CARB Approves $27 Billion Regulation to Phase Out Gas Forklifts by 2043

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

On June 27, the California Air Resources Board adopted the proposed regulation on zero-emission forklifts, mandating a phase-out of gas-powered forklifts by 2043. Despite opposition from various labor unions and industry groups — including an agricultural coalition — CARB concluded that large spark-ignited forklifts exceed federal ozone standards.

As part of the California Environmental Protection Agency, CARB reports directly to Governor Gavin Newsom’s office, whose Executive Order N-79-20 prompted this regulation by ordering CARB and other State agencies to transition off-road vehicles and equipment to 100% zero emission by 2035 where feasible.

According to the CARB Staff presentation, the regulation on forklifts is necessary to meet the air quality standards by the deadlines outlined in the Clean Air Act, calling for the reduction of 2 tons per day of oxides of nitrogen and 0.2 tons per day of reactive organic gases. Under the rule, the production or sale for use in California of Class IV and Class V LSI forklifts is prohibited beginning in 2026. Additionally, the use of spark-ignited forklifts by large fleets — 26 units or more — will begin phase-out in 2028. Smaller fleets will phase out starting in 2029.

One of the largest opponents of the regulation, the Western Propane Gas Association, explained that the economic impact of this will cost forklift owners and operators up to $27 billion. According to a press release from WPGA, unintended consequences of the rule will have a lasting economic effect across the state.

“CARB’s decision today to adopt this damaging regulation will lead to lost jobs, economic competitiveness, and still not achieve the goals that they expect,” Colin Sueyres, President and CEO of the Western Propane Gas Association, said in a press release. “Organized labor, agriculture, small businesses, and community stakeholders have raised hundreds of concerns over the years on this rule that has gone unheeded. Instead, they have rejected any effort to achieve their very goals sooner through collaboration with those being regulated.”

The phase-out schedule is based on the model year and designed so that no forklift is required to be phased out before it is 10 years old. According to CARB, the regulation was developed through an extensive public process including public meetings, workshops, stakeholder input, and site visits. As a result, the regulation allows for certain compliance exemptions for special circumstances, including forklifts used in the field for agricultural or forest operations.

The California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association (CGGA) issued a press release stating that enforcement of the proposed regulation would be “misguided” and place a “burden on the state’s economic competitiveness.”

The California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association (CGGA) is a state-wide organization that represents California’s cotton ginning industry.

The bill, introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Steve Bennett, would have restricted any new industrial and agricultural groundwater wells in several of California’s key agricultural production areas as well as circumvent the authority SGMA grants to GSAs.

POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

Key themes in proposed agricultural legislation in 2024 include water regulations, pest management, and the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act — by denying permits for large-diameter, high-capacity wells within a quarter mile of a domestic water well.

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Central Valley Farmers Withstand Legislation, Litigation, and Regulatory Pressure

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Two L-words are getting Central Valley agriculture in the weeds — legislation and litigation. Alongside water regulations, pesticide bans, bankruptcy filings, and other issues afflicting the industry, legislation and litigation are generally the root causes of concern.

Despite these challenges, there was a notable development recently as the groundwater measure that would restrict local entities from issuing a permit for a new groundwater well — AB 2079 — failed in the Senate Natural Resources and Water Committee on June 11.

The bill, introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Steve Bennett, would have restricted the local control of groundwater — guaranteed by the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act — by denying permits for large-diameter, high-capacity wells within a quarter mile of a domestic water well.

Under AB 2079, prohibited permits would
President’s Message

By Jenny Holtermann
President, KCFB

What is the cost of advocacy? How much are you willing to pay to protect your farm? The farming lifestyle and agriculture industry are not for the faint of heart. We are often up before the sun and don’t make it home until dark. We tend to animals or crops at all hours of the day, regardless of what day it is. Animals get sick, pipes leak, equipment breaks, fences fall, wires get stolen, protectants need to be applied, and the list goes on. There are many parts to the day that are unpredictable and out of our control. After completing daily tasks and any others that get thrown your way, when do you have time to track legislative bills, read water regulations, attend a State Water Board hearing, stay up to date on the air quality standards, or fight the latest laws threatening our way of life?

That’s where Farm Bureau comes in. While it does seem like our expenses just keep getting higher and higher, laws keep impacting our daily lives, regulations are overburdensome — yes, I agree, but it could be worse. The Farm Bureau has worked tirelessly at the American, State and local levels to lessen the impact to agriculture from these burdensome regulations. As members, we are often unaware when the Farm Bureau stops a bill or amends the bills to make them “not as bad.” When the Farm Bureau meets with lobbyists and legislators to delay the regulation or lower a fine, it is just an average Tuesday. These little victories are not often seen as progress or making an impact.

However, in 2023, during a proceeding to limit PG&E undergrounding miles in favor of alternative methods, California Farm Bureau worked to save over $100 million or $1,100 per meter. In a 2021 proceeding to divide Southern California Edison revenue requirements amongst rate classes, CAFB negotiated a savings of $15 million or $600 per meter. In a 2022 proceeding to divide PG&E’s revenue requirement amongst rate classes, CAFB negotiated a savings of $10 million or $110 per meter. These are just a few examples of how CAFB efforts have lessened the increase of electricity on our agriculture operations. Next time, we open that electricity bill, remember it could be worse.

Pesticides, insecticides, and fungicides are often a high investment in our farming businesses. These are often looked at to protect our crops from the increase of electricity on our agriculture operations. Next time, we open that electricity bill, remember it could be worse.

PRESIDENT’S MESSAGE on PAGE 3

Executive Director’s Report

By Rachel Nettleton
Exec. Director, KCFB

What better way to cool off and engage with your community as the summer heat intensifies than attending the Kern County Farm Bureau’s “Save Water, Drink Beer” event on Friday, August 16th, at Crusader Brewing Company? Starting at 5:00 p.m., this networking event offers a great opportunity to learn about the Kern County Farm Bureau, explore membership levels, and discover what we can offer to both agricultural and non-agricultural community members.

This event is more than just an enjoyable evening out — it is a chance to connect with like-minded individuals and businesses who recognize the vital role agriculture plays in both personal and professional contexts. Agriculture impacts every aspect of our lives, from the food we eat to the products we use daily, and the Kern County Farm Bureau is committed to creating a strong connection between agriculture and the broader community.
from threat of disease or insects. In 2022, chemicals were $33,333 per California operation on average, or about 3% of total expenses.

A popular generic herbicide costs $12.50/gallon, and a brand name costs $32/gallon. Adjusting the costs for the concentration and application rate difference between generic and branded, the cost per acre was $3.12 for the generic and $3.50 for the name brand. This comes out to a 56% savings. It was California Farm Bureau that was there years ago, to help California farmers gain access to generic chemicals and save farmers approximately 50% on total pesticide costs.

These silent victories are just two examples of helping to lessen the burden farmers face of rising input costs. We often look at our high costs and all the threats to our industry with overwhelming pauses. Trust me, I get it. It is getting harder and harder to make finances work for our farm. Let’s not forget, the silent victories that happen every day to help us keep farming.

If the Farm Bureau wasn’t there fighting on our behalf, what would our businesses look like today? I will ensure my Farm Bureau membership is paid, to ensure Farm Bureau will keep fighting for us, on our behalf, what would our businesses look like then? What would you have to say if you couldn’t afford to feed and clothe your family? What would you have to say if you couldn’t afford to make answers to our members, we encourage you to reach out to us at kcfb@kerncfb.com.

Be sure to mark your calendars and join us for an evening of fun at our Save Water, Drink Beer event and learn more about our memberships or future local benefits program. If the above information is not convincing enough, each attendee will receive two drink tickets and there will also be delicious appetizers. If you are interested in attending this event, tickets can be purchased through Eventbrite or email us for more details.

Executive Director’s Report
Continued from PAGE 2

By involving more individuals and businesses, we aim to create a more interconnected community in agriculture. This event is an excellent opportunity to build those connections, share experiences, and explore how we can collectively support and benefit from a thriving agricultural community.

The Kern County Farm Bureau has several exciting initiatives opened up to build upon our community involvement and support for local businesses. For instance, our local benefits program will launch in January 2025, aiming to support local businesses by driving more customers their way, while also providing our members with valuable discounts and benefits that they can use in their work or daily lives. If you are a business owner interested in learning more about this program or potentially offering a benefit or discount to our members, we encourage you to reach out to us at kcfb@kerncfb.com.

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.executive director’s report

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by christine johnson
chair, kern county
young farmers & ranchers

The Kern Young Have you heard the statement that “farmers are the original environmentalists”? Sounds like a stretch. What may first come to mind are visions of tree-hugging, fish-loving social justice warriors with hidden political agendas. Yet, upon further consideration of the term, an environmentalist describes one who cultivates and respects the land, animals, and resources that the earth has provided — essentially a steward. I believe this truly describes those who feed and clothe our nation.

Our goal with the Kern Young Farmers & Ranchers is to promote agriculture in a variety of different ways — through education, relationships, fundraisers, and scholarships. Scholarships, in particular, are practical ways to focus on supporting the next generation of those who will care for our environment.

The 4-H, FFA, and college students that apply for our scholarships and agriculture grants are doing the work of sustaining the environment by learning to responsibly raise animals or by focusing their higher education efforts on agriculture’s multi-faceted industries in today’s world, such as crop science.

When the time comes every year to distribute our agriculture grants and scholarships, I am amazed at the students who apply. It is humbling to read the essays and hear very personal stories of how each student landed in agriculture. Some of these very talented individuals I’ve had the privilege to meet in person. This year, as I reviewed the nearly 30 essays for our agriculture grants to 4-H and FFA students, I was touched by the recurring themes of determination and resiliency. Some students mentioned financial hardships, single-parent households, or grandparents who made sacrifices so they could participate in raising an animal for the fair. Other students noted future goals such as saving for college or starting an almond farm.

Learning about the aspirations of these students prompted me to ponder on determination and resiliency. I often journal quotes that inspire me, and over the past few years, I’ve assembled some sayings of the ancient Stoic philosophers. Here are a few paraphrased quotes:

• “Define your fears to see that they can be easily defeated.” — Seneca

• “See difficulty as an opportunity to prove yourself.” — Epictetus

• “Remember what you’ve had the courage to already endure.” — Marcus Aurelius

• “Focus on the smallest step you can take.” — Zeno

• “Don’t be afraid to ask for help.” — Marcus Aurelius

• “Make courage a habit - seek out challenges, practice voluntary discomfort and do what you are afraid to do.” — Seneca

I believe some of the students who applied for our agriculture grants understand truths far beyond their age. We were honored to choose 13 winners and award them with $400 each. Check out our social media for the individual winner names. Thank you to those who support our efforts so that we, in turn, can support the next generation.

Reach out to us on social media to learn of our upcoming events and mark your calendars for a tour of the Pandol Cold Storage facility in Delano on August 10th at 10 a.m.

Email: KernYFR@KernCFB.com

Instagram: @Kern_YFR

Facebook: KernYoungFarmersAndRanchers

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AUGUST 2024

valley ag voice

Young Farmers & Ranchers

By Christine Johnson
Chair, Kern County
Young Farmers & Ranchers

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Legislators Spin Words

California include groundwater usage, pesticide restriction, labor, and various environmental initiatives.

AB 828 — a groundwater pumping exemption to grant managed wetlands a three-year exemption from the implementation of SGMA — introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Damon Connolly will be read again in the Senate Appropriations Committee on Aug. 5. Under AB 828, wetlands and small disadvantaged communities would be able to use their average annual water usage without the “excessive fines” implemented under SGMA.

The proposed bill provides an example of how certain words and phrases can reflect policy goals while also appealing to environmentalist groups that endorse or support Connolly. These include, but are not limited to, the Sierra Club California, California Environmental Voters, and the Center for Biological Diversity Action Fund.

First, the bill would prohibit a GSA from using its authority “regarding the establishment of ground-water extraction allocations for small community water systems serving disadvantaged communities from permitted public water supply wells and to managed wetland extractors, except as specified.”

The terms “prohibit” and “except as specified” set clear limits of authority for GSAs over their power to manage small community water systems and wetland extractors. Further, the bill specifically refers “small community water systems serving disadvantaged communities” and “managed wetland extractors” which would garner advocates from social justice and environmental protection groups.

Supporters of the bill, such as the National Audubon Society, highlight these phrases in their statements of support, explaining its position that GSPs should not propose a one-size-fits-all cap on water needs while saving energy and can reduce wear and tear on your irrigation system.

COMPROMISE LANGUAGE

The drafting process is an essential element in garnering support for a bill as it may be revised to include compromise language that addresses the concerns of various parties, thereby making the bill more acceptable to a broader range of legislators.

Several pieces of pesticide legislation were significantly altered at the behest of agricultural groups such as the Agricultural Council of California — an organization that consistently advocates for the rights of farmers, ranchers, and dairy producers.

Among a few notable bills that the Ag Council and others opposed, AB 1963 introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Laura Friedman would have banned the use of paraquat dichloride without a scientific reevaluation by the Department of Pesticide Regulations.

When it was first introduced, the bill would have required DPR to prepare quarterly reports regarding granular chlorpyrifos use, monitoring, and exposure during the quarter. The first round of revisions in April cut this language completely and instead shifted to make “unlawful” the use of any pesticide containing paraquat dichloride in the state.

“By creating a new crime, the bill would impose a state-mandated local program,” the revision stated.

The latest revision in July omitted this language, and as it stands, the proposed bill would require DPR on or before January 2029 to complete a reevaluation of paraquat dichloride to determine its continued use or restriction. The Ag Council withdrew its opposition as a result of this change.

Another pesticide bill, AB 1864, which initially faced opposition due to expanded notice of intent requirements near schools, saw amendments that narrowed NOI obligations, prompting the Ag Council to withdraw its opposition. Additionally, AB 2532, addressing rodenticide use in wildlife habitats, underwent revisions limiting restrictions to specific circumstances and removing provisions for private legal actions, ensuring alignment with public health, food safety measures, and agricultural pest control needs.

BILLS TO WATCH

As the Legislature reconvenes, a few key pieces of agricultural legislation will be considered.

SB 1299, introduced by Democratic Senator Dave Cortese, proposes a disputable presumption that a heat-related injury arose during employment if it occurs within a specified timeframe after working outdoors for an employer who fails to comply with heat illness standards. This bill has passed the Senate and is currently in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

AB 2149, introduced by Assemblymember Damon Connolly, would require certain rolling and swinging gates to meet specified safety standards and be inspected by a professional or qualified employee by July 1, 2026, and at least every 10 years after. This bill applies to gates of a certain size and weight intended for public use or by a large number of people. Amendments are being negotiated by a coalition, including the Ag Council, to reduce the impact on affected businesses.

The power of language cannot be underestimated in navigating California’s complex legislative landscape. As bills like AB 828 and SB 1299 illustrate, each word and phrase holds the potential to significantly shape policy outcomes.

As the legislative session resumes, stakeholders across agriculture and beyond must remain vigilant, deciphering the nuanced rhetoric that defines the future of California’s ag policy. The battle over words is far from rhetorical — it shapes the boundaries of regulatory power in California.
Cal-Organic Farms Attends Organic Produce Summit

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Cal-Organic Farms, a prominent organic producer of fresh vegetables, participated in the Organic Produce Summit on July 10-11. In a press release, Bob Borda, Vice President of Sales at Cal-Organic Farms, discussed the company’s market position and offerings ahead of the event.

Cal-Organic Farms grows over 65 different commodities annually with an emphasis on supply reliability. Borda highlighted the recent acquisition of San Miguel Produce, which has expanded Cal-Organic’s capabilities in value-added cut and washed cooking greens and vegetables.

“With the acquisition of San Miguel Produce, Cal-Organic is bringing the same commitment to the value-added set of cut and washed cooking greens and vegetables. The combined processing expertise of San Miguel Produce and Grimmway Farm’s growing is where premium quality and consumer convenience intersect,” Borda said.

This collaboration aims to maintain premium quality while enhancing consumer convenience. Additionally, the partnership supports Grimmway’s efforts to minimize food loss and waste by utilizing more of the crop after harvesting. This strategic alignment leverages complementary strengths and shared sustainability goals to drive growth in the value-added marketplace.

International Fresh Produce Association Welcomes New VP

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Jessica Keller has been welcomed as the new Vice President of Global Industry Relations at the International Fresh Produce Association. This newly established role underscores IFPA’s dedication to enhancing member value on a global scale. Keller will oversee IFPA’s global representatives, country councils, and committees, driving the implementation of the association’s worldwide initiatives.

In a press release, Miriam Wolk, Chief Membership Officer, highlighted Keller’s experience in the global produce and floral supply chain.

“She has had an incredibly successful career that has been defined by her leadership, vision, and strategic acumen. She will be a fantastic resource and advocate for our global membership, and I look forward to the impact she will have on IFPA, members and volunteers, and the industry as a whole,” Wolk said.

Keller previously served as Chief Operating Officer at Food Hall Company and spent 16 years at Whole Foods Market, including as Regional Vice President of the Southwest Region.

“I am excited to join IFPA and am deeply committed to its mission of promoting global consumption of fresh produce and flowers,” Keller said. “Together with our global representatives, I look forward to fostering growth and making a positive impact in our markets.”

Keller holds a bachelor’s degree in business with a minor in Latin American Studies. She is fluent in English and Spanish and proficient in Portuguese, enabling her to navigate global operations effectively and communicate IFPA’s value across the supply chain.

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JSS Almonds is a growing processing and marketing company in Bakersfield, CA. Our facility specializes in shelled and inshell almonds, as well as organic almonds.
We strive to deliver continuously competitive and profitable returns to our growers through solid performance.
California Enforces Ongoing Fruit Fly Quarantines, Eradication Efforts Prove Successful

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Invasive pests swarmed California agriculture last year as increased rainfall created ideal conditions for tiny creatures to make a large impact on the agricultural industry. Fruit flies have remained a prominent issue for fruit growers — specifically Tau, Oriental, Mediterranean, and Queensland fruit flies which each triggered quarantines throughout California.

The California Department of Food and Agriculture lifted the Tau fruit fly Los Angeles County quarantine in June which covered 110 square miles. The quarantine was put in place in July 2024 after the invasive pests were first detected, marking the first time the Tau fruit fly initiated a quarantine in the Western Hemisphere.

In a press release, Victoria Hornbaker, director of CDEAs Plant Health and Pest Prevention Services Division explained that the eradication efforts were successful for one of the largest statewide invasive fruit fly populations in California in several years.

“The lifting of this quarantine proves that our efforts are working, and the responsiveness and cooperation of residents across California and our partners is critical to that success,” Hornbaker said.

The quarantine prevented the harvesting or movement of over 300 varieties of crops without meeting strict treatment standards. While the Tau fruit fly has been successfully eradicated, there are still three active quarantines for the Oriental, Mediterranean, and Queensland fruit flies.

While the quarantine in Contra Costa County was lifted in July, Riverside County and San Bernardino County are under active quarantine for the Oriental fruit fly, a pest that poses a threat to several crops in California including pears, plums, cherries, peaches, apricots, figs, citrus, tomatoes, and avocados.

According to the CDEA, the OFF would amount to up to $176 million in crop losses, additional pesticide use, and quarantine requirements. The Oriental fruit fly has been introduced into California several times by the movement of infested fruits and vegetables into the state, and while infestations have been found in the state, they are usually successfully eradicated.

The Mediterranean fruit fly also triggered a quarantine in LA County in 2023 as the presence of an established population would cause a severe economic impact through the restriction or prohibition on fresh fruit exports both domestically and internationally, CDEA explained.

The Mediterranean fruit fly has one of the widest host ranges of any pest fruit fly and is considered the most important agricultural pest in the world. According to the CDEA, it has been recorded infesting over 250 cultivated and wild fruits.

The CDEA has a Preventative Release Program to control Medflies, which has reduced infestations in the Los Angeles area by about 93%.

Another active quarantine for the Queensland fruit fly is in place in LA and Ventura Counties. The quarantines went into place in November 2023 to prevent its spread and protect the state’s agriculture industry.

The exotic insect originated in Australia, but the first detection in California occurred in 1985 in San Diego County. According to CDEA, the QFF feeds on several types of fruits and vegetables, including pome and stone fruits, citrus, dates, avocados, and many vegetables, particularly melons and tomatoes.

PREVENTING THE SPREAD

To help prevent future introductions of invasive species, the CDEA requested that residents cooperate with agricultural officials by allowing them access to gardens to place traps, inspect plants, conduct necessary treatments, or remove potentially infested produce.

As temperatures rise and vacationers ramp up their travel plans throughout the summer, agriculture officials urge residents to refrain from bringing back potentially infested produce from their trips.

Residents can determine if their property is located within an active quarantine area by visiting CAFruitFly.com. Residents should inspect their gardens for signs of invasive fruit flies or maggots and report any findings to the CDEA at (800) 491-1899 or their local county agricultural commissioner’s office.

Cargill to Lay Off 178 Workers Ahead of Fresno Meat Plant Sale

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Cargill is set to lay off 178 workers from its meat processing plant in Fresno, California, ahead of the facility’s sale to Central Valley Meat, the state’s largest beef producer. The Fresno plant produces an average of 1,600 cattle per day and about 1.4 million pounds of trim, boxed, and case-ready beef daily.

Layoff notices were issued to the workers between June 3 and 7, according to WARN filings. The decision to lay off the workers is part of Cargill’s agreement to sell the plant to Central Valley Meat, which committed to retaining as many of the plant’s workers as possible.

Upon the announcement of the acquisition in May, Central Valley Meat Company issued a press release explaining that Cargill’s team would have an opportunity to explore roles with CVM.

“Both companies are committed to retaining as many employees as possible and retaining beef processing capacity for producers,” the press release stated.

A Cargill spokesperson told Agriculture Dive that more than 700 employees will join CVM upon its purchase of the plant, and the WARN notice was issued for the 178 employees who will not be retained.

The affected workers will continue to receive pay and benefits for 60 days and will be eligible for severance packages, job search, application, and interview assistance, the spokesperson said.

The layoffs are set to take effect on Aug. 4, according to the WARN filings.

By Valley Ag Voice Staff
Phase Out of Gas Forklifts

Continued from PAGE 1

Association and Western Agricultural Processors Association have advocated on behalf of the agricultural industry since the proposed regulation was announced, and representatives spoke on behalf of agriculture during the hearing.

According to CCGGA President Roger Ialom, they have been actively engaged with CARB on this regulation, and their final ask centered on the expansion of compliance dates for agricultural fleets from 25% to 20%.

“We’re simply asking for a 20% cap per compliance year to spread out the compliance over a few more years,” Ialom said. “It does not get an exemption. It does not mean we won’t meet the dates that are the final rule. It simply gives us a little more time to meet the compliance period or the cost that we’re going to be facing because this rule will be costly.”

Priscilla Rodriguez, assistant vice president of the Western Agricultural Processors Association, echoed this request, explaining that as written, the proposal would require 100% of agriculture fleets to be converted over by the year 2034. Rodriguez petitioned the board for a 20% compliance cap, providing an additional four years to reach compliance.

“The other thing that I want to note is all operations do not have the ability to pass along the costs. Those costs affect our bottom line,” Rodriguez said. “We operate in a global market. The price is set. We can’t simply increase the price per pound of our almonds, our pistachios, our walnuts — that’s not the way it works.”

Extending the compliance date would allow for greater ease in consuming the costs of converting entire agricultural fleets without exceeding the 2038 compliance year deadline.

Another agricultural advocate representing the Agricultural Council of California, Jacob DeFant, requested the 20% phasing cap as well as a revised definition of “agricultural operations” to include retail nurseries.

“Forklifts are an essential part of many farm and infield operations, and these forklifts have a distinct operational use primarily during our harvest seasons — many times only being used two or three months out of the year — and it’s important to acknowledge the unique demands and dynamics of that infield usage,” DeFant said.

Before the public hearing, the draft proposal placed a 25% cap on phase-out dates. A cap on the required percentage of forklifts to be phased out initially limits the burden on fleets with older forklifts, ensuring no more than 50% turnover out initially limits the burden on fleets that are the final rule. It simply gives us a little more time to meet the compliance period or the cost that we’re going to be facing because this rule will be costly.”

Carb chair, Liane M. Randolph proposed that the 2026-2026 period be used to assess the transition, equipment availability, and phase-out progress. Randolph recommended directing the executive officer to evaluate the rule’s implementation and propose any needed changes to the compliance schedule by 2028.

This suggestion was accepted, and CARB adopted the forklift regulation with this additional language.

FUNDING PROGRAMS AND INCENTIVES

In an effort to support producers throughout this costly transition to zero-emission forklifts, the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District is accepting applications requesting monetary incentives to replace LSI forklifts with zero-emission replacement forklifts.

Projects will be funded on a first-come-first-serve basis with incentive amounts calculated at a maximum of 80% of the eligible costs of new forklift. Applicants are required to obtain approval and have a signed, executed contract from the SJVAPCD prior to purchasing new equipment as any equipment purchased prior to an executed contract is ineligible.

Eligibility requirements include that forklifts must be deployed within the SJV district and owned and operated for the past 24 months. Additionally, old forklifts must currently be in use and maintain operational conditions until replaced.

For additional eligibility and application information, visit the Zero-Emission Forklift Replacement Program website.

Along with this SJV-specific program, CARB’s Clean Off-Road Equipment Voucher Incentive Program offers potential incentive amounts that fund vouchers used to purchase zero-emission off-road equipment such as forklifts, transport refrigeration units, construction and agricultural equipment, and terminal trucks.

Possible incentive amounts include vouchers up to $300,000 and infrastructure enhancement up to $30,000 for large forklifts and agricultural equipment.

The CARB incentive project is funded by the Air Pollution Control Fund and the Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund — vehicle purchasers can contact approved dealers to submit a voucher request for eligible vehicles.

Farmers Withstand Pressure

Continued from PAGE 1

also include applications for agricultural and industrial wells in basins that experienced more than half a foot of subsidence since 2015. The bill was opposed by various groups in agriculture, business, water districts, and local government representatives. While the coalition opposing the bill offered amendments, Bennett did not accept them, and it failed to pass.

Among the legislators who voted against the bill were Central Valley senators Shannon Grove, Melissa Hurtado, and Susan Talamantes Eggman.

CARB ZERO-EMISSIONS

The California Air Resources Control Board is considering changes to the draft regulatory text of the Zero-Emission Forklift Regulation. In order to accelerate the transition to zero-emission forklifts, CARB’s staff is developing a measure to drive greater deployment within fleets throughout California.

The regulation aims to replace internal combustion engine forklifts and applies to forklifts engaged in agricultural operations.

An Agriculture Coalition composed of the Agricultural Council of California, California Citrus Mutual, California Cotton Ginners and Growers Association, and other agricultural stakeholders submitted comments on the proposed regulation.

The coalition’s comments included calls to expand exemptions and extensions, protect data by opposing certain reporting requirements, clarify regulatory definitions affecting nurseries, and place caps on phase-out schedules for agriculture businesses.

On June 27, CARB will review the draft text at its board meeting and potentially adopt the regulation. Farmers and producers are encouraged to voice their comments on the regulation.

PESTICIDES

Several regulations on pesticides are being considered by the Legislature, including AB 1863 which would ban the use of paraquat. Introduced by Democratic Assemblymember Laura Friedman, AB 1963 passed the Assembly Committee on Environmental Safety and Toxic Materials and is being considered by Senate committees.

If passed, the bill would prohibit the use, manufacture, sale, delivery, holding, or offering for sale any pesticide product containing paraquat dichloride until the Department of Pesticide Regulation completes a reevaluation of the chemical. The Ag Council of California opposes this bill and urges DPR to complete its scientific review of paraquat.

Another proposed pesticide bill introduced by Friedman, AB 2552, would prohibit the use of a second-generation and a first-generation anticoagulant rodenticide within 2,500 feet of a wildlife habitat area. The penalty for violations is up to $25,000 per day, per violation. AB 2552 passed the Assembly and has been ordered to the Senate.

Democratic Assemblymember Damo Conolly introduced a third pesticide bill being considered in the Senate — AB 1864 — to require a notice of intent to an ag commissioner for new categories of pesticide before it is applied within one-fourth of a school. The bill would expand reporting requirements near school zones with documentation on the timing, notification, and method of application.

Ag commissioners would be required to collect public notifications before an application and must document which fields are sprayed.

LITIGATION FOR WATER

Two recent lawsuits being considered by California courts share a common denominator — water. Recently, the court ruled in favor of California’s largest reservoir project in decades, Sites Reservoir, against an environmental court challenge.

Citing a legal debate. Newsom’s office, the Sites Reservoir project cleared this legal hurdle as a result of Newsom’s streamlining law last year which reduced delays caused by CEQA litigation.

The infrastructure streamlining law requires courts to determine CEQA challenges within 270 days. As a result, the court’s determination occurred within 148 days.

“California needs more water storage, and we have no time to waste — projects like the Sites Reservoir will capture rain and snow runoff to supply millions of homes with clean drinking water. We’re approaching this work with urgency, everything from water storage to clean energy and transportation projects.”

Sites Reservoir is in the process of acquiring state and federal permits to start construction, expected to begin in late 2026. Public hearings with the State Water Resources Control Board have begun and will continue through October 2024.

As for pending litigation, the Southern San Joaquin Municipal Utility District entered a lawsuit against the City of Delano for their approval of the Niagara water bottling plant. The lawsuit alleges that the city did not appropriately consider environmental reviews under CEQA and failed to hold a public hearing before approving the plant.

According to the lawsuit, the plant would extract up to 1.6 million gallons of ground-water from the Kern County Subbasin per day and up to 1,792 acre-feet of water per year from the aquifer without replenishment plans. The Basin is critically overdraft by an average of 324,326 acre-feet annually.

The district has petitioned that the court set aside approvals for the water bottling plant and grant a permanent injunction to prevent the plant’s operations.
No Ifs, Ands, or Nuts: Almond Market Shows Strong Demand

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Record-breaking almond shipments over 10 consecutive months have led to a dramatic reduction in carryout, signaling robust demand and market stability.

The 2024 California Almond Objective Measurement Report published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture in July estimates a 2.3 billion meat pounds production forecast—a 13% increase from last year’s crop of 2.47 billion meat pounds.

While the objective report estimates are down 7% from the subjective report released in May, it follows a favorable bloom as well as a year marred by tremendous economic challenges. According to the Almond Board of California, the objective report comes when the carryout is projected to drop to levels not seen in years, with almond shipments setting a record of 10 months straight and at least 212 million pounds shipped.

The success of the 2024 bloom is attributed largely to favorable weather conditions, especially beneficial for bee activity during the bloom period which sets the stage for a potentially huge harvest, according to the USDA.

“It reflects both a good bloom and hard work by California almond growers during trying times,” Clarice Turner, president and CEO of the Almond Board of California said in a press release. “For perspective, demand has been strong, consistent, and continues to grow, which has reduced the carryout to what may be the smallest in years.”

The almond industry has never seen shipments of even 200 million pounds for 10 straight months in the same crop year, Turner explained. A low carryout indicates a strong demand relative to supply, which may lead to higher prices for growers and suggests a balanced market where the risk of overproduction and associated price drops is reduced.

Turner highlighted that demand has been strong and consistent, which has significantly reduced the carryout.

“The actual supply of California almonds available for the market is the combination of crop size and carryout from the previous year,” Turner said. “We expect only minor changes, if any, to the supply for market this next crop year because the forecasted increase in crop size will mostly be offset by the smaller carryout. Clearly, global demand is strong and consistent. We will continue to work hard to meet growing demand.”

The Objective Measurement Report is based on 1.38 million bearing acres and is generally more accurate than the subjective report. The 2023 harvest yielded 2.47 billion pounds, 5% below the objective estimate for that year. For 2024, production for the dominant Nonpareil variety is forecast at 1.10 billion meat pounds, a 17% increase from last year’s 941 million meat pounds — Nonpareil represents 39% of California’s total almond production.

The average nut set per tree increased by 3% from 2023, with the Nonpareil variety also seeing a 3% rise. The average kernel weight for all varieties is 1.61 grams, a 4% decrease from the previous year. For Nonpareil, the average kernel weight is 1.64 grams, down 3%. A total of 98.9% of all nuts sized were sound.

The bloom period for the 2024 crop started in the second week of February and ended by mid-March, with significantly higher bee hours reported compared to last year. Favorable weather during the bloom was followed by wet and warm conditions in April, increasing pest and disease pressure. However, dry conditions and mild temperatures in May helped the developing crop. Multiple heatwaves in June and July necessitated increased irrigation across orchards, but the harvest remains on schedule.

Pistachios and Walnuts

The American pistachio market is also seeing promising trends. According to a report from Meridian Growers, pistachio shipments in April increased by 9% compared to last year, with year-to-date shipments up by 50%. International demand, especially from Europe, China, and emerging markets, continues to drive growth, while domestic shipments have also risen.

While heat waves have slowed tree growth, pistachio prices remain stable, the report explained, and growers have begun early cutting in orchards to check embryo viability.

The walnut market, particularly organic walnuts, is facing challenges despite typically higher prices for certified organic crops. Conventional prices have reached record lows, dragging down organic walnut prices as a result.

According to the California Walnut Board, California’s organic walnut sector remains small, with about 2% of total state production in 2023 — 18,514 tons compared to 805,035 tons of conventional walnuts. While the organic walnut market is in a slightly more optimal position than conventional walnuts, prices remain historically low due to oversupply.

However, demand has picked up, and the supply of both organic and conventional walnuts is beginning to balance with demand, thanks to record shipments this year. While 74% of conventional walnuts are exported, most organic walnuts stay in the U.S., with only 20% going to foreign markets. This dynamic may be changing, as California organic walnuts become more attractive to international buyers, including those in Europe, who previously sourced organic walnuts from eastern Europe.

Sun World International Unveils the Future of Fruit in Wasco

By Valley Ag Voice Staff

Nestled in the heart of Wasco, California, Sun World International’s research facility buzzes with activity year-round, dedicated to crafting the future of fruit — mostly table grapes.

According to Paola Barba, one of the lead table grape breeders, explained that Sun World is not just growing fruit, they are creating it. Within Sun World’s labs, breeders analyze DNA and meticulously extract embryos from seedlings. Barba explained that seedless varieties are a consumer favorite.

“It’s not much [Genetic Modification] or anything like that — it’s very natural,” Barba said. “But what we do is we pick those seeds before they start to build up. So when you eat grapes, sometimes you see a small trace of seeds — that was bugger at some point. And that’s what we use to create new grapes.”

The journey from initial selection to commercialization is rigorous. Each year, the team sifts through around 50,000 potential candidates, gradually narrowing down to a handful of promising varieties. These selected few undergo extensive testing for taste, texture, size, and crucially, how well they fare in various climates — a global consideration with trials spanning over 16 countries.

One promising candidate was commercialized in four countries last year — Ruby Rush — and it continues to fare well in the Central Valley’s growing conditions as well as in Italy, Spain, and Israel.

“We need to breed something that’s grower-friendly in a sense and that can make them money in the end,” Dan Joubert, senior marketing manager at Sun World, said. “But on the other side is the consumer, and the consumer needs to want to buy it, it needs to look good, and it also has to able to last.”

For its part, Ruby Rush has been growing in popularity among growers and consumers alike. The variety is less labor-intensive than other table grapes as they have looser clusters negating the need to hand-cut them.

“You need to pay people to go and do that, so the new varieties like this one are naturally loose,” Barba said. “But if you take like a traditional variety, like a wine grape, it’s really tight, and the growers don’t want that anymore because labor is expensive and the other issue is the opportunity because sometimes you need people to do the work and you don’t have that.”

While Ruby Rush is only commercialized in four countries, it is being tested in more areas and is expected to become available in several more countries. Joubert explained that the process is extensive to ensure that a variety will be a positive investment.

“We have a technical team and they’re located in every single country, so they are there to support the grower…we learn the variety, we see if it works, and we’ve seen with this one specifically, it can adapt to harsh conditions,” Joubert said.

The goal, Joubert, is to have Ruby Rush available at retailers year-round with the same flavor and texture, ensuring it becomes a consumer staple.

Aside from its innovative breeding program, Joubert explained that the new theme for Sun World is “What’s Next?”

“For example, we’re always traditionally doing stone fruit and table grapes, and last year we acquired a mango variety,” Joubert said. “We’re also looking at citrus and then any other potential crops that we feel are underserved.”

As Sun World continues to expand its breeding portfolio and brand identity, it is hosting a mid-season field day in Bakersfield on Aug. 22.

For more information about SunWorld’s latest developments and future events, visit SunWorld International’s website or contact marketing@sun-world.com.
Supreme Court overturns Chevron Doctrine

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

On June 28, the Supreme Court overturned the Chevron Doctrine which compelled federal courts, for the past 40 years, to defer to a federal agency’s interpretation of an ambiguous statute if they were delegated by Congress to administer it.

In a 6-3 vote, the high court overruled this doctrine, which was initially placed in the 1984 decision in Chevron v. Natural Resources Defense Council.

“The Administrative Procedure Act requires courts to exercise their independent judgment in deciding whether an agency has acted within its statutory authority, and courts may not defer to an agency interpretation of the law simply because a statute is ambiguous,” the court ruled.

For agriculture, this power shift from federal agencies to the courts may result in fewer regulations as it would alter how laws affecting farming are applied — agencies such as the Environmental Protection Agency or the U.S. Department of Agriculture will face greater challenges in imposing regulations.

State Water Board Adopts Permanent Water Restrictions

By Natalie Willis, Reporter, Valley Ag Voice

Just before a national holiday, the California State Water Resources Control Board adopted a proposed regulation, placing permanent water restrictions on residents and urban water suppliers.

The policy, “Making Conservation a California Way of Life” was approved on July 3, and requires urban water suppliers to reduce the amount of water provided to customers over the next 15 years. If suppliers and customers fail to reduce water use, the districts would face fines of up to $10,000 a day.

As such, districts can implement mandatory restrictions and raise rates on high-volume water users. The SWB’s approval marks the first time districts would face fines of up to $10,000 a day.

The first round of water cuts is required by 2025.

BACKGROUND

The policy was developed to build off of Senate Bill 606 and Assembly Bill 1668 which former Governor Jerry Brown signed into law in 2018. The bills were widely supported by a coalition of water suppliers, environmental groups, and lawmakers to address water usage by urban and agricultural sectors.

The legislation places responsibility on urban water suppliers to adhere to new efficiency standards tailored for indoor and outdoor residential use, water loss due to leaks, and specialized needs based on local conditions.

In addition to urban mandates, the legislation requires agricultural water users to expand water management plans to include annual water budgets and efficiency goals aimed at minimizing water loss and enhancing drought resilience.

To carry out this legislation, the Department of Water Resources provided recommendations to the SWB in 2022, and the Board began the rulemaking process for the regulation in August 2023.

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AFBF Challenges BLM Rule that Destabilizes Ranching

Press release provided by the American Farm Bureau Federation

A lawsuit filed today by the American Farm Bureau Federation and 11 other groups challenges the lawfulness of the Bureau of Land Management’s Public Lands Rule, which threatens the future of ranching in the U.S. by destabilizing a decades-old tradition of grazing on federal lands.

Gary Heibertshausen, a sheep rancher in Montana and Farm Bureau member, says access to public lands for livestock grazing is crucial to the success of his ranch. “If Willow Creek Partners could not graze its livestock on federal land, we would be forced to sell our sheep and cease operating as a ranch.”

Heibertshausen and his partners hold six grazing permits covering several thousand acres of federal lands. He is supporting the case, saying the BLM rule creates substantial risk and uncertainty for ranchers, adding, “Under the rule, we can no longer be certain that the public lands on which we currently rely for grazing will remain available for grazing over the coming years.”

BLM issued the final rule in May with a stated goal of increasing the health and resilience of public lands, but a lack of clarity in the rule and changes in policy that are not authorized by law make it unacceptable. The rule also makes it more difficult for ranchers to play an important role in the stewardship of public lands.

AFBF President Zippy Duvall said, “Further restricting grazing on public lands takes us backward not forward because ranchers are delivering a return on the trust placed in them to care for public lands. They are clearing brush that could fuel wildfires, controlling invasive species, and bringing overall health benefits to the land.”

The benefits of grazing range from reducing wildfire risk and slowing the spread of invasive weeds to building robust root systems and spurring forage growth for native species. The misguided Public Lands Rule threatens the important balance our country has achieved on public lands, as well as the future stability of the many ranches that depend on grazing permits.

BLM oversees approximately 245 million acres of property in the West, which amounts to one-tenth of all U.S. land. For nearly a century, farmers and ranchers have worked with the federal government to ensure Western land can be used for both public enjoyment and agricultural use. So, the rule’s changes to the management of public lands have broad implications for agriculture and the future for America’s ranchers.

AFBF is joined by the American Exploration & Mining Association, American Forest Resource Council, American Petroleum Institute, American Sheep Industry Association, National Cattlemen’s Beef Association, National Mining Association, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, Natrona County Farm & Ranch Bureau, Public Lands Council, Western Energy Alliance and Wyoming Farm Bureau Federation in its court challenge of the rule.

Scan the QR code to learn more about ABC’s continued efforts to share the good news of nutrition and wellness with the world.
State Growers Eye Pause To Mexican Avocado Imports

By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

With the supply of Mexican avocados tapering off and prices rising, California growers of the buttery fruit have ramped up harvest, hoping to send the bulk of their crop to the market while it remains strong.

They may see prices jump even higher if the U.S. Department of Agriculture does not immediately resume full inspections of avocados from the Mexican state of Michoacan, the global epicenter of avocado production.

U.S. government officials confirmed late last week that USDA inspectors will “gradually” return to packing plants in Michoacan after two inspectors were attacked and temporarily detained while doing their jobs earlier this month.

The incident halted inspections of Mexican avocados and mangos, though it did not stop fruit exports already in transit. Avocados from the state of Jalisco also are not affected.

Officials said more work is needed to ensure the safety of U.S. inspectors before reaching full operations.

“I think there’s a lot of excitement or interest in seeing what is going to happen,” Santa Barbara County grower Russell Doty said.

Even though the flow of Mexican avocados has slowed this time of year, the world’s leading producer can still ship considerable volumes.

In June 2023, Mexico exported more than 200 million pounds of avocados to the U.S., according to USDA. At its peak last year, Mexican avocado shipments reached nearly 300 million pounds during the month of March. That’s more than California’s entire 2023 crop of 237 million pounds, according to the California Avocado Commission.

California avocado acreage stood at 52,204 in 2022, with Ventura, San Diego, Santa Barbara, Riverside and San Luis Obispo being the state’s largest producers, respectively. Though the Golden State produces nearly 90% of U.S.-grown avocados, it represents less than 10% of what’s on the U.S. market, which is dominated by Mexico. Last year, the U.S. imported a record 2.78 billion pounds of fresh avocados, with 89% coming from Mexico, Peru, the Dominican Republic, Chile and Colombia supplied the rest.

This year, California is expected to produce more than 250 million pounds of avocados, the commission estimated. About 60% of the crop has been harvested, with the remaining fruit still sitting on trees, the commission reported last week. Harvest began in January and is expected to run through September, with peak volumes from April through July.

The commission declined to comment on the potential market impact of the disrupted imports of Michoacan avocados.

Doty said he has already seen an uptick in price, with quotes last week as high as $1.90 to $2.10 a pound, compared to $1.75 to $1.80 before the pause. He said he thinks packinghouses are taking a wait-and-see approach, as “they don’t want to get out over their skis” by offering too high a price before knowing how long the situation will last.

USDA said it is “committed to resuming inspections of avocados and mangos in Michoacan as swiftly as possible,” though federal officials did not provide details on when that will be.

A threat to a USDA plant inspector in 2022 led the U.S. to suspend avocado imports from Michoacan for about a week. An import ban in December 2020 involving avocados from one region in Michoacan lasted for a month after an armed group burned avocado shipments.

For the longer import ban, Doty said he remembers hiring a second harvest crew that year so he could pick twice the amount of fruit to take advantage of the rising market. But with the current situation, he said the speculation is that the disruption will not last as long and that trying to hire another crew may not be beneficial.

He described his crop as small in volume but with big-sized fruit. He attributed the smaller crop to cool weather in the spring of 2023, which did not allow much fruit to set. In contrast, conditions this past spring were more favorable, producing “a very nice set of fruit.” He began picking in April and said he expects to finish by the end of July.

San Diego County grower Enrico Ferro described his crop as “a decent size” and said he considers himself lucky, noting a lot of growers in his region are struggling with lower yields this year due to poor fruit set last year. In addition to not getting enough warm and sunny days in March and April of 2023 to set the fruit, he said trees also did not get pollinated very well due to a lack of wind during bloom.

Like Doty, Ferro started harvesting in April, picking his largest fruit first to allow the rest of the crop to size. He usually finishes his season by July after two picks. But with a lot of smaller fruit this year, he said he plans to stretch his season into August for a third pick to allow more fruit to size.

“We’re having an unusual year where it’s June, and we still have bloom and very foggy mornings,” Ferro said. “That pushes us a little farther into the year.”

Even so, he said he’s “very grateful” for the amount of rain the region received the past two years, as “it really helps to clean all the salts out of the soil.”

“The cost of water being so high, it’s like money falling out of the sky,” Ferro said.

That the market has improved this year is another plus, he said, noting how prices last year dropped to around $1 a pound. When prices finally did move up in July, “a lot of people were already done harvesting,” he said.

San Diego County farmers who don’t have access to groundwater and must buy higher-priced municipal water may need at least $1.50 a pound to break even, Ferro estimated. With the price of water set to increase by another 20%, he said, “there’s worry that that’s going to really make it impossible (for farms) to keep going.”

For Santa Barbara County’s Doty, who does have his own groundwater, $1.30 a pound can still be profitable, he said.

With a “good crop still on the trees,” Ferro said he’s encouraged by the price increase, especially if Michoacan avocados continue to be held up. Improved bloom conditions this year should deliver a large crop for next year, he said.

“After 20 years of being here,” he said, “things are finally looking up.”
Farmers Weigh Options As Burn Ban Nears

At 4 a.m. in Lodi, Alex Noriega, foreman for the agricultural service provider Fowler Brothers, climbed onto an excavator to rip apart discarded grapevines and drop them into a cement-lined steel box called an air curtain burner for smokeless burning.

The disposal method is one of a few options San Joaquin Valley farmers have turned to as the region phases out open agricultural burning. On Jan. 1, farmers in the eight counties in the San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District will be prohibited from nearly all open burning under a state law adopted in 2005.

The law aimed to address the health impacts of poor air quality on largely Latino farm towns in the San Joaquin Valley, where the air quality is among the worst in the nation.

Agricultural burning, which accounts for about 4% of the region’s fine particulate pollution, has long been the least expensive and easiest way to dispose of orchard and vineyard removals. Eliminating it poses challenges.

“It’s real difficult when you can’t burn,” said Michael Naito, who grows vinegrapes, table grapes, almonds, and pistachios in Fresno and Madera counties.

Burning materials from crops such as wheat, rice, and some fruit trees was already banned. But a lack of affordable alternatives for disposing of vines and most tree crops postponed a total ban until the California Air Resources Board in 2021 directed the valley air district to end all agricultural burning by 2025.

Since then, the district has imposed restrictions to phase out the practice. Grant programs to fund alternative methods, coupled with the phasingout, caused the amount of agricultural material burned in the valley to fall by more than 80% from 2019 to 2023, according to air district data.

“We’re seeing similar trends so far this year, too,” said Robert Gilles, program manager for the district.

The largest growers were the first to have burning restricted. This year, growers with more than 100 to 250 acres, depending on specific farming practices, are prohibited from burning. Next year, open burning will be prohibited even for small growers.

Farms of any size will still be able to seek permits to burn attrition piles and diseased trees and vines.

As more farmers come under the ban, they are searching for alternatives to burning and raising questions about the viability of adopting new methods.

The primary alternative is to grind trees or vines into mulch using a woodchipper. But doing that requires heavy equipment, depends on the availability of agricultural service providers, and costs much more than burning. “It’s not cheap,” Naito said.

Adding to the challenge is increased demand to clear removals from farmland. The timing of the burn ban has coincided with limitations on groundwater pumping in the San Joaquin Valley and poor commodity prices that have driven farmers to tear out more nut trees.

Meanwhile, a historic downturn in the wine market has prompted winegrape growers to remove some 30,000 acres of vineyards this year, about 5% of the state’s bearing acreage.

Vineyard disposal, which accounts for most of the agricultural burning in the valley, is especially difficult because of metal stakes and wires embedded in grapevines.

“It’s just a lot more hand labor,” Naito said.

This year, he removed 70 acres of Zinfandel and Thompson Seedless grapevines. “We rolled up the drip hose, cut the wire, and took out all the stakes and wires and trellises,” Naito said. “Then they came in and stacked it and shredded it all up.”

Air curtain burners, commonly used by government agencies to reduce wildfire fuels and clean up debris after natural disasters, have emerged as another tool for vineyard disposal. The shipping container-size burn boxes have fans that force smoke particles downward, where they burn again, and the particles break up. According to government agencies, the method reduces harmful emissions by 80% to 90%.

“This is how everything is going to need to be burned in the San Joaquin Valley starting Jan. 1,” said Randy Baranek, project manager for Fowler Brothers, one of few agricultural service providers that has purchased an air curtain burner.

The burn box costs $300,000, weighs 60,000 pounds, and requires a crane and a flatbed truck to transport. During the past several months, Baranek has supervised vineyard disposals from Lodi to Bakersfield. “These burners have been working five to six days a week consistently all year,” he said.

The company recently acquired a third air curtain burner to keep up with demand. But the expense of the equipment and its transport can make it cost-prohibitive for operators to serve farmers with small land parcels.

“I have a set cost to move this thing in, whether it’s a 100-acre field or a 10-acre field,” Baranek said. That base cost is about $3,000. “For a 10-acre grower, that’s $300 an acre. For a 100-acre grower, that’s $30 an acre. So, what do you do?”

In 2018, the air district launched a funding initiative called the Alternative to Open Ag Burning Incentive Program, offering farmers grants of $300 to $1,300 per acre, depending on the type of farming and the removal method, to offset removal costs. Farms smaller than 100 acres receive an additional $400 per acre.

Jeff Bitter, who grows vinegrapes in Fresno County and is president of Allied Grape Growers, called the program a “lifesaver.” But future funding is uncertain. An initial $178 million provided by the state budget in 2021 has been exhausted, air district officials said.

The air district’s governing board recently approved $43 million to keep the program afloat for the fiscal year that began July 1, using funds from the district’s operating budget. Aaron Tarango, grant program manager for the district, said it is “doing what it can” to continue the grant program. But he said the district “can’t guarantee money” past June 2025 without board approval.

Earlier this year, the program reduced the maximum acreage for which a grower can get grants—from 500 to 250 per year.

Farmers may also apply for grants from the U.S. Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service to grind their trees or vines into mulch. That initiative offers similar rates per acre but is overall a smaller pool of funds than the air district incentive program, and it is limited to mulching methods.

With no guarantee of long-term funding, there is a risk, growers said, that farmers with out-of-favor crops such as vinegrapes or walnuts will be able to afford neither the cost of farming nor the cost of removals.

“I would predict that if the funding isn’t there that there would be more vineyards and orchards that people will just walk away from and leave them abandoned,” Naito said. “It’s just a breeding ground for different pests to overwinter. That becomes a big problem.”

Bitter has already begun seeing abandoned vineyards. He said, “I think we’re going to see more.”

By Caleb Hampton, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

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VALLEY AG VOICE August 2024
COMMENTARY: Logging Can Protect Forests, Increase Water Supplies

By Edward Ring, Senior Fellow, California Policy Center

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Practical solutions to California’s energy and water shortages will always have a better chance of being implemented if they adhere to the limitations placed upon them by those concerned about climate change. A solution that should work for everyone is forest thinning. It will save our forests, with the added benefit of increasing our water supply.

Wildfires have become catastrophic because the California Legislature funds fire suppression at the same time as it has regulated timber harvesting nearly out of existence. We are very good at squelching wildfires before they get started. But if ignited, our overgrown forests can now fuel infernos that were once unfathomable.

California’s forests today have tree densities that are many times what is historically normal, and conditions are more dangerous because we’ve reduced our annual timber harvest from 6 billion board feet per year in the 1990s to around 1.5 billion board feet today.

In past millennia, fires caused by lightning strikes routinely burned off undergrowth and a high percentage of small trees, leaving the larger trees to survive. Today, trees and undergrowth are so crowded that everything is stressed. Light, soil nutrients and water are shared by anywhere between two and six times as many trees and plants as these ecosystems naturally evolved to support. Observations of excessive tree density are corroborated by numerous studies, testimony and journalistic investigations.

This is why fires have gotten so bad. Anyone concerned about climate resiliency who cares about the health of our forests should be demanding forest thinning.

Examples of success with forest thinning are readily available. When the Creek Fire tore through the forests of Fresno, Madera, and Mariposa counties in 2020, 20,000 acres around Shaver Lake were spared. The fire engulfed an estimated 380,000 acres but inflicted almost no damage in these 20,000 acres of managed forests.

For decades, Southern California Edison protected the watershed feeding into the 135,000 acre-foot Shaver Lake reservoir by forest thinning via selective logging and controlled burns. Significantly, the wildlife counts in these managed forests were consistently higher than average.

That forests subject to responsible logging actually report more robust populations of wildlife, including the endangered spotted owl, is rarely acknowledged. But comparisons between commercially managed forests in California’s Northern Sierra and adjacent national forests that are off limits to logging confirm this assertion. Even clear cuts, when implemented on a multi-decade rotation and with each cut limited in area, are beneficial to wildlife. They temporarily create meadows that create forage for deer, in turn creating food for mountain lions. These open areas also help owls and other raptors spot prey. When the slash is furrowed along level contours, runoff is contained and percolates.

Logging has come a long way. It’s time to bring it back to save the forests. But what about water? It turns out that forest thinning also reduces the amount of water that is immediately taken up by the roots of overcrowded trees and undergrowth and transpired into the atmosphere. Instead, more of this water can run off into tributaries or percolate to recharge springs. How much water?

A 2011 study by experts from the University of California, Merced, and UC Berkeley provides enough data to begin to answer that question. It reports that 60% of the state’s consumptive water comes in the form of Sierra runoff, and when forest cover is reduced by 40%, total runoff increases by an estimated 9%. California’s consumptive use of water, including urban and agricultural use but not including diversions for ecosystem health, is around 40 million acre-feet per year. That means if California’s forests were thinned appropriately, 2.2 million acre-feet of water would be added to California’s water supply in an average year.

This is not a trivial increase, particularly because it could be realized at no expense to taxpayers. In fact, reviving California’s timber industry would create thousands of jobs and industry profits, which would increase state tax revenues.

Another benefit would be the obvious upside of having an additional 2 million acre-feet of water to deliver to California farmers. That’s enough to irrigate at least a half-million acres, with all the jobs, food and tax revenues this productive farmland would contribute to California.

Restoring California’s forests to a healthy density is a win for everyone. It will restore wildlife habitat at the same time as it revitalizes California’s logging industry. It will sequester carbon in lumber products, generate fuel for biomass energy, and prevent super fires. By transforming California’s forested watersheds, it will increase California’s water supply, boost hydroelectric power generation and, most importantly, help maintain California’s status as America’s food basket.

What are we waiting for? If you harvest more timber, you can harvest more water.
Farmers Work to Save Heat-Stressed Crops and Livestock

By Ching Lee, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

Crops and livestock across the state continue to take a beating as California farmers work to reduce impacts of a lingering heat wave that has increased their costs and jeopardized production.

With prolonged triple-digit temperatures pummeling the state’s key agricultural regions—topping 110 degrees in some areas—farmers are irrigating fields more frequently, deploying misters and fans to cool livestock, and shortening daytime work for agricultural employees or working after sundown.

Merced County dairy farmer Bob Borba said milk production could drop 15% to 20% when there are consecutive days of high heat as cows eat less. Hot weather also reduces cow fertility and breeding, throwing off the dairy’s calving schedule. Cows may calve in sweltering conditions will be more at risk of lameness and mastitis.

Branco Lopes said.

“Dairy cows have a hard time with heat,” Borba said.

Even so, dairy farms have come a long way in the past 20 years in how they protect their animals from extreme weather and keep them more comfortable during heat waves.

The barns themselves have changed, with open corrals under roofs to provide shade from the sun. They’re also equipped with fans and misters that spray cows regularly with water to cool them off.

What’s more, dairy nutritionists typically change the herd’s diet to a ration with more calories and fiber to compensate for the animals’ reduced feed intake during sustained high-heat events, said Rubia Branco Lopes, University of California Cooperative Extension dairy advisor for Tulare and Kern counties.

Keeping the cow’s diet high in fiber is important, she said, as it reduces the risk of ruminal acidosis, or grain overload, which could lead to increased risk of lameness and mastitis.

Heat stress also affects the cow’s immune system because the animal is doing all she can to reduce her body temperature, increasing stress. This will decrease her fertility, she said.

While keeping shade and water on the animals remains important, Branco Lopes said shading water troughs and feed bunks will encourage them to drink and eat. Dairy farmers should also check the nozzles on sprinklers or misters to ensure they’re working properly, she said.

“It’s little things, but in the end, they’re important,” Branco Lopes said.

Borba said even though improved health and farm conditions have allowed dairy cows to better handle extreme heat, there will still be some mortality. His concern, he said, is with the state’s limited rendering capacity to keep up with livestock carcasses.

Persistent, scorching temperatures can put crops such as table grapes at risk. At Mirabella Farms in Fresno County, grower Philippe Markarian said he was working to prevent damage to the fruit. But he said he anticipates some crop loss.

“The vines will be under a significant amount of stress,” he said.

Last week, most of the varieties Markarian grows were going into veraison, when the grapes begin changing color and ripening. With high-enough heat, the berries will cook on the vine, especially if they’re in direct sunlight, making the fruit unsalable.

Markarian said he was increasing irrigation to help the vines weather the heat. He was also experimenting for the first time with applying a polymer coating designed to prevent vine stress by mitigating transpiration, helping the plants regulate their internal temperatures.

He typically begins picking Flame Seedless—the first variety to come off each year—around July 10-14, but heat stress on the plant will delay harvest, he said.

Other permanent crops such as walnuts may also sustain damage from the heat. With triple-digit temperatures continuing, Stanislaus County grower Jake Wenger said there is always concern the nuts may turn black as the heat cooks the kernels inside the shells.

To prevent sun and heat damage, he said he applies a white clay film on the foliage and nuts, particularly trees on the edge of orchards and at the tops of canopies that receive the most direct sun. Even with these measures, he said he expects some sunburn damage.

In a crop progress report this month for Blue Diamond Growers, Mel Machado, vice president of member relations for the cooperative, said almond growers are increasing the frequency and volume of irrigation.

**HEAT-STRESSED** on PAGE 15
USDA Invests $4.5 Million to Build Nutrition Hub Network

Press release provided by the U.S. Dept. of Agriculture

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) today announced the availability of $4.5 million in funding to establish three additional USDA Nutrition Hubs in communities across the country. The new Nutrition Hubs will provide tailored and scalable approaches to equitably advance food and nutrition security and help prevent diet-related chronic diseases, especially in historically underserved communities.

The additional Hubs will create a network that builds on the work of the pilot Nutrition Hub established last year in partnership with Southern University and A&M College under USDA’s Agricultural Science Center of Excellence for Nutrition and Diet for Better Health (ASCEND for Better Health) initiative.

The funding announcement was made during a virtual event highlighting USDA’s effort to prevent diet-related diseases, including cancers, through precision nutrition research and community engagement as part of the White House Cancer Moonshot Community Conversations week of action.

With funding provided by the National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s (NIFA) Agriculture and Food Research Initiative (AFRI)—the nation’s leading competitive grants program for agricultural sciences—the Hubs will focus on providing science-based information tailored to priority communities of interest including Tribal, Hispanic and Insular Areas.

The Nutrition Hubs will complement and increase the impact of USDA’s collective contributions to Extension, education, and research communities, and underserved communities at large to better understand real-world opportunities and challenges around nutrition and diet-related health disparities and to develop coordinated science-based solutions and resources that benefit those communities.

“Equitable access to healthy, safe, and affordable foods that promote optimal health and well-being can have a significant impact in reducing rates of diet-related chronic diseases, including many cancers,” said Dr. Chavonda Jacobs-Young, USDA Chief Scientist and Under Secretary for Research, Education and Economics. “When people have tailored tools, resources, and knowledge, they are empowered to take a more active role in managing their nutrition and health.”

Each Nutrition Hub will address program area priorities through the lens of precision nutrition, which is defined as nutrition tailored to different population subgroups based on integrating data for that subgroup. Findings from precision nutrition research will result in targeted development of nutritional recommendations and messaging for individual subpopulations, rather than a “one-size-fits-all” approach to dietary guidance.

“These Nutrition Hubs present an exciting new opportunity through our AFRI program portfolio to strengthen Extension, research and education efforts of our nation’s Land-grant Universities,” said USDA NIFA Director Dr. Manjit K. Misra. “The goal of this program area priority is to stimulate and catalyze cross-cutting and interdisciplinary work among scientists and stakeholders that will reduce the incidence of diet-related diseases while building current and future workforce capacity.”

Over the long-term, each Nutrition Hub will work with priority populations to develop and share science-based nutrition information and foster research and training opportunities in human nutrition research to advance food and nutrition security, particularly in underserved and underrepresented communities.

Applications for this new competitive award program are being accepted through October 3, 2024. The complete Request for Applications, including eligibility information, is available online.

Heat-Stressed

Continued from PAGE 14

Donny Rollin, who grows almonds and pistachios, said he’s doing his best to keep his trees well hydrated. Because he irrigates in sets, he said, the challenge is timing his watering rotation around orchards so that all his trees are adequately irrigated.

For Dave Vierra, who grows fresh-market fruits and vegetables in Yolo County, the growing season is still early enough that the heat won’t be too detrimental to his crops. He said he expects “minimal loss” on his tomatoes, which might get a bit sunburned. His sweet corn will fare OK, he said, as will his tomatoes, which are still on the green side, with the plant’s huge canopy to protect the fruit from sunburn.

With high heat, there is concern of increased pest pressure, especially mites, worms and moths, all of which he’s monitoring for in his corn crop, he said. Perhaps his biggest heat-related impact so far is on sales, especially at farmers markets, which have seen attendance drop. To maintain his presence, he said he continues to participate in all his usual markets. His on-farm fruit stand also remains open, he said, though sales have not been as severely impacted as at farmers markets. He credited the installation of shade and misters at his fruit stand for keeping customers and employees comfortable.

One bright spot has been watermelon sales, which he said benefited from the heat. Sweet corn and watermelon are typically big sellers during the summer, but he said sales of sweet corn have been sluggish due to higher prices at the retail level.

“Very interesting landscape at the moment, to say the least,” Vierra said.

With harvest crews working fewer hours due to the heat, he said there’s more spoilage in the field. Sweet corn is picked at night, with crews typically done by 9 a.m., he said. Trying to keep crops cool through the heat will add to his costs, Vierra said, noting the increased energy used for cold storage and other cooling equipment. Because they are running full throttle, he said, they tend to need repair.

“We rarely get out of a heat wave like this without some sort of equipment failure,” he said. Excessive heat can also cause yield losses for field crops such as rice, especially during flowering, as the heat can hurt the pollen. But Luis Espino, UCCE rice farm advisor for Butte and Glenn counties, said the rice plant has not yet reached that vulnerable stage. In the past, panicle blanking, or empty kernels on the rice panicle, was more common due to nighttime temperatures dropping below 55 degrees for consecutive days in mid-July, causing the flowers to not fertilize. But in recent years, high daytime heat tended to be the more likely culprit for blanking. “It just desiccates the pollen,” Espino said. “The flowers open, and that pollen just cooks.”
Yolo County Farm Cultivates Seeds, Ecological Restoration

By Caleb Hampton, Assistant Editor, Ag Alert

Reprinted with permission from the California Farm Bureau Federation

In Yolo County, nestled among sprawling orchards and field crops, is a one-of-a-kind farm.

“Every species we grow has a place it was originally collected from. We generally try to return the species back to that area,” said Julia Michaels, restoration ecologist at Hedgerow Farms.

“I was working in Sutter County’s apple, peach, and prune orchards in 2010, harvesting fruit and doing other traditional farm work, when my friend, Alejandro García, invited him to work at Hedgerow Farms. Since then, Sánchez and García have crisscrossed California, going as far north as Humboldt and as far south as Bakersfield, trekking through hills and creek beds to collect samples of native grasses and wildflowers to plant at Hedgerow Farms. “They’re some of the best botanists in the state,” Michaels said.

Fish and Wildlife is in the process of replacing 100 acres of thistles with native plants such as purple needlegrass and wild rye. “It was important for us to grow natives that were genetically similar to what should be in the wild,” she said. “And that’s what Hedgerow offers. They collect the seeds themselves in the different lands and watersheds.”

“So much of the success of restoration depends on what species you plant and that depends on what is being made available through native seed farms,” said Michaels, who earned a Ph.D. in ecology from the University of California, Davis.

While the farm prioritizes partnerships with land managers for large-scale restoration projects, it also sells seeds for 150 plant species on a retail website for farmers who want to plant native species in their home gardens. And it provides farmers with plants that make good habitat for bees and other pollinators.

Hedgerow Farms, which takes its name from the rows of trees and shrubs that run along the edges of its fields, is itself an example of land restoration. Those rows, inspired by hedgerows Anderson observed decades ago in Kenya, create a corridor that stretches from the nearby Berryessa hills to the farm, transforming irrigation ditches into verdant creek beds where foxes, deer, and rabbits scamper.

Hedgerow Farms grows native wildflowers and grasses. Fields are planted with seeds collected from wildlands to replenish California’s natural spaces.

Each spring and summer, Hedgerow Farms turns into a patchwork of yellows, greens and violets as its fields of native wildflowers come into bloom. For more than three decades, the farm has cultivated native plants for seed production, supplying land managers working to restore wildlife preserves and other nature areas.

“We basically create our own superbloom,” said Julia Michaels, restoration ecologist at Hedgerow Farms. “We go out into the wild and, with permission, find big blooms of native wildflowers and collect a small amount of the seed.” Hedgerow Farms uses the wild seed to plant a field of the native species at its 300-acre farm near Winters, “turning a handful of wild-collected seed into thousands of pounds of seed.”

Hedgerow Farms produces around 400 species of native grasses and wildflowers, which it sells to government agencies, and other land managers for use in ecological restoration projects, often after wildfires, floods or other disasters. “What we’re doing is amplifying the amount of seed that eventually goes back into the wild,” Michaels said.

The farm harvests plants for seed from April through October, using machines similar to wheat or rice harvesters. The plants are then dried on tarps and put through combines to separate the seeds from the plant material. The seeds are cleaned and shipped to a warehouse in San Joaquin County.

Native plants grown at the farm include blue-eyed grass, poppies, lupine, sage, and many others. Over the years, the farm has built an inventory of millions of pounds of native seeds. Hedgerow also has a farm in Santa Barbara County, where it grows plants better suited to coastal climates and soil types.

On 300 acres in Yolo County near Winters, Hedgerow Farms grows native wildflowers and grasses. Fields are planted with seeds collected from wildlands to replenish California’s natural spaces. (Photo: Fred Greaves)

Because the farm is so unique in what it grows, “there’s lots of trial and error and learning from mistakes and experiences,” said farm manager Jeff Quiter. “There’s not a lot of research on stuff that we grow.”

A handful of farms have adopted Hedgerow’s model. But for years, according to land managers, Hedgerow Farms was on its own in producing native plant seed in California, and it continues to lead the way.

“They were out there alone forging the way for restoration,” said Stacy Martinelli, environmental scientist for the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

The department, which must go through a bidding process before making purchases, had to write special contracts with Hedgerow Farms because “they were the only company that provided what we wanted,” Martinelli said.

One of the keys to the farm’s success, Michaels said, is the knowledge and experience of its collections experts. Originally from Chiapas, Mexico, Manolo Sánchez was working in Sutter County’s apple, peach, and prune orchards in 2010, harvesting fruit and doing other traditional farm work, when his friend, Alejandro García, invited him to work at Hedgerow Farms.

Hedgerow Farms, which takes its name from the rows of trees and shrubs that run along the edges of its fields, is itself an example of land restoration. Those rows, inspired by hedgerows Anderson observed decades ago in Kenya, create a corridor that stretches from the nearby Berryessa hills to the farm, transforming irrigation ditches into verdant creek beds where foxes, deer, and rabbits scamper. The hedgerows also harbor beneficial predators that provide pest control for the farm.

“They’re basically highways of habitat for birds and mammals and insects,” Michaels said.

Today, when collections experts Sánchez and García hit the road to gather seeds from across the state, they witness the farm’s legacy in the landscape. “It gives me a lot of pride,” Sánchez said, “that I can drive by some sites where we’ve planted and see how the flowers are doing.”
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Climate-Smart Practices Help Dairies, Nourish Crops

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Prompted by drought-induced water allocation cutbacks in 2014, the diversified DeJager Farms began looking at buried drip irrigation and manure water from its dairy operations to try to help its farming operations survive.

Since then, the Chowchilla-based producer of milk, beef, row crops, and specialty crops has embraced the system. It has installed seven irrigation systems that treat and filter manure water from nearby dairy operations to support crop production. Two more systems are in the works for DeJager Farms, which produces forage feed for dairy cattle and crops such as processing tomatoes, wheat, and almonds.

“The benefits we’ve found have just been enormous,” DeJager Farms Chief Financial Officer Richie Mayo said during a recent farm tour.

DeJager Farms was one of threeoperations in 2014 participating in pilot programs led by Sustainable Conservation, a nonprofit that promotes collaborative stewardship of natural resources, and Netafim USA. The nonprofit wanted to ensure that application of dairy effluent, as the nutrient-rich liquid is often called, is a measure of salts and loosely correlates to nitrogen content. This can vary widely throughout the season.

Over the years, DeJager Farms worked with Domonic Rossini and his team at Netafim USA to design and build the systems. All the components, including sand media filters, are standard to the Netafim product lineup except for the mixing valves.

Based on trial and error, Rossini said they’ve found what appears to be the sweet spot of drip tape with 14-inch emitter spacing and 0.16 gallon-per-hour output, installed in 40-inch rows and buried about 12 inches deep. DeJager Farms also has adopted 100% conservation tillage on its crops, except for processing tomatoes, allowing the drip tape to remain untouched below the soil surface for the roughly 12-year lifespan.

Manure from dairy farms first goes through a solids separator, where the larger material is removed. The resulting liquid then goes through preliminary treatment to further remove solids before it goes into a holding lagoon.

Water conservation efforts are supported by U.S. Department of Agriculture grants awarded to dairy producers. DeJager Farms said the system benefits dairy and farming operations by reducing greenhouse emissions and cutting water use. (Photo: Vicky Boyd)

PRODUCERS don’t necessarily need a solids separator, but Mayo said the goal is to remove as much particulate matter as possible to reduce potential system clogging. “The whole principle is to get the water as clean as we can and still hold the nutrients,” Mayo said.

DeJager pairs a manure-water lagoon with a fresh-water lagoon to allow blending or the option of using fresh water alone. An EC meter measures the manure water’s real-time EC, or electrical conductivity, which is a measure of salts and loosely correlates to nitrogen content. This can vary widely throughout the season depending on temperature, weather and the cows’ diet.

Based on the readings, a computerized controller blends the fresh and manure water to obtain the proper nitrogen concentration. Mayo can monitor the activities remotely from his smartphone as well as turn the system on and off. In addition, the system sends him alerts should something go wrong.

He bases his water and nitrogen applications on crop coefficients. Developed by the University of California, they factor in the crop, weather, planting date, growth stage and irrigation method to predict the plant’s optimum water and nitrogen needs at specific points in the season.

Mayo’s standard rotation is seven to eight years of alfalfa. After the stand is removed, he may move into processing tomatoes, silage corn and wheat for the remaining four to five years of the drip tape’s life.

For corn, he begins the season using fresh water to fill the soil profile before planting. As the plants begin to grow, he starts with a 15% manure-water concentration and slowly increases it to 40% when the corn is tasseling and has the highest nitrogen demand.

Because he is using SDI and making applications only when the plant needs it, Mayo said the farm has increased its water-use efficiency by 30% and its nitrogen-use efficiency by 43% compared to flood irrigation.

The buried drip systems allowed the farm to get through the 2021-22 drought without fallowing fields, even with 18% lower pump capacity than it had in 2020—21. Because he is using SDI and making applications only when the plant needs it, Mayo said the farm has increased its water-use efficiency by 30% and its nitrogen-use efficiency by 43% compared to flood irrigation.

Thomas J. Willis, D.V.M.

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AUGUST 2024
The Protestant Problem

By Joshua Stevens
Faith Contributor, Valley Ag Voice

Over several years, Trent Horn and others have listed several problems they believe should give pause to anyone who professes Protestantism. He focuses on two main issues: first, an issue with sola scriptura, and second, what he calls the Protestant creed problem. This article will detail Horn’s arguments, while subsequent articles will go through the issues one at a time to provide a defense for Protestantism.

In Horn’s 2022 article and video, Horn begins his argument with a foundational question: in Protestantism, how do you know what the bare essentials are for Christianity and what belief or beliefs would cause someone to be outside the Christian faith? He correctly defines sola scriptura as being the only infallible source of authority for a Protestant. He then makes the following claim: “If scripture is the highest or ultimate authority for Christians or the only infallible authority, Protestantism has long concluded, has long affirmed, I should say, that there is no authority that has the unique responsibility to interpret scripture.” He contrasts this position with the Catholic view that the magisterium has been placed in charge of the teaching of scripture. Horn’s first question to Protestants is, “Do Protestants agree on the ‘main things’?” and his second would follow, “Does the Bible explicitly reveal the ‘main things’?”

Horn contends that Protestants disagree on major issues, and these disagreements show that Protestants can’t agree on the essentials of Christianity; the problems he brings up are: Can Christians lose their salvation? Does baptism save infants? Can Christians deny sola scriptura or sola fide? Can Protestants truly hold to church tradition for teaching? Are Catholics Christian? Horn posits these questions should be answered within scripture and uniformly amongst Protestants.

More recently, in response to the Southern Baptist Convention’s inability to adopt the Nicene creed, Horn posted an article about the problem Protestants have with creeds. He touched on this in his 2022 article, though this one focuses on the issues specifically with creeds in Protestantism. Horn goes on to show Protestants using the creeds and early councils as guardrails to keep us within the bounds of orthodoxy while we read and interpret scripture. He says this position is incoherent as it ends up two ways: either you start in sola scriptura or “So it fails in one of two ways. First, if this whole paradigm treats scripture, the creeds, and the early church as being equal in authority, then it’s not sola scriptura. Because if sola scriptura is true, these sources cannot be equal in authority because sola scriptura says that scripture is the only infallible authority.”

He goes on to prove this, saying that if you can’t hold to Ariasianism because Nicare condemns Arianism, then ecumenical councils hold equal authority to scripture. As a result, sola scriptura is undermined and voided. He continues to say that if ecumenical councils are to be treated as guardrails, then they must have “binding authority” so that no one individual’s interpretation can go outside the guardrails.

Horn also says it would be impossible for these creeds to have authority if modern Christians reinterpret these councils and decrees, citing an issue with baptismal regeneration in the Nicene Creed going back to his intro regarding the Southern Baptist Convention not adopting the Nicene Creed. Ending his article by saying, “So the only way one can say as a Baptist that their faith rhymes with old time religion is if you radically reinterpret what the ancient church believed so that you can disregard what they actually believed.”

Protestants must be able to wrestle and contend with these issues Horn has brought up. If he is right, Protestants have to rethink much of their dogma or perhaps even abandon their tradition. However, this article is not written so that Protestants may lose faith or be disheartened. Over the next few months, these articles will go through and address these points so Protestants can have confidence in the faith we hold.

WILL YOU PRAY WITH ME?
Thank you, Lord, for granting us all the opportunity to think, reason, and speak—that we may discuss with each other the most important of things and, by doing so, draw closer to you and the truth that has been revealed. Over these many months, guide us as we read and write to defend the faith you have given us, grant us humility that we may admit when we are wrong, and the love to embrace the truth you reveal for us all. In Jesus’ holy name, we pray. Amen.

Bibliography

SAVE-THE-DATE
FOR THESE AGRICULTURE EVENTS

Mark your calendars for a few fun summer events this month that you won’t want to miss! From networking opportunities at a brewery to live music at a summer soiree, these events promise valuable insights, fun activities, and community engagement.

KERN COUNTY FARM BUREAU
Save Water, Drink Beer” are words to live by, especially if you want to learn more about the Kern County Farm Bureau. On August 16 at 5 p.m., this event offers opportunities to explore membership levels, network, and cool off with a pint at Crusader Brewing Company.

The KCFB Young Farmers and Ranchers are also actively engaged in networking events and fun activities, including a tour of the Pandol Cold Storage facility in Delano on August 10 at 10 a.m. To learn more, reach out to KernYFR@KernCFB.com.

SUMMER SOIREE
On August 25, the Community Alliance with Family Farmers is hosting its 2024 Summer Soiree at Full Belly Farm in Guinda, California. This farm-to-table benefit for regenerative agriculture, local food, and family farmers will feature dinner, live music, and more!
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