

Water board expands authority to curtail Delta water rights

The State Water Resources Control Board on Tuesday approved a regulation granting it new authority to curtail senior water rights and ramp up enforcement for illegal diverters. The action is in response to one of the driest periods on record for California and the entire western U.S. The order targets more than 5,000 water right holders for the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta watershed, one of the nation’s most complex water right systems.

“We believe this emergency regulation is needed to help protect the drinking water supply for 25 million Californians and irrigation supply for over 3 million acres of irrigated farmland,” said Eileen Sobeck, the board’s executive director, during a recent press call.

Sobeck added that the board hopes to protect iconic salmon species and ensure storage supplies for future years.

Department of Water Resources (DWR) Director Karla Nemeth stressed that “the system is very, very taxed,” after two dry years and inefficient runoff into reservoirs that fell short of expectations by more than 800,000 acre-feet. Before installing a salinity barrier in the Delta this summer, DWR was having to release “ever-increasing amounts” to ensure freshwater actually made it to stressed Delta ecosystems.



DWR Director Karla Nemeth

Nemeth scorned farmers for taking advantage of the warm, dry conditions this spring with early plantings, which led to unregulated diversions ahead of the agency’s initial allocation decisions.

In describing the spiraling drought impacts to the industry, CDFG Secretary Karen Ross said the farmers and ranchers she has engaged with likened the situation to the drought of 1977-78—the only water year drier than the current one. They understood the necessity of these actions and the limited options available for the state, she added.

“The grass and the forage simply are not there,” said Ross. “[Ranchers are] having to go to markets for hay and, in many cases, also paying to haul in water to water the livestock. That is adding cost at a time where there's not going to be the revenues to make up for that.”

She called it “absolutely necessary” for the board to take actions now to save water for farmers in the future.

This has been a very measured approach,” she said. “It really calls to our attention the extraordinary balancing act that the State Water Resources Control Board is required to make with all of these beneficial uses of water and addressing the very real serious and significant situation we find ourselves in.”

The water board signaled its intentions to curtail water rights back in March, when it sent letters to more than 4,000 water users asking for voluntary cutbacks. Agricultural stakeholders appreciated efforts staff have made since then to gather feedback and revise the board’s regulatory approach.

During a staff workshop last week on the proposed regulation, Justin Fredrickson, an environmental policy analyst for the California Farm Bureau, recognized the board had made “some notable improvements” since calling for voluntary curtailments during the last drought and since wielding a legal tool that labels agriculture as wasteful and unreasonable when it drafted an emergency regulation for the Russian River watershed in June. Fredrickson noted the board’s primary focus has instead relied on quantifying the unavailability of water in the Delta.

Yet he raised alarms that this is only the second time the board has “experimented” with such a large-scale curtailment of water rights, drawing concerns for board actions beyond the emergency order.

“We need workable, predictable curtailments as an approach for long-term drought resilience,” said Fredrickson. “We believe that the water right system is equal to that task. It’s actually specifically designed to deal with scarcity.”

He called it “a work in progress” for bringing the existing system into the 21st century, but had hope.

“The water rights system divvied up water over many decades, usually on a small scale, and it works pretty well there,” he said. “But when you take it to the grand scale of something like the entire Bay-Delta watershed, it’s a tall order to expect perfection from the get-go.”

Fredrickson worried how smaller operations without “an army of engineers” would be able to grasp and comply with the regulation.

Chelsea Haines, who manages regulatory relations for the Association of California Water Agencies, said the expanded reporting requirements for water use under the regulation would place additional burdens on these water holders. She pushed the board to ensure this additional information is necessary for managing the current conditions.

Valerie Kincaid, a water law attorney representing irrigation agencies within the San Joaquin Tributaries Authority, dug into the legal framework behind the order, arguing the curtailment of pre-1914 water rights was outside the board’s jurisdiction. A 2015 court challenge over the board’s previous attempt to curtail Delta water rights found the agency failed to provide adequate due process before taking away water rights. Kincaid said the board has still not addressed due process in the current regulation and the governor’s expanded drought proclamation in May “simply doesn’t provide relief from these constitutional protections.”

She added that the methodology the board approved for the unavailability analysis had deficiencies that the board avoided addressing due to the lack of time and resources.

Dana Heinrich, an attorney for the board, affirmed the board’s legal authority.

“We believe we are on very firm legal footing in addressing water availability and potentially issuing curtailment orders to pre-1914 water right holders and riparian [right holders],” said Heinrich.



Valerie Kincaid, a water law attorney at O’Laughlin & Paris LLP

Kincaid also worried about the impact of the regulation on storing water next winter.

“There needs to be a very specific process in place for lifting the regulation,” she said. “It’s critical that all of our reservoirs are able to refill when there’s rain.”

She called for sunseting the regulation on November 1.

“Without that, we’re going to have a major, major problem with our reservoirs,” she said.

Director Nemeth acknowledged the critical management decisions ahead for establishing storage carryover targets for next year.

"We will be certainly having some pretty important conversations with the water board and in public settings as we head into this fall," said Nemeth.

Ross was hopeful several shovel-ready groundwater recharge projects could launch this year to take advantage of any excess flows and address short-term storage needs. She noted that a resources trailer bill Gov. Gavin Newsom signed into law in July would offer some grant funding as part of a \$737.7 million drought package.

Board staff have also expressed support for any cooperative agreements among water right holders in the Delta watershed to conserve water and avoid official curtailments.

We highly encourage those types of voluntary agreements," said Diane Riddle, a deputy director in the Division of Water Rights, emphasizing large-scale agreements in consultation with state and federal agencies would hold the most opportunity.

Steve Koretoff, who runs Purity Organics Inc. and serves on the board of the Almond Alliance of California, pushed for the state do more to address future water shortages.

"The state of California needs to increase the level of importance of water storage, both above ground and below ground," said Koretoff. "There needs to be a real commitment and designated lead for the state to ensure that the water storage is implemented and remains a priority of state infrastructure investment."

He cautioned the board not to order any curtailments that could cause irreparable harm to family farms and disadvantaged rural communities that depend on agriculture for jobs.

"The San Joaquin Valley is one of the most efficient places to grow food anywhere in the world," he said. "We can grow more food with less water than anywhere else on the planet."

In a separate letter to the board, Almond Alliance Elaine Trevino called for the development of a state task force to review water storage projects and expand recharging programs. Trevino also urged the board to support voluntary agreements to balance water use needs among the environment, municipalities and agriculture.

Ahmed "Mike" Alamari, who runs Pacific Farm Management, emphasized the "human factor" that is at play with every water board decision and that impacts the daily lives of his staff.

"Morale is very low amongst ourselves and anxiety is at its peak, as we continue to see the drought effects and political environment that's currently surrounding water in California," said Alamari. "I pray and urge that you guys do find a common ground. Keep politics out of the discussion and understand the nature of the decision you are making."

Environmental advocate Regina Chichizola from Save California Salmon said she hated to see farmers shut down but argued that 80% of the anglers who depend on the Delta are already shut

down and have lost their boats, mortgages and livelihoods, leaving a deep economic wound for coastal communities.

“These curtailments are vital and needed and coming a little too late,” said Chichizola. “We've let the fish die. Fishermen and tribes are facing amazing and huge losses over and over again.”

California lawmakers blame fish die-offs on Trump policies and Newsom, Biden inaction

At an informational hearing last week to address drought impacts on salmon fisheries, state lawmakers blasted the Newsom and Biden administrations for not repealing Trump-era policies before California entered another drought.

“We're witnessing the collapse of this iconic species right in front of our eyes,” said Senator Mike McGuire of Healdsburg. “Never in our nearly 50-year existence has this committee contended with such a dire situation.”

The Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) estimated the lack of a cold-water pool could lead to 100% of endangered winter-run Chinook salmon in the Sacramento River dying this year. Lower river flows trigger warmer temperatures in the river, which stress fish and elevate juvenile mortality and egg loss, explained CDFW Director Chuck Bonham, who testified at the committee hearing.

James Stone, who heads the Nor-Cal Guides and Sportsmen’s Association, said the Central Valley salmon fishery in 2002 propelled a \$90 million annual industry but was down to just \$2 million last year.

McGuire, who chairs the joint committee, called this a direct result of the Trump administration easing regulations.

“Federal water policy shifted here in California to push water that was once stored behind California's reservoirs to the Central Valley,” said McGuire. “California—and candidly, the current administration—has maintained this abysmal policy.”

He called the biological opinions a dark cloud hanging over the survival of the salmon species.

“The current biological opinion is good for agriculture, bad for fish and bad for the environment,” said the North Coast Democrat, who has often defended his district’s small dairy and cannabis farmers in committee hearings. “That was ramrodded through and made it nearly impossible for this species to be able to survive a pretty bad year.”

Assemblymember Mark Stone of Scotts Valley, who co-chairs the committee, agreed that federal policies have driven fisheries to extinction and “unwound” California’s conservation efforts over the years.

Eileen Sobeck, executive director of the State Water Resources Control Board, acknowledged the opinions have changed the approach of the federal Central Valley Project. But she defended the board's actions to protect salmon this year.

The board felt that it did the best that it could ... to come up with what it thought would be an appropriate carryover target at Shasta to provide a source of cold water that would benefit fish and also carryover storage for next year," said Sobeck. "We've been somewhat disappointed that the predictions about operations and dry conditions have been even worse than our conservative predictions."

Bonham added that California did sue the Trump administration over the 2019 biological opinions for endangered fish in the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta watershed.

"That litigation was brought in part because of our judgment that the salmon protections in the federal approach were insufficient," he said.



Sen. Mike McGuire, D-Healdsburg

Bonham also pointed out that the federal government last month told a federal court that the Bureau of Reclamation has committed to reinitiating by October consultation on the opinions under the Endangered Species Act, which will result in new or amended opinions.

CDFW has also worked with the Department of Water Resources to adopt a new State Water Project permit with more specific triggers to protect salmon, Bonham explained.

"We have literally put the pedal to the metal to release our cold-water storage down to the Central Valley," insisted McGuire. "The cold-water pool in Lake Shasta simply isn't going to be there this year because of that federal policy."

Bonham pointed out that the dry conditions, exacerbated by climate change, are currently affecting 96% of seven western states and could rival the Dust Bowl.

"This is a super serious and bleak situation for salmon across the state," he said. "I'm also more worried, to be honest, as we head into next year. Our standard methods of evaluation aren't keeping up with these cascading climate effects."

Another year of trucking 17 million salmon to the San Francisco Bay due to the low water levels would not be "the soundest strategy" if 2023 and 2024 are dry as well, he added.

“We have a legitimate set of almost no-way-out decisions,” explained Bonham. “That scenario puts us—and particularly the water board—in a place none of us have ever been. What’s it like to have bare minimum for public health and safety and not much else for anything?”

Following Bonham’s testimony, Barry Nelson, a policy representative for the Golden State Salmon Association, brought the issue back to Trump.

“The salmon die-off this year on the Sacramento River is not caused by drought. It’s not caused by climate change. It’s caused by water management,” said Nelson. “The state water board has permitted the bureau’s fish kill this year.”

Nelson recommended the board take enforcement action against the bureau over Shasta Dam operations and reject any voluntary agreements over Bay-Delta flows in favor of approving the board’s more aggressive Bay-Delta Plan.

Kate Poole, who directs water policy for the Natural Resources Defense Council, argued the state also failed to plan for or predict recurring droughts and instead chose to “prioritize water deliveries to big agribusiness over protecting salmon and California’s fish and wildlife.”

“Much of the deliveries going to agribusiness in the Sacramento Valley this year are to flood irrigate literally hundreds of square miles of rice farms,” said Poole. “We shouldn’t be doing flood irrigation, certainly not in a year like this one. We should grow other crops that aren’t as water thirsty.”

According to Sacramento River Settlement Contractors, Northern California rice farmers agreed last fall to delay diversions due to the low storage levels. With reduced allocations, they planted 25% less acreage this year. Further strains on the system led to an additional 10% of fallowing, and farmers volunteered more cutbacks to provide junior water right holders with permanent crops with enough water to make it through the year.

Noticeably absent from the committee hearing to defend farmers were any agricultural representatives selected to testify. Republican Asm. Megan Dahle of Lassen County, who runs a seed and trucking business with husband Sen. Brian Dahle, serves on the committee but was not able to attend. According to her office, the assemblymember has been occupied with a rash of wildfires and other emergencies in her district.

Republican Sen. Jim Nielsen of the Sacramento Valley was also absent, along with three Democrats on the committee. The hearing took place in Sacramento during the Legislature’s summer recess, after lawmakers had returned to their districts.

New fruit pest prompts CDFA response

California has its first known appearance in a commercial crop of the black fig fly, a pest that only feeds on that particular fruit. Figs are not a major crop in California, though more are grown in the state than anywhere else in the United States.

A small orchard in Ventura County became the first site of a CDFA hold on July 12 after positive identification of the fly. The hold means the grower was asked not to move fruit off the property to prevent the fly's spread to other places, said Andy Cline, assistant director of CDFA's Plant Health and Pest Prevention Services Division.

Ben Faber, a farm advisor with U.C. Cooperative Extension in Ventura and Santa Barbara counties, said he had been getting calls since June from homeowners and rare-fruit growers who would describe a damaged fig and want to know what had hurt it. But it wasn't until the agriculture commissioner's office in Ventura County received a fig sample with the larvae in it that officials could definitively identify it with DNA testing. Faber said while it was the first positive identification of this particular fly in California, it had been found in Mexico. "The major transporters of pests and disease here," Faber said, are people taking fruit with them to different places. That's why California has border inspections even at state lines, not just the Mexican border.

Once the fig fly was identified, CDFA "engaged industry pretty quickly" to alert growers in the Central Valley, which has the majority of commercial fig trees, said Mark McLaughlin, director of CDFA's Plant Health and Pest Prevention Services Division. His team also issued a pest advisory and he said USDA's Animal Plant Health Inspection Service is partnering with the state to conduct a risk assessment.

Cline said new invasive pests are frequently found in California and "we do have increasing pest pressure and an increasing rate of the number of invasive species that do actually get detected every year." The pressure from "exotic fruit flies" is especially consistent, he said. These fly species are similar but attracted to different specific food sources and Cline said that, while developing a custom attractant for each species would be ideal, the sheer number of different ones makes that impossible. Instead, they emphasize detection and then a formulated response that aims to eradicate new species.

McLaughlin said USDA and state agencies are important, but different, partners. The federal government plays a larger role when crops are key exports or a pest may come in on imports versus states working together when a common crop is threatened, such as with citrus pests. McLaughlin said funding to maintain the work comes from many sources, including competitive grants through the farm bill. The federal government has not made as much funding available this year as in the past, he said, and he has a constant need to secure enough funding "to ensure that we carry the mission out of the department."

When everything goes as planned, containing a new pest is possible, as has so far been the case with the Asian citrus psyllid (ACP), which causes citrus greening and decimated crops in Florida, Texas and Brazil before it was identified in California.

UC Extension's Faber said fig trees can have two crops in a year and if a grower gets out ahead of any black fig fly presence with traps and sanitation, "they could effectively eliminate the flies going after the fall crop." But they would need to act fast, he said.

He hopes they are successful because "it's a really dandy piece of fruit."

Push for conservation funding raises farm bill questions

Congressional Democrats are pushing for a historic increase in conservation program funding that would help pay farmers to address climate change, but the money also could create some challenges for the House and Senate Agriculture committees as they write the new farm bill.

Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich., has said she wants to include \$50 billion in new conservation spending over the next 10 years in the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation package Democrats are planning to move in coming weeks to pay for a range of domestic spending priorities.



Sen. Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich.

If Stabenow wins the full amount she wants, that \$50 billion would theoretically double existing spending levels on farm bill conservation programs, which range from the land-idling Conservation Reserve Program to the Environmental Quality Incentives Program and Conservation Stewardship Program, which are designed for working lands.

However, because of arcane Senate budget rules, lawmakers might not be able to make use of the full \$50 billion.

Here's why: Under what's known as the Senate's Byrd rule, funding provided by a reconciliation bill is limited to a 10-year window that starts when the legislation takes effect. Funding provided through the Democrats' reconciliation measure would presumably start in 2022, and then run out in 2031. That would create a potential funding cliff for future farm bills.

However, experts say the funding could be extended longer by stretching it out over the next farm bill's 10-year budget window. If the next farm bill is enacted in 2024, that means the Agriculture committees could make the conservation funding extend through 2033, said Bart Fischer, a former chief economist for the House Agriculture Committee who is now co-director of the Agricultural and Food Policy Center at Texas A&M University.

But it's not as simple as stretching the \$50 billion over those 10 years. The reconciliation bill's funding allocation for 2022 and 2023 — a total of \$10 billion — would be lost. So that means only \$40 billion, an average of \$4 billion a year, would actually be available for the Agriculture committees to use in the new farm bill, Fischer says.

But in Fischer's view, there would be a major benefit to extending the funding over the farm bill's full, 10-year budgeting window. **Because of congressional budget rules that apply to farm bills, the higher funding levels for conservation programs would automatically become a permanent part of the farm bill baseline.**

While the Senate’s Byrd rule limits reconciliation bills to a 10-year period, “in a farm bill there’s no such restriction,” Fischer told *Agri-Pulse*.

Bill Hoagland, a federal budget specialist with the Bipartisan Policy Center, agreed that the Ag committees could use the reconciliation funding to create permanent baseline for farm bills if the panels extend the spending over 10 years.

More than 200 conservation and farm groups are sending a letter Wednesday to Democratic congressional leaders appealing for an increase in conservation funding.

"Increasing baseline funding for the Farm Bill conservation programs and ramping up conservation technical assistance on the ground will enable landowners to mitigate the impacts of drought and flood, improve habitat, improve soil health and long-term food security, create new job opportunities for rural economies, and galvanize the agriculture sector to lead the charge in our fight against climate change," the letter says.

The shape of the reconciliation package, including its broad funding priorities, will become clearer when Democrats release a Senate budget resolution that will have instructions and spending amounts for the Agriculture committees and other panels. The resolution must be passed before the chambers can create the reconciliation bill with its various spending and tax provisions.

Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer, D-N.Y., has repeatedly said he will bring up the resolution after the Senate finishes debate on the bipartisan infrastructure bill that is now on the floor.



Bart Fischer, Texas A&M

But prospects for the reconciliation package are still cloudy. Senate Democrats can’t afford to lose a single member of their caucus, and neither Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona nor Joe Manchin of West Virginia have committed to vote for it. Sinema says \$3.5 trillion is too much, and Manchin has expressed concern about the overall impact on the economy and the effect of clean energy provisions on fossil fuels.

The former chairman of the House Agriculture Committee, Rep. Collin Peterson, D-Minn., is doubtful the package can even pass the House, where Democrats hold a slim 220-212 majority.

He said there are 10 to 15 Democrats who would likely oppose the bill both because of the level of proposed spending as well as a Democratic proposal to start taxing capital gains at death, which would effectively nullify the benefit of stepped-up basis.

“I don’t think they can even pass reconciliation out of the House, and it’s got to start in the House. It can’t start in the Senate,” he said. “The biggest problem is not just the tax issue; I think the amount of spending is a problem for people.”

Infrastructure bill would reshape, dramatically expand broadband funding

A massive bipartisan infrastructure bill the Senate is debating this week would make a historic \$65 billion investment in expanding high-speed internet, but the bulk of the funding would be routed through states, and rural broadband advocates want to see the Agriculture Department play a bigger role in distributing the funding.

The 2,702-page bill, which would provide \$550 billion in new spending for infrastructure, also would fund the repair of rural roads and bridges and pay for the reconstruction of upper Mississippi River locks and dams that are vital to moving Midwest farm commodities to export markets.

For the West, there would also be significant new resources for forest management on federal lands and for addressing irrigation needs, including rehabilitation of Bureau of Reclamation projects.



Shirley Bloomfield, NTCA-The Rural Broadband Association

Little in the bill could have a bigger benefit to agriculture and rural areas than the broadband funding, which includes \$42.4 billion to fund a formula-based grant program for states to deploy high-speed internet service and does not favor any specific technology.

An additional \$2 billion would be provided for USDA broadband programs, including the flagship ReConnect loan and grant program, which Congress has been funding at less than \$1 billion a year.

Under the bill, new projects funded either through the state grants or USDA would have to provide minimum service speeds of 100 megabits per second download and 20 megabits per second upload, far faster than the 25/3 speeds currently required under the ReConnect program.

The projects would also have to serve unserved areas before serving underserved areas. Unserved areas would be defined as currently having internet speeds of less than 25/3; under ReConnect, an area doesn't qualify as unserved unless it has speeds no higher than 10/1. The 100/20 requirement was a compromise between lawmakers who wanted 100/100 and those who wanted to keep the threshold at 25/3, said Jon Conradi, a spokesperson for Connect Americans Now.

“For new service, the provider will have to meet that new threshold,” Conradi told *Agri-Pulse*. “That’s a nod to the folks who were worried about what’s commonly referred to as ‘future-proofing,’ to make sure the speeds for new builds would be able to support the digital technologies of the future.”

NTCA — The Rural Broadband Association CEO Shirley Bloomfield said the speeds should have been symmetrical at 100/100.

“I still think we’re aiming low,” Bloomfield told *Agri-Pulse*.

“American consumers are using a lot of upload speeds, they just are, and I don’t know how you put that genie back in the bottle,” Bloomfield exclaimed, calling it a missed opportunity.

Bloomfield also would like to see USDA get a larger share of the funding more in line with a bill recently approved by the House Agriculture Committee that would authorize \$43 billion in ReConnect funding.

The bill would make a major change in eligibility for broadband funding by changing the definition of an unserved area.

Currently, at least 90% of an eligible area must be considered unserved by high-speed internet service to be eligible for ReConnect funds. The bill would lower the threshold to 50%, with a requirement that 10% of the funding be set aside for areas that meet the current, 90% threshold.



Jim Matheson, NRECA

Sen. John Thune, a South Dakota Republican who is planning to offer several amendments to the broadband section, said he fears the lower, 50% threshold would siphon money away from rural areas that need it most.

Jim Matheson, CEO of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, said the 50% level would still be better than nothing. “There were situations in the past where people would bid for areas where there were just a handful of people who might be below the category and that census block would take up money and it wasn’t going to areas where the real need existed,” he told *Agri-Pulse*.

Another \$1 billion in the bill’s broadband funding would be allocated for “middle-mile” infrastructure for fiscal years 2022 through 2026. Middle mile is defined as any broadband infrastructure that does not connect directly to an end-user or consumer.

About 30 states have state fiber networks that are assets pooled by community-based providers and carrying internet traffic a long way can be a burden in some rural areas, NTCA’s Bloomfield said, referring to the need for middle-mile investments.

The bill also would make the Federal Communications Commission’s Emergency Broadband Benefit program permanent and renames it as the Affordable Connectivity Program. This program would subsidize broadband service for eligible households at a rate of \$30 per month instead of the EBB program’s \$50 rate.

Among the infrastructure bill’s non-broadband provisions, the bill would provide \$5.2 billion for Army Corps of Engineers projects, with \$2.5 billion earmarked for lock and dam improvements, which would include the upper Mississippi River work. There would be another \$300 million set aside for work on the lower Mississippi River.

The bill would provide \$110 billion for roads and bridges, with \$36.7 billion of that designated for grants to fix bridges. There is an estimated backlog of \$125 billion in needed bridge repairs.

The bill would set aside \$3.4 billion to the Interior Department and Forest Service for wildfire risk reduction through mechanical thinning, controlled burns and other means. And there would be a new exemption for some forest management work from requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act.

Another \$2.1 billion would be earmarked for restoring the ecological health of both federal and private lands.

ASF detected in Dominican Republic, prompting worries it may spread to US

The recent detection of African Swine Fever in the Dominican Republic has shone a spotlight on the prevention protocols in the United States for a disease that is closer to American shores now than it has been in roughly 40 years.



Paul Sundberg, Swine Health Information Center

The disease, which the World Organization for Animal Health (OIE) says can have a mortality rate for affected pigs as high as 100% and does not yet have a cure, has forced China to destroy more than 1 million pigs over the last five years and ravaged countries throughout Africa, Asia and Europe.

“African Swine Fever has been coined as ‘volcanic lava,’” said Paul Sundberg, the executive director of the Swine Health Information Center (SHIC). “It doesn’t necessarily move really quickly, but it continues to move at a rather steady pace and it burns everything that it comes into contact with.”

The Dominican Republic officially reported two initial outbreaks in Sánchez Ramírez and Monte Cristi provinces to OIE’s World Animal Health Information System (WAHIS) on July 29. A total of 842 backyard-raised pigs — a relatively small number considering the estimated 1.8 million hogs that currently live in the country — were found to be susceptible. Four more outbreaks affecting a possible 14,135 pigs in Sánchez Ramírez province were announced by the Ministry of Agriculture in a [release on Sunday](#).

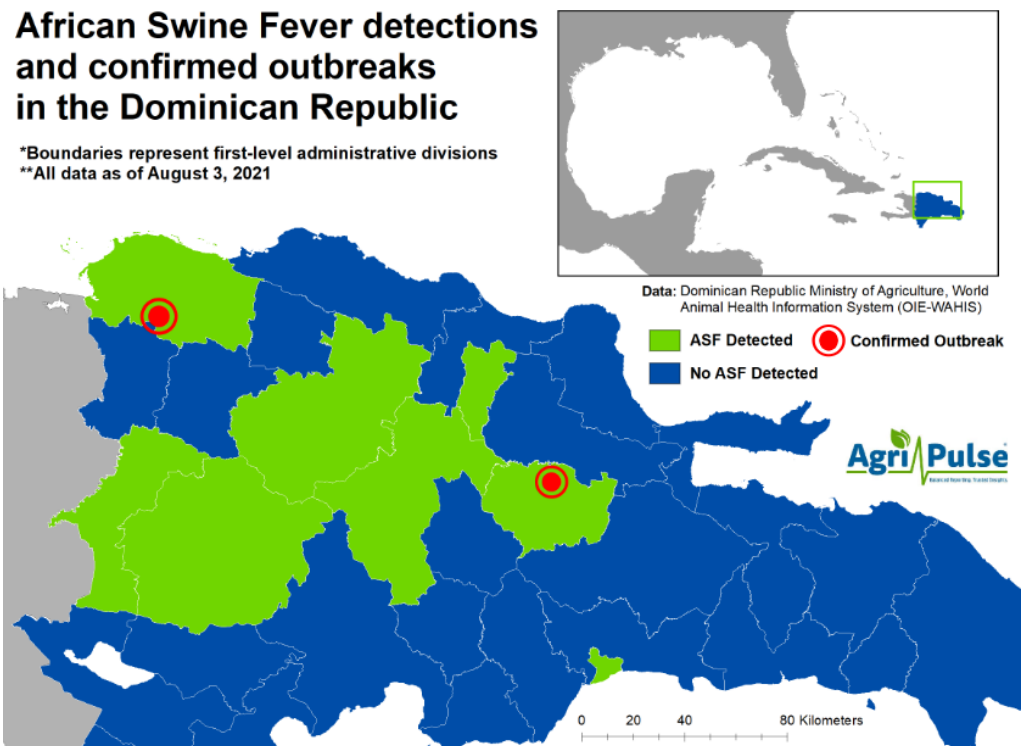
But [information released by the nation’s Official Commission for the Control and Eradication of Outbreaks of African Swine Fever on Monday](#) indicates that it now may be present in 11 additional provinces.

ASF’s discovery in the Dominican Republic is frightening for the U.S., which has only about 700 miles of ocean separating it from the island and is home to approximately 75.7 million hogs, according to USDA’s National Agriculture Statistics Service (NASS). (See map on the next page.)

A study last year by Iowa State University economists estimated that the virus could cost the U.S. pork industry about \$50 billion in losses over 10 years if it were to enter the country.

Several outside agencies like the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture, the OIE and the USDA have offered to assist the Dominican Republic with tracking and containing the disease.

“USDA is committed to assisting the Dominican Republic in dealing with ASF, is offering continued testing support, and will consult with them on additional steps or actions to support response and mitigation measures,” the department said in a release. “We will also offer similar help to Haiti, which borders the Dominican Republic and is at high risk for ASF detections.”



ASF has not yet been found in neighboring Haiti, but the SHIC noted in a report that local news agencies have recently reported an increase in the mortality of pigs in the small border town of Anse-à-Pitres.

“The first outbreak in the Dominican Republic was very close to the border with Haiti, therefore we are concerned that, unfortunately, Haiti could already be or will be soon affected by this disease,” Monique Eloit, the OIE Director General, told *Agri-Pulse*.

The virus does not affect humans and, according to the OIE, can be spread by direct contact between hogs or indirectly through workers' clothes, vehicles, implements and ticks. It also circulates when food scraps containing infected meat are used as pig feed.

The last time the Dominican Republic dealt with ASF was in 1980. A two-year battle with the virus saw 192,473 culled pigs, according to the SHIC.

Last Wednesday, USDA put out an import alert notifying the world that all imports of live swine, swine germplasm, unprocessed pork products and pork byproducts from the Dominican Republic or Haiti were prohibited unless they were consigned to a USDA approved establishment or fully taxidermy finished.

The agency stated that processed pork products and byproducts in passenger baggage could only be imported if they met APHIS packaging and cooking requirements or were accompanied by official documentation confirming the products had been treated.

Both the Dominican Republic and Haiti were already subject to import restrictions on pork, along with every other Caribbean country except the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, due to the existence of classical swine fever — another viral disease that often proves fatal for swine — within those nations.

“The thing that is in our favor is that since classical swine fever is on the island of Hispaniola, in both countries, we have long since not had trade,” said Patrick Webb, acting chief veterinarian of the National Pork Board. “So that limits opportunities for the virus to move in through legally traded products.”

A USDA official told *Agri-Pulse* that after the detection of ASF was confirmed, USDA quickly reached out to Customs and Border Protection to ask the agency to heighten its efforts to detect any pork products travelers might try to bring in from the Dominican Republic or Haiti.

Rusty Payne, the director of media for CBP, told *Agri-Pulse* in an email the agency will be increasing inspections of flights from the Dominican Republic and ensuring that garbage from these airplanes is properly disposed of. It has been meeting with the National Targeting Center, the Office of Intelligence, the National Pork Producers Council, the American Feed Industry Association and APHIS to discuss agricultural trade and the use of canine teams in passenger pathways.

APHIS will also be increasing the capacity of its National Animal Health Laboratory Network and plans to add ASF testing to its existing classical swine fever surveillance efforts, along with increasing inspections and enforcement of garbage feeding facilities to make sure that fed garbage is cooked properly, according to public affairs specialist Mike Stepien.

If the virus were to be detected in the U.S., whether it comes in feral or commercial swine, all U.S. meat exports would likely be shut down immediately. Pork from about 30% of all the hogs raised in the U.S. is exported.

With the partial exception of Canada, the U.S. does not have any regionalization agreements with foreign countries when it comes to ASF. That means a detection in the U.S. could result in foreign countries initiating blanket bans on all U.S. pork — not just pork from affected regions.



Monique Eloit, OIE

The U.S. and Canada recently reached an agreement to keep trade intact if ASF is found in feral pigs on either side of the border.

“Continuing trade with Canada in the event of a feral African Swine Fever detection is important to our stakeholders, and this trade protocol provides the necessary guidance to minimize the impact to the swine industry,” USDA Chief Veterinarian Burke Healey said in a statement released in March. “This collaborative effort uses a science-based approach to ensure trade between both countries resumes as quickly as possible.”

The Dominican Republic is using “total military control” in certain points of the two affected provinces and announced it would be prohibiting the movement of live and slaughtered pigs across their borders, placing them in quarantine and conducting periodic epidemiological surveys within them.

Part of the reason ASF is so costly for affected countries is because depopulation and disposal efforts are necessary for pigs exposed to the virus. The few infected pigs that do survive an outbreak will become lifelong carriers of the virus. The meat of those that die is often contaminated.

"Pigs that are infected with ASF can also infect others," Eloit said. "Therefore, in the absence of a vaccine, a stamping out approach should be considered as part of the control measures to stop the spread of this disease. That is not so easy to implement in backyard farms because sometimes you don't know exactly how many pigs there are, as well as whom they belong to. The socioeconomic consequences should also be considered."

The National Pork Board is encouraging all producers to establish biosecurity measures on their operations and sign up for AgView, which helps producers of all sizes and types provide disease status updates and pig movement data to state animal health officials. These measures include clothing and showering requirements, regular equipment maintenance, clear communication of farm rules, a well-thought-out loading system, attention to what supplies are being brought in and proper disposal of carcasses.

If producers notice a high fever, decreased appetite, weakness, red and blotchy skin, diarrhea, vomiting, coughing or difficulty breathing in their hogs, they should report those animals to their state or federal animal health officials.

US dairy says Canada using new ways to boost dairy exports

Canada is again using its national dairy pricing program to bolster exports and sidestepping commitments in the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, according to fresh allegations from the U.S. dairy sector.

Canada is following the letter of USMCA, but not the spirit, U.S. industry officials say.

Canada agreed in USMCA to scrap its Class 7 dairy pricing program and put in place export thresholds and surcharges to cap some milk protein exports. That met demands from U.S. negotiators who were concerned Canada was flooding the international market with cheap skim milk powder. Those subsidized exports, the U.S. argued, lowered the prices U.S. producers could get for their exports.



Becky Rasdall, IDFA

Now, the U.S. dairy sector says it is seeing an alarming trend of rising Canadian milk protein exports under a different class of products. Canada, says Becky Rasdall, vice president of trade policy and international affairs for the International Dairy Foods Association, is using government-set prices for a different class of products that are not subject to the new thresholds set in USMCA.

“We’ve seen an uptick in milk protein exports under other tariff lines that appear to be an effort by Canada to do an end-run around those (USMCA) export disciplines,” says Shawna Morris, vice president of trade policy for the U.S. Dairy Export Council and National Milk Producers Federation.

Allan Huttema, chairman of the board of directors for the Northwest Dairy Association and Darigold, asked the U.S. government to take action on what he sees as a problem that will only continue to worsen, but industry representatives do not see an easy resolution.

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative, Huttema said, needs “to keep a careful eye on milk protein isolate and skim milk powder exports out of Canada. We are concerned that they may be increasing production to circumvent milk protein export caps, undermining the spirit of USMCA.”

Rasdall said “USMCA did require the elimination of Class 7, but (Canada) created new milk classes that recreate the same problem.”

It was at about the same time that USMCA came into force a year ago that the Canadian Dairy Commission implemented Class 4a to set prices for dairy protein products, some of which are similar but not exactly the same as what was covered by the now-defunct Class 7.

“Canada’s actions have given cause for concern,” Huttema told the Senate Finance Committee last week. “Canadian exports of milk protein isolates and certain skim milk blends manufactured under the new Class 4a have been increasing in a manner that seems designed to evade USMCA disciplines.”

And Ken Bailey, a consultant to Darigold, tells *Agri-Pulse*, “Yes, Canada has essentially replaced Class 7 with 4a. That price uses a formula set in USMCA. Our concern is Canada is using this USMCA sanctioned price to continue to export high-value milk proteins.”

The Canadian Dairy Commission lists “concentrated milk protein in liquid and dry forms at a concentration of at least 40% on a dry matter basis” and “all types of powders (including but not limited to whole milk powder, skim milk powder, yogurt powder, sour cream powder, edible casein powders” and “concentrated milk as an ingredient in the food industry” and “milk and milk components used to make infant formula” as Class 4a products.

Chantal Paul, a spokesperson for the Canadian Dairy Commission told *Agri-Pulse* that the agency is well aware of U.S. views regarding Class 4a, but said the Commission would not comment. The Dairy Farmers of Canada did not respond to requests for comment on this story.

Class 7 is gone, but Canadian exports of Class 4a products are strong — stronger than the equivalent of U.S. exports of the same commodities — and Canadian prices are consistently lower, according to IDFA data.

“Rising exports of products not limited by USMCA wouldn’t be an issue,” Rasdall said, “except that in this case, we think these exports are rising because Class 4a is functioning the same as Class 7 did by providing a price that is well below the cost of production, which effectively acts as a subsidy for exported products.”

The high volume of milk protein isolates (MPI) being exported by Canada are not interchangeable with skim milk powder — the prime concern the U.S. had with Canada’s Class 7 pricing program — but they are similar, and Canadian exports are of the MPIs are just as concerning, says Morris.

“U.S. companies also produce MPIs that they export to various markets,” she said. “While the end uses of MPI are typically different than the end uses for skim milk powder, if Canada continues to increase its exports of MPI it will still be effectively offloading more dairy protein onto global markets than USMCA envisioned, which ultimately compete with U.S. dairy proteins around the world.”

But getting Canada to stop will likely be very difficult. That’s because, technically, Canada is adhering to what it agreed to under USMCA.

The U.S. and Canada agreed to set up a committee that will discuss dairy export issues, but Canada’s actions under Class 4a are not a breach and not an issue that could be addressed in a USMCA dispute panel, say U.S. industry representatives. Instead, it may be an issue that the U.S. will need to take to the World Trade Organization.

Rasdall stresses IDFA is “not saying Canada hasn’t implemented the pricing formula in USMCA wrong; we’re saying that they found a way to implement the price formula as written correctly while still developing a pricing system that allows them to price protein below their cost of production and therefore protect that subsidy for their producers.”

The short version, she says, is that “class 4a is the new class 7, and even if Canada is acting consistent with USMCA commitments on milk classes, we are not convinced the subsidy provided under class 4a is WTO consistent once those 4a products are exported.”

Farm Credit, USDA actions on lending have hemp industry concerned

A recent memo from the Farm Credit Administration to farm credit banks and associations on hemp financing has a prominent hemp industry group concerned that many growers could have difficulty obtaining loans they need to expand their operations.

FCA, however, says that was not its intent, and the informational memo, from FCA Director of Regulatory Policy Kevin Kramp, is merely meant to provide guidance to institutions thinking about lending to hemp operations.

The National Industrial Hemp Council, which represents growers, processors and other entities in the hemp supply chain, says the Farm Credit Administration is, in essence, advising its four banks and 67 associations not to lend to hemp growers unless they are in states with USDA-approved plans.

But that, NIHC says, leaves out growers licensed under state plans authorized by the pilot program for hemp established in the 2014 farm bill. That program legalized hemp production for state-administered research and marketing programs before Congress legalized hemp more broadly in the 2018 farm bill, under which states and tribes submit their plans for USDA approval. Hemp farmers in states with neither a 2014 pilot program plan nor a 2018 USDA-approved plan are required to obtain a license directly from USDA.

But Congress also gave states the option to continue operating under the 2014 program, which offers them more regulatory flexibility than the USDA regulations, and which was extended through the end of 2021 after widespread concern was expressed about testing and disposal requirements and enforcement. The FY22 Appropriations bill passed by the House last week further extends the 2014 authority through the end of 2022.

According to USDA, as of July 27, 20 states are continuing to operate under the 2014 farm bill authority, including four of the five largest programs by acreage — Colorado, Oregon, Kentucky and New York — responsible for about three-quarters of all U.S. hemp production, according to NIHC Government Affairs Committee co-chair Rick Fox.

“What we tried to convey in this memo was that if you as an institution are going to finance hemp, these are things you should consider,” said Lori Markowitz, senior policy analyst in FCA’s Office of Regulatory Policy. “It’s definitely not an absolute.”

There are still fears about lending to hemp producers because is associated with marijuana — which remains illegal under federal law. Both are cannabis plants, but hemp is defined as having below 0.3%.THC.

"From a lending perspective, this slim margin of error presents risk that may make some banks hesitant to serve these businesses, particularly banks that lack the resources to ensure a business is complying with that threshold," an American Bankers Association spokesperson said in a statement published in the Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch.

Mark Hayes, spokesman for the Farm Credit Council, the trade association representing farm credit institutions, said a handful of member institutions it contacted said the memo had not raised any concerns about lending to producers in states operating under the pilot program.

However, Fox, a hemp grower in Vermont, said the memo's emphasis on the 2018 farm bill program and USDA regs and its "silence regarding producers in 2014 states (i.e., not subject to USDA approval), will likely deter lenders from financing any such hemp producers out of perceived risk."

"If your institution decides to proceed with financing hemp, you should consider collecting, analyzing, and documenting the following information from each applicant," the memo says, listing first "a copy of the USDA-approved plan issued by the state or tribe" and then "a copy of the producer's license or authorization number issued by the state. If the state or tribe does not have a USDA-approved program, you should obtain a copy of the producer's license issued by USDA."

NIHC also is concerned about USDA Rural Development grant programs that are closed to hemp producers operating in states without approved USDA plans. In rules issued for value-added grants and the Rural Energy for America program, RD said, "Given the absence of federal oversight or regulations governing the 2014 Farm Bill pilot program, Rural Development will not award funds to any project proposing to produce, procure, supply or market any component of the hemp plant or hemp-related by-products, or provide technical assistance related to such products, produced under 2014 Farm Bill authority."



Rick Fox, NHIC

"Here again, the overwhelming majority of all the acres licensed for hemp production are not eligible for Rural Development funding," Fox said. "And we are not aware of any statutory basis for that determination."

Fox says USDA is being inconsistent in its oversight of hemp — allowing crop insurance and export promotion funding for all licensed producers regardless of their states' 2014 or 2018 status, for example, but not REAP or Value-Added Producer Grants. He says other inconsistencies persist as well, such as the ineligibility of hemp for specialty crop funding even though most hemp in the U.S. is grown as a horticultural crop that meets the statutory requirements for specialty-crop designation.

"Congress has repeatedly stated its intention that hemp is an agricultural commodity and worthy of USDA's full support as the primary authority for hemp production in the United States," Fox

says. “After decades of prohibition USDA’s reticence and risk-aversion is understandable, but it’s restricting capital and restricting access to financial services and it’s time to get over it.” Markowitz suggested NIHC reach out to FCA to discuss the matter.

Unrest in Cuba shakes up ag trade outlook

Public protests in communist Cuba are rare, so when people recently took to the streets to demonstrate in protest against the government, the world took notice and America’s ag sector is still weighing the implications for trade between the two countries.

While Dalton Henry, vice president of policy for the U.S. Wheat Associates, says it’s just too early to gauge whether the unrest hurts or helps advocates for allowing increased ag trade, Peter Bachmann, vice president of international trade policy for the USA Rice Federation, says he’s hopeful.

“We are encouraged that something different is happening,” said Bachmann. “Because of lockdowns and food shortages, the Cubans are demanding change. The U.S. has to support these people who are standing up to their government and want freedom from communism.”

The unrest from within Cuba has united governments — including the U.S. — from around the globe to denounce the Cuban regime’s harsh treatment of protesters.

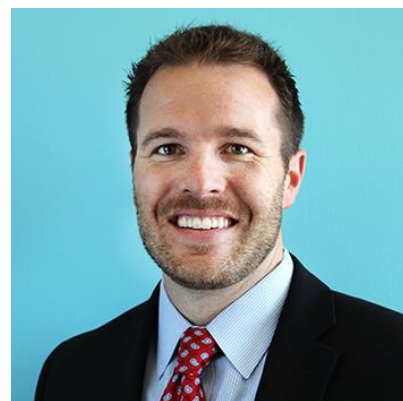
“We urge the Cuban government to heed the voices and demands of the Cuban people,” U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, together with foreign ministers of 20 nations, said in a joint statement issued July 25. “The international community will not waver in its support of the Cuban people and all those who stand up for the basic freedoms all people deserve.”

Still, it’s unclear if the recent turmoil will push the Biden administration to reach out and support policy changes that would improve the lives of Cubans.

“It’s tough to see how this situation plays out,” says Henry, who says the Cuban protests are more of a complicating factor than a catalyst for change. “It certainly makes things more challenging.”

President Joe Biden still has not taken the steps many were hoping he would to continue the Obama administration’s push to improve relations between the U.S. and Cuba. Biden hasn’t even rolled back any of the Trump administration’s travel or other restrictions on Cuba.

USW, along with many farm groups, advocates that one of the best things the White House and Congress could do is end restrictions that stop the U.S. from supplying Cubans with farm commodities like wheat, rice and corn.



Dalton Henry, U.S. Wheat Associates

“That’s been our argument for a long time,” Dalton said about the point of view that the best way to support the Cuban people is to help feed them.

Cuba imports about \$2 billion worth of ag commodities per year, but the U.S. gets only about 10% of that business even though the two countries are separated by only about 90 miles of water.

“The Cuban people want our goods, especially U.S. rice, which is easily the safest, most efficient and most sustainable food supply in all of the world,” said Louisiana rice merchant Scott Franklin in a statement released by USA Rice. “This is the last trade frontier for the U.S., and its significance cannot be overstated.”

The U.S. was the largest foreign supplier of rice to Cuba before the embargo was put in place in 1960, but now “U.S. rice exports to Cuba are essentially zero,” says USA Rice.

Now ordinary Cubans, many of whom the State Department says were beaten or arrested, have taken a bold step and the U.S. has to back them up with policies, says Bachmann.

“If the U.S. comes in heavy-handed and tries to tell (Cubans) what to do, that’s probably not going to help in the long run,” says Bachmann. “The change has to come from within and this is the first time in decades that there’s been this Cuba-driven demand for change.”

U.S. politics surrounding policy change with Cuba is polarizing and has been for decades, especially in the swing state of Florida — home to the anti-communist passion of many Cuban-Americans.

Sen. Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican who has been outspoken on Cuba policy, accused the Biden administration of supporting “engagement” with the Cuban government during a recent appearance on Fox News, and criticized trips to the country by lawmakers. And now Rubio, House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., Sen. Rick Scott, R-Fla., and other lawmakers are demanding an audience with Biden “to discuss how Congress and your Administration can work together to bring an end to the oppressive communist regime in Havana and liberate the Cuban people,” according to a letter they sent to Biden July 26.

But it is engagement with Cuba that many farm groups want. Some of the biggest farm groups in the country signed on to a letter last month in support of legislation by Sens. John Boozman, R-Ark., and Michael Bennet, D-Colo., that would allow for private financing of U.S. ag exports to Cuba and permit U.S. companies to set up agricultural businesses in Cuba.

Congress allowed U.S. farmers to once again export to Cuba when it passed the Trade Sanctions Reform and Export Enhancement Act of 2000, but the law also



Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack was among the Obama administration officials who visited Cuba in 2015.

required Cubans to pay cash in advance for U.S. ag commodities, which puts the U.S. at a severe disadvantage to suppliers from Europe, Asia and South America.

Cuba imports about 30 million bushels of wheat every year, but none of it is coming from U.S. fields. Instead, it's mostly European and Canadian producers that supply Cuba's demand.

News Briefs:

National Farmers Market Week celebrates resiliency. The 21st Annual National Farmers Market Week (NFMW) kicked off Sunday, Aug. 1. The week is meant to highlight the essential role that farmers markets play in our food system and celebrate the resilience and safety of farmers markets during the pandemic, according to the Farmers Market Coalition. The week of celebration runs through the first week of August every year and is formally announced by a USDA proclamation. This year, Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack visited Pearl Street Farmers Market in Denver to commence the week-long campaign. Vilsack's proclamation discussed the role farmers markets play in federal nutrition programs and in supporting minority and family farms. The Farmers Market Coalition says that 2021 NFMW is focused on three main messages: Farmers markets are essential businesses and their short supply chains provide resiliency for food systems; farmers market operators are local food heroes, but they have been left out of many food system relief efforts; and farmers markets offer safe outdoor spaces that allow shopping with air circulation and social distancing. The sponsors of this year's NFMW are Square, Farm Credit Council, American Farmland Trust, the Food Liability Insurance Program, and the Farm Board.

USDA study finds biobased products boost the economy. A new Department of Agriculture study shows the biobased products industry supports almost 5 million jobs and adds nearly \$500 billion to the economy. The report, commissioned by USDA's BioPreferred Program, specifically analyzes the biobased products industry, which includes the production of bioplastics, but stops short of examining the market for biofuels. The analysis also pointed to a biobased product industry ripple effect: For every biobased industry job, 1.79 additional jobs are supported in the economy. Further, the report highlighted the more publicized environmental benefits of using biobased products. "Biobased products displace approximately 9.4 million barrels of oil annually, and have the potential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an estimated 12.7 million metric tons of CO2 equivalents per year," USDA noted. The program, meant to stimulate economic development, add jobs to the economy, and create new markets for commodity crops, now includes over 16,000 registered products.

Metallica funds ag scholarship to train veterans in diesel technology. In a unique philanthropic effort, the heavy metal band Metallica is funding a scholarship to prepare veterans for careers in agriculture and connect them with job opportunities, according to Hartnell College. Metallica's nonprofit, All Within My Hands Foundation, will donate \$100,000 to Hartnell, a community college in California's Salinas Valley, as part of its Metallica Scholars Initiative. The initiative, which is entering its third year of operation, is funded by Metallica and led by the American Association of Community Colleges. It aims to support students while also highlighting the importance of career and technical education. To carry out the initiative, Hartnell will partner with the Grower-Shipper Association of Central California and the Veterans

Transition Center of Monterey County. Beginning in August, the partners will start working with 20 veterans who have been recipients of support services from the VTC. VTC provides local veterans and their families housing, counseling, and employment training. The participating veterans will complete Hartnell courses in diesel mechanics and related skills, while also being paid for on-the-job training that will be completed with GSA member companies in the Salinas Valley. The participants will also receive a toolbox with basic equipment worth \$2,300. Taylor Farms, Automated Harvesting LLC, Dole Fresh Vegetables and Braga Fresh are the companies currently taking part in the program. Christopher Valadez, the president of the Grower-Shipper Association, said veterans normally have abilities that are extremely adaptable to working in the ag industry, such as working under pressure, planning, and logistics connections. “We believe this can be the beginning of a new and lasting relationship that connects the Salinas Valley agricultural sector with our local veterans' community,” Valadez said.

NSF and NIFA invest \$220M in Artificial intelligence research. USDA’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture and the U.S. National Science Foundation have announced a \$220 million investment in 11 new Artificial Intelligence Research Institutes that will be led by NSF. The new investment will build on the \$140 million already invested in seven AI Research Institutes last year. The programs are intended to result in a range of advances, including adapting AI into a more accessible “plug and play” technology, innovating solutions to strengthen agriculture and food supply chains, and improving online learning via AI. “These innovation centers will speed our ability to meet critical needs in the future agricultural workforce, providing equitable and fair market access, increasing nutrition security and providing tools for climate-smart agriculture,” said NIFA Director Carrie Castille. To meet their investment goals, NSF also partnered with the Department of Homeland Security, Google, Amazon, Intel, and Accenture. In addition to the \$140 million invested last year, NIFA’s investment will expand the reach of the AI Research Institutes to 37 states. “These institutes are hubs for academia, industry and government to accelerate discovery and innovation in AI,” said NSF Director Sethuraman Panchanathan. “Inspiring talent and ideas everywhere in this important area will lead to new capabilities that improve our lives from medicine to entertainment to transportation and cybersecurity and position us in the vanguard of competitiveness and prosperity.” Examples of two of the institutes funded are the NIFA Institute for Agricultural AI for Transforming Workforce and Decision Support and the NIFA AI Institute for Resilient Agriculture.

Farm Hands West: Newsom appoints Scholer, Sanchez

Governor **Gavin Newsom** has appointed **Craig Scholer** to be the deputy secretary for legislative affairs at the California Environmental Protection Agency. Scholer has been the chief of staff for Assemblymember **Mark Stone** since 2018.

Lauren Sanchez is headed back to California to work as Gov. **Gavin Newsom’s** senior climate adviser. Since February, Sanchez has served as the senior adviser to the Special Presidential Envoy for Climate **John Kerry**. Before that, she was deputy secretary for climate policy and intergovernmental relations at the California Environmental Protection Agency.

Nicole Elliott has been appointed as director of the newly established Department of Cannabis Control. The department was established to better improve access to licensure, simplify regulatory oversight and support California businesses in regards to the cannabis industry. **Rasha Salama** has also been tapped to be the chief deputy director of the department. Elliott previously worked as Gov. Newsom's senior adviser on cannabis in the office of business and economic development. Before that, she was director of the Office of Cannabis for the city and county of San Francisco's General Services Agency from 2017 to 2019. Salama previously was the assistant branch chief of the California Department of Public Health's Manufactured Cannabis Safety Branch.



Chavonda Jacobs-Young

President **Joe Biden** has announced his intent to nominate **Chavonda Jacobs-Young** to become USDA's undersecretary for research, education, and economics and chief scientist. Jacobs-Young currently serves as the administrator of the Agricultural Research Service. She has been at USDA for the last two decades serving in leadership positions such as acting director of the National Institute of Food and Agriculture and acting deputy undersecretary for the REE mission area.

The U.S. Senate has confirmed the nomination of **Janie Simms Hipp** to serve as USDA's general counsel. Hipp currently serves as the CEO of the Native American Agriculture Fund. She also worked in the Office of the Secretary at USDA during the Obama administration as the senior adviser for tribal relations and as director of the Office of Tribal Relations.

Phyllis Fong has been appointed as the Acting Inspector General of the Federal Housing Finance Authority. Fong will continue to serve as the IG for USDA while she serves as the acting FHFA IG. Fong has served as IG for the USDA since 2002.

Nicole Angarella has been nominated to be the inspector general at the United States Agency for International Development. Angarella currently serves as the general counsel to the USAID Inspector General. Angarella has also been a senior legal counsel at USAID's Office of the Inspector General and at the Department of Transportation's Office of the Inspector General.

Sara Neagu-Reed is returning to Washington to take a job as a senior government relations staffer with the National Farmers Union. She was most recently with the California Farm Bureau Federation but also spent time with the National Corn Growers Association and was on staff at the Department of Agriculture during the Obama administration.

Don Parrish has retired from the American Farm Bureau Federation, where he worked as senior director of regulatory regulations. Parrish dedicated most of his career to working on water issues, including federal authority over waters of the U.S., wetlands, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs), water quality standards, and conservation issues related to the farm bill. Before joining AFBF, Parrish was an economist at Auburn University and before that, he was employed by the Farm Credit System as a research analyst. He currently chairs the Waters

Advocacy Coalition and also chairs the Agricultural Nutrient Policy Council. Parrish will start his retirement by moving back to Alabama with his wife Dee.

After 30 years of service, **Cynthia Robertson** has retired from USDA's Farm Service Agency located in Bakersfield, Calif. She most recently served as the county executive director.

Karla Stockli has been selected as chairperson of the Buy California Marketing Agreement, known as CA Grown. She currently serves as the CEO of the California Fig Advisory Board. Stockli succeeds outgoing chair **Donn Zea**, executive director of the California Prune Board, who has led the board the past two years.



Karla Stockli

Ryan Galt has been appointed as faculty director for the Agricultural Sustainability Institute at UC Davis. Galt currently is a professor in the Department of Human Ecology.

Cristina Murillo-Barrick joined the UC Cooperative Extension as an agricultural land acquisitions academic coordinator, serving the Fresno, Merced and Tulare counties. In this role, she will support the mission of California's Sustainable Agricultural Land Conservation Program to help fight climate change by protecting productive farmland. Before accepting this position, Murillo-Barrick was an environmental science educator at Golden Gate National Recreation Area, Yosemite National Park and Shenandoah National Park. **Sandipa Gautam** joined UC Cooperative Extension as an area citrus integrated pest management adviser. She previously worked as an assistant research entomologist in the UC Riverside Department of Entomology.

Matt Baur has officially been named director of the Western Integrated Pest Management Center. Baur served as the acting director of Western IPM Center during the COVID-19 pandemic. He has been the Center's associate director since 2014.

Steve Blecker no longer works for the California Department of Food and Agriculture in the Office of Pesticide Consultation. He was a senior environmental scientist.

The Soil Health Institute has hired six new scientists to its team: **Loutrina Staley, Christine Molling, Jason Ackerson, Nate Looker, Mara Cloutier, and Vance Almquist**. Staley joins SHI as a soil scientist. She has experience as an advanced science teacher in the Decatur City School system, where she implemented a STEM program in agriculture and food science. Manning will be a modeling specialist for the Dairy Soil and Water Regeneration project. She joins SHI from the University of Wisconsin Space Science and Engineering Center's Cooperative Institute for Meteorological Satellite Studies. Ackerson has been brought on to be a project scientist for soil carbon measurement and technology discovery projects. He joins SHI from the Department of Agronomy at Purdue University where he was an assistant professor and extension specialist. Looker will be a project scientist for field-based establishment of Soil Health Targets for farmers and field conservationists. He previously studied at the University of Minnesota-Twin Cities, where he looked at the impact of tropical forest succession on soil-based

ecosystem services. Cloutier is a project manager for the Dairy Soil and Water Regeneration project in partnership with Dairy Management Inc. She previously worked at Pennsylvania State University where she researched conservation management practices that improve soil health and how it influences soil microbial nitrogen dynamics and nitrous oxide emissions. Almquist has been hired to develop quantitative strategies for grouping similar soils to aid in establishing and mapping Soil Health Targets for farmers and field conservationists. He previously worked at the Pacific Ecological Systems Division of EPA's Office of Research and Development.

The Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership has hired **Liz Ogilvie** to be the chief communications officer, effective Aug. 16. TRCP will also bring on **Alex Funk** as the director of water resources and senior counsel on Aug. 23. Ogilvie most recently was the chief marketing officer at the American Sportfishing Association. Funk previously was an agricultural and rural resiliency policy specialist at the Colorado Water Conservation Board.

Jerome Lyman has been elected board chair of the Farm Foundation. Lyman is a retired McDonald's exec and currently serves as the chief compliance officer for Nazar Systems. **Dan Basse**, president of AgResource Company, was elected vice chair, and **Kristin Kroepfl** of Quaker North America and **Sylvester Miller II** of Indigo are joining the board as new members.

Bill Vann, 67, his wife **Susie**, 60, and two friends died in a helicopter accident in Colusa County, Calif., on Sunday. The cause of the crash is unknown and is still under investigation. Vann was a notable almond grower in California. Vann along with his brother Garnett Vann started farming together in 1973 under the name Vann Brothers.

Owner of Kirkland Tree Farms, **Mark James Kirkland** passed away on July 13 at age 64. Kirkland's tree farm has been a certified family forest in the in Longview, Wash., area since 1961. Passionate about maintaining healthy forests and educating others, Kirkland served for over 20 years as a member of the Cowlitz Farm Forestry and took an active role in the annual seedling tree sale.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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