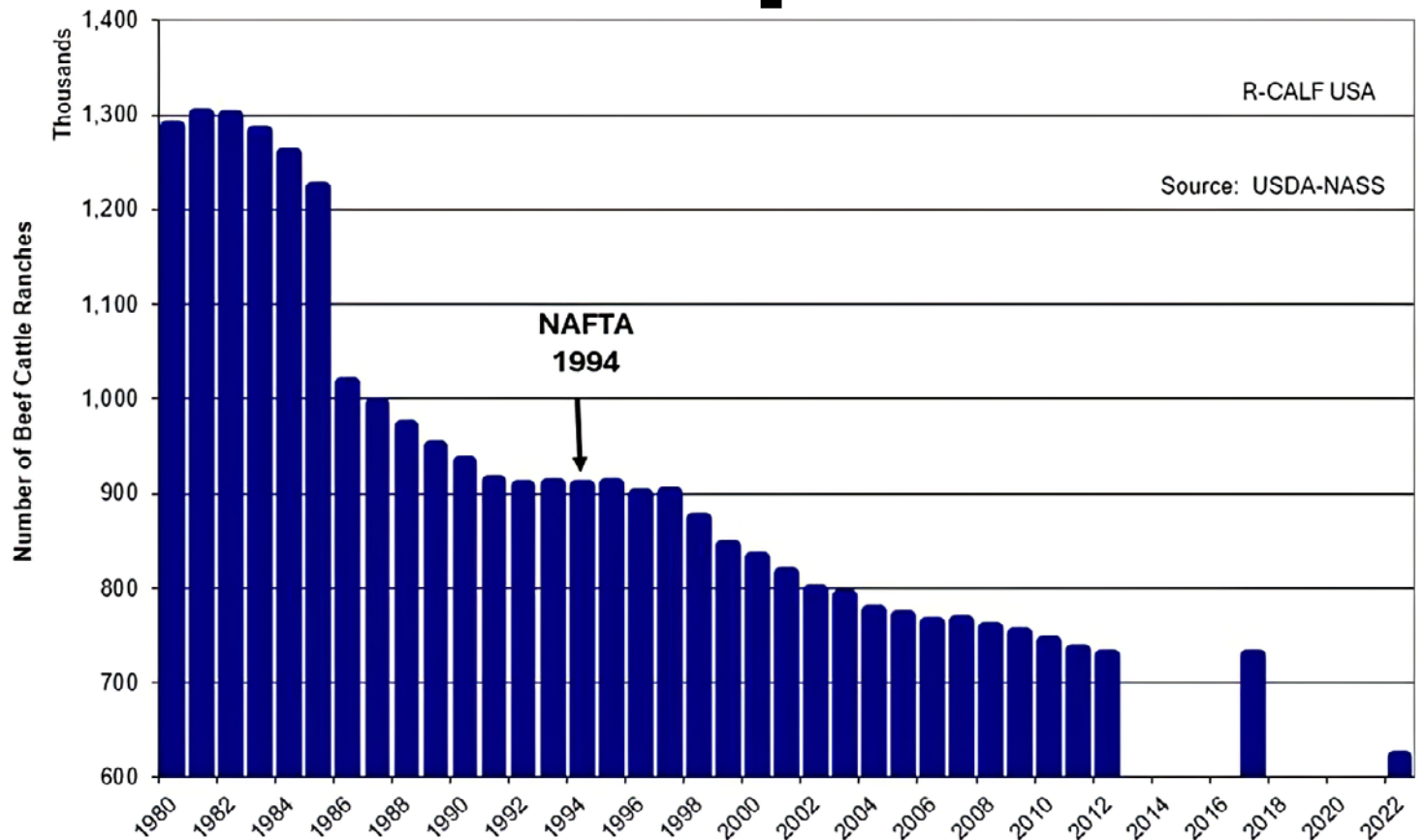
As for the sheep industry, the new sheep and lambs census reveals that nearly 500 full-time sheep producers (those with a herd size of at least 100 head) have exited the industry since 2017, and the U.S. sheep inventory, at only 5.1 million head in 2022, likewise represents the smallest U.S. sheep herd in decades.

“While the U.S. experienced widespread drought beginning in mid-2020, the drought only contributed to the cattle and sheep industries’ steep decline that started four decades ago,” said R-CALF USA CEO Bill Bullard.

Bullard said the U.S. lost nearly 558,000 beef cattle operations from 1980 until the previous 2017 census, representing a loss rate of over 15,000 producers per year. And now it’s lost nearly 665,000 through 2022.

“That means we’ve now lost well over half of all U.S. beef cattle farms and ranches in just over a generation and more than 5 of every 10 beef cattle farmers and ranchers in business in 1980 are gone today,” continued Bullard.

He said the situation in the sheep industry is



Alarming Exodus of America's Beef Cattle Operations

Total loss of 665K Operations (~16,000 Operations Lost Each Year from 1980-2022)

worse. “We’ve now lost more than 6 of every 10 full-time sheep producers that were in business just over a generation ago.”

Bullard said these long-term losses pose a grave danger to U.S. food security. “We are fast centralizing our production supply chains for beef and lamb, making them much more vulnerable to disease, climate, and geopolitical events.

“Our members have been offering solutions to reverse these negative trajectories for decades,

but so far neither Congress nor the USDA has taken any meaningful steps to address this serious problem,” he continued.

Bullard said the cattle industry needs an infusion of competitive forces that can only materialize if consumers can distinguish beef exclusively produced in the U.S. with a mandatory country of origin label. He said Congress or USDA needs to eliminate anticompetitive cattle procurement tools such as unpriced forward contracts; and that both the cattle and sheep industries need relief

from unlimited imports that allow multinational meat packers to source cheaper beef and lamb from around the world that then displace domestically produced beef and lamb.

“The alarming contraction of our cattle and sheep industries are a serious threat to our nation’s food security and we’re hopeful Congress will respond with meaningful solutions in the 2024 Farm Bill,” Bullard concluded.

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What Exactly is Digital Marketing and Why is it Important for Your Brand?

By Dave Plivelich, CEO
The Marcom Group

Digital marketing serves as a tool for businesses to amplify their message. It allows companies to grab the attention of the world showcasing what they have to offer through the reach of the internet. Picture a scenario where billboards extend beyond roadsides and appear on computer screens, tablets, and smartphones. That’s essentially what digital marketing entails.

So what is digital marketing? In terms it refers to promoting products or brands using electronic media. It sets itself apart from marketing by utilizing channels and techniques that enable organizations to analyze marketing campaigns in real time gaining insights into their effectiveness.

Why is digital marketing crucial? Imagine having a store with exceptional products but lacking awareness among potential customers. This is where digital marketing steps in. It empowers businesses to connect with customers who are engrossed in smartphone scrolling Google searches, Facebook browsing, or YouTube video watching. Think of it as a signpost that directs people towards a company’s website or online store.

Here’s why digital marketing plays a role in building a company’s brand:

Connects with People Where They Spend Their Time: With so many people online it is essential for businesses to reach out to their potential customers in that world. Digital marketing allows companies to engage with audiences where they spend a portion of their time.

Cost Effective Alternative to Traditional Marketing: Traditional marketing methods like TV ads or billboards can be quite expensive. However digital marketing provides an affordable option that can reach a broader audience at a lower cost.

Levels the Playing Field: In the past, only big corporations with substantial marketing budgets could afford certain advertising channels. Now, thanks to digital marketing tools and platforms, businesses of all sizes have an equal opportunity to make an impact and reach their target audience.

Precisely Targets the Audience: It’s like having a homing device that directs your message towards

people who’re genuinely interested, in what your company offers. For example, if you sell gardening tools, digital marketing enables you to identify and connect with gardening enthusiasts directly.

Promotes Customer Engagement: Digital marketing goes beyond displaying advertisements. It involves engaging with customers through social media interactions, interactive websites, personalized targeted emails, and more.

Having a conversation with customers is more than persuading them to make purchases.

Easily Monitor Results: One of the advantages is the ability to track the performance of a campaign. Through marketing businesses can gather insights on how many individuals viewed their advertisements how many clicked on them and even how many made purchases as a result.

Enhances Brand Reputation: By delivering on promises companies can establish a connection with their target audience that can transform customers into brand advocates. This ultimately strengthens the reputation of the brand.

The methods employed in marketing can vary, ranging from engaging potential customers through email campaigns and optimizing website content for better search engine rankings to running ad campaigns across various social media platforms. The primary objective remains capturing people’s attention and converting them into customers.

Digital marketing serves as the lifeblood for a company’s presence and plays an essential role, in its growth during this digital era. It enables brands to shine amidst the online landscape and attract the attention of relevant individuals at opportune moments.

About the Author

Dave Plivelich, 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. TheMarcomGroup.com / MarcomBranding.com.



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2024 World Ag Expo: 'The Best Farm Show on Dirt'



The 2024 World Ag Expo took place in Tulare, California in February. (Photos: Valley Ag Voice)



By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The 57th Annual World Ag Expo ran from February 13 - 15 this year, spotlighting over 1,200 exhibitors at the International Agri-Center in Tulare, California. Every year the farm show brings tremendous revenue to Tulare County, as well as a deeper appreciation for California agriculture.

Over 100,000 attendees saw the latest in ag tech, heard from industry experts at the seminar trailers, and experienced a snapshot of the Central Valley's dedication to agriculture. This year, several of the exhibitors demonstrated their technology and highlighted a catered approach to the unique ag landscape of our valley.

World Ag Expo Chairman Stan Creelman told ABC News that the local economic impact is more than \$56 million. Along with several new, innovative technologies, the farm show featured its first live cattle auction.



EXHIBITOR SPOTLIGHT

While exhibitors and attendees traveled across the nation to attend the expo, several local companies gained tremendous exposure. The show included over 100 demonstrations of various types of agricultural equipment as well as educational displays. One company, Nutrien Ag Solutions — the world's largest crop inputs company with several crop consultants located in the Central Valley — offered an interactive booth with flower seeds.

Many of the exhibits showcased their worth for the Central Valley landscape in terms of its unique terrain. Clawson Motorsports attended the show with its all-terrain vehicles, focusing largely on electric vehicles to align with California's goals and regulations.

Another company dedicated to sustainable energy solutions, Valley Pacific, highlighted its mission to fuel California. Alternative fuels, such as biodiesel, were showcased, underscoring the company's initiative to meet any grower's needs while remaining sustainable.

Other company spotlights include Pearson Realty, Holloway Ag, New Holland, and AgWest Farm Credit. Planning for next year's expo is already underway, and those interested in exhibiting can begin submitting vendor applications.





(Photo: Lulijia Kovalova / Adobe)

Are the Gospels Historically Reliable?

By Joshua Stevens
Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

For nearly two millennia, Christians have looked to the gospels to read the words and acts of Christ and His ministry here on Earth. From these written works, Christians rest dogmatic views such as the divinity of Christ, the virgin birth of the Messiah, the death, resurrection, and great commission. However, skeptics have posed the legitimate question of how we know the gospels we have today are genuine, accurate, and true.

This is not an argument for the infallibility of scripture; it is just that what we have today is the same as what the early Christians had, and it accurately depicts what happened. To determine reliability, one must first set a bar for what *is* and *isn't* reliable.

A common example posited to show this would be if your friend tells you that a concert is going to be in town and, as it turns out, there is no concert in town. He would be wrong in that instance, but that does not then mean he is unreliable. A greater sample size would need to be shown to substantiate that claim. As for the gospels, as noted by apologist and author Jimmy Aiken, there are over 50 examples from the gospel where skeptics such as Bart Ehrman agree that the gospels are probably or very probably right.¹ These examples include that Jesus was born as a real person who lived in first-century Palestine as a Jew and a teacher and was crucified under Pontius Pilate. These are not small claims but integral claims to the faith we hold.

Erhman's greatest critique of the scriptures seems to be a couple of things as Joel Edmund Anderson writes, "What Ehrman essentially argues throughout many of his books on Jesus is this: (1) we don't have the original manuscripts of the four gospels, (2) the thousands of copies that we do have all have differences (these are called 'textual variants'), and therefore (3) you can't really trust anything you read in the New Testament because it is not reliable. That's basically the core thesis of most of his books."²

Taking these critiques individually, why should we believe the gospels if we don't have the original

manuscripts? The first thing to consider is when looking at the reliability of the gospels, we should judge it based on the standards of the time, where most copies that survived to us today are hundreds of years after the original; for the gospels, we are looking at the span of less than one hundred years. P52, a fragment of John's gospel, was dated as early as 125 AD, and Clement's letter to Rome was dated as early as 95 AD and contains quotes from 10 New Testament books.³ We have early copies and more of them than any historical event in antiquity.

When looking at how Ehrman defines differences, his argument will be regarding differences in the story between the gospel narratives—from John’s changing the day Christ was crucified to apparent contradictions with the birth of Christ. One way to view these differences is to remember that each gospel has a slightly different way of approaching the story and different audiences. They also employ different narrative devices to tell a particular story. Most apparent contradictions can be explained by several commonly used devices such as paraphrasing, interpretation, abbreviation, omission, reordering of events or sayings, and/or reporting similar events and sayings. The final thing to note regarding differences is that they aren’t always contradictions, for example:

“Consider these two sentences:

- There's a window in my office
- There's no window in my office

This is a true contradiction because for one of these sentences to be true, the other must be false. These are not the kinds of contradictions usually attributed to the gospels. Instead, the discussions tend to center around apparent discrepancies and contrary accounts, but when we look closely at them, we find that they're typically cleared up pretty easily."⁴

Reliability is judged subjectively. Some skeptics believe the apparent contradiction between the synoptic gospels and the gospel of John, such as the day and time of Christ's crucifixion, to be a nail in the coffin. Others can see why John changed the day and time to highlight a theological point or can

harmonize the passages.

At the end of the day, the gospels are more right than wrong, and the margin is not small. Moreover, they are more right about the core issues at hand, being Christ's birth, life, death, and resurrection. Proof abounds surrounding the gospels' historical facts, including the characters' names and places, which are real and accurate for the time, and there are no anachronisms. The amount of manuscript evidence and the short period it took to write copies can and should give us faith that what we read today is what the earliest Christians read.

Will you pray with me?

Dear Lord, thank you for the care You have taken

in preserving the scriptures we have today, for allowing us to read and learn from those who have come before us so we may run our race without falling into the same mistakes. As we set about this month, let us be emboldened to speak confidently about what you have given and shown to us. Amen.

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SAVE-THE-DATE

FOR THESE AGRICULTURE EVENTS

This is a special month for agriculture, as March 19 is federally recognized as “National Ag Day.” Along with celebrations lined up for the nation’s farmers, ranchers, and dairy producers, events are planned throughout the month, from technology expos and agribusiness conferences to the local Kern County Water Summit.

TECHNOLOGY

The World Agri-Tech Innovation Summit is taking place in March at the Marriot Marquis in San Francisco. The program runs from March 19-20, and attendees will hear from several industry leaders and witness tech showcases with breakout sessions, roundtable discussions, and plenty of networking opportunities.

AGRIBUSINESS

The 2024 Outlook Agribusiness Conference, held by the California Chapter of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers, will take place March 21 at the Bakersfield Marriott at the Convention Center.

Before the conference, multiple education classes will be offered as well as a student reception, an ag tour, and a California Classic BBQ & Scholarship Auction. Program sessions include ag land trends, pistachio industry outlook, water outlook, solar and alternative agriculture, and a fresh perspective on California's ag economy.

On March 11-13, the Agricultural Council of California is hosting its 105th Annual Meeting in Carlsbad, California.

SUMMITS

The Water Association of Kern County's 2024 Water Summit on March 7 at the Mechanics Bank Theatre in Bakersfield. Along with a vendor showcase, the summit will include several guest speakers covering topics from infrastructure to SGMA.

Another summit is taking place out of state on March 18 at the National Press Club in Washington D.C. Agri-Pulse's Ag & Food Policy Summit will include discussions on local food systems, biomanufacturing, environmental markets, and overseas demand. Virtual participation is available.



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Technology Services

INNOVATING THE LATEST TECHNOLOGY SOLUTIONS FOR BUSINESSES.



How we can help you

Serving expert, fully managed IT Support & IT services across San Joaquin Valley from our bases in Bakersfield & Visalia.



Technology Experts

With years of networking experience behind us, our team can provide knowledge in a variety of solutions to help better connect your business efficiently.



Security Focused

We place cyber security at the heart of everything we do. We deploy only the leading cyber AI based security solutions to ensure that businesses and their users are secure.



Quality Support

Our goal is to provide the best quality support to our clients, helping businesses advance and succeed.



Proactive & Reliable

By proactively managing a network, we can help keep downtime at a minimum. We also do our best to ensure that IT disasters are resolved quickly before it affects your business.



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