

Study: Regulatory costs more than double in six years for valley farmers

The most comprehensive study to track state and federal regulatory impacts on growers has been released. Regulatory costs grew 265% on average across a range of farmers in the San Joaquin Valley from 2012 to 2018, while total production costs rose by just 22% on average over the same period, according to the findings.

“Nobody else has actually looked at what is the entire burden of regulatory costs that agriculture faces,” study co-author Lynn Hamilton, an agribusiness professor at Cal Poly San Luis Obispo told *Agri-Pulse*. “The reason that we've been asked to do this research was to allow policymakers a true viewpoint. This is data that was collected from individual growers.”



A state geologist measures groundwater levels in Yolo County.
(Source: DWR)

Hamilton, who is a featured speaker for the 2021 Agri-Pulse Food & Ag Policy Summit West on July 12, has published a series of research papers on regulatory costs for growers. Her 2018 paper revealed a nearly 800% growth in costs for Salinas Valley lettuce growers over the span of a decade, with a much higher burden placed on smaller growers. The new research shows that costs have been rising at a higher rate for larger farm sizes due to new labor wage requirements. Both studies were in partnership with the Air Resources Board (CARB).

The research published on Friday by Cal Poly focuses on a number of regulations that have taken effect since 2012, when Hamilton and her colleagues performed the initial case studies with farmers. Those regulations include the State Water Resources Control Board’s Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program, the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act (SGMA), the Food Safety

Modernization Act, state pesticide restrictions near schools, the Affordable Care Act, and state legislation on rest breaks, paid sick leave and agricultural overtime pay.

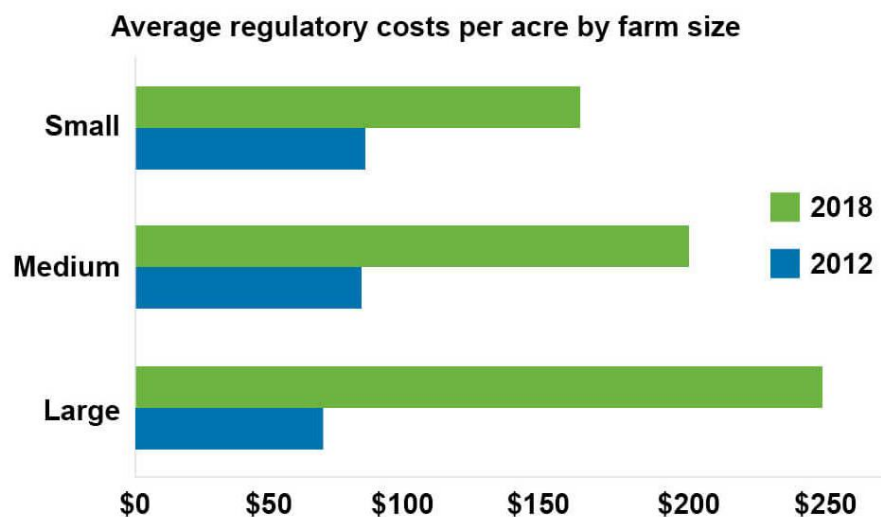
“It’s a shorter timespan [than the 2018 study], but it’s over a much broader array of farms,” explained Hamilton. “It’s over eight different crops and a wide array of the biggest farms in the state to really small growers and hobby farms who have 40 acres.”

The results showed regulatory costs were higher for permanent crops than for field crops. The greatest cost increases came from labor-related requirements, leading many operations to consider switching commodities or investing in new technologies to reduce those costs.

With such high compliance costs for some regulatory programs, growers have been contracting out pest control advisors (PCAs) and consultants for water quality monitoring, among other tasks.

Industry leaders have often pleaded with state policymakers that farmers have limited ability to pass on regulatory costs to consumers, and the researchers note this in the paper. The majority of growers in the valley are “very small producers,” with more than half farming fewer than 50 acres and another 20% farming fewer than 180 acres, “making them absolute price takers in their markets.” Farmers are further limited by global market supply and demand as well as yield risks from weather and other external growing conditions.

“When regulatory compliance costs are added to production costs, holding all else constant, the probability of making profit decreases,” reads the report.



Source: Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo

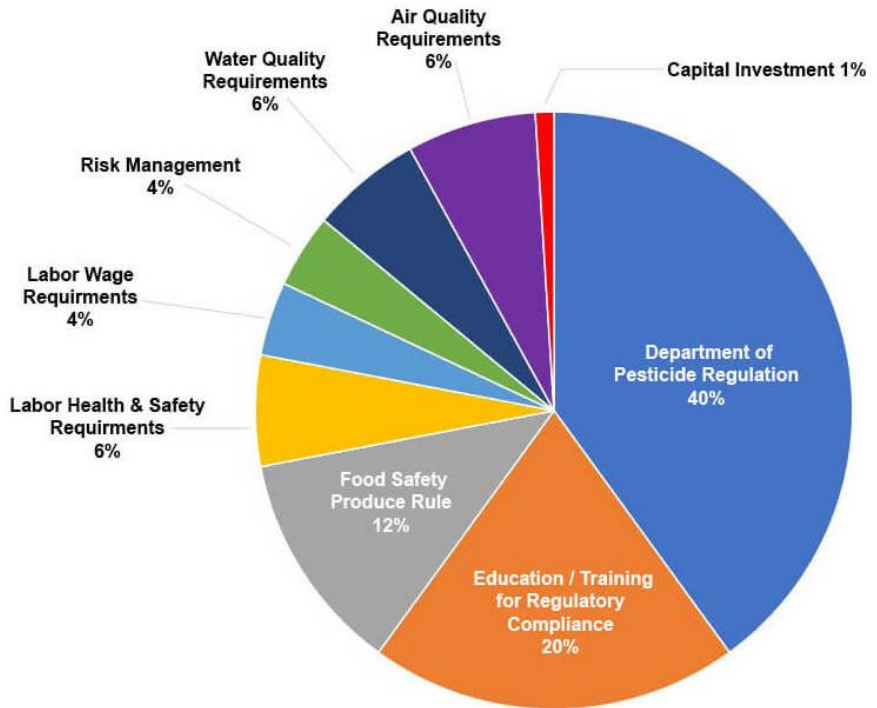
The Newsom administration has acknowledged the added costs that agriculture has faced from agencies working in silos with minimal perspective on the cumulative impacts the layers of regulations have on individual farmers. In a conversation with the Agricultural Council of California last week, Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot said the governor is passionate about the issue and has been looking for ways to support locally driven leadership when implementing these regulations as a way to reduce costs. Crowfoot hoped these efforts could lead to economies of scale when it comes to state spending on regulatory programs. A provision the administration has proposed in the state budget aims to reduce costs by consolidating reporting and monitoring processes into one central hub.

The Cal Poly study points to several more regulations that have been adding substantially more costs since 2018 and were not included in the research. The authors are currently studying the economic impacts to disadvantaged communities from permanently fallowing farmland in the valley under groundwater plans for SGMA. CARB, meanwhile, is requiring agricultural operations with heavy-duty trucks weighing 14,000 pounds or more to replace engines older than

2010 with newer, low-emission engines by 2023, allowing little time for investing in the large capital costs.

Pesticide costs for new regulations were largely underreported in the new study since those are generally embedded in PCA fees and chemical prices. The researchers also struggled with discerning new regulatory costs at the processor level that were passed on to farmers.

Regulatory costs by category for small producers



Source: Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo

Packing houses passed down new food safety costs to citrus growers through differential pricing, for example.

On the labor side, the state has steadily phased in the agricultural overtime law, which the authors expect will further reduce the available workforce. The valley lost more than 90,000 agricultural workers during the study period, with an increase in mechanization and a decrease in the labor supply driving the decline.

California is also raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

“It is unclear whether this will be a net gain for the community because of the potential decrease in the number of jobs available and/or hours worked,” the report notes.

Another emerging cost for growers is CARB’s recent prohibition on open agricultural burning in the valley. The state budget plan approved by the Legislature on Monday would allocate \$180 million in incentives grants to support noncombustion alternatives to burning.

Yet the industry expects to shoulder steep labor, transportation and capital costs in adapting to the ban over the next three years, according to the researchers. Hamilton is working with CARB to further analyze those costs as well.

“For whatever point in time we do the analysis, it’s only going to get worse,” said Hamilton. “And that’s certainly the case with the burn regulation.”

She shared grower concerns regarding technology and labor costs for any such alternatives.

Despite the dismal numbers brought to light from her studies, Hamilton sees this as an opportunity for policymakers.

“One of the only ways that agriculture is going to stay within this regulatory environment and be compliant,” said Hamilton, “is if public policy is devised to help people comply.”

While incentives grants can go a long way in helping industry adapt, the hurdles for accessing those dollars can be overwhelming. Growers told Hamilton they appreciated discounts for new tractors through CARB’s program for replacing aging equipment, known as FARMER, but they “paid through nose” in terms of time and energy spent on the required documentation.

“That’s why I see the value of having this information,” said Hamilton.

Valley coalition asks Newsom to fund shovel-ready drought projects

The Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley has offered Gov. Gavin Newsom a list of projects to fund this year in response to the deepening drought. The coalition of local leaders, water agencies, farmers and commodity groups hopes the governor can allocate part of his \$5.1 billion drought package to protecting drinking water in disadvantaged communities, restoring habitat, repairing canals and supporting a range of other multibenefit projects.

“We believe that, coupled with strategic land repurposing, these programs and projects could move the state and region closer to a future that protects the environment, economy and communities while helping them thrive,” writes Blueprint Director Austin Ewell in a letter to Newsom.

The coalition has expanded to include five caucuses, one of those composed of environmental groups.

“Particularly, the environmental demand is a hard one to get our arms around,” said Scott Hamilton, chair of the group’s Technical Water Committee, during a Blueprint meeting earlier in June. “We’re very much looking forward to working with some of the environmental groups to get a better handle on that.”

Hamilton expects to reach out to The Nature Conservancy to coordinate on restoration projects in Tulare and Madera counties. Ewell said the Blueprint team has also been meeting with groundwater sustainability agencies to “evangelize and get them on board.” **The Blueprint seeks to broaden the range of stakeholders and beneficiaries in the coalition to gain the Democratic support needed to sway previous opponents to such infrastructure investments.**



Workers repair a section of the California Aqueduct in Kern County. (Source: DWR)

The largest request is asking the governor to support Senate Bill 559 by State Senator Melissa Hurtado of Sanger. Newsom vetoed Hurtado’s previous version of the measure last year, after an appropriations committee had amended it to remove all funding.

The new bill proposes \$785 million for restoring conveyance capacity along the Friant-Kern Canal, the California Aqueduct and the Delta-Mendota Canal. The Blueprint argues this would bolster California's resilience to drought and climate change by replenishing groundwater basins, filling reservoirs, supporting recycled water projects and restoring ecosystems.

Newsom had proposed \$200 million for conveyance projects in his drought package. That was trimmed down to \$100 million in the package approved by the Legislature on Monday as part of an agreement between the governor and Democratic legislative leaders.

Yet the administration may be considering further allocations for water storage through the state budget. Sergio Aguilar, an assistant program budget manager at the Department of Finance, told the Assembly Budget Committee on Monday that an additional \$2.1 billion in general taxpayer funding in the budget package remains to be allocated. The two branches have deferred negotiations over the remaining spending for the water resilience and drought package until later this summer.

Aguilar noted that a significant amount remains from the Proposition 1 water bond money approved in 2014, and the Water Commission is currently considering options for approving this money for storage projects. Several Central Valley lawmakers have shared frustration lately that Prop. 1 funding was meant to better prepare the state for droughts like the one this year, but has instead remained in limbo.

“We have a lack of clarity when it comes to water storage, which has to be part of the solution if we're going to prepare for droughts in the future,” said Republican Assemblymember Vince Fong of Bakersfield on Monday.



Austin Ewell, executive director of the Water Blueprint for the San Joaquin Valley

Republican Asm. Thurston Smith of Apple Valley pushed lawmakers to go much further than Newsom or even Hurtado have proposed. He sought to add an amendment to the “budget bill junior,” guaranteeing \$1 billion in water storage investment. The Democratic majority quickly overruled the amendments.

The Blueprint is also proposing projects that would bring more immediate relief if the drought persists into a third or fourth dry year. This could include lining canals and reservoirs to reduce water loss, installing meters on groundwater wells to better manage pumping, expanding projects that recycle municipal water for irrigation, and implementing groundwater recharge projects. Another measure that has been deployed in previous droughts would pump water upstream along the California Aqueduct to areas cut off from their banked groundwater supplies.

With the drought temporarily falling thousands of acres in the valley this year and the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act threatening to permanently retire as many as a million acres from production, the Blueprint is proposing \$20 million to support land repurposing. The proposal dovetails with Assembly Bill 252 by Asm. Robert Rivas of Hollister, which has strong support from the Environmental Defense Fund and offers a similar program.

Such projects would be subject to a lengthy process of environmental documents and permit applications that require strategic design, planning and preparation.

“Those dollars for repurposing should only be spent when there is a collaboratively completed framework on how to achieve that water balance,” according to the Blueprint report to the governor. “Developing creative, cost-effective plans through collaboration is expensive and time consuming, but the initial investments often result in more thoughtful and effective plans with broader stakeholder, agency and public support.”

Infrastructure deal offers far-reaching ag benefits

The infrastructure spending deal President Joe Biden struck with a bipartisan group of senators could go a long way toward addressing critical agriculture needs, from improving waterways to making high-speed internet universal and fixing many crumbling bridges and roads.

The agreement, which calls for \$579 billion in new spending over existing funding levels, is much smaller than the \$2 trillion American Jobs Plan that Biden proposed in April.

There also is no detail on how the \$579 billion would be spent other than the broad categories in which the funding would be allocated, including the \$109 billion designated for roads and bridges, \$66 billion for railroads, \$65 billion for broadband, \$16 billion for ports and waterways and \$5 billion for the Western water shortage.

Lawmakers and staff are working now on how the money would be divvied up.

However, there are several areas where the package could have a far-reaching impact.

The White House says, for example, that the \$65 billion for broadband is enough to “connect every American to reliable high-speed internet, just as the federal government made a historic effort to provide electricity to every American nearly one hundred years ago.”

This is the “opportunity to really move the needle” on long-standing infrastructure needs “that have never had the full weight of this type of investment,” said Susan Howard, program director for transportation finance at the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials.

“I commend both the administration and Congress for moving this forward. We're hopeful that something will get done,” said Mike Steenhoek, executive director of the Soy Transportation Coalition.

The \$16 billion for ports and waterways also should be sufficient to ensure that the Army Corps of Engineers can begin to replace aging locks and dams on the Mississippi River.



President Joe Biden. White House photo.



Mike Steenhoek, Soy
Transportation Coalition

“It’s not chump change,” Steenhoek said. “That’s a meaningful investment. The big question is how does it get apportioned across ports and inland waterways.”

Some biofuel industry advocates already are looking to reshape the deal, which includes nothing for biofuel infrastructure but \$7.5 billion for electric vehicle charging stations and an equal amount for electric buses and ferries.

Democratic Rep. Cindy Axne, who represents an Iowa swing district, said funding for biofuels needs to be included in whatever infrastructure bill emerges from Congress.

“As Congress works to develop the final language on this bipartisan agreement, I will have strong reservations about supporting the legislation that reaches the House if there is not also a pathway that will support this commonsense and bipartisan priority,” Axne said in a letter to congressional leaders.

The biggest question of all is whether the deal can pass Congress. Although Biden has endorsed the package, he initially said he wouldn’t sign it into law unless Congress also passed another package of Democratic spending priorities, likely costing trillions of dollars. Biden later walked back what sounded like a threat to veto the infrastructure measure unless the partisan bill reaches his desk, too.

But at least one Republican involved in negotiating the infrastructure package, Sen. Jerry Moran, R-Kan., wants assurances that the Democratic package won’t have the votes to pass. At the same time, some progressives say they won’t vote for the bipartisan deal unless it’s linked to the reconciliation measure with their other priorities.

Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., indicated on Sunday that he would support a Democratic measure as long as it’s much smaller than one that progressives are seeking.

Another unknown is what estimates the Congressional Budget Office will put on the proposed methods of paying for the infrastructure spending. If they come in low, it could affect the overall size of the package that Congress can pass.

Here is a look at how the bipartisan package could address key needs of agriculture and rural America:

River projects could finally see funding

The Waterways Council, which represents agricultural shippers and other interests, has compiled a priority list of 15 Army Corps of Engineers projects totaling \$6.3 billion in needed investment. The list includes five sets of locks and dams on the Mississippi River, starting just north of St. Louis with Lock and Dam 25, a \$624 million project. Lock and Dam 21, near Quincy, Ill., is the most expensive project on the list at \$750 million.

The priority list also includes two more Illinois River locks, LaGrange and Peoria, at a total cost of more than \$1 billion, as well as projects on the Ohio and Tennessee rivers and other waterways.

The Corps started in 2004 doing technical studies on the upper Mississippi and Illinois River projects, collectively known as the Navigation and Ecosystem Sustainability Program. Rehabbing those locks and dams is viewed as critical to ensuring that U.S. grain and soybean exports remain competitive with those from South American competitors.

“We definitely want to see how they put this package together and how they split up that” \$16 billion, said Dustin Davidson, director of government relations for the Waterways Council. He called the bipartisan proposal a “very good step.”

Meanwhile, the American Association of Port Authorities has identified about \$20 billion in port projects that its members say need federal funding. The estimate includes the cost of building rail access to docks. By comparison, about \$750 million in harbor funding has been provided over the last three years.

The top port priority for Midwest ag exporters — a project to deepen the lower Mississippi River channel from the Gulf of Mexico to Baton Rouge to accommodate larger vessels — is already underway using existing funding sources.

Formula, financing questions remain for road, bridges

A study by TRIP, a nonprofit transportation research group, estimated in 2020 that there are \$211 billion worth of rural roads and bridges that need to be repaired or improved. In 2019, some 8% of the nation’s rural bridges were rated as poor and structurally deficient; 47% were rated fair. It remains to be seen how much of the \$109 billion in the bipartisan deal rural areas would see. But a plan AASHTO released in April for addressing the total \$756 billion backlog the Transportation Department has identified nationwide called for an upfront infusion of \$200 billion in new spending to go with what the government already is projected to spend over 10 years.

Among the details in the bipartisan plan that are still to be determined is the state cost-share for projects, assuming there is one, said Howard. Traditionally it has been 20%.

Another question is how much money lawmakers will expect to be raised through the nonfederal financing mechanisms called for in the bipartisan deal. According to the White House fact sheet, one of the ways lawmakers will pay for the bill is through "public-private partnerships, private activity bonds, direct pay bonds and asset recycling." Private activity bonds are tax-exempt and issued by state and local governments to finance projects.

“A lot of the framework that was put forth in this bipartisan deal relies heavily on financing, public-private partnerships, private activity bonds,” Howard said. “It's not clear yet how much they're anticipating each of those could bring in.”

Broadband agencies ‘ready to roll’

In announcing the deal, Biden told reporters last Thursday the \$65 billion in broadband funding will bring “down the price that people pay now for internet service, and close the American digital divide.”

By comparison, the USDA’s primary loan and grant program for broadband expansion, the ReConnect program, has been getting less than \$1 billion a year.



Shirley Bloomfield, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Rural broadband advocates expect the money in the infrastructure deal would be steered toward existing programs, including ReConnect and the Federal Communications Commission's funding program for high-cost service areas; emergency broadband program, which addresses high-speed internet affordability; and the rural telehealth program.

“The nice thing about those two agencies is they are ready to roll,” said Shirley Bloomfield, CEO of NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association. “They’ve been doing this; they’ve got the drill down. We’re not going to have to wait through a long proceeding to figure out new rules by which (participants) must abide by.”

She said the Commerce Department’s National Telecommunications and Information Administration also will be worth watching because the agency has also gotten broadband funding recently.

Bloomfield said it will be important for the departments and agencies to stay coordinated by sharing coverage maps and information. On Friday, USDA, FCC and NTIA announced an interagency agreement "to share information about and coordinate the distribution of broadband deployment federal funds."

She said bills such as the Accessible, Affordable Internet for All Act that Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn. and Rep. James Clyburn, D-S.C., introduced in March could provide a potential road map for delivering new broadband funding. The bill aims to invest over \$94 billion in high-speed internet in unserved and underserved communities.

There is also the BRIDGE Act, introduced by Sens. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., Angus King, I-Maine, and Rob Portman, R-Ohio, which would provide \$40 billion in broadband funding.

Western ag groups hope to tap 'resilience' funding

More than 220 Western ag organizations recently sent a letter to the Senate asking for \$48 billion in water projects for a region that is in the throes of a drought this year. The list includes requests for continued funding of existing programs with the Bureau of Reclamation, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the USDA, as well as new projects identified by states.

The \$5 billion earmarked for Western water storage in the infrastructure deal wouldn’t come close to filling those requests, but Dennis Nuxoll, vice president of federal government affairs at Western Growers, said funding for the projects could also come from the \$47 billion that is designated in the infrastructure package for “resilience.”

“Those two are the areas where we're hopeful that some of our priorities are reflected,” Nuxoll said. Nuxoll also told *Agri-Pulse* that Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., helped get a provision in the omnibus spending bill enacted last December to create an account to fund aging water infrastructure. Sinema was closely involved in the White House infrastructure negotiations.

“We’ve asked Sen. Sinema to ensure that there’s actually money funded into that account,” said Nuxoll.

News Briefs:

California dairy selected for industry's pilot program to reduce emissions, improve sustainability. The dairy industry is marking a milestone on its path toward the goal of net zero emissions by 2050. With a \$10 million investment from Nestlé over the next five years, the Innovation Center for U.S. Dairy has selected the first of five farms in its pilot program to see which innovations and technologies will work to achieve climate goals while also generating new revenue streams on the farm. Innovation Center CEO Barbara O'Brien said \$1.5 million from Nestlé will go directly to projects at Trinkler Dairy Farm in California, which is a Nestlé supplier. Four additional farms from different locations and of various sizes will be added to the Dairy Scale for Good pilot program, O'Brien said. The first five years of the "learning journey," as O'Brien calls the plan, "are going to be so critical to filling some of the gaps we have" in understanding what's economically feasible. Methane digesters that capture the gas from manure and channel it into the renewable gas pipeline, and feed additives that can reduce the methane released from cow burps are among the technologies in the mix, O'Brien said. Different farms experimenting with myriad approaches will ultimately "help drive adoption of what farmers know works," she said. Results from on-farm pilot projects will be documented and shared with others. In addition to Nestlé, the dairy initiative has support from The Nature Conservancy, Syngenta and other partners, and O'Brien adds that the farmers are expected to put money on the table, too. "It's really about a public-private co-investment that's ultimately going to make this happen," she said. The goal of carbon neutrality by 2050 was "a decade in the making," she added. She expects additional farms in the pilot program will be announced later this summer.

Record-breaking heat in Washington affects fruit harvests. Fruit growers in Yakima, Wash., are dealing with unprecedented heat, with temperatures predicted to peak at 115 degrees this week, which dampens production but also may affect quality. Cherry picking, a labor-intensive job, has been complicated by the Pacific Northwest heat wave. Farmers are planning on predawn harvests or harvests that begin at sunrise and end early in the day, according to the Seattle Times. United Farm Workers released a statement Tuesday urging Washington Gov. Jay Inslee to issue emergency heat standards for all farm workers in the state to ensure they are protected from heat stroke. Beyond irregular working conditions, farmers are concerned ripe cherries exposed to extreme heat could shrivel, or unripe cherries will not grow to full size. Although Washington farmers are accustomed to intense heat at the end of the summer, temperatures have not risen this high so early in the summer for more than four decades. The highs are supposed to remain above 100 degrees until next week. Sean Gilbert, president of Gilbert Orchards in the Yakima Valley, told the Seattle Times, "The closer to market, the more acute the damage." Thus, while the week's record-breaking heat complicates Washington's cherry harvest, apple and potato growers in the state are also concerned that their harvests later in the summer will also be affected. High temperatures can leave marks on apples and lower the yields of potato crops. "It is safe to say there will be some impact. Right now, I'm just very concerned but not alarmed," Dale Lathim, the executive director of the Potato Growers of Washington, said to the Seattle Times.

Inhofe introduces GPS interference bill. Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., has introduced the Recognizing and Ensuring Taxpayer Access to Infrastructure Necessary for GPS and Satellite Communications Act, or the RETAIN Act, which would require Ligado, an American satellite communications company, to compensate all GPS and satellite communications users affected by its new 5G services. In 2020, the FCC decided to allow Ligado to provide 5G services, although the spectrum and frequencies it planned to use for the 5G services would interfere with the reception capability of GPS devices. The controversial FCC ruling only mandated that Ligado compensate the federal government for interference. The FCC's decision will adversely

affect day-to-day activities like using a credit card or cellphone, as well as military operations, aviation, and the economy at large, Inhofe argued on the Senate floor. Inhofe also said the agriculture industry would be adversely affected because farmers and ranchers “depend on GPS and satellite communications when planting crops, applying fertilizer, and during harvesting operations to move large and critical machinery with precision.” Senators Jack Reed, D-R.I., Tammy Duckworth, D-Ill., and Mike Rounds, R-S.D., are all co-sponsors of the bill, and 80-plus organizations, including the American Farm Bureau Federation, also back the bipartisan legislation. A letter signed by AFBF and the other organizations said the bill “acknowledges the harm to GPS and satellite communications end users caused by the Ligado order and ensures the burden of cost sits squarely where it belongs — on Ligado, rather than our first responders, farmers, pilots, boat owners, surveyors or construction companies.”

Farm Hands West: Moore tapped to lead Forest Service

Secretary of Agriculture **Tom Vilsack** has named **Randy Moore** as the new chief of USDA’s Forest Service. Moore will be the first African-American to serve in this role. Moore has been serving as a regional forester in the Pacific Southwest Region in California since 2007, where he has had responsibility for 18 national forests. Before that, Moore served for five years as the regional forester for the Eastern Region headquartered in Milwaukee, Wisc. He started his career in conservation in 1978 with USDA’s Natural Resources Conservation Service in North Dakota. Current Forest Service chief **Vicki Christiansen** will step down from her role on July 26.



Randy Moore

The California Legislature has appointed Sen. **Connie Leyva** of Chino to serve as a nonvoting member on the Air Resources Board. Leyva replaces Sen. **Bill Monning** of Carmel, who termed out of office last year. Before serving in office, Leyva led the California Labor Federation. Gov. Newsom also announced he is appointing **Jamie Callahan** and **Daniela Simunovic** to serve on the California Air Resources Board. Callahan has been appointed to serve as the chief of staff and policy adviser to the chair and Simunovic has been appointed to be senior adviser on environmental equity. Callahan has served as deputy cabinet secretary in the Governor’s office since 2019, and she has also served as chief executive officer of the 2018 Global Climate Action Summit. Simunovic has been the senior policy director for Better World Group since 2019.

The Senate Rules Committee has also approved Gov. **Gavin Newsom**’s appointments to serve on the Water Commission. This includes **Kim Gallagher**, who manages rice production for Erdman Farms in the Sacramento Valley and San Diego labor attorney **Fern Steiner**. Steiner clerked at the National Labor Relations Board while in law school. The appointees await final confirmation on the Senate floor.

Today is **Dave Kranz**’s last day with the California Farm Bureau Federation. For the last 11 years he has been with the CFBF, most recently serving as the director of publications and media relations. **Peter Hecht** will take over Kranz’s responsibilities as the new chief editor of publications.

IFCO, a provider of reusable plastic containers for fresh food packaging, has appointed **Rick Overholt** as the company's new vice president of grower sales, North America. He succeeds Craig Kelly who is retiring after seven years in the IFCO SYSTEMS organization. Overholt joins IFCO after serving in numerous sales leadership roles during his 22-year career at CHEP, most recently serving as national sales director of produce.

Jon Kiley has been promoted to sales manager for Awe Sum Organics. He joined Awe Sum Organics in August as an account manager. Kiley brings over 20 years of experience in organic produce sales, previously working for Earthbound Farms.

President **Joe Biden** announced his intent to nominate **Cindy McCain** as the nominee for U.S. representative to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization, and **Homer Wilkes** as the nominee for undersecretary for Natural Resources and the Environment at the Department of Agriculture. McCain is the widow of late Sen. **John McCain**, R-Ariz. Wilkes is a Mississippi native and serves as the director of the Gulf of Mexico Ecosystem Restoration Team. He previously served as the acting associate chief of the USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service from 2010 to 2012.

The Agricultural Retailers Association (ARA) has promoted four of its staff to new positions, effective July 1. **Bryna Hautau** will add senior to her title as the new senior director of operations and events. Hautau joined the ARA in 2013 as an administrative assistant. **Hunter Carpenter** is the new senior director of public policy. Carpenter joined ARA in 2015 after working at Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment as manager of state affairs and grassroots. **Melisa Augusto** will be promoted to vice president of communications and marketing from director. She has been with ARA for the last four years. **Donnie Taylor** will become the senior vice president of member services and corporate relations. He has been with ARA for the last 10 years.

Rachel Pick has started a new job with the U.S. Farmers and Ranchers in Action as the director of programs and operations. Pick joins USFRA from USDA where she most recently served during the Trump Administration as an adviser to the general counsel. Before that, she was the chief of staff in the office of partnerships and public engagement.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory has added **Meyer Seligman** as the new director of government relations. Seligman previously worked on the Senate Appropriations Committee as a professional staff member for the subcommittee for energy and water development.



Meyer Seligman

Kathy Krenger will be joining the Kraft Heinz Company as the new chief communications officer, effective July 21. She currently works for the Hyatt Hotels Corporation as the senior vice president of global communications. She will succeed **Michael Mullen**, who has announced his retirement after 23 years with the company. His last day will be Aug. 15.

The American Seed Trade Association has elected **Brad May**, BASF, as the new chair of ASTA's officer team. **Jim**

Schweigert, GroAlliance, has been elected as the first vice chair, and **David Armstrong**, Sakata Seed America, was tapped to be the second vice chair.

Jim Collins Jr. has announced he will retire as chief executive officer of Corteva, effective Dec. 31. He has agreed to continue in his role while the company searches for his successor. Collins has been with the company and its predecessor, DuPont, for more than 37 years.

After 41 years of federal service, **Bradley Karmen** retired from USDA's Farm Service Agency. Karmen, who has worked on seven farm bills dating back to 1985, started his own consulting firm, working with farmers, ranchers, and agribusinesses in preparation for the 2023 farm bill.

Gene White, a founder of the Global Child Nutrition Foundation, passed away June 23 in Oak Harbor (Whidbey Island), Washington. She was known to be a trusted and knowledgeable resource for school feeding programs around the world, providing advice to several countries, including Tunisia, Paraguay, and China. A native of Ohio, White received her undergraduate degree in Food and Nutrition from Miami University in Ohio and a Master's Degree in Nutrition from Ohio State University. In her career, she served as president of both the School Nutrition Association and the California School Nutrition Association. Before that, she served as the assistant superintendent and director of child nutrition programs for the California State Department of Education.

**Best regards,
Sara Wyant
Editor**

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