

UFW bill could be a backstop to SCOTUS decision in union case

California legislators will hold a key hearing Wednesday before the Assembly appropriations committee on a bill sponsored by United Farm Workers that would make it easier for the union to recruit employees. The measure comes as the U.S. Supreme Court considers the legality of California's landmark farmworker law allowing union access to agricultural property.

Agricultural and business groups are heavily opposed to Assembly Bill 616. Proponents argue the bill simply adds a new type of election for farmworker organizations by creating a vote-by-mail option.

“What we're trying to do is ensure that all the farmworkers have a ready ability to be able to cast that ballot,” said AB 616 author Assemblymember Mark Stone, a Democrat who represents parts of the Central Coast, at an April 22 hearing of the Assembly Labor and Employment Committee, which approved the bill on a 5-2 vote.

“We've learned over the last number of years the effectiveness of mail-in ballots and how that system works, and how it is protective of the right to vote and ensures a fair and equitable outcome,” Stone said.

Farm groups like the Western Growers Association (WGA) countered that the bill would erode guarantees of free choice and secrecy adopted in the California Agricultural Labor Relations Act (ALRA) of 1975. WGA Vice President of State Government Affairs Matthew Allen argued the existing secret ballot elections are already held at convenient



Asm. Mark Stone, D-Scotts Valley

times and places for employees and under the direct supervision of the state's Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB). Opponents worried AB 616 would replace the secret ballot election with representation cards that require the signatures of just 50% of the employees — a proposal known as card check.

“Distribution and collection of the signed authorization cards is not subject to any meaningful supervision or scrutiny from any agency,” said Allen.

He also took issue with a bonding requirement in the bill, arguing it represents “a direct threat to an employer's due process rights” because it does not allow the employer to appeal unless a bond is posted in an amount to be determined by the ALRB.

“The ALRB is not a neutral party in this context and is an inherently prejudicial interest in the outcome of the appeal,” said Allen.

The California Chamber of Commerce added AB 616 to its annual list of “job killers.” CalChamber Policy Advocate Ashley Hoffman argued the ALRB and its national counterpart already have special rules to eliminate last-minute electioneering.

“We're afraid this bill would essentially eviscerate those protections,” said Hoffman.

According to [CalChamber](#), the bill includes “an unnecessary presumption of retaliation that is effectively unlimited in scope, because it would apply for the duration of an election campaign, which could last for a year or more.”

Republican Asm. Kelly Seyarto of Riverside County asked what was wrong with the current process.

“They have the ability to get a ballot and fill it out without somebody standing in front of them, watching what's going on or giving them a prefilled ballot,” said Seyarto. “If the union's good enough, they don't have to worry about it. Everybody's going to sign up.”

He said the measure would instead create a coercive environment for workers.

The committee approved AB 616 along party lines. Asm. Lorena Gonzalez of San Diego, a Democrat and former labor leader, called the inequities striking between the current standards for farmworker unions to gain recognition and those for teachers unions, which “simply” turn in a petition listing the employees who would like to join.

“We believe that for public employees — especially teachers and hospital employees — that is sufficient,” said Gonzalez. “Yet somehow this actually more stringent review that would still be happening under the ALRB somehow is not.”

She added that such barriers have prevented workers from feeling safe when forming a union in the agricultural industry. Following a plunge in membership beginning at the turn of the century, United Farm Workers has about 6,000 active members as of December 2019, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

Stone was astonished by opposition “creating this specter” that workers would be handed prefilled ballots.

“We have some additional protections that if someone is assisting the individual casting the ballot, they indicate that on the ballot,” said Stone. “The assumption that that guarantees

there's a thug standing over an individual saying, 'This is how you're signing it, I'm filling your ballot out,' is just a little bit beyond the pale."

Such representation cards were last proposed in a 2011 bill and vetoed by then-Gov. Jerry Brown — in direct contrast to his first term as governor, when he signed the ALRA into law. In his veto message, Brown called the proposal a drastic change from the ALRA and said he was not convinced "that the far-reaching proposals" were justified.



Jackson Gualco, president of The Gualco Group

Jackson Gualco, president of the agricultural lobbying firm The Gualco Group, said UFW has put the initiative back on the agenda to take advantage of Brown's departure and the potential for Gov. Gavin Newsom, under a recall threat, looking to bolster his support among labor groups. Gualco explained that UFW had supported former mayor of Los Angeles Antonio Villaraigosa in the gubernatorial primary, but Newsom quickly moved to mend fences with UFW.

"It's a very active political organization that Democrats — in particular liberal Democrats — want to get their endorsement," said Gualco, during a policy event last month for the California Association of Winegrape Growers (CAWG). "And that's pretty much all that's left [of UFW]."

The U.S. Supreme Court is expected to decide soon on whether to uphold a core element of the ALRA.

Attorneys challenging the law argued that allowing access to agricultural property to organize employees should require payment under the Fifth Amendment, which forbids the taking of private property without just compensation. A ruling in the case is expected to come in July, two months before the Legislature wraps up the session.

Michael Miiller, director of government relations for CAWG, said a decision in favor of the agricultural employers would bolster the arguments of AB 616 proponents. Gualco agreed that would likely enhance the desire of UFW to get the card check system in place.

"Because they don't have to worry about trying to run an election, which historically UFW has done very poorly with," said Gualco. "You can use a variety of techniques, some of them not very savory, in order to get people to sign onto the card."

AB 616 will be heard on Wednesday in Assembly Appropriations, a committee where lawmakers are known to kill bills without debate. Yet Gualco said this bill is likely to make it all the way to the governor.

"With the supermajority in both houses of the Legislature, we're fully expecting it to move through," he said, noting there are 41 co-authors on the bill — a third of the Legislature. "It's a very real threat."

Lawmaker pleads for state to fix canals and avoid a global food crisis

State Senator Melissa Hurtado of Sanger has spent three years refining her arguments for financing critical repairs to water conveyance infrastructure in the San Joaquin Valley. During a committee hearing last week, Hurtado stood ready to refute the longstanding argument that the beneficiaries should cover the entire cost—a critique that played a part in the demise of her previous measure to fix the Friant-Kern Canal.

“I’m here because we are on the verge of a global food crisis that requires immediate action,” said Hurtado. **“My bill, SB 559, the State Water Resiliency Act, will help prevent a global catastrophe.”**



Friant-Kern Canal subsidence

The 2021 version of the bill is more ambitious and takes aim at the state’s record budget windfall by doubling the funding to nearly \$800 million and broadening the scope to address maintenance needs for the Delta-Mendota Canal and the California Aqueduct. Hurtado pointed to a federal effort led by California Senator Dianne Feinstein and Central Valley Rep. Jim Costa, who have introduced new legislation in Congress proposing more than \$600 million in matching funds for the canals. Hurtado also noted that the Friant Water Authority has gathered more than \$175 million from local agencies and nearly \$250 million in existing

federal funding to contribute to repairing the Friant-Kern Canal. The lawmakers plan to split the costs for all repairs evenly among state, federal and local agencies.

“SB 559 creates a framework for the state to take on its rightful role in partnering with local agencies and federal government,” said Hurtado.

The canals have experienced as much as a 60% reduction in flow, due largely to subsidence that resulted from the last drought. It has led to as much as \$30 million a year in additional power and operational costs. Investing in the maintenance, explained Hurtado, would add nearly 13,000 direct jobs and another 25,000 indirectly over 10 years.

“It will also preserve thousands more that could be lost if the lack of water leads to fallowed lands,” she said.

Hurtado also made a case for protecting safe drinking water for Californians.

“We’re talking about Americans, real people, that have been significantly impacted by just a lack of water,” she said. “In 2018 I saw firsthand—in a nondrought year—the damage that it does to real people not having water.”

Ricardo Ortega, general manager of the Grassland Water District, said the repairs would offer environmental benefits as well, leading to additional water deliveries to the wildlife refuges within his district.

“Subsidence along these canals threatens their ability to provide enough water to the habitat and to keep wildlife populations healthy,” explained Ortega.

Invariably, Sen. John Laird of Santa Cruz, who served as Natural Resources secretary during the Brown administration and now chairs the Natural Resources and Water Committee, where the bill was heard, said that California has held to a historic beneficiary pays policy.

“The water project itself was 97% paid for by the water users and 3% by the state taxpayers,” he said. “This is a logical thing for the users to pay.”

Laird reasoned the fact that the canals serve drinking water to 31 million people and irrigation water to three million acres of farmland meant the costs could be spread broadly, making it more affordable. As with previous opponents of Hurtado’s bills, Laird argued state money should not go to a federal project unless all Californians benefit, including the farmers in his district who do not import water.

“In many ways, it favors one agricultural area over another,” he argued. “And if you're a disadvantaged community that is not served by state or federal water, you are even more disadvantaged for paying taxes and not getting anything back.”

Anticipating the beneficiary pays argument, State Water Contractors General Manager Jennifer Pierre said the reduced deliveries have already been costing millions of water users who played no role in the destruction of the canals.

“Identifying all the parties who are responsible for damaging this infrastructure and securing their funding contributions is a complex and lengthy undertaking,” said Pierre. “The repair costs are simply too great for [water users] to bear alone.”



Sen. Melissa Hurtado, D-Sanger

Many Central Valley lawmakers have grown increasingly frustrated over the lack of state funding to address aging infrastructure across the valley.

“We basically inherited a big mess,” said Sen. Ben Hueso of Logan Heights. “We've been sitting here for 10 years discussing this restoration. And what has the state done in response to it until today? Really nothing. And that's a shame.”

Hueso said the beneficiary pays argument assumes those water users did something wrong. He said one of those beneficiaries is the environment, since species are now threatened due to the canals not flowing properly.

“This is really about the whole ecosystem of our entire California estuary, which extends from Los Angeles all the way to Mount Shasta,” he said. “It's hard to find another one in the world.”

Hueso pointed out how the disrepair has led to saltwater intrusion that is now inhibiting food production in coastal areas.

Republican Sen. Shannon Grove of Bakersfield shared her frustration and agreed with Hurtado on the threat to food security.

“The Central Valley has the top three food producing counties in the world—not in the nation, not in the state—in the world,” said Grove. “We very well could be on the verge of a food crisis.”

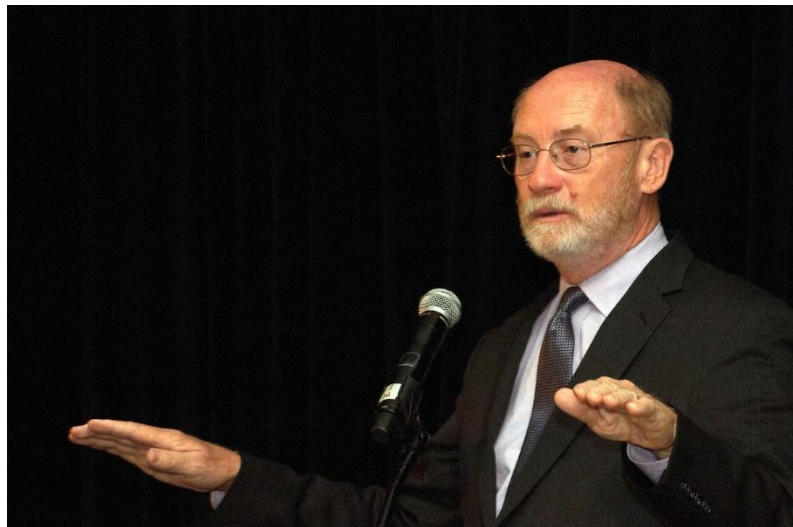
She said the end users have been taking a huge risk in putting together the matching funds for the repairs, arguing they put tax dollars into the Proposition 1 bond for water infrastructure that has not delivered more water to them.

“I was one of the people who worked on the 2014 water bond,” said Sen. Susan Eggman of Stockton. “We had high hopes that that was going to do perhaps more than it did. One of the tenants we made in there was that all areas of the state be treated equally.”

Calling it a bipartisan issue, Grove referenced infrastructure funding efforts by Feinstein, Costa, former President Donald Trump, Republican Rep. Kevin McCarthy of Bakersfield and President Joe Biden.

“It's amazing to me,” said Grove. “With all these powerful people that have the opportunity on both sides of the aisle to be able to fix this situation, we can't ever seem to get it done.”

With the debate closed, Laird ultimately voted in favor of the bill, though three other Democrats abstained. The measure now faces a critical hurdle next week with the first appropriations hearing, where Hurtado’s previous bill stalled twice before being vetoed by Gov. Gavin Newsom.



Sen. John Laird, D-Santa Cruz

Grapes and almonds poised to maintain top sales spots in California

As drought grips many of California’s prime agricultural areas, its two top-grossing crops are positioned well to pull through, much as they did during the last prolonged dry spell in the mid-2010s.

Grapes and almonds, which since 2004 have been the state’s top sellers, both have some natural drought tolerance thanks to their origins in the Mediterranean climate where recurring aridity is expected. But in California, their success is also tied to irrigation.

“We never get enough rain to supply enough water for grapes, for tree nuts,” said Roland Fumasi, executive vice president at RaboResearch Food and Agribusiness. When there’s not enough winter rain or snow to resupply water for irrigation, things get interesting. **On March 23,**



Source: Nasdaq Veles California Water Index

the state announced some areas would receive as little as 5% of their annual water allocation from government managed water projects. By the end of April, 88% of California was in severe, extreme or exceptional drought, including most of the agricultural land, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

Fumasi said that leaves growers with three options: fallow some ground and shift water for those acres to ones that are in production, use more groundwater (if wells are reliable) or buy more surface water on the spot market if they can. But, he cautions, “they’re having to pay a lot more for that surface water.”

Immediately after the state’s allocation announcement, the spot water price jumped from \$530 per acre foot to \$686 and a month later stood at \$869, more than \$150 higher than the peak price in June 2020. For growers with a variety of crops, Fumasi says priority for water use will usually go to the highest value crop, which is likely to be tree nuts or grapes. He said at planting time, a grower may have some flexibility with annual crops, for example to switch to a melon variety that uses somewhat less water but can still be grown and harvested with existing equipment. It’s too soon to say how many changes like that farmers will make this year, but “in some parts of California that’s taking place.”

California Farm Bureau water resources director Danny Merkley echoed the idea that diverse farms with both tree nuts or grapes and annual crops may forgo the latter.

“You are reluctant to do it, but you can not plant those crops,” he said, “so that the water that would normally go there can go to your trees and vines that cannot go without water for a year.”

Almond trees prefer to get plenty of water, but a dry year doesn’t have to mean disaster for the grower.



California almond orchard. (courtesy Almond Board of California)

“The trees themselves can actually survive,” said Gabriele Ludwig, director of sustainability and environmental affairs at the Almond Board of California (ABC), and the quality of the harvest is fine. But the year following the dry year, she said, “the yields become miserable.”

Industry and university researchers have studied how best to manage almond acres during droughts and Ludwig said one of the lessons learned from the 2012-2017 drought was that those recommendations had not reached all the growers who could use them.

“There were opportunities to increase water-use efficiencies with the existing technologies,” she said. So ABC hired a team to increase outreach to growers on details like irrigating for specific soil types and careful monitoring of trees’ water needs throughout the day. In another study, ABC determined how a grower should distribute a limited amount of water. They concluded that whatever percent of your need you receive, you should apply that percent of normal water at all the times you irrigate, rather than shaking up your whole irrigation schedule. Ludwig says next they’re working on precision irrigation solutions. Another looming question is how best to manage almond acres in the season following a dry year. “How do you manage all of your other inputs if you’re not going to get much (yield)?”



California winegrapes.

As a high-value, permanent crop, grapes are also typically a top priority for irrigation.

“What we saw was actually at the height of the drought, yields increased a little bit because people were able to irrigate their crops,” said Kaan Kurtural, a cooperative extension specialist in viticulture at U.C. Davis.

Kurtural advises grape growers to install flow meters so that they can measure, rather than time, irrigation and know exactly how much water is getting to the vines. In current research, he said, “we’re trying to look at

different trellising systems” that could use water more efficiently. Other research goals include identifying germplasm, rootstocks and different cultivars that can “take this heat a little bit better,” he said, to prepare for the future.

“What we’re now seeing is more periodic and extended periods of less rain that we normally got,” he said. “It’s going to be a tough season, no doubt about it.”

“We’ve got some vineyards that are taking out productive vines,” Merkley said, to install small ponds that can collect water “to carry them through these types of things in the future.”

Most indicators suggest grapes and almonds will continue to top California agriculture.

They’ve done well in part because demand for both has remained high. Almond prices peaked in 2014-15 at \$4/pound and fell to \$2.43 in 2019, but sales have stayed robust, especially to export markets. Grape prices (across all types) crept up during the drought to a high of \$899/ton in 2017

and in 2019, at \$846/ton, remained well above pre-drought levels that had never reached \$600/ton.

“For reasons around general economics and, again, water,” Fumasi said, “we expect to see a slowdown and maybe a plateauing of acreage” being converted to almonds over the next 5-10 years. But he added the rate of expansion was already slowing heading into the current dry period. He said table grape acreage has also been declining, though labor costs are a significant factor in that change.

A major difference for California agriculture between the start of the last drought and the current situation is the implementation of the Sustainable Ground Water Management Act.

“Just because the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act passed in 2014, doesn’t mean we can’t pump groundwater,” Fumasi said, noting that agriculture will use more this year. But it does change the dynamic and the political climate.

“We’re currently working on a groundwater management guide for growers just to say, ‘these are your options,’” Ludwig said. But the ABC is also exploring how orchards might play a role in groundwater recharge during flood years, she said, by evaluating where and when conditions in certain almond orchards might be appropriate for flooding.

Merkley, who has worked for the state Water Board and also been critical of it, says that **even though droughts tend to attract a lot of attention, California’s climate is also characterized by recurring floods and he wants to see the state ramp up its ability to hang onto that water and use it for agriculture.**

Longer droughts, he says, are going to be punctuated by heavy rainfall and snowfall years. “We’ve got to take advantage of these ‘in-betweens’ and it’s just hard to do,” he said, in the current regulatory environment. He estimates as many as a million acres could be idled this year because of drought conditions “and this could have been avoided had the state done a better job of preparing after the last drought.”

California almonds and grapes 2000-2019

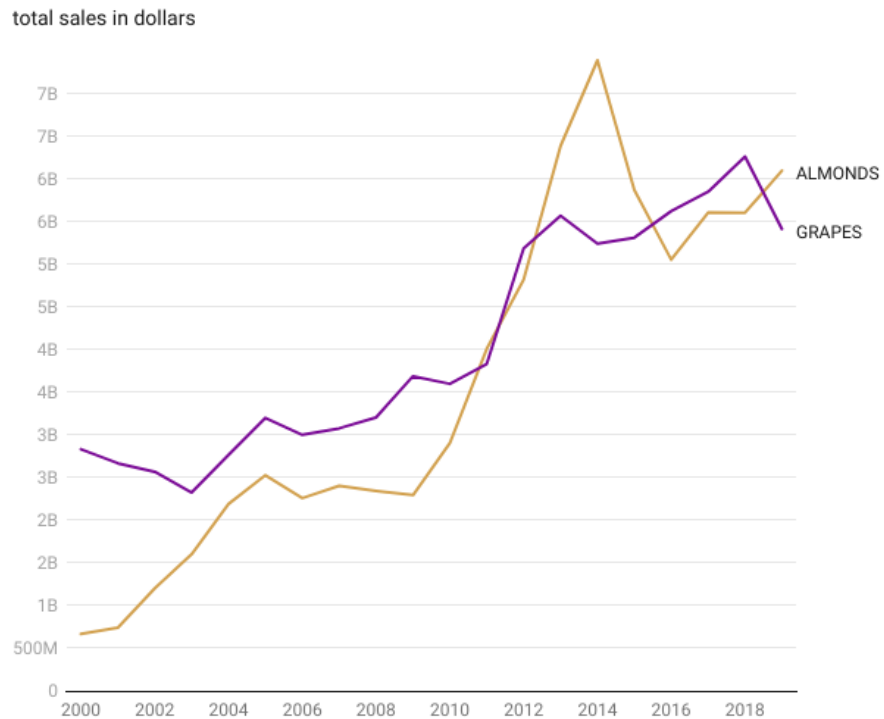


Chart: Amy Mayer • Source: USDA NASS • Created with Datawrapper

Farm groups, enviros to USDA: Prioritize climate, update crop insurance

Farm and environmental groups that often disagree on ag policy are urging the Agriculture Department to prioritize climate change in conservation programs and to consider changes to crop insurance that would promote the use of cover crops and other carbon-conserving practices.

USDA, which is preparing to release a strategy for addressing climate change, was ordered by President Joe Biden to seek comments on how it should use existing policies and programs. The deadline for filing them was last Thursday, and more than 2,700 were submitted.

Among the common themes: ensure that the Conservation Stewardship Program and Environmental Quality Incentives Program give priority to funding practices that address climate change; increase the number of technical advisers available to farmers, and study reforms to crop insurance that don't penalize the use of climate-friendly practices or even lower the cost of premiums. Another priority: rewarding in some fashion those "early adopters" who have been following conservation practices for years and can't qualify for carbon credits on measures they have already taken.



Farm and environmental groups filed comments in response to USDA action launched through an executive order signed by President Joe Biden.

“Just as climate change is a multifaceted problem, it will require multiple tools from USDA, the private sector, and other stakeholders as farmers implement solutions on their land,” the National Farmers Union said in a statement that is echoed through many of the comments.

There also is strong support for addressing the needs of farmers who may be left behind by agricultural carbon markets, including small-scale farms and minority producers.

USDA also needs to consider regional disparities, according to the National Association of State Departments of Agriculture, or NASDA. “USDA must consider the local and regional diversity of crops and agricultural practices when determining which tools to make available to farmers and ranchers,” the group said.

There is less unity on whether or how much to increase conservation program spending or what USDA should do to support carbon markets.

The Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance, which represents more than 70 national and state farm organizations, and many nonmember groups support the consideration of a carbon bank at USDA.

FACA issued some broad recommendations on Monday for pilot projects to test ways a carbon bank could be used to get farmers to adopt conservation practices. Beyond that, there doesn't seem to be a lot of industry agreement on the issue yet.

The Environmental Defense Fund suggests the bank could be used to guarantee prices for carbon credits, but the National Pork Producers Council (NPPC) says the bank shouldn't buy and sell credits itself. Both EDF and NPPC are FACA members.

The National Association of Conservation Districts suggests USDA provide low-interest "climate-smart bank loans" to beginning and historically underserved farmers. The loans would be tied to the adoption of conservation practices.

The National Association of State Conservation Agencies says USDA has a role to play in structuring carbon markets but "the idea of carbon banking should remain in the private sector. ... A carbon credit purchase exercise that is funded annually with taxpayer dollars is not a bank."

The carbon bank concept faces continued resistance from many congressional Republicans. The ranking member of the Senate Agriculture Committee, John Boozman, R-Ark., issued a statement Tuesday saying that USDA "does not have the authority to create and operate a 'carbon bank' as proposed by the Biden administration."

FACA filed comments on behalf of the coalition, and several of its member groups, including the NFU, EDF and some national commodity organizations also filed their own. The American Farm Bureau Federation and the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, two founding FACA members, largely adopted the FACA comments as their own.

Here is a look at some of the major policy areas and what FACA and individual farm and environmental organizations think USDA should do:

Conservation programs

The Food and Agriculture Climate Alliance says prioritizing CSP and EQIP contracts that will "result in demonstrated positive soil health, carbon sequestration, and resilience outcomes" will encourage producers to adopt new conservation practices.

FACA also calls for the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service to streamline conservation practices and says the agency should consider the use of precision agriculture equipment as an "important conservation tool."

Several groups, such as NFU, the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, the National Wildlife Federation and the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, are calling for Congress to double spending on CSP, EQIP and other conservation programs. Existing programs "meet only a fraction of the need for voluntary conservation on the landscape," NWF told USDA.

Another common theme in the comments that USDA received is the lack of technical assistance for farmers. **"In some parts of the country, one NRCS employee may be tasked with serving scores, if not hundreds of farmers across a large geographical region,"** NFU said, **noting that NRCS had 1,200 vacancies in April 2020.**

FACA says USDA should accelerate the approval of private advisers.

The Conservation Reserve Program continues to divide farm groups. The Biden administration is trying to add 4 million acres to the program by increasing payment rates and incentives.

FACA is silent on CRP, while NSAC calls for expanding the program, including its Grasslands Initiative, "to explicitly support carbon sequestration goals." But the National Cattlemen's Beef Association and NPPC, both FACA members, warn against idling significant amounts of land because of the potential impact on feed prices.

"It is entirely conceivable that climate policies and artificial incentives could be created that would lead to a serious undersupply of acreage for feed grain production," NPPC says.

Crop insurance

There's a lot of agreement that USDA needs to ensure crop insurance goes hand in hand with the use of conservation practices, including by conducting research to document the impact that increased conservation practices can have on crop production.

FACA wants USDA to create a standing group that would review conservation practices to make sure that "where appropriate," they are incorporated within the insurance program's standards for good farming practice, or GFPs.

FACA also wants USDA to do a study of conservation practices and says the findings would "help identify additional ways to assist producers in adopting science-based climate stewardship practices, while ensuring that any steps taken are driven by data and consistent with appropriate underwriting practices."

The National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, which isn't a member of FACA, has some of the most detailed recommendations when it comes to crop insurance. The group says there is more USDA can do to encourage cover crops, including by making sure that intercropping is allowed.

The latest cover crop guidelines remain "confusing and limiting," says the group, which represents many smaller-scale producers and farms using organic or regenerative practices, USDA also should clarify that all conservation practices and standards as defined by NRCS are considered GFPs, NSAC says.

A major environmental group that isn't a FACA member, the Natural Resources Defense Council, goes further than many ag groups and calls on USDA to take other steps to lower premiums for farmers who use conservation practices, including by supporting state premium subsidy programs. Programs in Iowa and Illinois have proved highly popular, NRDC notes.

NRDC also said USDA should consider additional insurance subsidies for conservation practices and ensure that farmers are encouraged to plant cover crops when natural disasters prevent them from planting or destroy their cash crops.

The Environmental Defense Fund also supports providing crop insurance discounts to farmers for practices that "enhance resilience."

In a joint filing, three crop insurance industry groups cautioned USDA to ensure that the insurance program remains actuarially sound and said the existing program rewards farmers for practices that make crops more resilient.

"The current methodology used to set premium rates takes into account a farmer's production history, and as yields improve through the adoption of new tools, techniques, and technologies, rates are naturally lowered to reflect reduced risk," said the groups, which include the American Association of Crop Insurers, Crop Insurance and Reinsurance Bureau, and National Crop Insurance Services.

Like NRDC, the industry groups took note of the Iowa and Illinois premium subsidy programs, saying they incentivized conservation practices without affecting the program's actuarial soundness.

Animal agriculture

For the cattle and dairy sectors, a major concern is the development and approval of feed additives that can reduce emissions from enteric fermentation, the methane released when cattle belch. The National Cattlemen's Beef Association called for USDA to work with other federal agencies to prioritize the approval of feed additives that can reduce emissions.

The National Milk Producers Federation, also a FACA member, said USDA conservation programs “have substantially neglected the areas of manure and feed management, areas that will have a major impact on reducing carbon emissions.”

USDA also should consider setting a transition program for farms that change feed rations, NMPF says.

FACA, NASDA and NPPC also call for streamlining animal biotechnology approvals. The Biden administration has not yet acted on a proposal by the Trump administration to shift the regulation of animal biotechnology from the Food and Drug Administration to USDA.

“Ensuring a risk- and science-based approval process for animal biotechnology products will help farmers and ranchers better insulate themselves and food production from the risks of climate change, and contribute to GHG reductions as well,” FACA says.

Coming soon: Details on conserving land and water under 30x30

The Agriculture Department continues to insist that working lands will be included in the Biden administration's goal of conserving 30% of the nation's land and waters by 2030, as the administration prepares to flesh out the details of its 30x30 initiative.

Christy Plumer, chief conservation officer at the Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, said Tuesday she's hearing from TRCP partners that have been in touch with the administration that an announcement is coming this week.

“We've heard it's going to be a plan for a plan,” laying out what the administration envisions being included in 30x30, after which it would bring “stakeholders to the table to flesh out some of the specifics.”



Bill Hohenstein, USDA

Some farmers and ranchers have expressed concern about a potential “land grab” by the federal government, but **Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack has insisted that's not the case, and other USDA officials have followed suit.**

Last week, it was Bill Hohenstein, director of the Office of Energy and Environmental Policy in USDA's Office of the Chief Economist, who told a panel at the North American Agricultural Journalists

conference that **“this is not about takings, this is not about restricting land, this is about encouraging conservation.”**

But Hohenstein offered a new rationale for land protection: “I think the more interesting part of the 30x30 conservation goal is that it gives the U.S. a platform to engage other countries where they don’t have that same legacy of conservation and as strong a track record as the U.S.”

The conservation goal was included in a Jan. 27 executive order on climate change that focused on land and marine waters. Citing U.S. Geological Survey data, a fact sheet on the E.O. said “only 12% of [U.S.] lands are permanently protected. Studies show that roughly 23% of America’s ocean is currently strongly protected, with the vast majority of ocean protections found in the western Pacific Ocean.”

In the White House fact sheet, the administration said it would be working to achieve the goal “by supporting local, state, private, and tribally led nature conservation and restoration efforts that are underway across America,” which would seem to be a clear indication that it wants to emphasize conservation efforts and not permanent “hands-off” protection.

Nevertheless, the concern continues in farm country, where some have been alarmed by rumors that the Biden administration wants to place restrictions on beef, despite the administration making no such pronouncement and Vilsack's denial of the purported effort.

Last week, the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association posted an alert on Facebook saying it “is aware of claims that President Biden’s 30x30 plan would call for a drastic restriction of beef consumption. Cattle and beef producers are rightfully concerned. **At this time, President Biden has not called for any reduction of beef production or consumption related to 30x30” or to the climate plan released by the White House calling for about a 50% cut in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.**

“We expect to know more about the specifics of the 30x30 plan in the coming days,” NCBA said. “Until the Administration’s plan is public, we will continue reiterating this simple fact — this Administration *needs* cattle producers to reach their goals. Without partnership through voluntary conservation programs and a two-way dialogue, any effort they make will be fragmented and ineffectual in the long-term.”

Also last week, the Interior Department sent a report to the White House on the 30x30 initiative, but no details have been released. Administration spokespeople say more information is forthcoming soon.

It’s that uncertainty that is fueling the concern among members of the American Farm Bureau Federation, says Ryan Yates, managing director of public policy at AFBF. **“It’s very difficult to answer a lot of the questions that we’re getting from our members,” Yates says, noting that the 30x30 goal “has become a bit of a boogeyman.”**

“We’re hearing what it’s not, but we’re not seeing what it is,” Yates says. “We’re eager to know more.”

Groups such as The Nature Conservancy and American Farmland Trust are working to ensure that land enrolled in working lands conservation programs such as the Environmental Quality

Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program are counted in calculating how the U.S. will reach the goal.

“We are very much pushing a broad definition of protection,” says Jenny Conner Nelms, TNC’s senior policy adviser for agriculture in North America. “It’s got to include publicly protected areas, Indigenous lands, private working lands — all those things have to be in the mix.”

And AFT has proposed that ag’s contribution to the goal include 5% of agricultural land in permanent protection and 25% be enrolled in some type of conservation program.

“With about 7 million acres already protected, another 40 million acres are needed” to reach the 5% goal, AFT said in its [policy proposal](#).

The 25% plank of that proposal, “deployed through expanding existing cost-share programs” as well as the Conservation Reserve Program and Regional Conservation Partnership Program, “would conserve another 235 million acres of agricultural land.”

In all, those bench marks “would protect and conserve 275 million acres of the United States — a sizable step toward achieving the 30x30 goal,” AFT says. That comes close to 30% of the approximately [900 million acres of farmland in the U.S.](#)

“It’s not looking to basically take any of that land out of production,” says Tim Fink, the group’s policy director.

Aviva Glaser, the National Wildlife Federation’s director of agricultural policy, echoes those comments, saying the 30x30 goal **“can be an opportunity to ramp up investment into conservation efforts on working lands.”**

Although she says much of the initial focus around the initiative “has been on formally protected areas, and in particular, lands and waters with strict protection status, legal designations and formal protected areas alone will not achieve the 30x30 goals.”

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership’s Plumer says in some cases, even when land is classified under what is known as GAP status codes as receiving less protection — Wilderness Areas are GAP 1, conservation easements are Gap 2, and private ranches are GAP 3, for example — it may “have far more sophisticated management regimes than some of the adjacent public lands.”



Aviva Glaser, NWF

Plumer also says TRCP has been “pushing really hard” to have fresh water, not just oceans, included in the 30% goal for waters, and stresses the importance of having private landowners at the table for those discussions.

Ferd Hoefner, former policy director and senior strategic adviser at the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition and now a private consultant, questions whether anything but permanent conservation would work to achieve the goal.

“It’s legitimate to use private land that’s under some type of long-term or permanent conservation easement,” he said. But “if it means anything where any conservation dollar has ever been spent, it sort of becomes meaningless.”

Hoefner says he has no problem with counting land protected by agricultural land easements covering land and wetlands, but says while there is some data to show landowners continue to employ conservation practices after their land is no longer enrolled in USDA conservation programs, more research on that point is needed.

“When the contract’s over, the government generally stops paying attention,” he said.

USTR prepares for USMCA meeting amid ongoing disputes

U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai has described the upcoming meeting with her Mexican and Canadian counterparts as a friendly-sounding “annual get-together,” but it’s also expected to be a showdown over contentious issues that have put the three countries at odds.

The free trade commission meeting hasn’t been publicly scheduled, but Tai said last week that it will be held in the next few weeks and she is already meeting with farm groups that have a lot at stake.

She met Monday with the National Milk Producers Federation, Florida Fruit and Vegetable Association, National Potato Council and the Northwest Horticultural Council, and ag sector sources say Tai will be meeting soon with representatives for corn growers and others.

Mexico

Corn growers are especially concerned about Mexico’s recent decree to ban genetically modified corn “for human consumption” by Jan. 31, 2024 — less than three years from now.

Mexico was the largest foreign market for U.S. corn in the 2019-20 marketing year and would likely be number one again for 2020-21, if not for the recent buying spree by the Chinese. Still, Mexican corn imports are on the rise and the decree represents a major threat, says one corn industry official who asked not to be named because of the sensitivity surrounding the upcoming USMCA meeting.



David Salmonsens, AFBF

“High-level government-to-government conversations will be very welcome,” the official said. “I’m just hoping some common sense will prevail here.”

As it stands now, Mexico’s decree on biotech corn is very unclear and it’s not possible to say just how much of the \$2.7 billion worth of annual U.S. corn exports would be impacted, according to an analysis by USDA’s Foreign Agricultural Service.

“Although the majority of U.S. corn exports to Mexico go into the livestock feed industry, U.S. corn is imported for use in the processing sector to make cereals, starches, and other processed products,” said the FAS office in Mexico City.

USDA has reassured farmers that the biotech ban won't impact the majority of U.S. corn exports to Mexico, but David Salmonsens, American Farm Bureau Federation's senior director of congressional relations, tells *Agri-Pulse* that there is still significant doubt about that.

“Well, maybe, but maybe not,” Salmonsens said. “I think everybody hears that, but we’re not really sure. ... There’s just a lot of questions about that.”

Salmonsens said the Farm Bureau hasn’t sat down yet with Tai, but predicted that would happen soon.

One ag leader who did meet with Biden’s USTR is Kam Quarles, CEO of the National Potato Council, and he spent much of the meeting expressing gratitude for the government’s work to pave the way for increased access to the Mexican market.

About a decade ago the Mexican government agreed to tear down a barrier that only allowed shipments of U.S. fresh potatoes to be sold within 26 kilometers of the U.S.-Mexico border, but Mexico’s National Federation of Potato Producers (CONPAPA) managed to stop the new regulations by going to the courts. That lengthy legal journey ended April 28 when Mexico’s Supreme Court ruled that the government could lift the trade barrier.

Now the Mexican government just has to follow through, Quarles tells *Agri-Pulse*.

“We’re not done yet,” he said. “We still need to work with the Mexican regulators to reinstate the access that we lost when the lawsuits were filed. The fortunate part of this is we’re not creating a new market access agreement. We’re simply reinstating what was already there. That gives us a lot of optimism that this is going to happen rapidly.”

Canada

National Milk Producers Federation President and CEO Jim Mulhern was also in the Monday meeting with Tai and he emphasized the industry’s complaint that Canada continues to misuse the quotas that it committed to under USMCA.

“Canada is still doing whatever it wants,” said Jaime Castaneda, the U.S. Dairy Export Council’s senior vice president for trade policy. “Canada continues to misuse the (tariff rate quotas) in a way that we believe is inconsistent with their USMCA obligations.”

Canada agreed under USMCA to increase U.S. access to Canada’s market for milk, cheese, cream, skim milk powder, butter, ice cream and whey by establishing quotas. But Canada, U.S. industry groups say, is manipulating those quotas to block the entry of products like cheese. Instead, Canada is giving 85% of the quotas to processors so they can buy U.S. products that don’t compete with Canadian products. This effectively limits U.S. suppliers that want to export more high-priority products.

“Canada is failing to meet its trade obligations by manipulating import license procedures and minimizing the ability of U.S. dairy farmers to have full access to the benefits of USMCA,” Mulhern said recently. **“That needs to stop, and we look forward to working with the Biden administration to ensure it does.”**

Leaders representing the U.S. wheat industry have not yet met with Tai, but they also need help in dealing with Canada. **Canada followed through on its USMCA promise to remove its “foreign grain grading discrimination system,” but the playing field with Canada is still not level, according to the U.S. Wheat Associates.**

Trade conditions are good for the few varieties of U.S. wheat that are listed in Canada’s variety registration system (VRS), but that’s still rare, says a USW spokesman.



Jim Mulhern, National Milk Producers Federation

“What we need to have full cross-border access for everybody is for Canada to change the law that would allow easier access for U.S. varieties to be considered under the Canadian registration list,” the spokesman said.

“While the VRS has been modernized slightly over the past decade, the system still only allows a small amount of U.S. test plot data to be used, which makes it difficult for U.S. developers to register their variety in Canada, especially in cases where the primary purpose of registration would be for importation,” USW said in a recent trade barriers report.

It’s unclear how much progress can be made on rectifying any of the trade gripes in just one meeting, but Tai has made the success of USMCA a priority.

“We must invest and commit to the agreement’s full and successful implementation. I will enforce the new standards, follow through on our commitments, and use the agreement to ensure that our partners, Canada and Mexico, do too,” she said in a Tuesday speech.

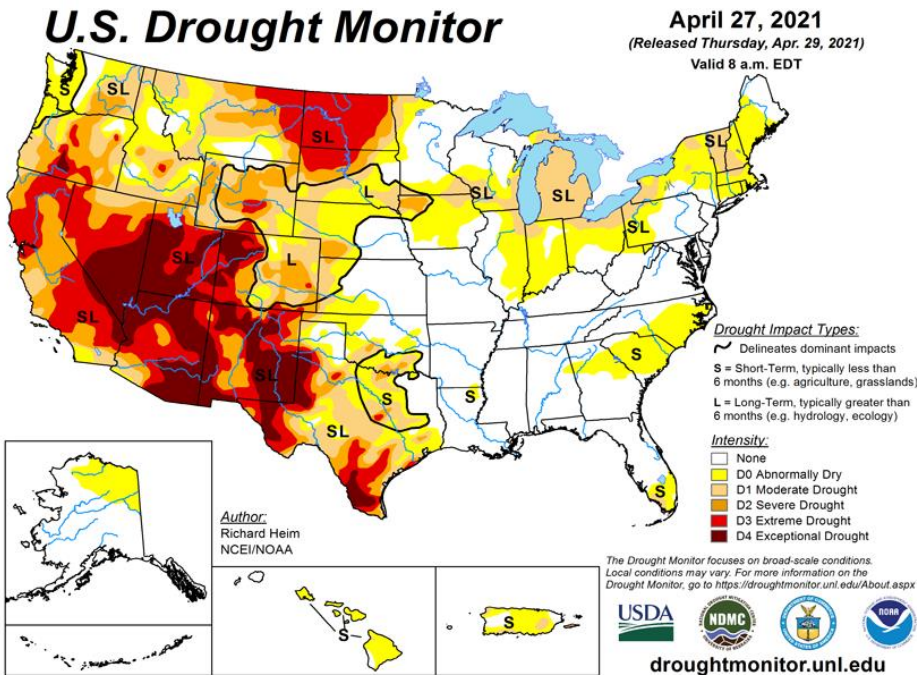
Drought spooks producers as planting underway with higher prices

High commodity prices are fueling farmers' optimism as planters get rolling this spring, but in some areas the lack of rain is making producers nervous as they plant into the dusty ground.

Over the last several months, extreme drought has plagued much of the western U.S., and it has recently worsened in North Dakota and Texas, according to the latest U.S. Drought Monitor. Roughly 48.4% of the U.S. is in a moderate or worse drought, up from 47.3% a week earlier.

Last year at this time, 14.8% of the nation was experiencing drought. Most of the Midwest showed no drought with abnormally dry conditions only in the Dakotas and northern California.

In the West this spring, shallow wells have been drying up in the San Joaquin Valley and Tulare County, California, where ranchers have culled cattle for sale “months earlier than usual,” according to the Drought Monitor. It also noted producers “were considering idling row crops to leave water for higher-value permanent crops like nut trees.”



In the northern plains, USDA Meteorologist Brad Rippey said durum wheat, spring wheat and sunflower production are all at risk due to the conditions.

“There’s certainly questions about the risk involved in trying to sow into dust effectively,” Rippey told Agri-

Pulse. “Unfortunately, it is likely we will see drought impacts, barring some gigantic spring storm that refills the soil moisture profile.”

As of April 27, 93% of durum wheat production, 82% of spring wheat production and 88% of sunflower production were experiencing drought, according to the Drought Monitor.

Tom Bernhardt, president of the North Dakota Grain Growers Association, said conditions in parts of the state are extremely dry, with sporadic rains here and there. He also said it is unseasonably cool.

“There’s some areas that have gotten a few little showers, just enough to moisten the top inch or so to get the seed out of the ground, but the biggest concern is getting the seed germinated, especially on a uniform seed count,” he told Agri-Pulse.

Bernhardt said there were also areas where winter wheat and rye are emerging that could be in trouble if they don’t get rain soon. Bernhardt grows spring wheat, corn, sunflowers and soybeans. He also has a cow-calf operation and said pastures are dry, too.

“Right now, the pasture conditions are extremely poor, so there is no grass to turn the cattle out to,” Bernhardt said.

According to USDA’s Crop Progress report released Monday, 44% of North Dakota’s pasture is considered very poor, 30% poor, 19% fair, and 7% good. Overall, 47% of the nation’s pasture is rated poor to very poor, 31% is fair, and 22% is rated good to excellent.

Rippey has been watching North Dakota since the mid-to-late summer of 2020 as dry conditions lasted through this winter. He said parts of North Dakota had less snow than parts of Texas.

“Almost a snowless winter and now just dribs and drabs so far this spring that has left North Dakota, and adjacent areas in northern South Dakota and eastern Montana, in very dire shape heading into the spring,” Rippey said.

Rippey noted there is hardly any subsoil moisture and very little topsoil moisture in North Dakota.

In western Texas, cotton producers are beginning to get nervous, Plains Cotton Growers CEO Steve Verett told *Agri-Pulse*. He said producers expect dry weather between January and mid-March, but look for rains by the end of March into April. Those didn't materialize this year.

Texas accounts for more than one-third of U.S. cotton production each year, and much of that is grown in the Lubbock region.

“I’m not aware of any spot on the whole High Plains right now that you could go to the field and plant a dryland crop and expect it to emerge,” Verett said.



Steve Verett, Plains Cotton Growers

He added that some areas in the west and southwestern parts of their territories in Texas are “as bad or worse” than they were in 2011.

In 2011, the whole state was in an exceptional drought, he said. Verett said it's tough for producers now who are excited to plant a crop knowing they could potentially market it at a good price but fear the weather could end it all.

“They’re excited, and that is the thing that is making this doubly gut-wrenching,” he said.

“You’ve got good prices out here for practically any crop you want to plant and that goes the same for cotton.”

Verett said producers are not giving up just yet, arguing the weather could turn at any time.

Rippey said annual rainfall in those parts of Texas is less than 20 inches, compared to 40 inches in some Midwest states, which makes it tough to overcome drier conditions.

Rippey also is keeping an eye on a few counties in Northwest Iowa and notes a short-term drying trend is extending from Iowa into parts of Michigan and Ohio.

“We’ve seen an expansion of the abnormal dryness and moderate drought across the Midwest in the last week or two, so that too is a concern,” he said.

However, he said a lot of those areas have better subsoil moisture levels.

News Briefs:

Imports have highest pesticide residue violations, according to California DPR

report. In its most recent report, the California Department of Pesticide Regulation found illegal amounts of chemical residue on 4% of the samples it tested, with most violations on imported produce. The [2019 California Pesticide Residue Monitoring Program Report](#), released last week, shows that of 3,274 samples tested, 137 contained illegal pesticide residue (either a level of residue exceeding EPA's limits for allowable pesticides or residue from a product not authorized for use on that crop). The commodity with the highest number of violations was dragon fruit (25 of 41 samples, or 61%) followed by chayote (9 of 73, or 12%), and tomatillos (9 of 112, or 8%). Imported products, including these, accounted for 82% of all violations. Among products known to have been grown in California, 98% had no illegal pesticide residue. One strawberry sample contained enough residue of methomyl to be deemed a health risk. When such risks are identified, DPR traces the sample back to its point of origin and takes action to remove it and any other potentially contaminated products from the food supply. In addition, it has the authority to impose fines. DPR Director Val Dolcini said in a statement the Pesticide Residue Monitoring Program is "a helpful way to educate growers about what is and isn't acceptable for use in California." And, it's also "useful as a deterrent to bad actors." In 2019, DPR imposed \$175,435 in penalties against a company with a history of selling produce that exceeds accepted residue levels. DPR had found Marquez Produce, Inc. in violation of pesticide residue regulations 21 times in 2015-2016 and 14 times in 2017-2018. The company agreed to pay the fines in installments and as of this year has paid them in full.

New RCPP grants will address water scarcity, wildfire resiliency, wildlife. As parts of Oregon and California face severe water shortages, the USDA Natural Resource Conservation Service has awarded the states a total of 9 Regional Conservation Partnership Program grants. The projects must match the grants with an equal amount of funding from other sources and the goal is to leverage both dollars and other partner resources to address a range of concerns from wildlife habitat to agricultural irrigation. California's four projects span the state and include rebuilding for wildfire resiliency, improving irrigation and water use efficiency and expanding California's Healthy Soils Initiative. Lead grantees are the Mission Resource Conservation District, the Rebuild North Bay Foundation, the Siskiyou Land Trust and California State University, but each of them assembled a collection of partners who will jointly implement the projects. "These 4 new projects will harness the power of partnerships to help bring about solutions to natural resource concerns across California while supporting our efforts to combat the climate crisis," NRCS California state conservationist Carlos Suarez said in a statement. Oregon's five projects include increasing habitat for migrating birds, ensuring adequate stream flow for endangered fish and frogs, improving irrigation for agriculture and increasing resiliency to wildfires. The lead organizations for the Oregon projects are the Lomakatsi Restoration Project, Oregon Department of Forestry, Ducks Unlimited, Trout Unlimited and Deschutes River Conservancy. Across the country, NRCS is investing \$330 million in 35 RCPP projects. The RCPP is one of the newer conservation programs, created in the 2014 farm bill and expanded in 2018.

Chef Andrés, former Ag Secretaries Glickman, Veneman headline new task force.

A new effort from the Bipartisan Policy Center to combat food and nutrition insecurity is headlined by a celebrity chef and former ag secretaries but also includes heavy-hitters from all aspects of food and agriculture. The Bipartisan Policy Center on Tuesday announced its Food and Nutrition Security Task Force, which will be co-chaired by former Ag Secretaries Dan Glickman and Ann Veneman, World Central Kitchen founder José Andrés, and FMI-The Food

Industry Association President and CEO Leslie Sarasin. The task force is a one-year effort “to improve access to healthy foods and diet quality for all Americans,” BPC said in a release. “The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the gaps in our collective ability to combat nutrition insecurity as millions of American families have gone without enough to eat,” Andrés said. “Now more than ever, we must seek bold solutions that bring the power of the federal government together with the nonprofit and private sectors to end hunger and make food an opportunity to create a better tomorrow.” BPC said the task force will review current policy and issue recommendations to improve food security during COVID-19 and the economic recovery; strengthen child nutrition programs; and enhance the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, including through potential farm bill action. The task force, Veneman added, “seeks to inform federal policy that will address the long-term health, educational, and economic impact of food and nutrition insecurity throughout the country. This is a crisis that can’t wait.” Other members of the task force include Feeding America CEO Claire Babineaux-Fontenot, Healthy Schools Campaign President and CEO Rochelle Davis, American Farm Bureau Federation President Zippy Duvall, United Fresh President and CEO Tom Stenzel, and several others from the medical and nutrition community.

Producer sentiment holds steady in April. A measure of the state of mind in farm country held steady in April, but producers are showing concern about what could lie ahead as the Biden administration considers a host of tax policy changes. The Ag Economy Barometer from Purdue University and the CME Group rose one point, to a reading of 178, in April. The figure is well above the plummeting figure of a year ago in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic but is still a little below the record high from October 2020. “The strength in commodity prices continues to drive improving expectations for strong financial performance, even as many are seeing rising input costs,” Purdue’s James Mintert said in a release. Producers offered split opinions on their opinion of current and future expectations. The index of future expectations rose five points while the index of current conditions fell seven points. Farm country also expects an uptick in taxes in the future. Some 87% of respondents said they expect capital gains rates to rise over the next five years, another 75% said they are “very concerned” about the possible elimination of the stepped-up basis, and 68% said they were “very concerned” about a possible reduction in the estate tax exemption. Only 5% of producers said they were “not at all concerned” about the impact of policy considerations potentially making it more difficult to pass **down** assets. In contrast, 13% said they were “somewhat concerned” and 82% said they were very concerned. However, producers are still investing in their operations, but are reporting plans to invest in things like equipment rather than buildings or similar improvements. “The divergence between the two responses could be reflective of the run-up in building costs and difficulty in scheduling construction projects across the U.S.,” Mintert said. The survey is based on responses from 400 producers from across the U.S. and was conducted April 19-23.

Farm Hands West: Almond Board of California hires new media manager

The Almond Board of California has hired **Rick Kushman** as the new manager of media relations. Before joining the Almond Board, Kushman worked as a columnist and reporter at *The Sacramento Bee*. He also worked as a communications strategist for E. & J. Gallo Winery and was a public affairs senior writer and executive communications expert at UC Davis Health.



Valerie Shepler

Valerie Shepler has joined the staff of Fall Creek Farm and Nursery as a commercial manager for the U.S. and Canada territories, based at the company’s Lowell, Ore., office. She brings more than 30 years of management experience in the agricultural industry and most recently was vice president of strategic sourcing and analysis for Milne Fruit Products, Inc. in Prosser, Wash.

Nichino America has elevated **Amanda Carson** to the position of East Region Sales Manager. Carson joined Nichino America in 2016 as a technical sales representative for the northeast territory. She was later promoted to product manager in early 2018.

James Glueck has been brought on to the policy team at Michael Torrey Associates as the new vice president. Glueck joins MTA after serving as the staff director for the Senate Agriculture Committee under then-Chairman **Pat Roberts**, R-Kan. He also worked in the personal office of Sen. **Mike Johanns**, R-Neb., covering the portfolio for risk management, biotechnology, grain handling, nutrition, trade, foreign relations, and water issues.

Andrew Brandt has joined the U.S. Grains Council as the director of trade policy. He will be based out of the council’s headquarters in Washington, D.C. Brandt most recently worked for the Senate Committee on Finance as an international trade policy adviser. In this role, he counseled the committee on international trade policy related to agriculture, biotech, energy and other matters. He also previously served as a legislative assistant to Sen. **Chuck Grassley**, R-Iowa, covering the portfolio for agriculture, biotech, international trade, banking and environmental policy. Brandt succeeds **Floyd Gaibler**, who passed away in January.

Former EPA Administrator **Andrew Wheeler** has joined The Heritage Foundation as a visiting fellow. In this role, Wheeler will advise the Heritage team on the economic and environmental impact of energy, climate change, and environmental regulations.

Angela Ellard, Republican chief trade counsel for the House Ways and Means Committee, has been selected as one of the new World Trade Organization’s (WTO) deputy directors-general. Ellard has worked on the House Ways and Means Trade Subcommittee since 1995 and has worked on 13 trade agreements.



James Glueck

Samantha Power was sworn in as the new head of the U.S. Agency for International Development on Monday, after being confirmed by the Senate in a 68-26 vote. Power served as the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations during the Obama Administration.

The Department of the Interior has announced new members to the agency’s leadership. **Lawrence Roberts** has been tapped as the Interior’s chief of staff. Roberts is a citizen of the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin and a professor at Arizona State University’s Sandra Day O’Connor College of Law, served as acting assistant secretary of Indian Affairs and principal deputy assistant secretary of Indian Affairs during the Obama administration. **Steve Feldgus**

returns to Interior as the deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management after serving for seven years on the House Natural Resources Committee, most recently as deputy staff director under Chairman **Raúl M. Grijalva**, D-Ariz. He also served as staff director for the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources. During the Obama administration, Feldgus served at the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement and the Bureau of Land Management. **Sarah Krakoff** has been brought on as the deputy solicitor for parks and wildlife. She most recently was a law professor at the University of Colorado Law School and is a nationally recognized expert in Native American law, natural resources law, and environmental justice. Krakoff is the founder and director of the Acequia Assistance Project.

Elsewhere at the department, **Mackenzie Landa** now serves as the adviser to the deputy secretary. She most recently served as counsel to Sen. **Cory Booker**, D-N.J., working on environment, energy, natural resource, and agriculture issues. Before joining Booker's staff, Landa served as counsel to the House Select Committee on the Climate

Crisis. **Heidi Todacheene** now serves as a senior adviser in the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs. She is a citizen of the Navajo Nation who served as legislative counsel for Interior Secretary **Deb Haaland** during her time in the House. Todacheene was also Democratic director of the Congressional Native American Caucus in Congress. **Eric Werwa** has been hired as the deputy assistant secretary for policy, management, and budget. Werwa brings more than 18



Heidi Todacheene

years of experience working on environmental and climate issues on Capitol Hill, most recently serving as Haaland's House chief of staff and legislative director.

Chris Rowland has been hired by Crop One, a technology-driven indoor vertical farming company, as the company's new chief financial officer. Rowland is a licensed certified public accountant and has spent his career managing and advising global and domestic companies through mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures, and turnarounds. Most recently, Rowland was the CFO for TCG GreenChem, a startup pharmaceutical company.

Krysta Harden and **Alison Lawton** have joined AgBiome's board of directors, effective immediately. Harden currently serves as the president and CEO of the U.S. Dairy Export Council and Lawton was most recently CEO of the microbiome company Kaleido Biosciences

Ron Phillips has joined Sysco as the company's new executive vice president and chief human resources officer. Phillips most recently worked at CVS Health as the senior vice president of human resources, retail, Omnicare and enterprise modernization.

Miracle King Wilson has joined BASF Agricultural Solutions as the company's new public relations manager. She most recently worked at the North Carolina Department of Transportation where she was the department's communications specialist. She is also a former television anchor, reporter and executive producer.



Miracle King Wilson

Eric Fejer now serves as a press assistant on the minority staff of the Senate Finance Committee. He previously served as an intern for Sen. **Mike Crapo**, R-Idaho.

Taylor DuBard has joined the staff of Sen. **Dianne Feinstein**, D-Calif., as a staff assistant. DuBard previously interned for Sen. **Kamala Harris**, D-Calif.

Andrew Dewsnup, president of Greenfield Fresh, passed away at the age of 60. He was recently diagnosed with esophageal cancer and was anticipating a 100% recovery. In 1998, Dewsnup began his career in the produce industry. In 2002, Dewsnup founded Greenfield Fresh, a produce brokerage located in the Bay area.

Marie Gallo, a Modesto philanthropist and daughter-in-law of a co-founder of E. & J. Gallo Winery, died in her sleep at her home Monday. She was 86. Gallo was well known for supporting the Catholic Church and other local causes and was the driving force behind the Gallo Center for the Arts. She and husband Bob Gallo, the son of Julio Gallo, raised eight children as the Modesto-based operation grew into the world's largest family-owned winery. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made to the Gallo Center for the Arts, 1000 I St., Modesto, 95354, or the Sisters of the Cross, 1320 Maze Blvd., Modesto, 95351. Funeral arrangements are pending.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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