Ag Leaders Seek Alternative Markets Amidst Rising Trade Deficit

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The U.S. trade deficit rose again in February following predictions of a $30 billion agricultural trade imbalance at the start of 2024. While a trade deficit is not inherently good or bad, large deficits can harm the economy and diminish a country’s influence in the global export market. A sizeable deficit such as the United States’ current projection necessitates domestic agricultural producers to seek alternative markets.

According to the U.S. Commerce Department’s Bureau of Economic Analysis, the trade deficit was $68.9 billion in Feb., up 1.9% from Jan. On behalf of American food and agricultural producers, the U.S. Department of Agriculture is looking for new markets and embarked on a trade mission to India from April 22-25. USDA Under Secretary for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs Alexis M. Taylor led the trade mission.

“India’s rising middle-class consumers’ familiarity with American food products and increased purchasing power is a real opportunity for U.S. producers,” Taylor said in a press release. “This along with the Indian consumers’ trusted view of American food and agricultural products as high-quality has contributed to an 11 percent growth in U.S. agricultural and ag-related exports to India over the past 2 years.”

Clarice Turner, Almond Board of California president, expanded on the opportunity to trade with India during a press conference commemorating her first 100 days in office.

“Fifty percent of the population in India is under 30 years old... and it is now the largest population in the world, relatively stable economy, and good politically from a stability standpoint. [It’s] a very attractive market to us,” Turner said.

In March, Taylor led a trade mission to South Korea with several California agricultural leaders such as CDFA Secretary Karen Ross. An opportunity for California’s specialty crops was uncovered in South Korea as they experienced strong interest in U.S. fruit and vegetables, nuts, dairy, eggs, coffee, and distilled spirits.

The trade mission resulted in $67 million in 12-month projected sales to South Korea which ranks as the trusted view of American food and agricultural products as high-quality has contributed to an 11 percent growth in U.S. agricultural and ag-related exports to India over the past 2 years.”

See AG LEADERS SEEK ALTERNATIVES on PAGE 4

The Importance of Blogs You May Never Read—Speaking Truth to Power

By Scott Hamilton
President, Hamilton Resource Economics

When a private company fails to function efficiently and fails to provide a good or service at a price the market is willing to pay, either the company undergoes a serious shakeup, or it goes under. The employees are let go and the assets are sold. But what happens when a government department fails to perform? With strong employee protections, replacing ineffective employees is difficult.

How can government agencies be held accountable when they fail to perform their intended purpose? Sixty years ago, the Department of Agriculture was formed to operate the State Water Project. Now DWR, like the Bureau of Reclamation, manages their water resources for multiple beneficial purposes, presumably based on the best available science. But what happens when they don’t? Who watches over government departments to ensure they are doing their job?

When it comes to water management, entities founded in Kern County are taking on that challenge with some piercing observations and commentary. Why? Because bad science leads to bad policy.

And bad policy results in the misallocation of resources, not only hurting farmers and farm workers but diminishing state revenues which has tax implications for all Californians.

See THE IMPORTANCE OF BLOGS on PAGE 13

ASFMRA Conference Unveils Insights Into Agricultural Land Values

SGMA Breakdown of the 2024 Trends in Agricultural Land and Lease Values

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Agricultural land value continues to be negatively impacted by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, according to the Outlook 2024 Agribusiness Conference hosted in Bakersfield on March 19-21.

Rural appraisers and agribusiness professionals gathered to discuss the “SGMA Effect” at the California Chapter of the American Society of Farm Managers and Rural Appraisers’ annual conference. The conference also featured speakers from the California Department of Water Resources and the California Agricultural Lands Coalition.

See ASFMRA CONFERENCE UNVEILS INSIGHTS on 13
I would be willing to bet that most of our Farm Bureau members who are directly involved in agriculture are advocates. Whether you have a conversation with your neighbor about what you do for a living, or the grocery store clerk about why you prefer conventional or organic produce, or even if you share casually with fellow little league parents by including local nuts, mandarins, or carrots in snack bags, I am sure every one of us has had a conversation at least once a month or more about the benefits of agriculture in our community.

Last month, the California Farm Bureau hosted its annual Capital Ag Conference during National Agriculture Week. Your Kern County Farm Bureau officers and staff traveled to Sacramento to better advocate for our farmers and our needs here locally. We participated in the Issue Advisory Committee where I represented Kern County on the Nut Committee. We received updates on the almond and walnut markets. We discussed property rights and water rights related to solar and the Williamson Act. We also reviewed potential policy changes that might need to be addressed to better serve our members.

Alex Dominguez our 1st President, Rachel Nettleton our Executive Director, and I later visited the Capitol and met with Senator Melissa Hurtado, Assemblymember Dr. Jasmeet Baines, and the staff at Senator Shannon Grove’s office. We later had the opportunity to network with an assortment of other senators, assemblypersons, and commodity groups. Building relationships is always top of mind on these trips to Sacramento and our Capitol. While we focus on issues impacting our local communities, relationships are key to furthering these discussions. It’s the passion we share that makes us memorable and helps to establish trust.

I often say relationships are more important than discussing issues themselves. It’s when we build those relationships that we become the trusted source and a confidant to turn to when issues arise. These advocacy visits and meetings with our elected officials in their environment allow us to offer our stories, share our passion, and provide insights into our expertise. Just like those conversations we have with our neighbors, the grocery store clerk, and our fellow little league parents—once we become the trusted source, they might open up to us about questions they have or food choices they should make in the future. It’s the relationships we build that can better serve our community and industry.

When we build those relationships, you never know where they will take you. In the relationships you make, ensure you always share your passion.

From left: Alex Dominguez, Rachel Nettleton, and myself met with Senator Melissa Hurtado, Assemblymember Dr. Jasmeet Baines, and Senator Shannon Grove’s staff. (Photo: Jenny Holtermann / Kern County Farm Bureau)
Young Farmers & Ranchers

A few months prior, as our Executive Team sat around a table brainstorming ideas for the shoot, Matt Pandol III relayed a memory he had with his dad at the previous year’s event. Mr. Pandol suggested that we offer T-shirts similar to one he received at a 2002 Kern YF&R “Shootout” fundraiser. Talk about a sharp memory! The shirt read “Cost of this T-shirt: $14. Amount farmer received for this T-shirt: $0.07. Farmers love and pride for feeding and clothing the world: PRICELESS.” Our plan was set—we would bring back the T-shirt and add one extra inscription: “In honor of Matt Pandol Jr.” As one more token to Matt and his family, I framed a photo of Mr. Pandol’s team from the 2023 clay shoot and asked all participants to sign it. We presented it at the end of the day as a gesture of the community’s appreciation.

Lastly and most importantly, we are extremely grateful for our sponsors, who make it possible for YF&R to continue hosting tours and events and provide scholarships for students in Kern County. We had 20 amazing companies who supported us as station sponsors, meal sponsors, and drink sponsors. I think it’s important enough to mention each by name so here we go—a big THANK YOU to: AgWest Farm Credit, Buttonwillow Warehouse Company, Coastline Equipment, Crusader Brewing Company, Dirty Bird Guns & Ammo, Driscoll’s, Harris BBQ, Jay Hershey, JSS Almonds, Kern Machinery, Klein DeNatale Goldberg, Miller Chemical, NV Catering, Pandol Brothers Inc., Quinn Company, Rovensa Next, S&S Sprayers LLC, Tasteful Selections, Valley Ag Voice and Vita-Pakt.

We will be back in March 2025 with another clay shoot and hope to continue the trend of an amazing fundraiser. We look forward to your support!

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Bipartisan Effort Revives Congressional Specialty Crop Caucus

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

On April 15, Representatives David Valadao, Jim Costa, David Rouzer, and Elissa Slotkin announced the re-establishment of the Congressional Specialty Crop Caucus—a caucus designed to address the needs of the specialty crop industry.

Specialty crops account for fruits and vegetables, tree nuts, horticulture, and nursery crops—a majority of which are grown in the Central Valley.

According to Costa, who represents a majority of Fresno and Tulare Counties, the caucus is significant for its strong bipartisan support as well as the assistance it will provide to local growers.

“They’ve faced special challenges ranging from natural disasters, climate change, pests, diseases, and complexities related to market access. Because these products, if you think about it, with the exception of tree nuts, are highly perishable,” Costa said during a press conference. “Getting them from the farm to the supermarket to people’s dinner tables is important in the supply chain.”

Valadao added that the caucus marks a step in the right direction in increasing representation for specialty crops which have unique issues in trade, labor, and mechanization.

“Trade is the result of a negative trade balance for California nectarines.”

TRADE DEFICIT

In the past, the U.S. generally exported more agricultural goods by value than it imported, but a robust increase in demand for imports created a negative trade balance for the past three fiscal years.

A trade deficit is the result of a negative trade balance wherein a country imports more goods than it exports, causing investors to seek opportunities in foreign markets. The agricultural trade deficit for 2024 is projected to reach a record of $30.5 billion—an unsustainable decline according to Senators Chuck Grassley, John Thune, John Boozman, and Mike Crapo who wrote a letter urging U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to export global markets for American farmers.

According to the Senators, the sharp decline in U.S. agricultural exports is directly related to an “unambitious” trade strategy that fails to meaningfully expand market access or reduce trade barriers.

“The Biden administration continually refuses to pursue traditional free trade agreements, China, Canada, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and others continue to ink trade pacts that diminish American export opportunities and global economic influences,” the letter stated.

Correcting the agricultural trade imbalance lay in the hands of the federal government, and U.S. Representatives Jim Costa, Jimmy Panetta, Adrian Smith, and Dusty Johnson have made it a priority by launching the bipartisan Congressional Agricultural Trade Caucus. The caucus was created to boost agricultural exports and address hindering trade barriers.

In a press release, the representatives explained that trade policies to benefit farmers, ranchers, producers, and others within the food and agricultural supply chains are paramount to countering the trade imbalance.

“The NTE Report highlights cross-cutting barriers affecting U.S. agricultural trade...such as Indonesia’s facility registration requirements for dairy, meat, and rendered products, and the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) requirements across a wide range of food and agricultural products; sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures which are not based on science, are maintained without sufficient scientific evidence, or are applied beyond the extent necessary to address SPS issues, such as India and Turkey’s procedures and requirements for agricultural biotechnology approvals...” Tai said in a press release.

However, Tai explained that the deficit should not be cause for alarm as part of its nature is a result of a strong U.S. dollar.

“The U.S. dollar is forecast to appreciate into calendar year 2024 at 1.8% globally, which continues to expand U.S. imports while presenting a challenge to U.S. exports,” Tai said.

Still, resolving trade barriers is vital to the future and success of the agricultural economy. While China followed through in implementing some provisions it agreed to in the Economic Trade Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the People’s Republic of China in 2020, it has not followed through on some of the more pertinent commitments.

According to Tai’s report, China implemented significant reforms in ag sub-sectors including meat and poultry products as well as facility registration but failed to act on commitments to purchase certain amounts of specific U.S. goods and services in 2020 and 2021.

China also imposed tariffs in 2018 ranging from 15% to 25% on a range of agricultural, steel, and aluminum products in retaliation against the U.S. decision to adjust import duties on steel and aluminum products which resulted in overproduction from China.

The U.S. launched a dispute settlement against the retaliatory tariffs and, in August 2021, a World Trade Organization panel found the tariffs were inconsistent with WTO. China appealed the panel’s ruling in Sept. 2023.

One of the most favorable markets for the U.S. is India which has seen significant trade traction after retaliatory tariffs were lifted. Last June, India also removed a 20% import duty burden imposed in 2019 which was a significant trade barrier.

The removal of these tariffs will build on the $15 billion in new or preserved market access for agricultural products, U.S. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said in a press release.

Additionally, the UK recently announced it would suspend tariffs for at least two years on goods and vegetables from the U.S. The result, according to Turner, represents $4 million annually in relief.

SPECIALTY CROPS

The USDA announced two specialty crop initiatives at the beginning of 2024—Assisting Specialty Crop Exports and Specialty Block Grant Program—to increase global exports and boost the competitiveness of the expanding specialty crop sector.

The ASCE initiative is particularly notable for the $65 million in project funding to help the specialty crop sector increase global exports and expand to new markets. Administered by the USDA’s Foreign Agricultural Service, ASCE will collect information necessary for export certification and packaging to meet other countries’ requirements.

“Each specialty crop product faces a myriad of import standards in every market it enters, including plant health standards, facility and product certifications, packaging requirements, licensing, inspections, maximum residue limits for pesticides and fungicides, and various import permits,” Under Secretary Taylor said in a press release.

“In order to meet all these requirements, it takes significant investment by commodity organizations and producers to navigate the gauntlet of regulations.”

The Specialty Crop grant program will provide $72.9 million in granting funding to projects designed to increase the competitiveness and expansion of the specialty crop sector.
OPINION: Progressive by Tradition

By Austin Snedden
Ranching Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

In a historically patriarchal society, agriculture has several women in leadership at the ground level. Times change and, in recent decades, women have begun to move into administrative positions regularly. But in ranching, women have played huge roles in running businesses for a century. I think small businesses in general have historically been more progressive when it comes to taking into the leadership of women. Where corporate advancement is often dependent on the perception of investors, corporate boards, other employees, and customer perception, in small businesses, advancement is often more performance or merit-based. Historically in agriculture, specifically cattle ranching, survival as a business and as a pioneer was often dependent on the entire family, creating a culture where females became accustomed to viewing the other gender as a colleague and not just someone with a different chromosome.

Reaching back to the pioneer days, the life expectancy of folks was rather short, and the life expectancy of males was significantly shorter than females. From getting kicked in the head by a mule, to encounters with nature’s predators, or even a simple cut that got infected before the advent of antibiotics, many women moved into leadership of their businesses due to the untimely death of their husbands.

Set aside women moving into leadership due to the untimely demise of a spouse, many women became leaders in a more merit-based fashion. My great-great-grandmother, Anna O-Keefe Snedden displayed her business acumen in the 1860s in the Kern River Valley area. Anna married my great-great-grandfather Samuel, a miner who had wandered from Canada to Mexico in search of gold. Anna quickly realized the only ones making a decent living around the mines were the folks feeding the miners. Anna took $300 of her own money and bought cattle. Over 150 years ago, our family changed trajectory due to the business leadership of a woman. This is one story of many where women in agriculture emerged into leadership roles.

This practice of family interdependence and family business has fostered a culture through generations in our industry that goes counter to traditional gender roles. I am not saying that women in agriculture weren’t challenged in a male-dominated society, but rather that in difficult times, moving into leadership based on merit rather than gender was often a necessity.

I highlight women in business leadership not because it is more important than any role including traditional gender roles, but rather to show that our industry has a tradition of merit-based advancement. Today several women own, operate, and run cattle businesses. I say all this not to push an agenda, but rather focus on examples of climbing and achievement that wasn’t spawned by some politically correct mandate, but rather happened organically by dynamic women in an industry accustomed to working shoulder to shoulder regardless of gender.

AB 2528: Implications for CA’s Prime Agricultural Land

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The cancellation of Williamson Act contracts is being contemplated by California legislators through Assembly Bill 2528. If passed, AB 2528 would amend existing law—the California Land Conservation Act of 1965 or the Williamson Act—which authorizes a city or county to enter contracts with agricultural landowners to preserve it for agricultural use.

The Williamson Act historically has protected and incentivized prime agricultural land. The bill would authorize landowners to petition to cancel a Williamson Act of farmland security zone contract in land that meets certain criteria including a lack of access to sufficient water to support irrigated agricultural use. Then, the landowner would be subject to a land use entitlement for specified energy that uses less water than the agricultural use on land—solar.

If passed, the bill would prohibit a cancellation fee. Solar developers would be entitled to access the land free of the protections offered under the Williamson Act and Farmland Security Zones by allowing a contract cancellation without fee and without the assurance that the land can return to future agricultural purposes.

Agricultural groups such as the California Farm Bureau have advocated against the bill.

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Almond Board of California President Reflects on First 100 Days, Unveils Strategies for Industry Growth

Notably in March, the UK lifted tariffs on raw almonds—4% on inshell and 2% on raw kernels—which were put in place after the UK left the European Union in 2021. According to Turner, this elimination represents $4 million annually in relief to UK importers.

UK trade officials released a list of commodities on March 18 that will have tariffs suspended until June 30, 2026, but there is a possibility for an extension or a permanent change.

While interest rates remain high, the likelihood of a recession is low and inflation appears to be softening, Turner explained. Still, food inflation has not softened substantially for almond consumers in the U.S.

“What I mean by that is almonds are at one of the least expensive price points they have been in many years,” Turner said. “That, unfortunately, is not getting passed on to consumers in the retail channels.”

She highlighted Trader Joe’s recent price change which lowered almond price per bag by $1.

“I hope the other retailers will follow,” Turner said.

The almond industry is set for a significant rebound within the next year and the Almond Board is capitalizing on innovative strategies to promote growth from diversifying product types and expanding to promising international markets.

The Almond Board hired Deloitte—the world’s largest consulting organization—to identify new markets and opportunities for future growth. One of their key findings lay in the 14 form factors of almonds aside from the typical forms of kernels, sliced, and chopped.

The U.S. has not yet capitalized on oil, powder, and flour products Turner explained, but new ways to market almond products are coming to the domestic market. Internationally, Deloitte helped identify international markets to export products.

Turner visited one of the most promising markets, India, in February. Roughly 50% of the Indian population is under 30 years old and are increasingly health conscious, she explained.

“And it is now the largest population in the world, relatively stable economy, and good politically from a stability standpoint. [It’s] a very attractive market to us,” Turner said.

India is the main exporter of U.S. fresh or dried almonds, holding over 474 million pounds exported in 2022-2023. Still, India’s market is complex, and continuous open communication is necessary moving forward, Turner explained.

Other identified markets include Indonesia, Turkey, Morocco, and continued efforts to keep open trade with China.

Turner also highlighted sustainability efforts the industry is undertaking and noted that almond trees alone sequester roughly 30 million metric tons of carbon every year.

“Every single year the orchards that we have in the ground today sequester 24.5 million cars worth of carbon out of the air,” Turner said. “That’s the equivalent of 3,134 Boring 735s or 29 coal-fired power plants.”

Nearly half of almond farmers replanting orchards use a practice known as whole orchard recycling, introduced in 2017, to capture 2.4 tons of carbon per acre, according to an infographic from the Almond Board of California.

Suspended UK tariffs reflect $4 million in relief to U.S. almond importers.

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

On April 9, Clarice Turner commemorated her first 100 days as President and CEO of the Almond Board of California through a virtual press conference, highlighting the state of the industry and innovative strategies to support almond consumption.

UK Suspends Tariffs on All Raw Almonds Beginning April 11

Almond Board of California thanks industry and government partners for helping reduce obstacles to California almond imports.

Press Release Provided by the Almond Board of California

The United Kingdom’s government announced it would suspend tariffs for at least two years on raw kernel and inshell almonds from all origins—including the U.S.—beginning April 11, 2024.

The Almond Board of California has been working for many years with the UK’s Nut and Dried Fruit Trade Association (NDFTA), the group that represents the UK processors buying California almonds. This past year, ABC provided factual information and trade data to NDFTA, which they used to officially apply to have tariffs suspended on imported almonds.

“We are grateful for our long-time partnership with the UK’s Nut and Dried Fruit Trade Association and appreciate the UK government’s approval of the application to suspend tariffs on almonds,” said Julie Adams, ABC’s vice president for global technical and regulatory affairs. “This will certainly benefit UK consumers with increased availability of healthy almond products.”

The tariffs—4% on inshell almonds and 2% on raw kernels—have been in place since the UK left the European Union in 2021.

UK trade officials on March 18 issued a list of commodities, including almonds, that will have tariffs suspended until June 30, 2026. UK officials said there is a possibility they will reassess before that date, possibly to extend the suspension or make a permanent change.

Estimates put the costs of the soon-to-be-suspended tariffs to UK importers at about $4 million a year. The suspension will allow UK importers to offer a more competitive price on raw California almonds to UK processors, and ultimately to consumers.

UK duties of 8-10% still remain on roasted almonds (which includes flavored almonds), 8% on marzipan and almond flour, and 20% on almond paste.

“We plan to work with NDFTA to assess further tariff suspensions in the UK, and with other partners overseas to identify opportunities for additional tariff suspension requests to lower costs for importers and processors and boost demand for California almonds,” said Keith Schneller, ABC’s senior advisor on trade policy.

State Water Board Places Tulare Lake Subbasin on Probation

The California State Water Board placed the Tulare Lake Subbasin on probation as a result of inadequate groundwater sustainability plans in the critically over-drafted basin. On April 16, several community members, groundwater pumpers, and groundwater sustainability agencies gathered at CalEPA headquarters to present their comments to the board.

The staff of the SWB recommended that board members place the Tulare Lake Subbasin on probation. Deficiencies in the GSP centered on groundwater levels, subsidence, and quality. While probation is meant to be temporary, it will remain in place until the Groundwater Sustainability Agencies address the issues within the subbasin.

Tulare Lake Subbasin operates under five GSPs—Mid-Kings River, South Fork Kings, Southwest Kings, El Rio GSA, and the Tri-County Water Authority. The GSPs collaborated on one GSP which was submitted in 2020, found inadequate in 2022, resubmitted in 2022, and deemed inadequate again. This triggered the process of state intervention.

The final staff report and subsequent recommendation to the board explained that the subbasin cannot reach sustainability by 2040 under the current GSP.

“Designating the subbasin probationary is critical for getting the subbasin back on track to achieve sustainability by 2040,” the report said.

Under probation, all who extract groundwater must report their well location and capacity of each well, monthly extraction volumes, and place and purpose for each use. This probationary status is the first of its kind, but a probationary hearing for the Tulare Subbasin will take place on Sept. 17.

Now that the probation has been approved, people who draw from the Tulare Lake Subbasin will be charged $300 annually per well as well as a $20 fee per acre-foot of water. Additionally, a 25% late fee will be imposed per month.

Clarice Turner, president and CEO of the Almond Board of California, gave a press conference of her first 100 days in office. (Photo: Rick Kushman / Almond Board of California)
California’s cotton industry expects significant expansion in 2024. (Photo: Jose / Adobe)

Cotton Acreage to Surge in California Amid Favorable Conditions

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

California’s cotton industry expects significant expansion in 2024 as a result of two consecutive, good water years and favorable pricing compared to competing commodities. According to a preliminary planting survey by the California Cotton Growers and Processors Association, cotton acreage is poised for a substantial increase of 72% this year.

CCGGA estimated that roughly 143,000 acres of Pima cotton and around 22,000 acres of upland cotton will be planted statewide this season—the current margin of error is 10%. The projection would entail an increase of 70% for Pima acreage and 83% for upland acreage compared to the previous year, but these are preliminary findings and may change pending field surveys by the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

The survey includes data from all California cotton gins as well as a glimpse into the state’s current cotton planting intentions.

Meanwhile, researchers at the Jordan College of Agricultural Science and Technology are engaged in projects designed to enhance the cotton industry’s productivity. A research showcase in April highlighted two projects created to identify genetic diversity in Fusarium oxysporum f.sp. vasinfectum—a pathogen that harms cotton plants through vascular discoloration, chlorosis, wilt, and plant death. The projects aim to identify and distinguish various genotypes of fusarium in order to improve upon disease management strategies.

Along with advancements in research, improved export opportunities in Bangladesh could benefit California cotton growers. For nearly five decades, Bangladesh mandated the fumigation of American cotton due to boll weevil concerns, but recent collaboration between the USDA and Bangladesh Ministry of Agriculture amended these import rules. The exemption of U.S. cotton from the regulation will substantially benefit the local cotton industry as Bangladesh is the fifth-largest export market—valued at over $339 million in 2023.

Bureau of Reclamation Updates Water Allotments, Class 2 Friant Division Still at Zero

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation updated its initial 2024 water supply allocation for Central Valley Project contractors because of improved hydrological conditions. Storms occurring in mid-to-late Feb. significantly enhanced the water supply outlook, mainly for Northern California.

In a press release from the Bureau, Karl Stock, California-Great Basin Regional Director, explained that they are satisfied with the improved hydrology and increased water supply allocations for Northern California, but contractors South-of-Delta will continue to experience limited supply.

To address water management challenges, the Bureau will reserve roughly 83,000 acre-feet in San Luis Reservoir to serve as a drought reserve pool—the reserve is not factored into the 2024 water supply allocation. An additional 185,000 acre-feet was rescheduled from the 2023 water year and stored in San Luis Reservoir, but it is also not included in this year’s allocation.

Adjustments to CVP water supply allocations include:

**NORTH-OF-DELTA**
Irrigation water service and repayment contractors will receive 100% of their contract total, up from the initial 75%.

**SOUTH-OF-DELTA**
Irrigation water service and repayment contractors—including Cross Valley Contractors—will increase to 33% from the initial 15%. Municipal and industrial contractors will not receive 75% of historical use or public health and safety needs, whichever is greater.

This new allotment is up from the initial 63%.

**FRIANT DIVISION**
Class 1 contractors will receive 65%, up from the initial 60%, but Class 2 allocations remain at 0%. Class 2 contractors describe irrigation and groundwater recharge users.
The Kern County Farm Bureau’s 40th Annual Farm Day in the City event started on March 20th and welcomed almost 5,000 school kids to the Kern County Fairgrounds over two days.

According to Rachel Nettleton, executive director of KCFB, the event has transitioned from its humble beginnings in 1984 with a small handful of students, to its current magnitude.

“Farm Day in the City aims to showcase and educate our youth, particularly 2nd to 4th graders, about the origins of their food and the significance of agriculture,” Nettleton said. “It is common [for] students to believe their chocolate milk comes from brown cows, so this event was created to foster a deeper understanding of where their food comes from.”

The mission of Farm Day in the City is supported by community sponsorships and volunteers that allow the event to remain free for participating schools. This year, the Grimm Family Center for Agricultural Business and Grimmway Farms serve as gold sponsors, and AC Foods and Bolthouse Farms contribute as silver sponsors.

“Their contributions have made it possible for us to continue to host this event year to year,” Nettleton said. KCFB’s continuous improvements and dedication to the event have led to it being the largest continuous student-oriented county farm bureau program in California.

Students will be introduced to farm machinery, livestock, and other commodities as well as demonstrations on agriculture, water use, and safety practices.

“When many people think of farming, they think of food and tractors. However, there is so much more that goes behind the production of our farming and ranching community, so Farm Day is a way to showcase many different aspects of the agricultural industry,” Nettleton said.

Over 30 exhibitors are participating this year, she noted, to discuss topics such as animal husbandry, be pollination, safety practices, and water use. The exhibitors are comprised of local farmers, ranchers, and agri-business representatives. High school FFA students with a passion for agricultural education will also participate.

Outdoor demonstrations with livestock and several indoor exhibits awaited Kern County students as they learned the importance of agriculture in their lives and to the community.

Kern County Brings Back Dairy Princess Program

The Dairy Princess Program for District 6—Kern, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara Counties—was revived this year with the help of the Kern County Cattle Women Association. According to Pam Bruni, Kern member of CWA, the program had been a long-standing tradition hosted by the Kern County Dairymaids before it was disbanded in 2012.

“I’ve been thinking about it for three to four years and asking several of the Ag groups I’m in, and finally got the Kern Chapter of CWA to help me take on the challenge,” Bruni said.

According to the CMAB, over the years the program has helped build a favorable public image for milk and dairy products and connects young female dairy leaders with an opportunity to serve as ambassadors for the industry.

Bruni explained that the program in Kern will pick up where it left off roughly 12 years ago. Dairy Princesses will attend mandatory training by CMAB in July to learn more about the industry, how to represent it, and how to carry themselves.

The contest will be held on Saturday, May 4, at the Kern Agricultural Pavilion.
Fong Wins Second Legal Battle for Congressional Seat

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

In April, a California appellate court ruled against California Secretary of State Shirley Weber’s efforts to take Assemblymember Vincent Fong off the ballot for the 20th Congressional District—a seat formerly held by Kevin McCarthy.

The case comes months after a lower court ruled in favor of Fong to keep his name on the ballot for both the Assembly and Congressional races. While his name appears on both ballots, Fong is only campaigning for the congressional seat.

Weber argued that allowing Fong to run for two seats could lead to candidates running for an unlimited number of offices during the same election. Ultimately, the court held that Weber’s argument against Fong’s candidacy and the statute cited—section 8003, subdivision b of the election code—was insufficient to warrant the removal of his name from the congressional ballot.

Fong was the favored candidate in the March 5 primary and won by a decisive margin. The court’s decision means that Fong will advance to the general election in November.

Save Foods Pre-harvest Treatment Approved by DPR

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

In March, Save Foods received regulatory approval for its pre-harvest treatment product—FieldProtect—supporting its expansion in California. The Department of Pesticide Regulation approved and registered FieldProtect in compliance with the state’s pesticide regulations.

This approval is a significant advancement for Save Foods in enhancing food safety and minimizing waste from farm to table. Additionally, it offers opportunities for commercial growth within the state.

According to a press release, Save Foods anticipates that entering California’s agricultural sector will allow for favorable conditions in the sustainable agriculture market as the state leads in organic production.

According to the California Department of Food and Agriculture, the state’s agricultural sector garnered over $59 billion in market value in 2022, supporting a prime environment for FieldProtect.

According to the release, agricultural exports from California rose to $22.5 billion in 2021, a 7% increase from the previous year. Additionally, organic product sales reached $14 billion—a 16.4% rise from the previous year.

The near-harvest treatment expects to address specialty crop markets in the state such as berries.
Avian Flu in Dairy Cows Puts Focus on Cattle Movement

By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with Permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

With an outbreak of highly pathogenic avian influenza affecting dairy cows in six states, the California Department of Food and Agriculture has implemented import restrictions on cattle from premises with confirmed or suspected cases of the disease.

The move comes as agricultural officials acknowledge the H5N1 virus has spread between cows. This has prompted calls to minimize dairy cattle movement.

Previously, it was thought that transmission was from infected wild migratory birds, which shed the virus through their feces, saliva and other secretions. It is suspected that the dairy cows initially caught the virus after consuming contaminated food or water. It is now believed that infected cows could pass the virus to other cows, as some affected states had received cattle from an affected dairy in Texas.

California’s new import requirements are “an attempt to mitigate potential transmission from affected premises and dairy cattle to susceptible livestock in California,” according to the state order, which took effect April 4.

To enter California, dairy cattle from states that have H5N1-infected cattle must be inspected by a veterinarian within seven days of shipment. A certificate of veterinary inspection must accompany the cattle saying they do not come from a premise that has infected cattle or is being investigated for H5N1 infection.

Other states, including Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Delaware, Florida, Hawaii, Idaho, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Utah and West Virginia, have imposed similar import requirements.

As of Monday, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has confirmed highly pathogenic avian influenza or HPAI, in dairy herds in Texas, Kansas, Michigan, New Mexico, Idaho and Ohio.

A worker at an infected dairy in Texas tested positive for the virus. It is the second reported human case in the U.S. The first occurred in 2022 in Colorado. Human cases of avian influenza remain uncommon but have occurred sporadically worldwide, according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control.

In addition, the virus has infected 19 different wild mammals in the U.S. The disease has so far not been reported in beef cattle.

The current strain of the H5N1 virus—first identified in Europe in 2020—has pummelled commercial poultry farms and wild birds worldwide. In the U.S., which reported its first outbreak in 2022, the disease has affected some 86 million birds, with nearly 7.2 million lost in California.

Now that the disease has crossed over to cattle, Anja Raudabaugh, CEO of Western United Dairies, said some dairy farmers are “absolutely terrified” of the potential impact of an outbreak in California.

Even though H5N1 does not appear to kill cattle directly, unlike in birds, infected cows experience a sudden drop in milk production averaging 10 to 30 pounds per cow, according to the Texas Department of Agriculture. About 10% of cows do not recover fully and return to previous milk production, Iowa State University reported.

Having to cull that many animals would be a major hardship, Raudabaugh said, as dairy farms are “absolutely terrified” of the potential impact of an outbreak in California.

Even before the current import restrictions, California was already “ahead when it comes to protecting our cattle,” State Veterinarian Annette Jones said. With its agricultural border stations, California has always required permits to bring cattle into the state, she noted. Weeks before it was known that HPAI was the culprit for making Texas cattle sick, Jones said CDFa met with border inspectors to ensure they were vigilant when checking for permits and certificates of veterinary inspection.

CDFa is also following up on cattle from affected states that have entered California to check for flu symptoms and to verify they’ve been isolated on arrival.

In addition to decreased milk production, other signs of H5N1 infection include milk that appears yellowish/brown and thicker, resembling colostrum; loss of cow appetite; low-grade fever; and changes in manure consistency. Sick cows must be removed from the milking string.

Steven Fenaroli, political affairs director for the California Farm Bureau, said he thinks the state’s current approach is prudent and measured, and that “blocking the border isn’t the solution” because there’s still the issue of wild birds.

Sonoma County dairy farmer Doug Beretta said it would be virtually impossible to keep wild birds away from the farm. Everything from seagulls, pigeons, crows, starlings and ravens come to eat the cows’ feed. He said he’s tried deterrents including owls and reflectors, but the feed remains a draw.

Unlike in the Midwest, where barns are built with doors and sides that can close due to the harsh winters, Beretta said California dairies are wide open.

Raudabaugh pointed out that some California dairies participate in conservation programs to help save the endangered tricolored blackbird by allowing them to nest in their forage fields. Dairy pastures on the North Coast also support Aleutian cackling geese.

Michael Payne, a veterinarian at the University of California, Davis, said how the virus is transferred and what factors promote it remain murky, but he thinks infection is occurring in a lot more than the estimated 10% to 15% of the milking herd. Some infected cattle may not show symptoms, he suggested.

Agriculture officials continue to stress the safety of pasteurized milk, as the process has been proven to inactivate bacteria and viruses. Jones said there remains “a lot of unknown related to raw milk and human health risk from H5N1-affected cows.” She said if any of the state’s licensed raw milk dairies becomes affected, the department will work with them “to oversee the best way to assure consumers that appropriate safeguards are being taken.”

Until more is learned about H5N1 in cattle, Jones said dairy farmers should isolate and observe new additions to the herd. Keep them away from lactating cows for at least 21 days. The larger the group, the longer they should be isolated in case the virus is slow moving without clinical signs. Put sick cows in the hospital pen right away and ensure the virus is not tracked to lactating cows. Pasteurize or safely discard hospital milk. Follow basic biosecurity, including cleaning boots and handwashing.

“I also heard that vigilant water trough cleaning, even daily, has been a big help in limiting impacts,” she said. Jones also recommended talking to USDA Wildlife Services for ideas on how to reduce migrating waterfowl visitors.
Dairy Farmers Look for New Methane Emission Solutions

By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

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With a construction boom of methane digesters projects on California dairy farms in recent years, milk producers have begun to reduce a powerful greenhouse gas emitted by the manure coming from their cows.

Now they must tackle the methane coming from the front end of their animals. Cow burps emit what’s known as enteric methane, and the race to reduce it represents a new frontier for the dairy industry.

The California Dairy Sustainability Summit in Davis last week shed light on some of the latest innovations in feed, genetics and vaccines showing promise.

The annual conference highlights achievements California dairy farms have made in environmental sustainability and some new planet-smart efforts.

Various speakers stressed the importance of public and private backing. Just as financial incentives have helped to get more methane digesters online, funding support is needed to drive progress in understanding enteric emissions and how to curb them.

California aims to cut livestock methane emissions by 40%, or 7.2 million metric tons, below 2013 levels by 2030.

Frank Mitloehner, an air quality specialist at the University of California, Davis, said California dairies are already close to achieving half the state’s methane reduction goals and will likely exceed them with reductions of 7.6 to 10.6 million metric tons of greenhouse gases, mostly methane, in coming years.

A “sizable reduction” will come from attrition, he said, as the state is expected to lose nearly 1% of its dairy cows annually. Most of the current methane reductions are through manure management, with dairy digesters accounting for more than half of the 7.2 million metric tons of reductions.

Digesters capture methane from covered manure lagoons on dairies. The biogas is then cleaned and turned into renewable natural gas, which can be used to power vehicles and generate electricity and, more recently, hydrogen.

As of August 2023, 161 dairy digesters were in operation in California, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Though the oldest operational digesters date back to 2004, most of the state’s digesters are new, with 120 built since 2021.

Spurring much of the growth is California’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard, an incentive program aimed at reducing use of fossil fuels. It allows biogas to earn credit for being a low-carbon fuel. At the federal level, the Renewable Fuel Standard program provides additional incentives.

Reducing methane is crucial to slowing global warming, Mitloehner said, because if the potent greenhouse gas can be curbed aggressively, dairy production can reach a point of climate neutrality, or not add warming to the planet.

Much of the buzz relates to new findings on how to cut enteric methane, which accounts for 51% to 67% of greenhouse gas emissions from dairies, according to data from the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations.

Feed additives have been in development for several years. Use of natural extracts such as essential oils and tannins can change the microbial composition in the rumen and may reduce methane by about 10%, Mitloehner said.

More effective are so-called methane inhibitors, which suppress the enzymatic formation of methane in the rumen. Such feed additives have been able to cut emissions by upwards of 30%, Mitloehner said.

Though he’s “quite bullish” about the effectiveness of some of the additives, Mitloehner said he’s also very cautious, as they have not been studied extensively and companies trying to commercialize the products lack data on the feeds’ impact on cattle health. He advised dairy farmers to “look for real evidence before you buy something and feed it to your cows,” adding that they should consider not just how well the feed reduces methane but also impact to milk, meat and animal welfare.

“All any kind of performance issues are nonstarters,” Mitloehner said.

Without authorization from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, feed manufacturers cannot label their product with claims that it can reduce methane.

The approval process remains slow, said Mark van Nieuwland, vice president of DSM-Firmenich, which makes Bovcar, a feed supplement the company says can reduce methane emissions in dairy cows by 30%.

Van Nieuwland said there needs to be more investment in research. Getting a new feed ingredient on the market requires tolerance studies to show the product is safe. There are few facilities globally that can do this type of work, and they have a long wait, he added.

Changling legislation can help, said John Tauxel, senior director of global agriculture methane at the Environmental Defense Fund. He pointed to Senate Bill 1842, the Innovative FEED Act, which aims to streamline approval of feed additives.

“Right now, any product that hopes to have an enteric reduction claim is considered a new drug,” he said. “That’s a seven-year, multimillion-dollar pathway.”

Even after a feed product is approved, van Nieuwland said barriers remain in getting enough farmers to use it due to the cost. He said there needs to be a way for producers to show the benefits of what they’re doing, so they can earn incentives to help pay for their efforts.

Another feed ingredient scientists have studied is a certain red seaweed, which has shown enteric methane reductions of up to 90% in some situations, said Charles Brooke, an expert in enteric methane at the nonprofit Spark Climate Solutions. More research is needed to understand its safety, he said, as the seaweed produces bromoform, which can be toxic at high levels. Feeding the seaweed to cows has shown bromoform residue in the milk.

Understanding what the safe limit is remains a barrier to commercializing the product, he added.

“I haven’t seen a lot of great efforts in directly addressing those barriers,” Brooke said.

Beyond feed, one of the more notable discoveries related to methane emissions in recent years has been in genetics. Scientists now understand that methane is a heritable trait, and there are tests that can show whether a cow is a high or low methane producer. This was not known five years ago, Mitloehner pointed out.

The revelation has put focus on selective breeding as a cost-effective and long-term strategy for reducing enteric methane. Producers could potentially bolster methane reductions by combining the use of genetics and feed additives, Brooke said.

“I think we have that capability and the possibility, especially here in the U.S.,” he added.

Vaccination is another area getting attention. Scientists continue to evaluate the possibility of administering a vaccine that can allow an animal to mount an immune response against methanogens, or methane-producing bacteria.

Researchers also continue to explore probiotics and their ability to shift the energy flow within the rumen away from methane and toward meat and milk.

“That has been a prime goal of ruminant microbiologists everywhere for the past 60 years. How do we get that efficiency into meat and milk?” Brooke said. “It still is top of mind for most of us looking at solutions because that’s going to help with cost, and that’s going to help with adoption.”
Study Finds Benefit in Clustering Organics

By Caleb Hampton, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

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A new study by researchers from the U.S. and Canada found that organic pest control methods such as hedgerows are more effective when organic farms are clustered together. (Photo: Caleb Hampton / Ag Alert)

A new study by researchers from the U.S. and Canada found that organic agriculture can increase pesticide use on nearby conventionally farmed fields.

The trends identified in the study, the researchers said, “could help governments leverage the environmental benefits of organic agriculture when converting new farmland that is organic, is aiming to expand organic agriculture to 25% of its farmland by 2030. California, also around 10% of organic, plans to double the portion of its farmland that is organic by 2045. That would mean converting an additional 65,000 acres in the state.

After modeling these scenarios based on data from Kern County, the researchers broadened their analysis using nationwide data on county-level organic acreage and yearly pesticide use. They found the same “U-shaped” trend, with county pesticide use ticking up slightly at low organic conversion rates and dropping below baseline only after a higher percentage of cropland was converted to organic.

The findings come as state and world leaders seek to incentivize organic farming to meet ambitious goals. The European Union, where about 10% of farmland is organic, is aiming to expand organic agriculture to 25% of its farmland by 2030. California, also around 10% of organic, plans to double the portion of its farmland that is organic by 2045. That would mean converting an additional 65,000 acres in the state.

The implication, according to the researchers, is that the overall pesticide reductions from organic farming “materialize at higher levels of conversion to organic agriculture, or if organic agriculture is spatially concentrated.”

Their analysis found that when organic fields are randomly dispersed, changing from a baseline of no organic acreage to 5% organic results in a 9% increase in overall pesticide use at the landscape level. At higher levels of organic conversion, such as when 20% of the cropland in a landscape is organic and randomly dispersed, overall pesticide use declines by 17%.

However, when organic fields are clustered, the same conversion levels of organic acreage result in overall decreases in pesticide use by 10% and 36%, respectively, completely mitigating the negative spillover effects seen at low organic conversion rates when acreage is randomly dispersed.

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The implications of the study are significant for farmers and agriculture experts. Without any policymaking, the study could inform individual farming decisions for growers who farm a mix of conventional and organic fields. "Trying to understand which current conventional field is surrounded by organics might indicate which field would most benefit from converting to organic agriculture," Larsen said.

Still, without any policymaking, the study could inform individual farming decisions for growers who farm a mix of conventional and organic fields. "Trying to understand which current conventional field is surrounded by organics might indicate which field would most benefit from converting to organic agriculture," Larsen said.
ASFMRA Conference Unveils Insights

Continued from PAGE 1 included the release of the 2024 Trends in Agricultural Land and Lease Values Report covering California and Nevada.

According to the trends report, farming districts and regions with the most secure groundwater and surface water supplies continued to see a strong interest relative to regions—namely Central and Southern San Joaquin—with insecure water supplies.

During a water outlook presentation, Vice President of Company Resources for Wonderful Orchards Kim Brown explained that water, not land, is the limiting factor in California agriculture.

“When you start from the overall picture of California, we’re water short,” Brown said. “We have more people than the state was designed to hold from a sustainability factor, and we have overplanting as far as crops go, especially when you look at what’s going to come down the pipeline in the diminishment of the use of groundwater through the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and allocations or reductions in pumping for certain areas.”

CENTRAL SAN JOAQUIN

According to the report, Region 4—Fresno and Madera Counties—there has been downward pressure on ag land real estate due to low commodity prices, high farming costs, rising interest rates, and an increased awareness in the marketplace of SGMA’s impact.

The highest land values are within the Fresno Irrigation District, the Kings River Water District, and San Joaquin River Exchange Contractors due to their strong, inexpensive water supply.

“In addition, implementation of groundwater restrictions in these areas is not currently expected,” the report said. Conversely, the lowest demand for farmland and values within Region 4 is attributed to white zone areas without surface water supplies as well as west side properties in federal districts for their unreliable water deliveries, expensive water costs, and pumping restrictions.

The ASFMRA report included four tiers detailing the most reliable and inexpensive water districts to the most unreliable and expensive water supplies in Tier 4. Water districts were not ranked within their assigned tiers.

• Tier 1: SJR Exchange Contractor Districts, Fresno Irrigation District, Aja Irrigation District, Consolidated Irrigation District, and Kings River Water District.

• Tier 2: Orange Cove Irrigation District, James Irrigation District, Tranquility Irrigation District, Madera Irrigation District, and Chowchilla Irrigation District.

• Tier 3: Raisin City Irrigation District, Pleasant Valley Water District, Gravelly Ford Water District, and Root Creek Irrigation District.

• Tier 4: Tri-T Water District, Also Water District, Westlands Water District, Panoche Water District, and White Land Areas.

For Fresno County, demand for cropland with well water as its sole water supply was limited last year, with a stable to slightly declining value trend ranging from $8,000 to $16,000 per acre. Similarly, properties reliant on well water in Madera County reflected limited demand and a stable value trend, maintaining a value range of $7,000 to $12,000 per acre.

“Demand has historically been driven by buyers motivated to develop permanent plantings; however, SGMA pumping restrictions have curtailed marketing activity,” the report explained.

Properties with multiple water sources experienced the greatest demand and strongest values in 2023—a trend expected to continue considering current and potential pumping restrictions in Fresno and Madera counties.

SOUTHERN SAN JOAQUIN

Value trends in Region 5—Kern, Kings, and Tulare Counties—were weakening in 2023 and properties with limited to no surface water rights were dramatically lower, according to the report.

Concerns over the implementation of Groundwater Sustainability Plans directed market pricing for permanent plantings and underlying land value. Now, the market takes great account of the future water budget of a given property based on groundwater pumping regulations and the historical percentage of surface water deliveries.

Properties within the river districts reflected the strongest demand and highest values for strong, inexpensive water supplies. Additionally, all Region 5 districts have groundwater recharge facilities to capture water not utilized within their service boundaries.

Similar to Region 4, the lowest demand and land values are White Land Areas with no surface water supply as well as west side properties in state districts. The four-tier breakdown of the most reliable and inexpensive water districts to the most expensive is as follows:

• Tier 1: ALTA Irrigation District, Buena Vista Water District, Consolidated Irrigation District, and Kern Delta Water District.

• Tier 2: Arvin-Edison Water Storage District, Delano-Earlimart Irrigation District, Kaweah Delta Water Conservation District, Kings County Water District, Kings River Conservation District, North Kern Water Storage District, Orange Cove Irrigation District, Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District, Shafter-Wasco Irrigation District, Southern San Joaquin Municipal Utility District, Stone Corral Irrigation District, and Tulare Irrigation District.

• Tier 3: Cawelo Water District, Corcoran Irrigation District, Lower Tule River Irrigation District, Melga Irrigation District, Semitropic Water Storage District, and Wheeler Ridge Maricopa Water Storage District.

• Tier 4: Angiola Water District, Belridge Water Storage District, Berrenda Mesa Water District, Dudley Ridge Water District, Kern-Tulare Water District, Lost Hills Water District, Pehley Irrigation District, Terra Bella Irrigation District, Westlands Water District, and White Land Areas.

The members of ASFMRA are trained to determine the value or lease rates of agricultural properties. Co-chairs of the 2023 trends report include agricultural rural appraiser Todd Combs, agriculture broker Josh Mendrin, accredited farm manager Scott Bozzo, and Matan Goldberg.

The Importance of Blogs

Continued from PAGE 1 new rule, the US Fish and Wildlife Service has discretion in designating areas as critical habitat, even if those areas do not and cannot support the species during one or more of its life stages. That is, even if an area is incapable of providing habitat during any life stage for a listed species, it can be designated as critical habitat. That presents a considerable threat to private property rights.

“California’s resources agencies and the delta smelt’s slide toward extinction.”

The causes for the decline of the delta smelt are many and most are well-recognized. This blog argues that the decline is not just due to a daunting list of environmental stressors but also due to the management and science of California’s resource agencies. Tasked to protect the delta smelt and its habitat, they have resisted managing the species “adaptively” which requires resource managers to utilize the best available science and “learn while doing.”

The California Department of Fish and Wildlife defiantly refuses to use best professional practices in their efforts to monitor and manage the Delta’s at-risk fishes—all the while claiming to do so.

“Half measures aren’t enough: California must confront hatchery and harvest impacts to achieve salmon recovery goals.”

Governor Gavin Newsom recently released a salmon recovery plan and although it is unclear who formulated such a plan, the Center felt it fell short. Most salmon recovery efforts focus on in-stream habitat restoration, managing warm water in rivers, and sustaining minimum flows in rivers. But this blog calls attention to the need to address hatchery and harvest issues if a recovery plan is to be successful.

There is no disagreement that California’s resource agencies have failed to meet recovery targets for endangered fish species. What is concerning is that they have failed to recognize their shortcomings and improve their management and science. Rather they continue to employ failed management measures—like increasing delta outflow—that have significant social and economic costs. Blogs call attention to their need to do better.
USDA Makes $1.5 Billion Available to Help Farmers Advance Conservation and Climate-Smart Agriculture as Part of President Biden’s Investing in America Agenda

Funding from the Inflation Reduction Act will help farmers save money, create new revenue streams, enhance natural resources, and tackle the climate crisis.

Biofuel and Ag Groups Call on EPA to Issue E15 Emergency Waiver

Biofuel advocates.

To remedy the ongoing disruptions to global energy markets, stabilize gasoline prices for American consumers, and support domestic energy security, the authors urged EPA to quickly authorize the summer sale of gasoline blended with up to 15 percent ethanol.

“The consumer cost savings that result from allowing the year-round sale of E15, even on a temporary basis, are well-established. As a result of the emergency waivers issued in 2022 and 2023, consumers choosing E15 experienced average cost savings of 10-30 cents per gallon, with some locations offering over $1 off per gallon,” they added.
Arbor Day: An American Tradition

By Mike McCoy, Executive Director, Kern County Museum

There was a time when American school children and civic groups would solemnly gather in April, dig holes, and plant trees. I remember my PTA President mother Helen McCoy and Standard School Superintendent Bryce Rathburn digging holes on the school playground and planting Mocko Ash. She wore a dress and high heels and Mr. Rathburn a suit and necktie. They were ably assisted by enthusiastic sixth graders and the principal. Sixty years later, the ash trees are still in evidence at Highland, Standard, and Wingland Elementary Schools in Olddale.

Arbor Day was declared a national holiday by President Theodore Roosevelt on April 15, 1907. The idea had originated by J. Sterling Morton of Nebraska City, Nebraska, at an annual meeting of the Nebraska State Board of Agriculture held in Lincoln. On April 10, 1872, an estimated one million trees were planted in Nebraska.

Pennsylvania conservationist Israel McCreight urged Roosevelt to make a public statement to school children about trees and the destruction of American forests. Soon Roosevelt issued an “Arbor Day Proclamation to the School Children of the United States” about the importance of trees and that forestry deserves to be taught in U.S. schools.

The California citrus breeding program is located at the California Citrus Mutual headquarters in Bakersfield and home to hundreds of trees. Many of the trees have memorial plaques and labels with the name of the tree. Unfortunately, due to drought stress and the occasional storm, the Museum has lost a fair number of trees over the last few years. Luckily, the Arbor Day tradition is still alive.

Led by Eagle candidate Colby Hughes of Troop 13, a number of Boy Scouts gathered on April 22 to plant six Krantor Venesia Purple Plum trees in Pioneer Village at the Museum. The popular ornamental tree was first propagated in Kern County by nurseryman Howard Krantor and is one of the most popular landscape trees in the world. While we had all of that scout power, we also added a couple Raywood Claret Ash trees in honor of Ted and Robin Little. A wonderful project that will bring shade to and last color to our museum.

If you are interested in connecting with the Tree Foundation of Kern County, the local non-profit helps civic clubs, churches, schools, and home owners plant trees—www.TreeFoundationofKern.org. As the old Greek proverb says, “A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit.”

FOOTNOTES

California Citrus Breeding Program Expanding with Congressional Support

Press Release Provided by California Citrus Mutual

Today, Presidents of California Citrus Mutual (CCM) and Citrus Research Board (CRB) issued statements applauding Congressional leaders for recently approving additional funds for the new citrus breeding program in Parlier, California. Congress is allocating an additional $500,000 in federal funding on top of the $1 million granted last year to expand the program into California. The program will now receive $1.5 million in federal funds on an annual basis along with the $500,000 that CRB provides the program with annually.

“CRB was instrumental in developing the concept for the California based program and was also involved in efforts to establish the nationwide program while CCM advocated to secure funding,” said CRB President Marcy Martin. “Our two organizations working together on behalf of the industry has been instrumental in getting this program off the ground.”

On behalf of the industry, I would like to thank our congressional leaders and the Committee for their continued support of this program, which will help us find solutions to issues specific to our growers located in California,” said CCM President and CEO Casey Creamer. “I would like to specifically extend our gratitude to Congressman Costa and Valadao and Senator Padilla for championing the need for this program in D.C.”

The California citrus breeding program will focus on fresh market citrus. Funding will go towards research and development of high-quality, superior citrus selections well suited to California growing regions, changing climatic pressures, consumer taste preferences, and resistance to pest and diseases, such as huanglongbing (HLB).

The California program is an expansion of the existing national USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) citrus breeding program located in Fort Pierce, Florida, which is focused primarily on varieties that are optimized for Florida growing conditions. Work done through the Florida program has resulted in new varieties with higher yields, increased disease resistance, improved color, and a longer shelf life.

The Florida and California breeding programs along with the continued support from the University of California citrus breeding program at UC Riverside will work together to deliver results for California based growers.

The California citrus breeding program is located at the USDA ARS field station in Parlier. Thanks to funds that have already come in, forward progress continues to be made with the addition of a dedicated scientist, developing plans for construction of a greenhouse and laboratory, and securing additional ground for the program.

The Wonderful Company Named to Fortune’s Prestigious List of 100 Best Companies to Work For

Press Release Provided by The Wonderful Company

The Wonderful Company, one of the largest private companies in the United States, has been named one of Fortune magazine’s 100 Best Companies to Work For®, ranking 91st on the list. A $6 billion global agriculture company with a 10,000-person workforce, The Wonderful Company owns and produces iconic, healthy brands including FIJI Water, POM Wonderful, Wonderful Pistachios, Wonderful Halos, Wonderful Seedless Lemons, Teléflora, and JUSTIN and Lewis Cellars wines.

Earning a spot on the highly coveted list is the result of the input of Wonderful employees who completed confidential surveys attesting to the company’s extraordinary culture, leadership, and relationship with its workers. Fortune recognized not just The Wonderful Company’s positive workplace environment but also its unique contributions to the communities where it operates, and where its employees and their families live. The Wonderful Company and its founders, Lynda and Stewart Resnick, have committed more than $2.5 billion in philanthropy and corporate social responsibility efforts globally, much of which is centered on tackling issues of education, health and wellness, affordable housing, infrastructure, the arts, and sustainability to make a meaningful difference in California’s Central Valley, Fiji, and beyond.

The recognition from Fortune is the only company culture assessment of how they are treated.

“We are very honored to have been named one of the 100 Best Companies to Work For®, and it is an honor to see it recognized.”

Wonderful was recently named to Fast Company’s 2023 Brands That Matter for providing free, quality health care to its workforce, local students, and their families. It was also recognized in 2023 by the Los Angeles Business Journal on its own Best Places to Work list.

Fortune magazine and Great Place To Work, the global authority on workplace culture, selected the list using rigorous analytics and confidential employee feedback, representing more than 6.2 million U.S. employees. Companies are assessed on their ability to create a great employee experience that cuts across race, gender, age, disability status, or any aspect of employee identity or job role.

“When people ask about what sets the Best Companies apart from their competitors, it’s one key ingredient: trust,” says Michael C. Bush, CEO of Great Place To Work. “When employees trust their leaders, their colleagues, and the organization, they become empowered to reach their full potential.”

To qualify for the Fortune list, companies must have 1,000 or more employees in the U.S., be Great Place To Work Certified™ organizations, and have consistently high survey responses across the 60 statements that constitute the Trust Index™ Survey.
Land-use Bill Taps Farmland for Solar Sites

By Caleb Hampton, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with Permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

Proposed state legislation to modify California’s longstanding farmland conservation law could pave the way for large swaths of farmland to be repurposed as sites for renewable energy projects.

The California Land Conservation Act of 1965, commonly known as the Williamson Act, preserves farmland by assessing property taxes based on the land’s agricultural value rather than its full market value. Landowners with Williamson Act contracts, which cover about half the state’s 30 million acres of farm and ranchland, generally see a 20% to 75% reduction in property taxes.

The contracts are agreed between landowners and counties or cities and can only be dissolved by paying a fee of 12.5% of the land value or through a nonrenewal process that takes nine years.

Assembly Bill 2528, introduced by Assembly Member Joaquin Arambula, D-Fresno, would allow owners of Williamson Act land that lacks sufficient water for farming to cancel their contracts—without paying a fee or waiting nine years—if the land is used for wind or solar energy projects. The bill is sponsored by the Large-scale Solar Association.

The proposed legislation seeks to align the state’s renewable energy and groundwater management goals.

California’s Sustainable Groundwater Management Act, or SGMA, requires users to bring groundwater basins into balance within the next two decades. It is expected to take more than 500,000 acres of San Joaquin Valley farmland out of production by 2040, according to a report by the nonprofit Public Policy Institute of California, or PPIC.

Meanwhile, for California to achieve its objective of 100% clean energy by 2045, it will need to dramatically expand its solar energy capacity, an undertaking projected to require up to 480,000 acres of land.

Arambula said in an interview that, in light of these circumstances, water-constrained farmland owners need to be given new land-use options, and solar companies need space to expand the production of renewable energy.

“We felt that those who were closer to the land would be best to determine whether or not that was land that was water constrained—or if we had a landowner who was being too cute,” Arambula said.

Farm advocates cautioned that cities and counties, which are themselves parties in the contracts, may also face economic demands to dissolve contracts.

In 2009, the state government eliminated subvention of Williamson Act contracts. Those basins cover most of the Central Valley, the Salinas Valley and other regions that produce much of the nation’s fresh produce.

City councils and county supervisors would then determine if individual parcels within those basins meet the criteria of not having “permanent access to sufficient water to support commercially viable irrigated agricultural use.”

“Farm advocates have opposed the bill, warning that it could have unintended consequences. The proposed law may tempt economically stressed farmland owners to exit their conservation contracts, they said, resulting in the loss of farmland and food supply.”

“We have a lot of very nervous landowners,” said Tricia Stever Blattler, executive director of the Tulare County Farm Bureau, referring to concerns about the region’s depleted aquifers. “We don’t know if some of these conditions can be reversible.”

Landowners can earn anywhere from two to seven times as much annual revenue renting land to solar companies as they do from farming it, according to the PPIC report titled “Solar Energy and Groundwater in the San Joaquin Valley.”

Farm advocates expressed concern that giving

Researchers have come to varying conclusions on whether it may be necessary to use farmland for large-scale solar projects to meet the state’s energy needs.

A 2017 study by researchers at the University of California, Davis, concluded the state had enough space to install solar projects that would generate between two and 10 times the amount of energy California needs mainly by using surfaces on already developed properties and by installing floating solar panels on reservoirs.

“There are multiple different analyses that say otherwise,” Arambula said, referring to the PPIC report as an example.

While that report does not contradict the UC Davis study, it highlights benefits of developing solar projects on San Joaquin Valley farmland farrowed due to SGMA, even mapping out the overlap of lands that are suitable for solar projects and are expected to be farrowed. The study also shows much of that land is under Williamson Act contracts.

“We simply wanted to encourage the process by streamlining the cancellation of those contracts,” Arambula said.

“We need to understand the sheer magnitude of clean energy that we will need to add to the grid to meet our multiple climate targets,” he said, noting that “it really necessitates large contiguous space” to achieve those goals.

Arambula also cited reports that found solar projects could soften economic and environmental impacts of SGMA, such as the loss of tens of thousands of agricultural jobs and the specter of fields and orchards turning into a dustbowl. The reports found solar projects would bring construction jobs and provide some dust control.

Scheuring of the California Farm Bureau said more should be done to seek solutions before drying up so much farmland.

“SGMA is going to take a toll in some places. We’re realistic about the effects of the law, but anything we can do to mitigate that would be a good idea,” Scheuring said, suggesting improved water infrastructure, conservation programs and aquifer recharge as potential solutions.

“What we’re really talking about,” he said, “is farm families and farm communities and the public food supply.”

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In 2009, the state government eliminated subvention for the conservation program, which was used to compensate counties for losses in property tax revenue on Williamson Act parcels. Since then, California’s Department of Conservation reported a sharp increase in acreage slated for nonrenewal. Imperial County withdrew from the program altogether.

“There are fiscal pressures out there,” Scheuring said. “There are big box stores. There are subdivisions. There are all kinds of things that can be very attractive from a short-term fiscal perspective to a taxing authority like a county.”

Norm Groot, executive director of the Monterey County Farm Bureau, said the Williamson Act has been a key tool in protecting the Salinas Valley, the so-called “Salad Bowl of the World,” from urban development.

Despite being among the most productive farmland on the planet and having ample groundwater, most of the valley’s subbasins were categorized as high or medium priority due to factors such as seawater intrusion and water distribution challenges.

“Solving our problems here is going to be a lot different than just declaring that a parcel does or does not have water and is thus eligible for conversion to another use,” Groot said, adding that he was concerned the bill could incentivize farmland owners to declare water bankruptcy rather than invest in infrastructure to improve distribution. “There are a number of water infrastructure projects that are proposed that could alter the paradigm over the next 20 to 30 years.”

Valley Ag Voice
California Dairy Innovation Center Announces Q2–Q3 2024 Schedule of Dairy Products & Innovation Training Opportunities

Modern cowshed. (Photo: Vipavlenkoff / Adobe)

By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Press Release Provided by the California Dairy Innovation Center

The California Dairy Innovation Center (CDIC) will be hosting Spring and Summer training programs for processors, producers, dairy industry professionals, entrepreneurs, educators, and students as well as health professionals. The courses, which have no pre-requisites, will be held at a variety of California locations and are open to all participants.

The schedule of courses includes:

**Dairy Foods Technology 101** will take place May 30, 2024, in Novato, Calif.

This course is a free educational event open to all California dairy processors and end-users, dairy entrepreneurs, producers, faculty and students in food science, agribusiness, and related fields, as well as qualified suppliers to the industry. It is ideal for individuals who are early in their careers in dairy products processing, entrepreneurs, and employees in production, operations, management, sales and marketing, research and development, and quality assurance roles within the industry.

This course aims to educate attendees on the intricate processes behind dairy product creation, from the fundamentals of milk production to key unit operations for fluid milk, cream, butter, cheese, cultured products and concentrated or dried dairy products, as well as sensory science and food safety. Led by industry experts, participants can expect to learn about the science involved in turning dairy milk into classic as well as innovative dairy products, gain a solid understanding of processes and the importance of these steps to ensure quality and safety. Attendees will have the chance to engage in interactive demonstrations, ask questions, and network with fellow participants who share their passion for dairy.

No pre-requisites are required. To receive a detailed program, information on area hotels, and to register, send name (or that of any participating employee), title(s), company name, phone number and email(s) to VLagrange@CMAB.net or NVanbuskirk@CMAB.net by May 25th. Full program details about the workshop can also be found on the CDIC website at CDIC.net.

**Yogurts, Fermented Milks and Probiotic Dairy Products**, which will take place June 20-21, 2024, at UC Davis is a collaboration between the CDIC, UC Davis, Dairy Council of California, and the California Dairy Research Foundation. During the course, attendees will learn from leading experts who possess extensive experience and expertise in dairy science, nutrition, and food innovation. This course will not only cover the fundamentals of processing but will also highlight the latest nutrition research and product innovations shaping the sector, market trends and opportunities.

During the course, attendees can expect to delve into such topics as:

- Latest research on the nutritional benefits of probiotics and fermented milk products.
- Market trends, types of fermented milks and market opportunities for California processors.
- Fundamental principles of milk fermentation and yogurt production.
- Innovations in processing technologies and product development, including lactose-free, clean label and reduced sugar products.

The course is designed for dairy industry professionals, dietitians and nutritionists, food scientists, researchers, educators, and individuals interested in expanding their understanding of fermented dairy products. With a blend of lectures, hands-on demonstrations, and lab tours on campus, participants will gain practical insights and valuable knowledge that can be applied in both academic and industry settings. The event is modular, and registration covers all three sessions, meals and refreshments, and a networking reception. For more information, please contact VLagrange@CMAB.net or NVanbuskirk@CMAB.net.

There are no pre-requisites required. Registration free for health professionals and additional information can be found at www.EventBrite.com.AU/Short-Course-Yogurt-Fermented-Milks-and-Probiotics.

**SAVE THE DATE:**

Advanced Cheesemaking: July 16-17. This two-day practical, hands-on course will take place at the Dairy Products Technology Center, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

Registration: www.Dairy.CalPoly.edu/Short-Course-Symposia


Registration: www.CDIC.net

Hispanic, Italian and Mediterranean Cheeses: October 8-9. This practical course will feature international cheese varieties and will take place at the Dairy Products Technology Center, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo.

Registration: www.Dairy.CalPoly.edu/Short-Course-Symposia

Short course and conference programs are co-organized with California Milk Advisory Board’s CDIC, with partial funding and contributions from Dairy Management Inc., the USDA’s Pacific Coast Coalition Dairy Business Innovation Initiative (hosted by Fresno State) and CMAB. Programs are subject to change. For more info about the CDIC and its educational opportunities, contact VLagrange@CMAB.net.
The Benefits of Using an Integrated Advertising and Marketing Agency

By Dave Plivelich, CEO, The Marcom Group

Efficiency and unity of advertising and marketing tactics are more important than ever. Companies aiming to establish a brand presence and effective communication channels can greatly benefit from teaming up with an agency that manages all their design, advertising, and marketing requirements.

Every marketing endeavor communicates consistently, which is essential for creating brand uniformity and recognition. Businesses can depend on one entity to synchronize their strategies across different platforms and campaigns.

**IMPROVED COMMUNICATION AND COLLABORATION**

Collaborating with an agency enhances communication channels both within the agency and between the agency and the client. This streamlined communication prevents misunderstandings and delays that may arise when multiple agencies handle parts of a campaign. Regular updates and meetings can occur smoothly, allowing for adjustments to strategies based on feedback or market changes.

**COST EFFICIENCY**

Using an agency for all advertising and marketing requirements is more cost-effective than engaging multiple specialized firms. Integrated agencies often provide bundled offers or retainers that are more economical compared to the expense of individual contracts. Moreover, managing one vendor over several can result in substantial cost savings due to reduced administrative overhead.

**FASTER PROJECT COMPLETION**

With an integrated agency, the time taken from conceptualization to campaign launch is often reduced. With strategy, design, and marketing teams housed under one roof, the back and forth that can delay projects is minimized. This could be particularly advantageous for businesses aiming to seize time opportunities or maintain momentum in evolving markets.

**CONSISTENCY ACROSS ALL TOUCHPOINTS**

Maintaining a brand story and image across all touchpoints is essential for branding. An agency that oversees everything from website design to advertising and social media ensures uniformity in brand messaging across all platforms.

**EXPERTISE AND INNOVATION**

Integrated agencies often employ professionals with marketing skills. This collaborative expertise can spark ideas that may not arise when working with specialized teams. The exchange of ideas among a variety of experts can lead to impactful campaigns that use cutting-edge technologies and current trends.

For companies seeking to expand their market reach and streamline campaign execution, turning to an integrated advertising and marketing agency can offer a solution. By consolidating marketing activities under one roof, businesses can ensure a brand message, enhance efficiency, and adapt quickly to market shifts.

Ultimately, this strategy not only saves time but also positions companies for greater success in a competitive business environment.

Are you ready to improve your business? Visit TheMarcomGroup.com to schedule a consultation.

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**UC ANR Offers Scholarships for Agriculture Students, May 13 Deadline**

Applications and nominations of outstanding students pursuing careers in agriculture will be accepted through May 13, 2024, for UC Agriculture and Natural Resources scholarships and awards.

Students, faculty, and colleagues are encouraged to take advantage of these opportunities to honor academic excellence and provide additional support for undergraduate and graduate students.

Bill and Jane Fischer Vegetation Management Scholarship is for students enrolled at ANY accredited California university, with preference given to graduate students. The recipient of the $1,000 multiple awards possible will be selected from students who are enrolled in fall 2024 pursuing degrees in vegetation management, weed science or agriculture specializations plant science, soils and plant nutrition, agricultural engineering, agricultural botany, plant pathology, plant protection and pest management, or agricultural economics. Students apply directly.

Howard Walton Clark Prize in Plant Breeding and Soil Building is for students enrolled at UC Berkeley, UC Davis, or UC Riverside. The $5,000 (multiple awards possible) will be awarded to a promising student who will be enrolled as a senior in fall 2024 in the College of Agriculture and/or Natural Resources with demonstrated scholastic achievement and talent for independent research with reference to either plant breeding (leading to new/improved crops and new/improved varieties using appropriate tools) or soil building (leading to improving soil quality related to soil productivity and sustainability as a resource). Nomination by faculty member required.

Knowles A. Ryerson Award in Agriculture is for students enrolled at UC Berkeley and UC Davis. $2,500 (minimum one award for each campus) given to an international undergraduate student who will be enrolled in fall 2024 in the College of Agriculture and/or Natural Resources, in any curriculum, preferably after completion of the junior year. The award is based on high scholarship, outstanding character and promise of leadership. Nomination by faculty member required.

More information about the application process can be found on [www.UCANR.edu/ANRScholarships](http://www.UCANR.edu/ANRScholarships). For questions, please contact Andrea Ambrose, UC ANR director of advancement, at APAmbrose@UCANR.edu.
MAY 2024

SAVE-THE-DATE
FOR THESE AGRICULTURE EVENTS

May is packed with several exciting events for professionals in the agriculture industry.

NETWORKING & CONFERENCES
On May 1-2, the Western Food Safety Conference will gather food safety industry leaders for a conference on fresh produce safety, research, and regulatory developments. Industry-leading scientists, executives, and professionals will be present to discuss the latest developments in food safety. The event is hosted by Hartnell College in Salinas.

The 2024 Annual Meeting of the California Cotton Ginters and Growers Association will take place on May 14 at the International Agri-Center in Tulare. Along with a legislative update, attendees will hear from either the growers or the ginters track to discuss the latest in the cotton industry. Sessions for growers include discussions on the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint and Regenerative Agriculture.

To end the month, the West Coast Produce Expo will run from May 30 to June 1 at JW Marriot Desert Springs Resort in Palm Desert. The event will feature farm tours, golf, and pickleball tournaments, speaker sessions, exhibit showcases, and themed receptions. Expected attendees include national buyers from top retail, wholesale, and food service companies.

EDUCATIONAL ENTERTAINMENT
The Dairy Princess Program for District 6—Kern, San Luis Obispo, and Santa Barbara counties—is returning on May 4 at the Kern Ag Pavilion. The California Milk Advisory Board program connects local young women to an opportunity to represent themselves and their district’s dairy industry.

On May 5, UC Agriculture and Natural Resources is partnering with the Master Gardeners of Sonoma County to host a Spring Planting Festival in the Unity Garden. The event will take place at Petaluma Bounty Farm from noon to 3 p.m. Master Gardeners will showcase planting in a variety of ways including simple vertical structures for vining vegetables and raised bed structures.

There’s a new outlaw in town.

103.7 OUTLAW COUNTRY RADIO

Tune in on Bakersfield’s newest country station for ag news and the best country from 90’s to now.

An Unlikely Example

By Joshua Stevens
Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

The disciples’ response is one of the most fascinating parts of the Easter message. Until the moment of the resurrection, they were seemingly clueless about God’s plan. Peter cuts off a man’s ear in the garden of Gethsemane (Mark 14:47) and continues to lie about his role in Christ’s ministry while Jesus is likely within earshot being flogged (Mark 14:66–72). Judas was so racked by guilt, he hung himself (Matthew 27:3–5). Other disciples hid away in fear and were rebuked by Christ for not believing He had returned (Mark 16:14).

These individuals spent years beside Christ, learning from Him directly, following Him so closely they were not understood what was to come. They acted in fear and selfishness. It wasn’t one of the 12 who came to Pilate and asked to bury Jesus or brought supplies to bury Christ, but instead a pair of men, also disciples of Christ, who had the courage to do so (John 19:38–39).

In the hours after Christ’s death, we see that the people who stood out for their courage are the least of these. For example, Joseph of Arimathaea is sparingly mentioned in the gospel accounts, and Nicodemus, whose main features include being a small tax collector goes on to follow Christ. Then, two women discover the empty tomb—a point that by modern standards wouldn’t pass the Bechdel test but, by ancient standards, would have been an attribute of the story that hurt the testimony’s credibility.

Beyond unlikely heroes in the hours and days after Christ’s crucifixion, we see a quick reconciliation upon his resurrection. How quickly the disciples turned from fearful men cowering behind closed doors to authoritatively speaking out, being persecuted and killed for what they believed to be true—only after it was revealed to them.

It would have been easy and justifiable for Christ to cast out the disciples and appoint those who had shown up as the chief ministers of the early church. Instead, we see an example of outstanding forgiveness, compassion, and love. One that mirrors a popular parable, “And he arose and came to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him” (Luke 15:20).

Every Christian and every church should endeavor to forgive each other even in the face of great betrayal or suffering, to continuously love and put one another’s needs above our own, and to hope each one of us is seeking Christ in the darkest of times like Joseph, Nicodemus, and Mary and serving Christ as boldly as the disciples after the resurrection.

WILL YOU PRAY WITH ME?

Lord, thank you for your son, who entered the world to dwell among us, set for us an example to strive for, and continue to sanctify us so we may reflect You more in every aspect of our lives. Give us hearts that break for the lost and rejoice for the found so we may join in Heaven’s glorious procession as we participate in the plan of and worship, He who is the one true God.

In Jesus’ name, I pray,

Amen.

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