Regenerative Agriculture Offers Long-Term Solutions for Central Valley

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Agriculture in the Central Valley is a beautiful thing to behold — poetic in its stoic desire to feed the world. As resources have grown limited — or restricted — valley farmers have led the effort to do more with less, from groundwater recharge to regenerative agriculture practices.

A recent Public Policy Institute of California report found that Kern County has led recharge efforts since 2017. Last year, it reported 2.9 million acre-feet of onsite recharge — 54% of the total volume reported.

The report, Replenishing Groundwater in the San Joaquin Valley: 2024 Update, explained that basins on the valley’s eastern side, including Kern, have the most suitable soils for recharge and the largest overdraft levels. These areas also host most of the region’s recharge activity.

The juxtaposition of the Kern River Valley being the most overdrafted basin but leading the way in groundwater recharge is indicative of the agricultural industry in the Central Valley — optimism is found even in restrictive regulations and scarce resources. The ingenuity of the region’s farmers finds a way to balance the necessary disruption of the natural environment while still outperforming the nation in agricultural outputs.

GROUNDWATER RECHARGE

Since the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act was passed in 2014, strategies to replenish the San Joaquin Valley’s critically overdrafted basins have come into focus. According to the PPIC report, the survey respondents recharged 5.3 million acre-feet within their service areas, but the estimate for the total valley-wide recharge volume was 7.6 million acre-feet — a 17% increase over 2017.

According to PPIC, more local water agencies are engaging in recharge and increased investments in 2023. The most common recharge efforts include allowing aquifers to replenish by replacing groundwater use with surface water, spreading water on farmland, and building dedicated basins to allow for water percolation into aquifers.

PPIC explained that favorable wet conditions last year allowed for more productive recharge, leading to the second wettest year in the valley’s southern half and the reappearance of Tulare Lake for the first time since the late 1990s.

However, not every year will be productive, as drier years narrow the window for aquifer recharge. Half of all local agencies fall back on four recharge methods: in-lieu recharge, recharge basins, unlined canals, and spreading water on farmland.

Aside from the recharge activity local agencies are working on, the Bureau of Reclamation has provided a $1 million grant to finance this undertaking.

The second major effort of the Blueprint is to evaluate where the broad group of stakeholders that make up the Blueprint can add valuable input into the two regulatory review processes that will impact operations of the Central Valley Project and the State Water Project (collectively, “Projects”) and associated water supply availability from the Delta. Surface water supplies from Northern California play a significant role in balancing the available water supply and demand in the Valley.

The Bureau of Reclamation has provided a $1 million grant to finance this undertaking.

Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley Builds Momentum

By Geoff Vanden Heuvel
Director of Regulatory & Economic Affairs
Milk Producers Council

Reprinted with permission from the Milk Producers Council

When the state of California began to implement and enforce the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act some nine years ago, it became clear that without change, there will not be enough sustainably available groundwater to support all of the irrigated acres that are currently in production. With that decline in agriculture, the businesses, communities and tax base that depends on those farms would be very negatively impacted as well. This reality prompted a wide variety of interests in the San Joaquin Valley to form a “coalition of the willing” that came to be known as the Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley (Blueprint). The dairy industry was one of those interests. Over 90% of California milk production is located in the San Joaquin Valley, much of which is designated by the state as “critically overdrafted.”

On behalf of Milk Producers Council, I have been involved with the Blueprint from the beginning. Here is an update on the progress of the Blueprint.

There are four major efforts that the Blueprint is working on. First, the Blueprint has identified that improved conveyance and recharge infrastructure in the Valley could increase the amount of wet year recharge from the local Sierra watershed by over 900,000-acre feet per year. The Blueprint, in combination with the California Water Institute at Fresno State, is developing a Unified Water Plan for the San Joaquin Valley. This effort is leveraging the information developed and projects proposed and planned by various Groundwater Sustainability Agencies, water districts, counties and other local governments into a report that will be delivered to the Bureau of Reclamation and then ultimately to Congress as the foundation for federal infrastructure investments in the Valley.

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Tulare Lake Subbasin Probation Highlights Need for Collaborative Groundwater Management

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Following the State Water Board’s decision to place the Tulare Lake Subbasin on probation — and upcoming probationary hearings for five critically overdrafted basins in the Central Valley — local groundwater management has become increasingly critical.

Coming up near a decade since the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act was signed into law by former Governor Jerry Brown, the future of the Central Valley’s water lay in the coalition of the willing. The face of that future is the San Joaquin Valley Water Blueprint.

The Water Blueprint — a volunteer-based coalition of community leaders, businesses, water agencies, local governments, and agricultural representatives — is leading the charge to advance water solutions for the region.

According to Geoffrey Vanden Heuvel, board vice chair of the Blueprint, when SGMA was...
President’s Message
By Jenny Holtermann
President, KCFB

Summertime is a busy time in agriculture. As a farm mom, there is always an extra layer of busy with farm chores, kids on summer break, and the constant juggling of life. I know many of you can relate. During the summer, many of us are prepping for harvest, getting equipment ready, and trying to make schedules that harvest time will inevitably disrupt.

While we can’t always predict the seasons or what’s happening next on the farm, there is one thing we can count on — regulations. This year marks the 10-year anniversary of SGMA passing, and we marked the occasion in Kern County by submitting our second amended Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). At our last Tailgate Talk, we had an amazing SGMA overview presentation that helped members understand the next steps and how we got to this point.

Groundwater Sustainability Agencies were formed in 2017, and in 2018, SGMA planning was initiated for our subbasin. SGMA has a separate timeline for different subbasins based on the ranking assigned by the Department of Water Resources. Kern County, being a critically overdrafted basin, had to submit its first plan by 2020. At the time, there were five GSPs submitted to DWR as a first attempt. In 2022, DWR issued an “incomplete” determination letter, and the subbasin submitted six revised GSPs. In 2023, DWR issued an “inadequate” determination letter, triggering our subbasin to go into State Water Resources Control Board intervention. The first sets of GSPs were missing the in-depth coordination that the state was looking for. The determination letters outlined the GSP’s inability to establish on-time results consistent for the entire subbasin, expressed concerns with the subbasin’s chronic lowering of groundwater levels, and called out inconsistent sustainability criteria for land subsidence. The subbasin responded by making several changes focused on improving coordination. A new Subbasin Plan Manager and P.O. contact was hired to lead the efforts in coordination.

On May 28, our second amended GSP — which is truly a completely revised plan — was submitted to the SWRCB for review. If you aren’t familiar with the makeup of your water district’s plan, I strongly encourage you to attend a water district board meeting or walk into their office and request a copy or meeting to learn more. There were seven newly identical GSPs submitted with added supplemental pages to explain the special conditions of the GSAs based on those versions submitted.

The current GSP had six months of deep coordination, with more than 146 meetings and a management structure everyone was able to agree on. Now, the GSP is adorned with a new look into minimum thresholds for groundwater levels, water quality, subsidence, and groundwater storage. Additionally, it includes a subbasin-wide well mitigation program that addresses decertified wells and water quality. Water budgets for planning purposes were also updated and are now correlated to each GSA. We are asking the SWRCB staff to review the amended GSP over the next 90 days and use these plans as the basis for their probationary hearing recommendation. We anticipate a draft deficiency letter to be released in November, followed by a probationary hearing that will likely be set for January 2025.

It is a daunting timeline but we have come so far since the first plan submitted. The Farm Bureau is actively engaged in advocating for our members and helping to further educate them on the plan. There will always be speculation as to what the outcome will yield.

It took a bit of time, but the subbasin has set the right people in the right positions to do the right job — and now we wait.

Executive Director’s Report
By Rachel Nettleton
Exec. Director, KCFB

This month marks my one-year anniversary with the Kern County Farm Bureau, and it has been a transformative journey. Coming from a non-agricultural professional background, I had a steep learning curve ahead of me. However, this industry welcomed me with open arms and offered a fresh perspective on the vital role agriculture plays in our lives.

Being born and raised in Bakersfield, surrounded by Kern County’s agricultural lands, I often say that I have always been a part of agriculture. Reflecting on my childhood, I recall mornings when I was late to elementary school because sheep were being herded across the road. In high school, as an avid runner, I frequently ran along dirt roads flanked by vast farmlands. These memories are vivid reminders of the agricultural landscape that once dominated our area.

Today, those sheep and dirt roads have primarily vanished, replaced by residential developments, paved streets, and streetlights. Change is inevitable, and with time, we often forget the Golden Age of our past. My involvement in the agriculture industry has illuminated the significant transformations over the past 20 to 30 years. This reflection raises a pressing question: what will our agricultural landscape look like in a few decades?

The transformation of Bakersfield’s landscape from farmland to residential areas is a microcosm of broader changes happening nationwide. Urbanization and regulatory pressures have reshaped the agricultural sector, presenting both challenges and opportunities. As we witness these changes, it’s imperative to remember the importance of agriculture not just as an industry but as a cornerstone of our daily lives. Agriculture is more than just an occupation; it is the lifeblood of our communities. It feeds us, clothes us, and sustains our economy. The disappearance of sheep from our roads and the conversion of dirt paths into concrete streets are symbolic of the broader shifts in agricultural practices and land use. These changes prompt us to consider how we can preserve the essence of agriculture while

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

The Kern County Farmers Market on Saturday, July 20th. Every year we put together this wonderful event for the community. I often get asked if the market is on — regulations. This year marks the 10-year anniversary of SGMA passing, and we marked the occasion in Kern County by submitting our second amended Groundwater Sustainability Plan (GSP). At our last Tailgate Talk, we had an amazing SGMA overview presentation that helped members understand the next steps and how we got to this point.

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Blasting them with radiation that causes the thick-hided civilians of the land and the extreme elements as scarcity. Envision the ranchers and cattle as the form of challenging cold, challenging heat, or forage that haven’t been selected for adaptability. I have in the soft environment hasn’t experienced hardship, durability. It is not that the individual animal raised in the sun’s army. For those who don’t have the luxury of shade, a hilltop with a breeze must suffice. Another strategy employed by these four-legged refugees is to play dead (nap), hoping that the invading force will pass over them.

The ally of the bovine refugee is the noble rancher. The bovine-assisting rancher has the critical responsibility to care for the asylum seekers at different times and locations. In fact, he is often much more susceptible to it because this attack from the burning gas ball in the sky makes these four-legged asylum seekers require shade, a hilltop with a breeze must suffice. Another strategy employed by these four-legged refugees is to play dead (nap), hoping that the invading force will pass over them.

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Regenerative Agriculture
Continued from PAGE 1

lead, farmers and researchers are increasingly investing in sustainable agriculture practices.

According to the release, one demonstration shown to farmers entails dropping two clumps of soil into two separate containers—one clump from heavily tilled land and the other from no-till, regenerative practices.

COVER CROPPING

One of the more widespread regenerative practices is employing cover crops in the winter which condense and capture water particles from the air whilst protecting the wet solar surface from solar radiation—the main cause for soil evaporation according to Daniele Zaccaria, associate professor and agricultural water management specialist at UC Davis.

Using water—the most essential resource to agriculture’s livelihood—for anything other than income-producing crops is not generally a popular idea, especially in the era of SGMA. A new study claims that cover crops, while non-income generating, can improve pollinator habitat, infiltration, soil health, carbon capture, and most importantly, water storage. The potential benefits of cover cropping would be prominent in the San Joaquin Valley where SGMA implementation, the study admits, is the most restrictive.

Three questions were posed within the collaborative initiative—what are the impacts of cover crops on water cycles; how does SGMA management account for cover cropping and is it effective; how can we ensure this practice remains available to growers while and when it makes sense?

The use of cover crops in Mediterranean climates can be traced back thousands of years, according to the study. In California, they were utilized primarily in orchards and vineyard systems from the early 1900s to improve soil fertility, reduce erosion, and improve water infiltration. Simply put, cover cropping is an agricultural practice involving planting non-cash crops to protect and improve soil quality and fertility—they are generally planted after the cash crop has been harvested.

One of the primary concerns with cover crops in regions like the San Joaquin Valley is their water usage. In an email, Zaccaria explained remote sensing models and tools, or outdated estimation models that are based on unrealistic assumptions,” Zaccaria said.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Central Valley farmers continue to demonstrate resilience and innovation in the face of water scarcity and regulatory challenges. The growing interest in regenerative agriculture is indicative of the ingenuity and adaptability of farmers to feed the world under harsh and unfavorable circumstances.

The resilience and adaptability of Central Valley farmers serves as a beacon of hope and a model for agricultural regions worldwide. By continuing to invest in sustainable practices and leveraging the support of policy frameworks and educational resources, the Central Valley can maintain its position as a leader in agricultural innovation and productivity.
Defining the ‘Significant and Unreasonable’ Inadequacies in Subbasin GSPs

A closer look at State Water Board probationary hearing staff reports.

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Despite varying interests and distinct stakeholder needs, one thing Groundwater Sustainability Agencies can collectively agree on is the need to avoid a probation determination from the State Water Resources Control Board.

Of the six critically overdrafted basins in the Central Valley, only the Tulare Lake Subbasin has officially been placed on probation. While the six basins cover different areas with unique water needs and landowner interests, there are several commonalities in the deficiencies the SWB found within the separate groundwater sustainability plans.

State Water Board staff has released three probationary hearing draft staff reports for the following basins — Tulare, Tule, and Kaweah. The subbasin GSPs share three specific inadequacies: chronic lowering of groundwater levels with insufficient Sustainable Management Criteria, continued land subsidence, and further degradation of groundwater quality.

LOWERING GROUNDWATER LEVELS

According to the SWB reports, achieving the sustainability objective for a basin under SGMA includes the lowering of groundwater levels as it can cause shallow wells to go dry or reduce their productivity.

For both the Tule Subbasin and Kaweah Subbasin — which will have their probationary hearings on Sept. 17 and Nov. 5, respectively — the Department of Water Resources identified three key deficiencies related to the chronic lowering of groundwater levels.

The lowering of groundwater levels indicates a “significant and unreasonable” depletion of supply, according to SWB staff. Three key deficiencies for this management criteria found within Tule and Kaweah Subbasin GSPs include insufficient goals within the GSP that allow significant impacts on domestic wells, as well as unreasonable impacts, and add details to well mitigation and demand management plans.

LAND SUBSIDENCE

Another consideration under SGMA is avoiding “significant and unreasonable” land subsidence that interferes with surface land uses. Simply stated, subsidence is the sinking of land as a result of groundwater removal — land subsidence from excessive groundwater extraction often leads to irreversible damage to infrastructure and aqueducts.

To avoid probation, the Tule and Kaweah GSPs must clearly define how they will avoid the effects of land subsidence on critical infrastructure and ensure sustainability goals are consistent with avoiding subsidence impacts.

SWB staff built upon DWR’s analysis that subsidence in the Tule and Kaweah subbasins may greatly impact the Friant-Kern Canal which delivers irrigation water to over 1 million acres of farmland.

The staff reports recommend that the GSAs develop and implement plans that avoid significant impacts on critical infrastructure due to subsidence. The Tulare Lake Subbasin’s GSP failed to revise its subsidence-based inadequacies before its hearing in April.

GROUNDWATER QUALITY DEGRADATION

The degradation of water quality relates to the local drinking water supply as SGMA requires GSAs to consider the interests of all groundwater uses, including municipal well operators and public water systems.

While the DWR analysis on Degraded Water Quality in the Kaweah Subbasin’s GSP did not list any deficiencies, the water board staff are concerned about the “potential impacts” that the subbasin’s management actions would have on drinking water and, as such, listed it as a reason for probation.

“The GSP’s goals are not well described, so it is unclear if the goals would prevent significant and unreasonable impacts,” the staff report said.

The DWR analysis for the Tule Subbasin, however, did list its degraded water quality section as insufficient. Reasons included not specifying which groundwater conditions are suitable for agricultural irrigation and domestic users, not explaining how using a 10-year running average for sustainable management criteria will avoid undesirable results, and failure to explain how the criteria relate to existing groundwater regulatory requirements in the subbasin.

Tulare Lake’s 2022 GSP did not adequately address its approach to Degraded Water Quality, thereby failing to remedy the third deficiency outlined by DWR.

INTERCONNECTED SURFACE WATER

The Tule and Kaweah GSPs had a fourth deficiency not included in the Tulare Lake Subbasin staff report — depletions of interconnected surface water.

Again, the DWR analysis on the Kaweah Subbasin GSP did not include this as a deficiency in their inadequate determination and acknowledged that while the section was not fully consistent with GSP Regulation requirements, the GSAs’ efforts to address the deficiency are adequate.

SWB staff took a reversed stance, claiming that while they acknowledge Kaweah Subbasin’s efforts to address data gaps related to interconnected surface water depletions, the current GSPs do not meet SGMA requirements.

The Tule Subbasin also does not have an adequate plan to address the depletion of interconnected surface water to achieve groundwater sustainability by 2040.
Continued from PAGE 1

Kings County Water District

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one primary goal of the coalition is the Unified Water Plan — a comprehensive plan that includes various water projects proposed by GSAs and supported by funding from the Federal Bureau of Reclamation. The comprehensive plan falls in line with the Blueprint’s philosophy that collaboration is crucial and the diversity and scale of agriculture in the valley necessitates a unified approach to water management.

“We’re either going to work together or we’re not going to be successful,” Heuvel said.

The Unified Water Plan expects its final report by the end of 2025, but drafts will be made available for public comment and review.

PROBATION

The challenges faced by the Tulare Lake Subbasin further underscore the complexities of groundwater management and the necessity to collaborate. Five GSAs operate within the subbasin, with distinct challenges and stakeholders pulling at the GSP.

Tensions within the subbasin were illustrated by the severe backlash Kings County Water

were beginning to realize that there just isn’t enough water to support all the agriculture that we built here in a way that will comply with the sustainability requirements that will ultimately be enforced by 2040,” Heuvel said. “It became quite clear that we either were going to just let this happen to us or we needed to get organized because this was a bigger problem than any one individual farmer could solve.”

The Blueprint became an entity to represent not just farmers, but the whole community, Heuvel explained. Driven by the necessity to address water sustainability collectively, the Blueprint began as a coalition of the willing and eventually received federal support.

“The whole idea behind the Blueprint is, you know, first identify the impacts of doing nothing and then do everything we can to try to figure out what the Blueprint is for improving on the worst-case scenario,” Heuvel said.

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District and the Mid-Kings River GSA faced for not approving the revised GSP. According to Aaron Fukuda, general manager of the Tulare Irrigation District, interim general manager of the Mid-Kaweah GSA, and technical committee member for the Blueprint, the probation process has three possible outcomes: build momentum, maintain momentum, or kill momentum.

“I think what we’re seeing in the Tulare Subbasin is it killed the momentum,” Fukuda said.

For its part, the MKGSA is ahead of schedule for its probationary hearing on November 5. Fukuda explained that significant progress on the second amended GSP has been made, and three technical teams are focused on addressing key deficiencies identified by the Department of Water Resources.

The Kaweah Subbasin faced two primary issues in its initial GSP — refining the sustainable management criteria, including groundwater levels and subsidence, and preparing for potential interconnected surface water impacts. Led by a team of hydrologists, the past year has seen intensive technical work and frequent meetings.

“Instead of just tweaking this and tweaking that... sometimes in life, you hit the reset button, go back to step one, reevaluate everything, and move forward,” Fukuda said.

Fukuda explained that there’s no textbook to groundwater just as there’s no textbook to farming.

“You can’t open a textbook and then go farm,” Fukuda said. “You’ve got to look at your parameters. You’ve got to make adjustments.”

As revisions near completion, the Kaweah Subbasin GSAs are preparing to present the amended GSP for public review. Upcoming workshops on June 24 and June 27 will be crucial for explaining the revised GSP to the State Board members and the public, highlighting the extensive work done and the sustainability projects in place.

Fukuda remains hopeful for a positive result at the Kaweah Subbasin hearing on November 5 and explained that the GSAs have remained committed to remedying the GSP and working toward sustainability.

“We’ve got the momentum now,” Fukuda said. “We’ve got a vision and a target out there where we’re aiming and we’re going.”

“Failed the landowners in their service area.”

During a special board meeting on May 29, the Kings County Water District voted to withdraw from the Mid-Kings River Groundwater Sustainability Agency and the joint powers authority it operates under. The motion to withdraw was made by KCWD president Barry McCutcheon — who also serves as the MKR GSA president — and seconded by KCWD director Ernest Taylor. The motion passed without opposition.

After the Tulare Lake Subbasin was placed on probation in April, the Mid-Kings River GSA was scrutinized for not approving a revised draft groundwater plan that the five GSAs within the Tulare Subbasin planned to bring before the State Water Board at the probationary hearing.

On May 20, the Kings County Farm Bureau sent a letter to McCutcheon demanding his and the entire Board of Directors’ resignations, along with the General Manager Dennis Mills. The letter explained that three KCWD directors hold seats on the MKR GSA, and Mills serves as the General Manager for both agencies, which have “failed the landowners in their service area.”

“The most critical breakdown was the failure to submit a Groundwater Sustainability Plan to the Department of Water Resources, which resulted in the State Water Resources Control Board placing the Tulare Lake Subbasin on probation,” the letter stated.

The MKR GSA is a joint powers authority comprised of the Kings County Water District, the City of Hanford, and the County of Kings. With the KCWD’s withdrawal, the JPA is left to the city and county as well as the responsibility to reach compliance with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.

In a Facebook post, the Kings County Farm Bureau expressed its disagreement with the KCWD’s withdrawal from the GSA.

“This action leaves the future of the sub-basin unknown,” Kings County Farm Bureau said. “KCFB hopes that the County of Kings and the City of Hanford will renegotiate a JPA quickly and get the GSA and sub-basin back on track.”

A formal notice will be issued to the joint powers authority, starting the 60-day notice to the County of Kings and the City of Hanford, initiating KCWD’s withdrawal from the Mid-Kings River GSA.
Cal.net and Emergent Connext Launch IoT Solution for AgTech
The Internet of Things promises water savings.

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Water conservation in the valley is receiving a high-tech makeover through the newly launched Internet of Things (IoT) network solution for the agriculture industry, promising to significantly advance AgTech and close the connectivity gap in fields and rural communities.

The IoT network solution is a collaborative effort between Cal.net, a leading California broadband provider, and Emergent Connext, a wireless technology company for the agriculture industry. With a focus on the Central Valley, the IoT network solution intends to address connectivity challenges and ultimately give farmers an estimated 10% in water savings.

The Internet of Things describes a network of interconnected devices that connect and exchange data with other IoT devices. Cal.net and Emergent are deploying a low-cost network that supports smart IoT sensors and devices for AgTech to increase farm and ranch profitability by reducing labor costs, minimizing farm inputs, and conserving natural resources.

Millions of IoT devices such as field sensors, pump and valve actuators, and industrial sensors like propane tank monitors will be connected through the network. In a press release, CEO of Emergent Mark Roudi explained that the solution was first deployed at Terranova Ranch in Fresno County where it automated irrigation and water management processes.

“By partnering with Cal.net and deploying our first solution at Terranova Ranch, we are demonstrating the power of data-driven agriculture to transform the way farming is done,” Roudi said. “Together, with Cal.net’s help, farmers can make smarter decisions, improve their bottom line, and contribute to a more sustainable future.”

The network aims to connect millions of IoT devices across 2.4 million square miles of rural land and 1.5 square miles of agricultural land.

In an email, Senior Vice President for Cal.net Craig Stein explained that the estimated water savings are at least 10%, and by automating water management, labor costs are projected to decrease by 20%.

“Our ability to turn the valves and pumps on and off automatically as scheduled will reduce the amount of water used by each farmer and help the conservation effort,” Stein said. “We can also use the data from the moisture sensors within the field to make decisions about turning on water based on the moisture of the soil.”

Stein explained that the water conservation solution utilizes almost all of a farm’s existing water distribution equipment and only replaces the valves and pump actuators to work with the IoT network.

“Our approach is to use as much of the existing equipment as possible, and if we must use new equipment for part of the solution, our goal is to utilize off-the-shelf equipment that is not proprietary so that we get the cost as low as possible to the farmer,” Stein said.

By partnering with Emergent, Cal.net plans to leverage its infrastructure to support Central Valley farmers and rural communities. Along with water conservation efforts, the network solution offers real-time monitoring of soil moisture levels, crop health, and environmental conditions while providing advanced irrigation, fertilization, and pest control automation.

According to Stein, future enhancement plans include adding features such as RFID tagging — radio-frequency identification — remote fan control, and additional monitoring capabilities for soil and fertilizers.

Almond Board Announces 2024 Election Results
New board will start its term Aug. 1.

Press release provided by the Almond Board of California

MODESTO, Calif. — The Almond Board of California announced the Board of Directors election results on June 11 and the names of the following nominees have been submitted to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture for selection to terms of office beginning Aug. 1, 2024:

- Grower Position #1, Member: Paul Ewing, Los Banos
- Grower Position #1, Alternate: Katie Staack, Hughson
- Grower Position #3, Member: Joe Gardiner, Earlimart
- Grower Position #3, Alternate: Garrett Bloemhof, Shafter
- Handler Position #2, Member: Bob Silvera, Williams
- Handler Position #2, Alternate: Justin Morehead, Coalinga
- Handler Position #3, Member: Darren Rigg, Le Grand
- Handler Position #3, Alternate: Chad DeRose, McFarland
- Co-op Grower Position #1, Member: Christine Gemperle, Ceres
- Co-op Grower Position #1, Alternate: Lucas Van Duyne, Ripon

The ABC board is made up of five handler and five grower representatives. It sets policy and recommends budgets in major areas, including marketing, production research, advertising, public relations, nutrition research, statistical reporting, quality control, and food safety.

Blueprint Builds Momentum
Continued from PAGE 1

That water must pass through the Sacramen-to-San Joaquin Bay Delta and right now the federal fishery agencies are reevaluating policies that will impact operations of the Projects for the protection of listed species. At the same time, the California State Water Resources Control Board is considering new water quality standards for the Delta, which will also have operational impacts to the Projects.

Our water agencies have invested millions of dollars and years of time in doing scientific studies to inform all of us on how the current policies have performed and to provide recommendations on ways to improve or maintain current levels of species protection while improving operational flexibility of the Projects. The Blueprint supports efforts to achieve regulatory alignment in these processes using the best available science to better balance species protection and water supply. Blueprint has contracted with a consulting firm that has extensive experience in this area to evaluate and recommend where a Blueprint voice might be helpful in influencing how these regulations come out.

The third major effort is to focus on what groundwater storage opportunities there might be in the Valley. This effort seeks to identify those locations, what conveyance infrastructure might be needed to move surface water to those locations and who might be interested in partnering with us in the effort. There are a number of urban water agencies who are extremely interested in participating with the Blueprint in this effort. In fact, two weeks ago the Blueprint signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California to begin investigating mutually beneficial opportunities to expand water banking storage projects in the Valley. Read more about the MOU signing here: https://tmnwrlf.com/WBmou/.

The fourth effort is a Blueprint sponsored Delta/San Joaquin Valley Farmer-to-Farmer Summit process. This effort brought together a dozen farmers, half from the Delta and half from the Valley. Over two, two-day sessions, one in the Delta in November and another one in February in the Valley, these farmers, with the assistance of a facilitator, and some subject matter area experts, discussed the challenges and opportunities in their respective areas. The conversations were very constructive, and some significant common ground was identified.

The group met again in May and decided to formalize their effort as an on-going process and work on specific projects and initiatives that are mutually beneficial to both regions. As you can see, the Blueprint has some real momentum. These are long-term initiatives that will require constant and consistent effort and support to produce positive results. I am thankful for these encouraging signs that this “coalition of the willing” can make a real difference in shaping the future of the Valley.
Central Valley’s Agribusiness Sector Sees Dynamic Changes

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

The agriculture industry in the Central Valley has seen tremendous movement in acquisitions and expansions of existing companies in recent years, impacting the region’s economy and agricultural future.

Amidst these changes, advancements in agricultural technology are also reshaping farming practices, with industry leaders leading the charge in addressing the pressing challenges of labor costs and efficiency.

FRESH PRODUCE
California’s Central Valley is the hub for fresh produce, attracting both local and international, lab-based agricultural companies to begin or expand their operations. Recently, Mucci Farms joined that list, expanding with a 32-acre greenhouse in Tehachapi, California.

Mucci Farms — a Controlled Environment Agriculture grower — announced its expansion to Tehachapi in June as part of the company’s strategy to enhance production capabilities and accessibility to fresh produce in North America. The company’s corporate office is located in Canada.

In a press release, CEO of Mucci Farms Bert Mucci explained that the company’s focus has always been centered on expanding access to allow for a greater supply of greenhouse-grown fruits and vegetables.

“The expansion is in partnership with Cox Farms — an entity of Cox Enterprises specializing in greenhouse-grown produce.

“We are committed to helping families access locally grown fruits and vegetables,” Steve Bradley, president of Cox Farms said in the press release.

“Together with Mucci Farms, we aim to drive positive change in the industry while delivering on our promise of quality and environmental responsibility.”

Mucci Farms’ expansion to the Central Valley follows a 2021 expansion into Camarillo, California and now holds several locations in the U.S. and Canada.

Another greenhouse operation, Revol Greens, came to Tehachapi in 2021 to establish a 16-acre greenhouse focused on leafy greens. In April, the Midwestern company announced a mass layoff warning of 100 employees from its California location expected to take effect on June 18.

According to Tehachapi News, Revol Greens reported it produced over 16 million pounds of lettuce in Dec. 2023 where it had roughly 100 employees at the time. While the warning letter seems to cover the entirety of that workforce, Tom Thompson of Revol Greens claimed there will still be employees working following the layoff date.

While the company will continue operations in Tehachapi, the layoffs are expected to be permanent.

Locally founded agriculture companies such as Grimmway Farms have also made business headlines and a recent acquisition of San Miguel Produce solidified the Bakersfield-based company’s efforts to expand product offerings and capitalize on the fresh produce market.

Grimmway announced the acquisition in May in a press release, explaining that integrating San Miguel Produce’s fresh-cut operation resources will enhance product offerings and open numerous opportunities.

“We are well positioned to build on our many successes of 2023 and meet the ever-growing consumer demand in the industry,” Jeff Hackley, President and CEO of Grimmway said in a press release.

Bolthouse Farms also announced business changes in May with the separation of Bolthouse into two distinct entities: Bolthouse Fresh Foods and Generous Brands. Bolthouse Fresh Foods will continue efforts in fresh carrot production, while Generous Brands will oversee fresh beverages and salad dressings.

This decision comes four years after Butterfly acquired Bolthouse Farms from Campbell Soup Company, a period during which the firm achieved over 30% topline growth. Butterfly’s co-founder and co-CEO, Adam Waglay, stated that the separation is intended to accelerate the growth of both businesses by allowing them to focus on their specific markets and capitalize on dedicated leadership teams.

MEAT PROCESSING
Central Valley Meat Co. — based in Hanford — announced the major acquisition of Cargill Meat Solutions’ Fresno processing plant in May.

Historically, the beef packing industry has been dominated by a few large companies, creating a bottleneck that smaller packers have struggled to navigate. CVM’s acquisition of the Fresno plant represents a significant shift in this landscape.

CVM has been notably aggressive in expanding its operations as it purchased another family brand, Harris Ranch Beef, in 2019. The company, which began in 1993, now employs over 900 people and processes 1,500 head of cattle a day.

This growth trajectory has been beneficial for California ranchers, breaking old business stereotypes and introducing new opportunities within the market. According to Austin Snedden of Snedden Ranch, the acquisition is expected to influence competition and market dynamics for local ranchers.

Traditionally, cattle from California have been sent out of state for processing, but the expansion of Central Valley Meat offers an alternative, bolstering local competition. Despite the overall decline in cattle numbers to 40-year lows, active competition remains, ensuring continued demand.

“The bright side is that, essentially Central Valley Meat is buying another business instead of going out of business,” Snedden said. “And that just shows a positive demand for beef and a price structure where people can make money right now raising cattle as well as packing cattle and retailing beef.”

AGTECH
Agriculture technology is an increasingly lucrative market as the demand for reduced labor grows.

An AgTech Trends 2023 survey found that 60% of agribusinesses are planning to increase their AgTech budget with the top three areas of investment being precision agriculture tools, farm management software, and data consolidation.

As the demand for agriculture technology grows, the Central Valley is equipping itself with industry leaders such as Oxbo to meet farmers’ needs. Oxbo is a global farm machinery company that recently opened a location in Bakersfield.

With six locations in California and an international footprint in Europe and Brazil, Oxbo specializes in equipment for the specialty crop industry. Over the past 60 years, Oxbo has become a leader in specialty harvesting and controlled application technology.

Oxbo’s Bakersfield site aims to reduce manual labor in agriculture, addressing the rising cost of labor and the growing reliance on technology. By integrating AI and sensing technologies, Oxbo’s machinery enhances efficiency and crop care, requiring fewer but more skilled operators.

The company promises comprehensive support, including on-site demos, service repairs, and 24/7 assistance during harvest seasons. Oxbo’s direct sales and service model eliminates the middleman, ensuring farmers receive dedicated support and maintenance.

Along with developments in grower services, companies such as John Deere have been meticulously working on technology solutions for precision agriculture. In 2023, John Deere announced the acquisition of Smart Apply Inc. — a precision spraying equipment company.

The technology is based on research and field testing by the U.S. Department of Agriculture and multiple universities with the goal of increasing efficiency, precision, and profitability.

Saddle Up and Celebrate National Day of the Cowboy

WHISTLE DIXIE
While not exactly a cowboy ballad, attending a country concert is a great way to celebrate the influence cowboys had on the industry.

Visiting the local honkytonk offers plenty of music options with up-and-coming artists and local favorites. For those near Bakersfield, Rooster’s Honky Tonk is open with live country music Wednesday - Saturday with doors opening at 4 p.m.

DON’T PULL A NO-SHOW AT A NATIONAL RODEO
The Country Rodeo Finals will take place on July 27 — aptly so — through the California Mid-State Fair in Paso Robles, California. The rodeo will be hosted at the Main Grandstand Arena at 7 p.m., offering an opportunity to see the hard work of the a and brightest cowboys and cowgirls.

Events include match roping, team penning, double mugging, barrel racing, breakaway roping, bronc riding, and bull riding.

SUPPORT LOCAL
The best way to celebrate National Day of the Cowboy is to support local ranchers and purchase locally sourced beef and dairy products. Ranchers work tirelessly in often unforgiving environments and against mounting regulatory pressures.

Celebrating the cowboy way of life goes hand in hand with supporting the individuals who continue to live and work as ranchers today.
The Maddy Institute Champions Ag Policy and Leadership in the San Joaquin Valley

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The Maddy Institute, a nonpartisan public policy organization with a focus on the San Joaquin Valley, has become a central force in shaping the Central Valley’s agricultural landscape. Based out of Fresno State University and affiliated with UC Merced, CSU Stanislaus, and CSU Bakersfield, the Maddy Institute is a first-of-its-kind collaboration to serve San Joaquin Valley residents.

According to Blake Zante, executive director of the Maddy Institute, its mission is to inspire the next generation of leaders, increase citizen participation in the democratic process, and provide nonpartisan public policy analysis on issues impacting the valley.

“We were created by the legislature by unanimous vote in 1999 in honor of Senator Ken Maddy, who is really known for being a bipartisan negotiator and deal maker in the state legislature for almost 30 years,” Zante said. “We’re really excited to have that first inaugural cohort up in Sacramento this summer and look forward to continuing it for many years to come.”

The newly established Agricultural Policy Center within the Maddy Institute exemplifies this commitment. The center aims to conduct in-depth research, provide policy analysis, and foster collaboration among stakeholders.

Another significant endeavor is the annual Future of Ag Summit, which brings together farmers, policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders to discuss pressing issues in agriculture. This year’s summit, scheduled for September 4, 2024, at the Resnick Student Union, will focus on California’s water future, exploring how different water users can coexist and thrive.

“This year we’re partnering with the California Water Institute to talk about the future of California’s water as it relates to agriculture and how various water users co-exist in California,” Zante said. “We have a couple of different components of our ag policy center up and running already, but we also really hope to lean into the policy research space.”

The summit will address several water-based topics including the implementation of the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act and the balance between urban, agricultural, and environmental water uses.

“People, agricultural stakeholders, and community members can connect to the Maddy Institute through event participation, internship programs, and tuning in to the Maddy Report — a weekly public affairs program available on television, YouTube, and podcast platforms.

For more information or to get involved, visit maddyinstitute.com or contact the institute directly at (559) 278-1133.
Project Seeks Clues to Stop A Deadly Vineyard Disease

By Dorsey Kindler, Reporter, Butte County

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Ongoing research at an experimental vineyard in Mendocino County could reveal new methods for combating Pierce’s disease, regarded as the most persistent crop threat faced by California’s $3.6 billion winegrape industry.

Pierce’s disease is caused by the bacterium Xylella fastidiosa, which kills grapevines by blocking water movement within the plant. It is spread, or vectored, by different species of insects, most notably the glassy-winged sharpshooter. While there’s no known cure, infected vines sometimes improve, or rid themselves of the disease entirely, between growing seasons.

A study project at the University of California Hopland Research and Extension Center takes a closer look at this “overwinter recovery phenomenon.” Overseen by UC Berkeley plant pathology professor Rodrigo Almeida and doctoral candidate Andrea Brown and Monica Donegan, the research started fieldwork in 2021 at a vineyard block planted with several Mediterranean winegrape varieties.

Donegan focuses on the effects of temperature on different strains of the Pierce’s disease bacterium, while Brown studies the immune processes of grapevines as they respond to the chill of winter. Their research indicates temperature seems to play a role in grapevines fend ing off the disease, which results in average annual crop losses estimated at $100 million in California.

The two-pronged study approach has already yielded new insights that could prove useful to growers, Brown said.

“Growers go in and pull up plants after they detect the disease, and that’s really expensive,” she said. “So, if after a cold winter, growers can wait a little with the hope that the plants recover, that could save them money down the line.”

Much of the research is funded by the California Pierce’s Disease/Glassy-Winged Sharpshooter Board, which is led by representatives from the winegrape industry in a shared mission to safeguard vineyards in the state.

The PD/GWSS Board announced $2.7 million in new funding for 15 research projects during the next three years. It will continue to fund eight previously approved multiyear projects.

“Thanks to the assessment and the initiative of the growers and our cooperation with federal, state and local entities, we have a fairly healthy pot of money that is able to be put towards research,” said Randy Heinzen, chair of the PD/GWSS Board.

Heinzen, president of Vineyard Professional Services in Paso Robles, is well aware of the danger that Pierce’s disease poses to growers.

He said for 130 years, California growers lived with the disease in the background. With introduction of the invasive glassy-winged sharpshooter as a vector in the late 20th century, things “really kicked into high gear.”

The glassy-winged sharpshooter is more destructive than the native California species of sharpshooter because it is able to feed on different parts of the grapevine and has the mobility to penetrate farther into vineyards.

Much of the control of Pierce’s disease involves the use of pesticides on insect vectors. As a result, Donegan said, decisions about whether it’s necessary to spray or when to spray could be informed by better research knowledge of how climate impacts grapevine recovery.

Donegan initiated her vineyard research by introducing two separate strains of Xylella fastidiosa—one from the warmer climate of Kern County and the other from the cooler North Coast region of Hopland. Starting in May 2021, she infected hundreds of vines composed of 13 separate cultivars, with a number of vines serving as uninfected control plants.

Questions, she said, were: “How does the disease progress with the different strains, and how does the disease progress with the different varieties?”

Donegan periodically took grapevine samples back to the lab for pathogen detection, using quantitative
Agriculture Summit Tackles Pressing Farm, Food Issues

By Christine Souza
Assistant Editor

As California farmers grow food for people in the U.S. and around the world, they must navigate myriad labor, water, environmental and regulatory challenges that drive up costs and make it tougher to succeed.

But some point out that those who work in the California agriculture sector, valued at more than $50 billion, have what it takes to remain profitable.

“California farmers and ranchers who contribute to our farm economy—whether they farmed for generations or are first-time farmers—are resilient, resourceful and innovative,” said Shannon Douglass, president of the California Farm Bureau, who attended last week’s Food & Ag Issues Summit West, of which the California Farm Bureau was among the sponsors.

“To overcome today’s challenges, it is important to engage with government leaders and others at events like this to identify solutions that work to support agriculture.”

Last week’s summit, presented by Agri-Pulse, brought together farmers, agricultural leaders, environmentalists, researchers and state officials to discuss topics including labor, water and policy.

In discussing the future of the state’s farm labor supply, Roland Fumasi, head of RaboResearch Food & Agribusiness for Rabobank, offered insights related to changing demographics in countries that supply employees to California.

As the global demand for food is expected to rise in the future, Fumasi said, this also increases demand for high-value crops grown in California.

“There’s a flip side to that coin,” he said. “As countries get more economically developed, their birth rates decline.”

Vineyard Disease
Continued from PAGE 10

polymerase chain reaction analysis. The DNA measuring technology gave her a metric of how much bacteria was in the plant. She did symptom surveys at different points throughout the year, looking for scorching, berry shrivel and matchstick petioles in the vines.

Brown, who began work at the Hopland research site in the winter of 2022-23, designed a study to examine the overwinter recovery phenomenon of grapevines exposed to different amounts of cold in three separate locations: Hopland, Berkeley and the Blodgett Forest Research Station near Placerville. The Berkeley location had the warmest winter conditions, Placerville the coldest, with Hopland in between.

“What I would hope,” Donegan said, “is that (with) a lot of the research we produce, people in the lab continue to build on and drill down more into the mechanisms that we find.”

Groundwater Management Act, or SGMA.

“There’s going to be some areas that are going to be hit harder with SGMA and the regulation of groundwater than other areas,” Woolf said. “You’re going to see a reduction in permanent crops like we’ve never seen before and a lot more fallowed acreage.”

Woolf suggested the state develop a plan related to capturing more water during wet years for groundwater recharge. “During any time of the year, we should know if almonds or pistachios or trees that take water during dormancy or what lands are best suited,” he said.

Panelists representing environmental groups discussed how they might work with farmers to find common ground.

“We’ve developed a groundwater accounting platform, which is basically a checking account so that you can see the credits and debits in close to real time,” said Katelyn Roedner Sutter, California director of the Environmental Defense Fund, adding that EDF worked with many partners, including the California Farm Bureau, to create the online platform.

EDF also developed OpenET, an online platform that uses satellites or remote sensing to estimate on-farm water use and worked with stakeholders on the state’s Multibenefit Land Repurposing Program, which funds projects for land repurposing to reduce groundwater use and restore wildlife habitat.

“If land repurposing is not done in a strategic way and in partnership with all the stakeholders, we could wind up with a dusty patchwork that is going to make air quality issues worse and flood issues worse,” Roedner Sutter said.

Karen Ross, secretary of the California Department of Food and Agriculture, talked about the high costs facing farmers. She said, “This is a turning point, but I also feel what has made California agriculture great and well-known for innovation, quality and sustainability is the innovative spirit of the people on farms and ranches, and at public universities.

“We’re in a time where innovation and technology are going to keep going faster and faster,” she added.

To help farmers streamline government regulations, Ross said CDFA and other state agencies are evaluating how to streamline agriculture food safety and water quality reporting requirements.

To learn more or participate in public workshops planned this month, go to www.cdfa.ca.gov/RegulatoryAlignment.

As part of the summit, California Assembly Member Reggie Jones-Sawyer, D-Los Angeles, was named the winner of the Agri-Pulse tomato growing challenge, which began on Earth Day in April.

Plants courtesy of Bayer Vegetables were distributed to legislative offices, and participants strolled to grow the best-looking tomato plant.

With his winning plant named “Stanley,” Jones-Sawyer, a member of the Assembly agriculture committee, won $1,000 that will be donated to a food bank in his district.
Farm Bill Passes House Floor, Ag Bills Advance Through Assembly

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

The Republican 2024 Farm Bill passed the U.S. House Agriculture Committee on May 24, despite limited Democratic support. After completing a markup on the 942-page bill, the committee passed the proposed legislation 33-21.

Now, the Farm, Food, and National Security Act of 2024 — the long-awaited farm bill — will be brought to the House Floor for consideration. In his opening statement before the markup, House Agriculture Committee Chair Glenn ‘GT’ Thompson explained the farm bill is a farm safety net for the “backbone” of the nation.

“I firmly believe the legislation before us today restores a robust rural economy, invests in America’s farmers, ranchers, and foresters, and bolsters every facet of American agriculture,” Thompson said. “And having seen the widespread support from stakeholders across this country, I believe we have achieved that goal.”

The new farm bill would increase specialty crop funding, increase farm safety net payments for certain commodities, and expand eligibility for disaster assistance. It also cuts Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program funding by limiting future updates to the Thrifty Food Plan, resulting in opposition from Democratic legislators.

Thompson explained that updates to the Thrifty Food Plan were cost-neutral for 40 years until President Joe Biden “unlawfully” updated the market basket to no longer be cost-neutral, resulting in the $256 billion increase to the farm bill baseline.

“Republicans are holding USDA and the States who administer SNAP accountable to the American taxpayer,” Thompson said.

In a press release, House Agriculture Committee Democrats ranking member David Scott explained that while the bill advanced out of the committee, it still has no future. It does not have the Democratic support necessary to be brought to the House Floor. It will not become law, Scott said. “There is still time for Republicans to come to their senses and strike a bipartisan compromise.”

U.S. Senate Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow released a farm bill proposal in May, but it is awaiting language from Republican legislators before moving forward. Contrary to the proposed House farm bill, the Senate proposal would increase eligibility for nutrition programs like SNAP.

The 2024 Farm Bill will require strong bipartisan votes and collaboration to become law before the September 30, 2024, deadline.

PENDING LEGISLATION

Along with work on the pending farm bill, the California State Assembly and Senate members are considering multiple agricultural bills. May 24 was the deadline for each house to pass bills before sending them along to the second house for consideration.

The assembly passed several bills on pesticides and integrated pest management which will be considered by the Senate. One contested bill, AB 1963, passed the assembly on May 29. This bill would prohibit the use, manufacture, sale, delivery, holding, or offering for sale in commerce of any pesticide product containing paraquat.

Introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Laura Friedman, AB 1636 would ban any use of paraquat in California fields and orchards by 2026.

At the annual California Cotton Growers and Growers Association conference, CCGGA president Roger Edom explained that the bill author’s arguments that paraquat is linked to Parkinson’s disease, non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma, and childhood leukemia are not based in science — especially as it is approved for use by regulatory agencies.

AB 1636 was read for the first time in the Senate on May 24 — the third reading is the last step before it passes to the governor’s desk. Friedman also pushed another pesticide bill through assembly — AB 2352 — which would expand the definition of a wildlife habitat area and prohibit the use of two rodenticide pesticides within 2,500 feet of a wildlife habitat area.

The California Chamber of Commerce originally opposed the bill until its revision in April which removed a stipulation that any person could commence a civil suit against those in violation. The new language states that the Attorney General, in the name of the people of the state or by request of certain departments or officials, may bring a lawsuit against a person in violation of the regulation.

AB 2352 was read for the first time in the Senate on May 24.

Another pesticide bill, AB 1864, was introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Danilo Cordal to strengthen prior enforcement regarding the use of pesticides within one-fourth mile of a school site.

AB 1864 would expand reporting requirements for pesticide use near school zones, including thorough documentation on the timing, notification, and method of application. The bill would also require county agricultural commissioners to collect public notifications before pesticides are applied and Assembly members also discussed bills on invasive species and integrated pest management. AB 2509, introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Ash Kalra, would define “integrated pest management” for the Food and Agricultural Code as “an ecosystem-based strategy that focuses on long-term prevention of pests or their damage through a combination of techniques, as provided.”

AB 2509 would also define “invasive species” as any nonnative organisms that cause “or are likely to cause, economic or environmental harm, excluding humans, domestic livestock, specified domestic or domesticated species, and nonharmful nonnative organisms.”

AB 2509 was read in the Senate for the first time on May 23.

Durheim To Lead CA Farm Bureau

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Dan Durheim, who worked for nearly two decades for the California Farm Bureau Federation and the Minnesota Farm Bureau, was announced Monday as the new chief operating officer of the California Farm Bureau.

Since 2016, Durheim has served as associate vice president for sponsor relations for Nationwide Insurance in Columbus, Ohio, after extensive experience working as an advocate for agriculture. A graduate of the University of Minnesota, Durheim worked with the Minnesota Farm Bureau as a program director for membership, policy and leadership development. He went on to serve AF&F in multiple roles, including as executive director of industry affairs, director of program development and executive director of the American Farm Bureau Foundation for Agriculture. “Dan has been a longtime champion for agriculture and for Farm Bureau, strongly believing in the work of this organization on behalf of farmers and ranchers on the county, state and national level,” said California Farm Bureau President Shannon Douglass. “Dan’s deep experience with Farm Bureau, established relationships within the industry, selfless leadership style and focus on strategic service of our members makes him uniquely qualified to serve in this historic position for our organization.”

Durheim will join the California Farm Bureau on July 1. He will be profiled in a future edition of Ag Alert®.
COMMENTARY: Farm Bureau Leaders Advocate on Farm Policy In D.C.

By Rachel Nettleton, Executive Director, Kern County Farm Bureau and Alex Arroyo, General Manager, King City Transplanting

California Farm Bureau’s Leadership Farm Bureau class in Washington, D.C., includes, from left, James Moller, Tanya Brouse, Ben Abbott II, Jackie Kennedy, Alex Arroyo, Danielle Vietti, Harry Sidhu, Rachel Nettleton and Sy Honig. (Photo: Isabella Quinones)

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

In April, the 2024 Leadership Farm Bureau class flew to Washington, D.C., where we engaged in a series of meetings with key policymakers to advocate for the interests of California agriculture, particularly regarding the upcoming farm bill.

Throughout our time in the nation’s capital, we gained valuable insight into the complex world of agricultural policy and laid the groundwork for impactful advocacy on behalf of our farming and ranching communities back home.

Leadership Farm Bureau is the emerging leaders program for the California Farm Bureau, which represents more than 26,000 member farmers, ranchers and agricultural professionals in the Golden State. The nine members selected to the LFB class this year are participating in a 10-month educational and professional development program, which includes 250 hours of instruction.

The class provides immersion in agricultural issues, public speaking and advocacy on critical matters affecting farmers, ranchers and agricultural businesses on local, state and national levels. The LFB class learns about agriculture in different regions of the country, about government, legislation, media and communications. These experiences equip our team to represent our counties and California Farm Bureau in the future.

Central to our agenda in Washington, D.C., were legislative visits aimed at lobbying for the farm bill, cornerstone legislation that shapes the future of America’s agricultural policy and funding. Armed with research, data and firsthand accounts from our constituents, we met with many members of Congress, such as Reps. Jim Costa, D-Fresno, and Doug LaMalfa, R-Richvale, to articulate the priorities and concerns of California agriculture.

We also had the opportunity to meet with representatives from the Embassy of Canada to discuss international trade policy. They emphasized the impact of the international trade relationship with Canada, an export destination for more than $5 billion in California agricultural commodities in 2022.

These meetings provided a platform to discuss a wide range of issues, from crop insurance and conservation programs to research funding and trade policy. We emphasized the importance of maintaining robust support for specialty crops, which are a key part of California’s agricultural economy. We stressed the importance of some of the major California commodities not covered by crop insurance, which include garlic, melons, broccoli, lettuce, carrots and cauliflower.

One of the major takeaways from our discussions was the recognition of agriculture’s vital role in addressing pressing societal challenges, from food security and environmental sustainability to rural economic development. By advocating for policies that support innovation, resilience and equity within the agricultural sector, we are not only safeguarding the livelihoods of farmers and ranchers but also advancing broader goals of economic and environmental stewardship.

Our meetings with members of Congress also highlighted the importance of bipartisanship in advancing agricultural policy. Despite differing political affiliations and priorities, there was a shared recognition of the significance of agriculture to the nation’s economy and well-being. By fostering dialogue and finding common ground, we can work together to craft policies that benefit all stakeholders across the agricultural value chain.

The Leadership Farm Bureau group also engaged in dialogue with several U.S. Department of Agriculture leaders, including Robert Bonnie, undersecretary for farm production and conservation. He explained the different types of programs USDA has to offer for emergency relief for farmers and conservation programs. We highlighted the importance of rapid emergency financial relief, because it is crucial to all the small farmers around the state and country.

As we reflect on our time in Washington, D.C., one thing is clear: The work of advocating for agricultural policy is ongoing and multifaceted. While our meetings with key stakeholders were a critical step in the process, they represent just one piece of the puzzle. Moving forward, we are committed to continuing our engagement with policymakers, stakeholders and the broader agricultural community to shape policies that reflect the needs and aspirations of California agriculture.

In the months ahead, as the farm bill takes shape and debates unfold on Capitol Hill, we will remain vigilant and proactive in advocating for policies that promote the sustainability of California agriculture. Our journey in Washington, D.C., may have come to an end, but our work is far from finished. Together, as leaders in our industry, we will continue to navigate the complex terrain of agricultural policy, ensuring that the voices of California’s farming and ranching communities are heard and heeded at every turn.

Newsom and Legislative Leaders Announce Agreement to Reform PAGA

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

A new agreement was reached to reform the Private Attorneys General Act after several months of discussion involving Governor Newsom’s administration, legislative leaders, labor advocates, and a coalition of businesses. The agreement, which aims to balance workers’ rights and reduce exploitative lawsuits, will be introduced in legislation and considered by the Legislature. If passed, the reform would allow workers to bring forth labor claims and receive fair compensation as well as limit lawsuits that hurt employers and employees.

“This package provides meaningful reforms that ensure workers continue to have a strong vehicle to get labor claims resolved while also limiting the frivolous litigation that has cost employers billions without benefiting workers,” Jennifer Barrera, President & CEO of California Chamber of Commerce, said in a press release.

Key aspects of the reform include increasing the share of penalties employers receive from 25% to 35% — plaintiffs would also be required to have personally experienced the alleged violations within the past year. For employees who take steps to comply with the Labor Code before receiving notice, the maximum penalty that can be awarded is 15%. Employers that seek to fix policies and practices after receiving a PAGA notice will have a penalty cap of 30%. Minor violations and wage statement errors that do not result in harm will also have reduced penalties.

The right to cure — wherein one party in a contract who defaulted under a contract provision is allowed to take steps to ensure compliance or cure the default — will also be expanded in the PAGA reform. Small employers will receive increased protection through a robust process with the state labor department, and larger employers will receive early resolution opportunities in court.

The California Department of Industrial Relations will also expedite hiring to improve enforcement of labor claims. The reform will allow courts to limit the scope of claims and evidence at trial and introduce injunctive relief.

The reform was proposed as a result of a current ballot measure, the California Employee Civil Action Law Initiative, which would repeal PAGA and replace it with a new law — the “Fair Pay and Employer Accountability Act.” The law would double statutory and civil penalties for violators and require that 100% of monetary penalties — rather than 25% — be awarded to harmed employees.

If the legislation reflecting the reform agreement is passed and signed into law by Governor Newsom, proponents of the PAGA ballot initiative agreed to withdraw their measure. The deadline for initiatives to be withdrawn from the ballot is June 27, 2024.
UC Cooperative Extension Hosts Potato, Carrot Trials in Kern County

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

In June, the University of California Cooperative Extension in Kern County hosted the annual potato and carrot variety trials offering insights into the latest advancements in crop breeding and the adaptability of varieties to Kern County’s unique climate.

Piles of potatoes were showcased at Hart Memorial Park through the collaborative efforts of UCCE and the California Potato Research Advisory Board. The potatoes were rated by marketability, total yield, and overall response to Central Valley conditions.

The Potato Trial Field Day featured a diverse array of potato varieties, each bred for specific traits such as disease resistance, yield potential, and adaptability to various soil and climate conditions. The field day provided an opportunity for farmers to observe these varieties closely and discuss their performance with UC researcher

While this is an annual event, it can take up to 10 years for promising varieties to take root in the valley as extensive pre- and post-harvest research is explored and broad-based adaptability is measured.

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According to Jaspreet Sidhu, vegetable crops farm advisor at UCCE, breeders are tasked with making certain selections for a variety over multiple years in order to determine its overall viability in the region.

“Sometimes they incorporate one thing, one gene into it, and the other one is offset...so they have to make selections really well for [roughly] five to seven years,” Sidhu said. “And then you have to trial in the lab and under small conditions and then you have to trial it into the field.”

For potatoes, a variety’s performance is inspected by multiple factors such as yield, tuber size, color, skin, and disease resistance. Fingerling potatoes have remained popular among growers with similar favorability carrying over into this year’s trial.

A field in Grimmway Farms was utilized for the carrot trial where common standard carrot varieties were grown alongside newly released and potential new carrot varieties. This year, 104 carrot varieties were displayed from various seed companies such as Bejo, IFS, Seminis, and Nunhems. Grimmway Farms had 14 varieties, five of which were Cello — a high-value variety.

Carrot varieties are evaluated based on shape, size, color, texture, and taste. Sidhu noted that varieties grown in Kern County may have differences in these aspects than other areas with different water, soil, and pest management.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture also showcased its varieties at the event, with Philipp Simon, research leader for Vegetable Crops Research at the USDA, explaining that breeding for disease resistance is a priority.

Cavity spot is one of the most common diseases in carrots — a disease that causes small legions on carrot roots, reducing their quality and making them unsalable — but purple carrots are largely resistant to it.

“And that’s something that we still don’t fully understand, but pretty much any purple carrot automatically has cavity spot resistance,” Simon said.

While one feature of the field day is to have varieties that are ready for the current industry, growers, and seed companies, it also provides an opportunity to look into non-typical carrots and features such as disease resistance which can be carried over through additional research trials.

Another area of research in carrots explores the potential for nematode resistance which is critical for improving marketable yield and quality, especially in areas prone to nematode infestations.

“Nematodes are a big problem, especially for carrots,” Sidhu said. “It doesn’t harm the yield or anything, but when you see those balls and the nodes in the carrot, it’s the aesthetic value, and you lose the marketable yield.”

LOCAL UC RESOURCES

Growers in the Central Valley can benefit from the resources UCCE provides, specifically farm calls and sample diagnostics. Sidhu explained that the service is free of charge.

“If they have any problem with the veg crops, they see any disease, they see any pests. They can always call me,” Sidhu said.

Sidhu can be reached at the UC Cooperative Extension Kern Office, and contacted at (661) 304-8870 or jaksidhu@ucdavis.edu.

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(Photos: Natalie Willis/Valley Ag Voice)
**Stew**

It’s What’s for Dinner.

If carrots and potatoes make you think of stew, the Valley Ag Voice has a recipe for you! To celebrate the bounty of local agriculture, we’re sharing a delicious stew recipe and encouraging readers to source ingredients locally:

**Guinness Beef Stew**
- 3 tablespoons of your oil of choice (grapeseed oil recommended), divided
- 3 pounds beef chuck roast, trimmed of excess fat and cut into bite-sized pieces
- Fine sea salt and black pepper
- 1 large white or yellow onion, roughly diced
- 4 cloves garlic, pressed or minced
- 1/4 cup all-purpose flour (cornstarch can be used to make this gluten-free)
- 1 (12-ounce) bottle of Guinness beer
- 4 cups beef stock (or water mixed with beef bouillon)
- 3 large carrots, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 1 1/2 pounds potatoes, cut into bite-sized pieces
- 3 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 bay leaf
- 2 teaspoons Worcestershire sauce
- 1 teaspoon dried thyme

Chopped fresh parsley, for garnish

**Instructions**

Generously season the beef with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in a large stockpot over high heat. Add half of the beef to the pan and sear, flipping the beef once it has developed a brown sear on the bottom, then repeating on multiple sides. Transfer the beef to a clean plate. Add an additional 1 tablespoon oil to the pot, add the remaining beef, sear, and transfer to the plate.

Reduce heat to medium-high and add the remaining tablespoon of oil to the stockpot. Add onion and sauté for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Add garlic and sauté for 1 minute, stirring occasionally. Stir in the flour and cook for 1 minute, stirring frequently. (For the GF option, make a cornstarch slurry to replace the flour.)

Pour in the Guinness and use a wooden spoon to scrape the bottom of the pan to lift up the “fond.” Stir in the beef stock, carrots, potatoes, tomato paste, bay leaf, Worcestershire, dried thyme, and the cooked beef (along with any of its accumulated juices). Cover the pot and simmer on low for 1 1/2 hours, stirring occasionally, until the beef is completely tender and the potatoes are soft.

Discard the bay leaf. Taste and season the stew with additional salt and pepper as needed, plus extra Worcestershire or dried thyme if desired.

Serve warm, garnished with a sprinkle of fresh parsley if desired, and enjoy!

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**Secretary Vilsack Announces USDA and FFAR Innovation Challenge to Catalyze Agricultural Solutions**

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR) today launched a global challenge to advance scientific research that will produce major breakthroughs for nutrition security while mitigating climate change impacts and advancing equity for underserved communities. The “Nourishing Next Generation Agrifood Breakthroughs” Innovation Challenge is open to researchers and teams at any stage of their careers, anywhere in the world.

This competitive Innovation Challenge will spark high-risk, high-reward research through innovations at the intersection of nutrition security, equity and justice, and climate-smart agriculture. With a focus on the next generation of researchers, this opportunity emphasizes providing resources to support highly creative and highly promising early-career researchers.

The Innovation Challenge is a unique opportunity for early-career scientists to lead interdisciplinary teams and pursue bold research to advance U.S. food and agriculture, said FFAR Executive Director Dr. Saharah Moon Chapotin. “We are thrilled to partner with the USDA on this joint funding opportunity that aims to produce major food and agriculture breakthroughs related to human health, climate change and social equity.”

Innovation Challenge applications are due Monday, July 29, 2024. For more information about the Challenge and to start the application process, you may visit the following page: USDA/FFAR Innovation Challenge page. You may also view the Zoom registration page to register to attend the June 13, 2024, USDA/FFAR webinar for prospective applicants that will offer detailed information about the application and selection process.

USDA touches the lives of all Americans each day in so many positive ways. Under the Biden-Harris Administration, USDA is transforming America’s food system with a greater focus on more resilient local and regional food production, promoting competition and fairer markets for all producers, ensuring access to safe, healthy and nutritious food in all communities, building new markets and streams of income for farmers and producers using climate-smart food and forestry practices, making historic investments in infrastructure and clean energy capabilities in rural America, and committing to equity across the Department by removing systemic barriers and building a workforce more representative of America. To learn more, visit www.usda.gov.

The Foundation for Food & Agriculture Research (FFAR) builds public-private partnerships to fund bold, high-risk research addressing big food and agriculture challenges. FFAR was established in the 2014 Farm Bill to increase public agriculture research investments, fill knowledge gaps, and complement the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s research agenda. FFAR’s model matches federal funding with private funding, delivering a powerful return on taxpayer investment. Through collaboration and partnerships, FFAR advances actionable science benefiting farmers, consumers, and the environment. Connect: @FoundationFAR
Record Heat Tests Worker Safety Measures

By Caleb Hampton, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

A sprawling heat dome put more than 30 million people across the Western U.S. under excessive heat advisories last week, triggering warnings from the National Weather Service about the danger of extreme heat to human health and potential impacts on “heat-sensitive industries.”

Over the past two decades, heat illness awareness and prevention has become a major focus for California farms that rely on workers to harvest crops and perform other essential work during the hottest months of the year.

“As we see seemingly warmer summers and earlier heat waves, it has become more important than ever for employers to make sure they’ve got things like shade, water and rest periods for employees,” said Bryan Little, director of labor affairs for the California Farm Bureau and chief operating officer of the Farm Employers Labor Service.

Last week, as temperatures soared into triple digits, farmers drew on years of experience to implement safety measures.

In Firebaugh, farmer Joe Del Bosque employed someone to drive around his melon fields in a truck loaded with water and ice. After seeing the forecast, the Fresno County farmer canceled work on the hottest day of the week and told the workers to come on Saturday instead, when it was about 10 degrees cooler.

Del Bosque converted old cotton trailers, once used to haul the crop to cotton gins, into mobile shade trailers. He outfitted them with benches and awnings so that his workers can take shaded rest breaks.

In Lodi, an apple thinning crew moved through farmer Jeff Colombini’s orchard on self-propelled platforms with water coolers mounted on them. The machines eliminate the need for workers to climb and carry ladders, reducing exertion, a key factor in maintaining safe body temperatures and preventing heat illness, according to health experts.

When the outdoor temperature reached 91 degrees, sensors in Colombini’s orchard sent an alert to his phone. The farmer then called his labor supervisor and told him it was time to stop work. “The goal is to have everyone out of the field before the temperature reaches 95,” Colombini said.

Farmers and farm labor safety experts in California said heat-illness awareness and preparedness have evolved since the state established the nation’s first heat-safety law for outdoor workers in 2005. The policy was adopted after farmworker deaths in the Central Valley.

“There has been a remarkable and important effort,” said Aaron Lange, who grows winegrapes in Lodi, referring to advances in heat illness prevention on California farms. “We take each job very seriously—what their exposure to risk is—and we talk about it and try to minimize that exposure.”

According to the National Weather Service, heat kills more people in the U.S. than any other kind of extreme weather, including disasters such as hurricanes, floods and wildfires.

California’s Heat Illness Prevention Standard requires that outdoor workers have access to water, shade and rest when the temperature rises above 80 degrees. When it hits 95, the highest level of the heat-safety law goes into effect, with more frequent breaks required.

The law also mandates trainings for supervisors and field workers, an acclimatization process and a reliable line of communication between farms and local emergency services.

“We have definitely seen an evolution where there is a desire to have this information and to share it with workers,” said Angelina Ceja, vice president and chief education officer of Modesto-based AgSafe, which conducts heat-safety trainings on farms across the country.

Years ago, when AgSafe began its trainings, it scheduled them in the evenings after employees got off work. Then farmers began inviting the organization to farms to conduct the required heat-safety trainings. Lately, “We’ve had requests from growers about coming out and doing additional trainings,” Ceja said. “The desire is definitely there.”

In the summertime, heat-safety equipment is a defining feature of the Golden State’s farmland. “Driving through California, whether it’s on the coast or in the valley, I see shade trailers, portable water and obviously restrooms,” Ceja said. “It can be quite different, just in terms of what I see, as I drive around and visit other places.”

California remains one of just four states with laws protecting outdoor workers from heat illness. But that could soon change.

In 2021, the Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration announced it would develop a federal heat standard to protect workers. An agency official told The Washington Post it plans to publish its proposed standard later this year.

There is evidence California’s heat standard and the efforts of the state’s farmers have made a difference. A 2021 study by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles, and Stanford University found heat-related injuries for outdoor workers in California fell by roughly a third since the state’s heat-safety law took effect.

According to new research, employers may also benefit from implementing heat protections for workers. Globally, heat can reduce farmworkers’ physical work capacity by as much as 30%, according to a study published this year by researchers from California, Arizona, Washington, the United Kingdom and Australia. Extreme heat also increases rates of illness and injury for workers.

“Farmers and employers have been developing good safety policies and practices to make work safer for their employees,” said Del Bosque, who is a former AgSafe director and whose parents were farmworkers. His personal connection to farmworkers gave him “a lot of passion,” he said, for doing everything possible to keep them safe in the field.

“It’s really important for us because our workforce is very important,” Del Bosque said. “We could not do what we do in California, producing fruits and vegetables and so forth, without our workforce. And it’s important to take care of them.”
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Program To Delay Harvest Protects Birds and Farmers

By Ching Lee, Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

For multiple years, Simon Vander Woude’s Merced County dairy farm has served as a refuge for an imperiled bird species that has increasingly looked to agricultural fields as a nesting ground. By agreeing to delay harvest where tricolored blackbirds nest, Vander Woude and other California farmers are helping to save a species that once faced potential extinction.

Tricolored blackbirds, which gained protection as threatened under the California Endangered Species Act in 2010, historically nested in freshwater marshes. But the loss of native wetland habitat has forced them to rely on winter siltage fields planted by dairy farmers. Because of the birds’ protected status, finding them in the field creates a hardship for farmers, as nesting season coincides with harvest and other farming activities.

To help protect the birds—and themselves from potential liability—farmers enter into a cooperative agreement to delay harvest until the birds have left their fields.

This year, Vander Woude and 13 other farmers impacted by the birds entered into such an agreement, known as the tricolored blackbird voluntary local program, or VLP.

The program protects farmers legally if birds are inadvertently killed or harmed during normal farming activity. It also compensates farmers for the loss of value of their crops that might result from the delay.

The VLP is administered through a cooperative agreement between the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service and the California Farm Bureau. Audubon California and agricultural organizations including Western United Dairies partner in the program, which covers Stanislaus, San Benito, Merced, Madera, Fresno, Kings, Tulare and Kern counties.

Early estimates by CDFW show around 250,000 tricolored blackbirds across 15 colonies were protected this year because of the delayed harvest efforts. That’s up from an estimated 233,000 birds last year and 218,000 birds in 2022—and a marked improvement from 10 years ago, when bird numbers plunged to a low of 145,000.

“Overall, we view the program as a great success,” said Shannon Skalos, CDFW avian conservation coordinator.

With program enrollment and landowner participation continuing to rise, biologists have observed greater reproductive success for the protected birds—likely a significant driver of the increased population trends seen each year, Skalos added.

Although current bird numbers are encouraging, Skalos said they are still way off from the high count of 400,000 in 2008. But she said she expects to see the upward trend continue.

With glossy-black bodies and red and white patches on their wing shoulders, tricolored blackbirds are found almost exclusively in California. They form colonies that often exceed tens of thousands of birds, with populations in the millions during the early 20th century.

Because tricolors build their nests off the ground, they tend to look for plants that provide stability. On dairy farms, they prefer forage crops such as triticale, a hardy wheat-rye hybrid with a sturdy stem that doesn’t blow much in the wind.

On Vander Woude’s farm this year, upwards of 20,000 adult birds were seen nesting in one field, although most of them abandoned the colony in late March, likely due to adverse weather, said Ian Souza-Cole, a biologist for Audubon California, a state affiliate of the National Audubon Society. Some 1,000 birds stayed behind and bred, he added.

Because that colony finished relatively early, Vander Woude said his schedule was pushed back by only 10 to 15 days, allowing him to still irrigate and harvest the crop for silage. Other years, he had to wait as long as 30, 60 or 90 days before he could get in the field. Last year, for example, when as many as 3,500 breeding birds occupied one field and another colony of some 15,000 birds tied up another, he ended up having to disk the crop.

“It was a complete loss,” he said. “Some years, you’re able to salvage some of it, but it’s never exactly what you wanted to do to make ideal feed.”

Even though it’s called a voluntary local program, farmers with nesting tricolors don’t have much of a choice but to enroll, Vander Woude pointed out. Because the birds are protected, violations come with fines and potential jail time.

Without the cooperative agreement, farmers could be subjected to a complete stoppage of all farming practices and legal action if they impact the birds, and be responsible for all crop losses, said Amrith Gunasekara, director of science and research for the California Farm Bureau and a representative for the VLP.

“The VLP is unique in that it allows farmers to continue to farm the field while at the same time protect the tricolored blackbird, thereby eliminating legal action and allowing the farmer to be compensated for crop losses,” he said. “It’s a great example of how state agency programs can be built around certain regulations to be flexible enough that it achieves practical outcomes for both food production and protection of wildlife species.”

For most of the years he was affected, Vander Woude said participation in the program cost him “a lot of money,” especially during the drought, when crop values skyrocketed and finding feed on the market to replace what he couldn’t harvest was hard to come by.

On top of losing their winter siltage crop, dairy farmers face additional delays planting their summer corn crop, said Paul Sousa, environmental services director for Western United Dairies.

“The later you plant your corn, the lower the yield,” he said, noting impacts to corn yield represent a greater loss to farmers hosting tricolored blackbirds. Xeronomo Castaneda, working lands program director for Audubon California, which works to secure funding for farmers and provides them technical support, acknowledged his organization has grappled with how to structure payments to offset farmers’ losses.

In the early days of launching the program—which dates back more than a decade before the birds were listed as threatened—there was not much funding to pay farmers at all, Castaneda noted. Knocking on their doors to ask them to delay harvest was much more difficult, he said, “because they’re trying to feed their cows, and we’re asking these folks to do something that is not farming.”

That changed as the program became more established and USDA-NRCS agreed to fund it. But producer compensation initially focused only on impacts to the winter forage crop and did not account for other consequences such as disruptions to summer planting.

After working with a dairy economics firm last year, the program now has a more accurate formula for calculating farmer payments, Castaneda said. In addition, CDFW has since chipped in to boost producer compensation, which totaled $1,600 per acre last year and this year.

Dairy farmer Vander Woude said even though the payments in most years still do not offset all his losses, the program has “gotten closer to being fair.” With feed costs lower this year, “the program worked, and I didn’t lose money on it,” he added.

“We don’t get everything we want, but they are listening and trying to make it an effective program,” Vander Woude said.

The program’s long-term sustainability remains a concern, Sousa of Western United Dairies said. Though the grant from USDA-NRCS is locked in, CDFW’s share is tied to the state budget and must be negotiated every year.

“What I would love more than anything is to have some perpetual funding that we know is going to be there,” Sousa said.

CDFW’s Skalos said long-term funding remains a challenge and may continue to be so, especially as bird populations increase along with the number of colonies found on dairies.

“But we are committed to the long-term protection of the species, as well as maintaining the positive partnerships with landowners and the dairy industry that have resulted from this program,” she said, adding that the department will work with state leadership to identify funding and long-term solutions to tricolored blackbird conservation.
Worship

He simply gives Himself away on the off-chance that one of us might look back at Him and offer ourselves in return.” (Asbury, 2017)

Unfortunately, while Asbury’s post tries to double down on his point and while it clarifies his overall point, it fails to address the real concern of his critics. God, a perfect being, is incapable of acting in a way that is “reckless. Does any Christian really believe that any part of the trinity acts in a way that is “unconcerned with the consequences of His actions?” Are we to throw away passages such as Jeremiah 29:11 where God is encouraging an enslaved Jewish people or Jesus’ prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane? Should we believe he didn’t actually mean, “Let this cup pass from me…” in Matthew 26:39. It’s questionable whether Asbury means is God the Father is unconcerned with the consequences of His actions, so He freely sends Christ to die a terrible death on earth without care.

Asbury goes on to say His love is not cunning or shrewd but can be downright ridiculous, that it bankrupted heaven for you. But if God’s love is not cunning or shrewd how else might we describe a plan to bring a savior to the world thousands of years in the making? Did God just decide randomly and recklessly to send Christ to a Roman dominated world? Just happen to have John the Baptist available to pave the way for Christ’s work? Or was it, in fact, a shrewd plan that was carefully executed. Moreover, did God bankrupt heaven for our salvation? Was there a shortage of righteousness or grace? A run on the spiritual banks of heaven for anyone who may need mercy? Certainly not. We know God’s love is eternal from passages like Psalm 136, that Christ brings news to a woman at a well saying, “whoever drinks of the water I give them will never be thirsty again…” John 4:14. God’s grace, mercy, and love weren’t bankrupted by Christ coming to earth, and we are told repeatedly throughout scripture God’s grace is more than enough for us in places like 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:11-13, Psalm 107:1, and more.

Of course, it would be possible for Asbury or someone else to contextualize these references in a way that would be appropriate. Yet, it is not something we see him, or our churches do when we delve into proclaiming these songs on Sunday. We should, collectively, make an effort to ensure someone else to contextualize these references in a way that would be appropriate. Yet, it is not something we see him, or our churches do when we delve into proclaiming these songs on Sunday.

Imagine yourself in the church of Ephesus caught up in Across the world, we find members of the body of Christ joining together to sing praise and worship our creator. Members of our congregations stand on stage and lead us in worship; they choose and practice the songs we sing together. In many churches there is great care for the kinds of songs we sing. However, from time to time, there is a song that gains popularity, and in an effort to innovate, it loses the truth.

Both locally and as the body of Christ at large, we must consider what we are willing to sacrifice, if anything, to pursue innovation in our worship. For example, Cory Asbury received much criticism for his song “Reckless Love,” which describes God’s love as “overwhelming, never-ending, and reckless,” two-thirds of which would be celebrated by any Christian.

The main critique of Asbury’s song? God, a perfect and omnipotent being, cannot be reckless any more than he can be foolish or naive. To be reckless, according to Merriam Webster dictionary, is “marked by a lack or proper caution, careless of consequences” or “irresponsible” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In essence, to sing this song would be to proclaim a lie about God’s nature.

Asbury, in his defense, took to a Facebook post in which he stated, “When I use the phrase, ‘the reckless love of God,’ I’m not saying that God Himself is reckless. I am, however, saying, that the way He loves, is in many regards, quite so. What I mean is this: He is utterly unconcerned with the consequences of His actions with regards to His own safety, comfort, and well-being. His love isn’t crafty or slick. It’s not cunning or shrewd. In fact, all things considered, it’s quite childlike and might I even suggest, sometimes downright ridiculous. His love bankrupted heaven for you. His love doesn’t consider Himself first. His love isn’t selfish or self-serving. He doesn’t wonder what He’ll gain or lose by putting Himself out there.

The California Mid-State Fair in Paso Robles, California, is hosting the “Fresno’s Global Ag Impact Tour” on July 26, showing attendees Jack London Square and the Port of Oakland for a first-hand look at how Fresno farmers help feed the world.

Tickets are on sale on the Fresno County Historical Society website.

Fresno Ag Tour

The Fresno County Historical Society and Kearney Mansion Museum are hosting the “Fresno’s Global Ag Impact Tour” on July 26, showing attendees how the Fresno County Ag Tour on July 27, at 7 p.m. in the Main Grandstand Arena.

The rodeo will feature various events such as match roping, team penning, double mugging, barrel racing, breakaway roping, bronc riding, and bull riding.

This year’s show will feature an American Freestyle Bullfighting competition featuring World Champion Bullfighter Alex McWilliams. Tickets are on sale now on the California Mid-State Fair website.

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California is gearing up for an exciting summer with various events catering to diverse interests. Upcoming events celebrate the rich agricultural heritage of the Central Valley and offer unique experiences ranging from educational sessions and field tours to rodeo competitions.

Organic Produce

The Organic Produce Summit will be held from July 10 to July 11 at the Monterey Conference Center. The first day will feature field tours and fun activities, while the second day will feature educational sessions.

On July 10, attendees will tour organic fields at Driscoll’s, Earthbound Farm Organic, and Braga Fresh. If so inclined, a morning yoga session will be held before the ag show exhibitors set up. After yoga, attendees can help pack 1,000 bags of fresh produce for families in need in Monterey and nearby counties.

An opening reception will take place in the evening.

On July 11, ag show exhibitors will move in promptly before breakfast. Educational sessions will take place throughout the day including discussions on labeling, packaging, sales strategies, and growth opportunities within the organic market.

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Country Rodeo Finals

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