

After a bipartisan push, where will infrastructure eventually land?

After weeks of negotiations, the Senate passed a bipartisan infrastructure package Tuesday in a 69-30 vote that would provide about \$1.2 trillion in funding to repair America's rural roads, ports and waterways, while dramatically increasing high-speed internet access, improving the electrical grid and more. It was a historic moment, but the path forward is far from certain.

Early this morning, Senate Democrats also advanced a sweeping \$3.5 trillion budget framework. The 50-49 party line vote sets in motion Democrats' plans to make major changes in health care, education, immigration, and the nation's tax laws, while also addressing climate change.



Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer

With slim margins in both the House and the Senate, Democrats will face difficult choices ahead as they work to transform the budget framework into a budget reconciliation package with detailed plans for spending and tax increases.

On final passage of the infrastructure bill, all 50 Democrats were joined by 19 Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., advancing one of the key pieces of President Joe Biden's economic agenda.

About \$550 billion of the package is new funding (as opposed to reauthorized funding) and includes \$110 billion in funding for roads and bridges and \$65 billion to expand broadband. There is about \$73 billion for clean power transmission as well as additional funding for ports and waterways and \$66 billion for passenger and freight rail improvements.

The bill also includes \$8.3 billion for Western water needs. Some \$3.2 billion is allocated for aging infrastructure and \$1.2 billion for water storage, groundwater storage and conveyance projects. The bill also would provide \$618 million over five years for the Agriculture Department's watershed programs.

Getting to this point marks a major milestone- a strong bipartisan push for making the U.S. more competitive on critical infrastructure repairs and advancements, but the next steps could prove to be even more difficult.

“This is transformational. I know compromise is hard for both sides, but it’s important....it’s necessary — for a democracy to be able to function,” Biden said during a press conference after the Senate vote.

But immediately after passing the bipartisan package, the Senate began debating the budget resolution that prepares the way for drafting Democrats' even more ambitious \$3.5 trillion plan for climate measures and domestic spending priorities. The budget framework directs committees to draft their shares of the reconciliation proposal by Sept. 15. **For agriculture, there’s a lot of money at stake - dollars that could significantly impact the next farm bill - as well as tax increases that affect agriculture, including increases on capital gains and a border carbon tax.**

Democrats on the Senate Agriculture Committee have started meeting privately to start carving up \$135 billion in new spending that would be authorized by the budget resolution. **"We're going to continue to have conversations and make sure that people both on and off the committee have a chance to express themselves," Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich. told reporters Tuesday.** Senate Ag Democrats will be coordinating with their House counterparts in deciding how the \$135 billion is spent, according to a congressional source familiar with the plans.

Republicans will have no input in how the funding is allocated, since they will not support the spending and tax plan Democrats are seeking to enact, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., "has made it clear that there would be no Republican votes" for the reconciliation bill, Stabenow said.

A vote-a-rama that ensued Tuesday in the Senate on amendments to the budget resolution provided a taste of the contentious debates ahead. Senate Republicans forced Democrats to go on the record on a series of issues, including protecting existing tax benefits when it comes to transferring farm assets from one generation to the next.

President Biden has proposed to start taxing capital gains at death, which would effectively nullify the benefit of stepped-up basis, and **Sen. John Thune, R-S.D., forced a vote on an amendment that called for “preserving” current tax rules for transferring farms and businesses, including the “full benefit of the step-up in basis for assets acquired from a decedent.” Thune's amendment, which is non-binding, was adopted on a 99-0 vote.**

Thune said the amendment "would provide permanent relief by preserving step-up in basis for all family owned businesses, farms and ranches.”

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, D-Ore., insisted that “Senate Democrats take a backseat to no one standing up for family farmers, ranchers and small businesses. In fact, President Biden has made it clear that any changes to stepped up basis will provide durable protection for family farmers, ranchers and small businesses.”

Biden's proposal would defer, but not eliminate, the tax liability on farms and businesses for as long as they are in operation.

Stabenow, who is a member of the Finance Committee, said Democrats on the panel would be meeting next week to discuss their section of the reconciliation package. The committee in May advanced a package of energy tax incentives that could be made part of the reconciliation package, including a clean fuel tax credit.

On Tuesday, the Senate also approved, 66-33, an amendment proposed by Sen. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, that called for "prohibiting or limiting the issuance of costly Clean Air Act permit requirements on farmers and ranchers in the US or the imposition of new federal methane requirements."

"Our hardworking livestock producers should not have to worry about being subject to onerous regulations and increased production costs due to the federal permits or regulations," Ernst said. Senate Environment and Public Works Committee Chairman Tom Carper, D-Del., said the amendment wrongly implied that the Environmental Protection Agency was considering new regulations on farms.

Also adopted, 53-46, was an amendment sponsored by the Senate Ag Committee's top Republican, John Boozman of Arkansas, that called for barring the Agriculture Department from ending loans for fossil fuel power plants.

The future of the bipartisan infrastructure bill is unclear in the House, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has insisted that the budget reconciliation package must also be approved by the Senate before she'll take both bills up in the House. A group of six moderate House Democrats are balking at that notion, suggesting that the Senate does not need to pass the larger and more partisan reconciliation measure before they vote on this infrastructure package.

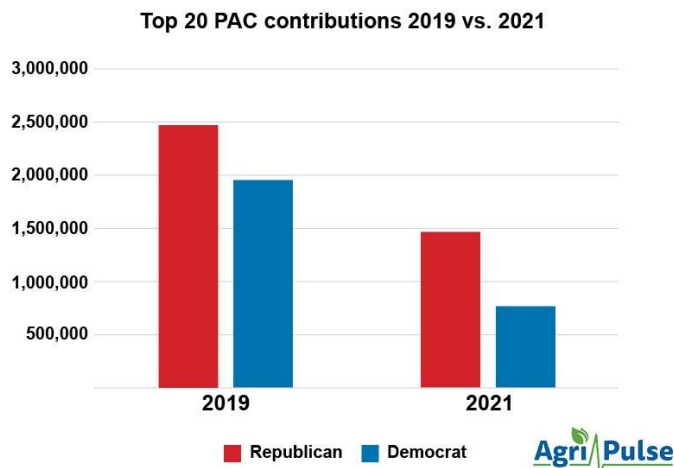
"As soon as the Senate completes its work, we must bring this bipartisan infrastructure bill to the House floor for a standalone vote," the lawmakers said in a letter. "This once-in-a-century investment deserves its own consideration, without regard to other legislation.

The House is expected to cut its August recess short and return to Washington the week of Aug. 23 to vote on the budget resolution, according to House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md. If the House passes a budget resolution identical to the Senate's, Democrats can move forward with budget reconciliation and pass legislation with a simple majority in the Senate rather than the 60 votes that are normally required.

Ag PACs pick up pace of contributions after post-Jan. 6 pause

Many political action committees tied to major farm and rural interests significantly slowed down their contributions to members of Congress after the storming of the Capitol Jan. 6, and the groups are now playing catch-up.

According to an *Agri-Pulse* analysis, some 20 ag-related PACs that have traditionally been the largest givers to Senate and House campaigns collectively cut their spending to \$2.2 million in the first six months of the year, down from \$4.4 million in the first half of 2019, the comparable period in the 2019-2020 election cycle.



Those PACs gave \$1.46 million to Republicans in the first half of 2021, down from \$2.46 million in the first half of 2019.

Democrats haven't been immune from the drop even though many PACs cite the Jan. 6 event as the reason for the cutback. Eight GOP senators and 139 House members voted that day against certifying President Joe Biden's election.

Contributions from those 20 ag PACs to Democrats fell from \$1.95 million in the first half of 2019 to \$761,000 in the first half of this year.

American Crystal Sugar, a Minnesota-based growers cooperative that has long been one of the biggest contributors to congressional campaigns from the ag sector, slashed its candidate contributions from \$890,000 in the first half of 2019 to \$425,000 this year.

American Crystal's PAC gave \$10,000 to candidates this January but nothing in February before resuming contributions in March.

The National Rural Electric Cooperative Association, which is in the middle of a high-stakes congressional battle over clean energy spending, nevertheless stopped its contributions and resumed giving in May at what are relatively small levels for its PAC.

NRECA's PAC, called the Action Committee for Rural Electrification, or ACRE, has contributed just \$113,000 to candidates this year, down from \$613,500 in the first half of 2019.

"Every election cycle is different and ACRE contributions from previous years shouldn't be used as a benchmark for future giving," said NRECA spokesman Stephen Bell.

"Following the election, ACRE took a thoughtful breath earlier this year due in part to the highly charged and volatile political environment, but has since resumed giving."

Top Senate and House recipients of leading ag PACs for 2021

Republican		Democrat	
Sen. John Boozman, AR	\$31,500	Sen. John Hickenlooper, CO	\$14,000
Sen. John Kennedy, LA	\$18,500	Sen. Ben Ray Lujan, NM	\$13,500
Sen. John Thune, SD	\$17,500	Sen. Brian Schatz, HI	\$11,500
Sen. Tim Scott, SC	\$13,000	Sen. Catherine Cortez Masto, NV	\$7,500
Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith, MS	\$12,000	Sen. Ron Wyden, OR	\$7,500
Rep. Glenn Thompson, PA	\$48,500	Rep. David Scott, GA	\$74,000
Rep. Vicky Hartzler, MO	\$47,000	Rep. Henry Cuellar, TX	\$32,000
Rep. Tracey Mann, KS	\$34,500	Rep. Jim Costa, CA	\$30,500
Rep. Randy Feenstra, IA	\$32,500	Rep. Troy Carter, LA	\$23,500
Rep. Kat Cammack, FL	\$31,500	Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, IL	\$22,500



The Farm Credit Council's PAC made no donations in January and February and resumed in March, but the group's contributions are still down by more than half, from \$268,000 in 2019 to \$125,950 in the first half of this year.

“We annually undertake a grassroots approach within Farm Credit to determine how best to focus our political campaign giving through Farm Credit PAC,” said spokesman Mark Hayes.

“Given the disturbing events around Jan. 6, that grassroots process took longer than normal. We worked with our members to ensure that we continued to focus our campaign giving towards candidates who support rural communities and agriculture.”

The National Pork Producers Council is also among the groups that reduced its contributions this year, but a spokeswoman cited factors other than the political turmoil in January. The group’s contributions to candidates declined to \$30,000 in the first half of this year, down from \$87,000 in 2019.

“NPPC is typically not very active in an off-election year. In addition, the pandemic has limited our ability to recharge our PAC,” said NPPC’s Rachel Gantz. “We anticipate a lot more activity next year.”

Similarly, contributions from Deere and Co. dropped from \$269,000 in 2019 to \$175,000. Deere didn’t give anything in January, which is not out of the ordinary for the company, but didn’t resume until March.

Several other PACs also resumed giving in March, including the Crop Insurance Professional Association, American Veterinary Medical Association, ethanol producer Poet, and Reynolds American.

One group that bucked the trend and maintained a relatively normal pace of contributions was the National Cattlemen’s Beef Association. But the group did reassess who it was contributing to, said Ethan Lane, NCBA’s vice president of government affairs.

“We definitely had an eye towards whether or not members of Congress can be effective advocates,” Lane said. He didn’t name any particular lawmakers, but he suggested some may have trouble working with other members of the other party on legislation after Jan. 6. “That’s not helpful” to NCBA, he said.



House Ag Chair David Scott, D-Ga.

House Agriculture Committee Chairman David Scott, D-Ga., collected the most money from the 20 ag-related PACs during the first half of this year, with \$74,000, followed by the committee's top Republican, Pennsylvania Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson, who picked up \$48,000. Among senators, the Senate Ag Committee's ranking Republican, John Boozman of Arkansas, received the most at \$31,500.

Many of the Republicans who voted against certifying Biden’s election continue receiving money from the major ag PACs, led by Rep. Vicky Hartzler of Missouri, who received \$47,000, and first-term Kansas Rep. Tracey Mann, who got \$34,000. First-term Rep. Kat Cammack of Florida received \$31,500. House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California and House Minority Whip Steve Scalise of Louisiana each received \$31,000. In the Senate, John Kennedy, R-La., received \$18,000.

[To download the PAC contributions, click here.](#)

GOP recall challengers defend farms after state water cutbacks

With California's Gubernatorial recall election coming up within a few more weeks, Republican frontrunners are turning up the heat on the campaign trail and blaming the Newsom administration for failing to plan for drought as well as for rising energy costs and high taxes.

A Republican debate among four of the leading candidates last week at the Nixon Library in Orange County brought the latest campaign messaging into focus. In opening the debate, former U.S. Representative Doug Ose immediately pledged to invest in new water infrastructure if elected governor.

“The first thing I'm going to do is I'm firing the guy that's preventing the construction of new water storage,” said Ose, who represented the Sacramento Valley from 1999 to 2005. “If we increase supply, it benefits not only farmers but also cities and the environmental community.”

Ose would revive a water project he advocated for at the start of his term, the Sites Reservoir, planned for an area west of Colusa. Ose said he would also support funding for Temperance Flat. Project managers put that proposal on an indefinite pause last year after failing to gather enough investment to meet a critical deadline for gaining matching dollars from the federal government.

Ose would also invest in reusing wastewater to supply farm irrigation—an approach that has gained ground in some counties but has been limited by funding constraints.



GOP candidates for the recall election debate water policy.

During the debate, Ose branded himself as “your guy if water is the issue.”

“There's one farmer in this race,” said Ose, who with his sisters grows rice on 1,000 acres. “Water is not theoretical to me. ... These guys all know the story. I live it.”

One of those recall opponents, former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer, also referenced the two reservoir proposals when debate moderator and conservative talk radio host Hugh Hewitt asked how he would respond to a State Water Resources Control Board decision “that is causing for the second time in a decade devastation to agricultural businesses.” The board had approved a day earlier a regulation granting it new authority to curtail senior water rights in the Sacramento–San Joaquin Delta and ramp up enforcement for illegal diverters.

“[I would] stop them,” responded Faulconer. “Agriculture is so incredibly important to our state, our community.”

Faulconer had visited Fresno the week earlier to discuss water issues with local farmers dealing with near-zero water allocations due to the drought. He stood outside of a branch office for the Department of Water Resources and promised to bring the political will needed to apply existing water bond funds—such as millions in unspent dollars from the voter-approved 2014 Proposition 1 water bond—to improving California water infrastructure.

“We’re the breadbasket for the nation,” he said at the debate. “Yet we have a governor that has not done a thing to increase water supply in California.”

Faulconer argued Gov. Gavin Newsom and legislators have allowed “far-left environmentalists” to stop them from advancing storage projects. The California Water Commission, however, was the agency responsible for the decision to reduce Prop. 1 allocations for the Temperance Flat and Sites projects in 2018, before Newsom took office.

“[Farmers] deserve a governor that’s not going to ignore the central goal,” he said. “If we don’t, why do we expect anything to be different year after year when we have drought conditions?”

Faulconer has been running ads on social media calling for more storage “to prevent future droughts and help our farmers.”

In his talking points, Faulconer referenced San Diego’s initiative to launch one of the largest water recycling projects in California. The city has set a recycling goal of 40% of its supply by the end of 2035. The city council had advanced the project in Faulconer’s first year as mayor.



Doug Ose on the family farm. (photo: oseforcalifornia.com)

Faulconer also took credit for spending his last year and a half as mayor working to get the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement across the finish line. He said USMCA will strengthen trade rules to help small businesses compete with major exporters like China.

When asked about the state water board decision, Assemblymember Kevin Kiley of Rocklin criticized it as a political choice.

“We rely on our farmers for our food supply,” said Kiley. “We absolutely cannot have them be the first to have to face rationing and cutbacks whenever we hit these dry spells.” Kiley took aim at comments about climate change made by CDFA Secretary Karen Ross when she testified to the board in support of the Delta order.

“Mother Nature will always rule the day, and Mother Nature and climate change have brought us the situation that we have,” Ross told the board.

Kiley labeled her statement as not true.

“The reason we’re facing these cutbacks is because of political choices that we have made,” said Kiley. “Endemic to our climate are periods of wetness and dryness.”

He called the State Water Project a marvel of engineering in the 1960s but said the state rested on its laurels by not expanding capacity in a significant way since then.

Kiley rose in the state’s Republican ranks recently after securing a legal victory in his lawsuit attempting to limit Newsom’s pandemic emergency powers, which was later overturned by an appeals court. He has been a steadfast critic of the governor in Assembly hearings.

Kiley revealed during the debate his plan for a constitutional amendment in the Assembly that would dedicate a portion of General Fund tax dollars every year to investing in water storage projects.

In a rapid-fire delivery of key talking points, Kiley ran through several other hot-button issues facing business owners in California. He promised to roll back the Private Attorneys General Act (PAGA), a 2004 measure often blamed for ramping up the number of lawsuits pitted against employers over labor violations. Kiley would repeal the 2019 independent contractor law known as AB 5 and initiate “a systematic review of every regulation that needlessly makes it so difficult to do business in California.”

Like Faulconer, John Cox said he would immediately “countermand” the state water board’s Delta regulation, and he blamed politicians and celebrity insiders for “running this state into the ground.”

The San Diego businessman and millionaire was the Republican pick to run against Newsom in the 2018 gubernatorial race. The party last weekend chose not to endorse an individual candidate for the recall race.

“The California water project was a miracle,” said Cox. “It turned this wonderful Central Valley into the fruit basket of the world. ... We need to make sure that we have water for the future as well as for the people that are here.”

Cox also pushed for more desalination projects, an issue Newsom has supported to the opposition of environmentalists. In calling for better forest management to prevent wildfires, Cox said the state needs to revive the timber industry.

“We used to have 100 sawmills in the state, and we ran them out of business with regulations,” he said. “They would clean the forest. They would build fire breaks. They would help make sure that fires were controlled.”

He added that politicians must stop blaming climate change and other “external sources.” Cox gained widespread media attention from the debate for proposing to cut the state income tax by 25% across the board and reduce government spending. He also vowed to bring in more energy sources to slash electricity costs.

“Businesses that rely on electricity tell me they're paying two, three or four times what their subsidiaries pay in other states,” said Cox.

Conservative talk radio host Larry Elder, who has jumped to the top of the polls among the 46 recall candidates, spent the evening at a donation drive in Bakersfield rather than at the debate. Like many Republicans, Elder has criticized Newsom over allegations that he held back wildfire prevention spending. And in alignment with the four candidates on stage, Elder contends that upgrading water infrastructure would be the most important step in responding to the drought.

“Our water infrastructure has not kept pace,” argues Elder on his campaign website. “It was built to support a population half the size of what California has today! Before we waste any more money, let’s invest in that.”

He argues Sacramento politicians were asleep at the wheel for prioritizing a high-speed bullet train over water supplies.

Another prominent Republican running in the recall, reality star and former Olympian Caitlyn Jenner was unable to attend the debate due to a prior commitment for filming Australia's version of *Celebrity Big Brother*. Jenner has also supported building more desalination plants to deal with drought.

The recall election is scheduled for September 14, though voters have already been receiving mail-in ballots.

Environment survey finds water supply, drought top Californians' concerns

In a recent survey, Californians identified water supply and drought as their top environmental concern, and the number of respondents who said they believe climate change is contributing to drought increased.

The Public Policy Institute of California conducted the survey of more than 1,500 residents statewide in July and in an open-ended question about the "most important environmental issue," 25% of respondents mentioned drought or water supply, said Rachel Lawler, the PPIC survey analyst who oversaw the project. Additionally, 63% of all adults — and 67% of adults in the Central Valley — ranked water supply as a "big problem." In 2015, another drought year, a record 70% ranked water supply and drought that way. Last year, 38% said it was a "big problem."



The survey also asked whether people thought drought and wildfires were linked to climate change.

"Clearly they are," said Craig Bleck, a professor at Imperial Valley College, who filled out the survey, adding that drought and wildfires are "two sides of the same coin."

The survey found about 80% of people agreed the drought is linked to climate change, Lawler said, which "was a pretty big shift" since the question was asked in 2015. As for wildfires and climate change, she said this year's survey found a significant change in Republicans' responses. Last year, 27% said climate change contributed to wildfires while this year 44% said yes. Among Democrats and Independents, the figures also increased but by less than 10 percentage points.

"I was surprised to see how much of a change there has been, even just since last year, with Republicans," Lawler said.

News reports of drought, and even seeing lower water levels in reservoirs and lakes, doesn't necessarily correlate to changes in water use. Ray Padilla, who works for a bank in Antioch and also filled out the survey, has noticed that there's not as much water but says despite some minor changes he hasn't seen his community really tackle water conservation. An immigrant from the Philippines decades ago, he said when water was scarce there, faucets ran dry.

"You would think that if they say drought, if you turn the faucet on it's really dry." Instead, he said he looks at the low water level in a reservoir near his house and is somewhat mystified as to

how water still flows through the tap. “If you do shut off the water,” he said, with some form of rationing, people will be forced to face the severity of the situation.

Another alternative would be to charge more for water above a certain basic amount, Bleck said. “If you raise the price of water, people use less.”

He noted that the Imperial Valley is at the top of the list for Colorado River water rights, so farmers and others are doing better than the present conditions might suggest. But while he supports farming and recognizes its importance both historically and economically in the area, some of the crops are very thirsty. “We could shift to other things that require less water,” he said, but only if farmers have an incentive to do that.

Lawler said it’s common for issues that are in the news to get top billing in the survey, which aligns with this summer’s results. She and her team aim to gather information for leaders and lawmakers that will help them do their work, sometimes providing “source material for when they are crafting legislation.”

USDA to review 'Buy American' enforcement in school lunch programs.

A “Buy American” executive order that President Joe Biden signed in January has prompted the Agriculture Department to take a closer look at how its current rules on buying domestic products for school meals are being enforced.

USDA’s Food and Nutrition Service recently put out a request for information about the effectiveness and challenges of the Buy American provision — a measure added to the National School Lunch Act in 1998 that, under most circumstances, requires school districts to buy products made and processed in the United States. Several agricultural groups claim that two exemptions to the requirement have allowed schools to sidestep the rules and buy foreign products.

“The USDA's interpretation of this for really quite some time now has been any cost differential means the schools are sort of free to purchase whatever it is they want,” Chuck Conner, the president and CEO of the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, told *Agri-Pulse*.

While the first exemption allows schools to buy commodities like bananas or pineapples that aren’t widely produced in the United States from foreign sources, the second allows schools to choose foreign commodities when the same domestic products are “significantly more costly.”



Chuck Conner, NCFC

Some farm groups worry that schools have been using this exception to buy foreign products over American ones because the FNS leaves it up to schools to determine what dollar amount constitutes as “significantly more costly.”

“From the standpoint of the domestic producers, they see that to be a big problem because, from their perspective, there's no real standard in place,” Roger Szemraj, a principal at Olsson Frank Weeda law, a D.C.-based firm specializing in food and agriculture, told *Agri-Pulse*. “All you're looking at is who may be offering the best price and the best price is not necessarily a significant price differential.”

In a 2018 letter to lawmakers, the coalition of 61 organizations — which includes the American Farm Bureau Federation, the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives and the Western Growers Association — said over 80% of the apple juice purchased by schools is from China and that 60% to 70% of the fish sticks served in schools are made from fish caught on Russian vessels and processed in China. Schools in more than half the country also have purchased Chinese canned peaches.



“I'm watching some of the markets for California's cling peach growers go away,” said Rich Hudgins, president and CEO of the California Canning Peach Association. “The Chinese product is always going to be cheaper than product produced in the U.S. The cheaper Chinese product obviously is produced under different environmental and food safety regulations as well.”

Both the California Canning Peach Association and the National Council of Farmer Cooperatives want to see the USDA remove the cost differential exemption.

However, School Nutrition Association spokesman Diane Pratt-Heavner told *Agri-Pulse* that her organization sees both exemptions as important for school food programs with tight budgets, especially during a time when wildfires and supply chain issues make it difficult and expensive to buy American food.

“Serving American-grown foods, that’s the first priority, but we do need to make sure that those exceptions remain in place,” she said. “Unfortunately, our members are having to use a lot of those exceptions right now, in particular, because of the supply chain disruptions that are really problematic for back-to-school time.”

Pratt-Heavner said the School Nutrition Association, which represents more than 50,000 members across the U.S. who plan, prepare and serve school meals, supports having the Buy America requirements in place but wants the USDA to preserve the exemptions. It is waiting to draft comments to submit to the Federal Register until after its board and public policy committee meet later this year.

“Right now our members are dealing with, pretty much, a supply chain crisis,” she said. “We need to make sure that moving forward that the regulatory requirements support efforts to maximize American-grown foods, but also continue to nourish students with a wide variety of fruits and vegetables and healthy food options.”

According to Pratt-Heavner, USDA foods account for 15% to 20% of the food served with school meals. The rest comes from distributors or manufacturers that schools contract with directly.

Conner said many schools buy what they think are U.S. products from food distributors, but the food turns out to originate in other countries. This makes it hard for schools to comply.

“The key is it’s got to be differentiated by the distributor in the distribution network that exists out there for the schools and right now that is just marginally the case,” he said.

According to the FNS, if schools want to use an exception, they must keep documentation justifying their use of the exception. However, there is no requirement to request a waiver from the FNS or the state governments overseeing the programs.

The significant cost differential was put in place by USDA regulations, so USDA has the authority to amend or remove it. Connor said Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack is “keenly aware of the interests that the White House and Biden administration have in the Buy America Provisions.”

In addition, it is likely Celeste Drake, a Biden appointee and the nation’s first director of the Made in America office at the Office of Management and Budget, will play a significant role in determining the future of the provision.

Changes could also come through Congress. Hudgins said legislation on the issue could be incorporated into a child nutrition reauthorization bill.

An additional solution USDA may weigh, as indicated by a question in its request for information, is creating a defined list of commodities that are classified as “excepted” items. This list would likely contain the hard-to-find U.S. items that schools are allowed to purchase from foreign sources.

Pork producers brace for California's new sow housing rules

California regulations that will require hog farms to provide sows with more housing space starting in 2022 will likely pose logistical challenges for pork exports while increasing production costs and raising retail prices, say producers and industry analysts.

Under a rule proposed by the California Department of Agriculture, farms must provide a minimum of 24 square feet of “usable floor space per breeding pig” in an enclosure. The regulations, which were required by a 2018 ballot initiative known as Proposition 12, take effect Jan. 1, 2022. The rule will be finalized once the formal comment periods are completed, the agency told *Agri-Pulse*.

According to a recent Rabobank report, only 4% of U.S. producers comply. Producers will have to either reduce the number of sows and keep the same square footage or build another housing barn to become compliant. Many sow barns currently provide about 16 to 20 square feet per animal.

Terry Wolters, a pork producer in southwest Minnesota, said he's not going to make any changes in his operation until the state finalizes its regulations. “How do we pay for what we are being asked to do when we really don’t know what it’s really going to be from the state of California?” he told *Agri-Pulse*.

As it stands now, pork producers are in a “limbo phase” of not knowing what to expect from CDFR, said Wolters, who is president-elect of the National Pork Producers Council.

Wolters said he currently uses individual stalls for housing and would be forced to remove those stalls to create a bigger gestation pen. Most producers use gestation stalls as a way to protect newborn piglets from other aggressive sows who might injure them. He said his newest facility is six years old with "20 to 30 years" of use still left and another was built in the late 1990s. He contends significant remodeling would need to be completed.



Terry Wolters, NPPC

Christine McCracken, executive director of animal protein at Rabobank, said the California regulations will mean a 25% reduction in housing density on sow operations.

She said a typical sow barn in compliance currently costs \$3,000 per sow; whereas the cost of a noncompliant unit is averaging \$2,000-\$2,200/head in construction costs. Producers would be forced to build additional barns at the cost of \$3 to \$4 million per barn for producers who have flexibility at existing operations, she noted. McCracken did state costs would vary based on the size of the operation, the current state of housing, location and how the producer intends to adjust to meet the mandate.

According to another analysis by Barry Goodwin, an economist with North Carolina State University, hog farmers are going to be forced to incur the costs of extensive renovations or the construction of new facilities, currently estimated at \$3,500 or more per sow.

The National Pork Producers Council challenged the rule in the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals with the American Farm Bureau Federation, but a three-judge panel upheld the proposition.

“For dormant Commerce Clause purposes, laws that increase compliance costs, without more, do not constitute a significant burden on interstate commerce,” the panel wrote in its opinion.

NPPC officials said they were exploring other options. The group also submitted comments to CFDA on July 12 asking for a two-year delay from the date when the regulations are finalized.



Travis Arp, USMEF

Republican Sens. Chuck Grassley and Joni Ernst of Iowa, Roger Marshall of Kansas, and John Cornyn of Texas introduced a bill last week aiming to "prohibit state and local governments from interfering with the production or manufacture of agricultural products in other states and challenges those states from interfering in interstate commerce." However, those governments would still be able to regulate farming and ranching within their own state.

McCracken said the rule presents a problem not just for producers, but also for processors. “Because live animal production is a lengthy process, those changes need to be months in advance. Setting back that rulemaking process really has created a bit of a conundrum,” she told *Agri-Pulse*.

McCracken expected the rule to cost the industry “hundreds of millions of dollars” overall. She said there are some ways to manage challenges, such as a producer reducing the number of pigs in a barn, but noted that packing plants take a certain number of pigs for processing.

“If you reduce those numbers ... it creates some logistical issues for packing plants. They need to find new sources of pigs and those just don’t exist overnight,” she said.

California also accounts for 15% of pork consumption in the U.S. and McCracken doesn't think consumers there are aware that the regulations will cause prices to go up.

“The largest consumers of pork in California tend to be some of the lower-income groups so it does feel a bit discriminatory from that perspective,” McCracken said. Other states are looking at similar actions but are watching to see what California ends up doing, she stated.

Travis Arp, senior director of export services at the U.S. Meat Export Federation, said the rule will affect international trade by posing logistical challenges for meat being exported through California to Asia. According to USMEF, last year the U.S. exported 3 million metric tons of pork and pork variety meat. This included 2.1 MMT shipped by ocean freight. Of the 2.1 MMT shipped by ocean freight, 53%, or 1.1 MMT, traveled through California ports.

“One of the main issues in the proposed regulatory text, is that product transiting through the state of California, whether or not it's destined to be sold in California, has to be identified on commercial documents” as compliant, Arp said.

If pork is not Proposition 12-compliant, and the foreign buyer was to cancel an order, the affected product would have to be sold somewhere domestically other than California, he said.

US farm groups up the pressure for healthier trade with China

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative still isn’t ready to sit down with Chinese trade officials and hash out a new path forward for trade relations, but U.S. farm groups are losing patience with the status quo.

The U.S. continues to hit Chinese goods with tariffs, and the Chinese continue to pick and choose which U.S. goods they’ll let in tariff-free under a trade war that’s technically still in place despite the “phase one” deal signed last year.

“The overall impression of everybody is we need to engage with China,” said American Farm Bureau Federation Senior Director of Congressional Relations David Salmonsén. “Both sides need to talk. We’ve got these tariffs and we’d rather have a better structure to make sure we can continue to have this good trade flow moving forward.”

That’s the bottom line on why the Farm Bureau signed on to a letter last week with ag and non-ag groups to U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai and Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, said Salmonsén.



Dave Salmons, Farm Bureau

The US-China Business Council letter asked both leaders to take “swift action to address the costly and burdensome tariffs and retaliatory tariffs” as well as make sure that “phase one” is fully implemented.

While U.S. exports of soybeans, corn, sorghum, pork, beef and poultry to China have had little problem in avoiding Chinese tariffs — it’s up to the Chinese government which U.S. commodities it excludes — other U.S. commodities like apples and feed ingredients continue to suffer. For them, the impacts of the trade war continue.

Well before the “phase one” deal, China fully opened its borders to U.S. apples in 2015 and trade rose sharply, said US Apple President and CEO Jim Bair.

“We were competing with China and winning,” Bair said. “China quickly rose to be our sixth-largest export market and we had hopes that was going to continue.”

It was a recipe for success for U.S. farmers until the trade war erupted and the U.S. hit China with Section 301 tariffs, designed to punish the Chinese for intellectual property theft, and Section 232 tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminum. China retaliated for both and U.S. apples got hit twice.

“The impact has been huge,” Bair told *Agri-Pulse*. “Since 2017 our exports to China have been down 40%, and in 2021 we’re down another 7% from last year, so it’s not getting better.” The problem, says Bair, is that China is excluding tariffs on the U.S. commodities it needs, like pork and soybeans, but not the ones it doesn’t.

China produces about five times as many apples as the U.S. does, but Chinese consumers still want the U.S. fruit that comes in varieties like pink lady and honey crisp, which are not available there.

“They don’t really need our apples, but their consumers want our apples because of the superior quality, taste and varieties that they don’t grow,” he said.

The Animal Feed Industry Association at first applauded the “phase one” deal because it broke through technical barriers that had been preventing U.S. companies from exporting feed ingredients and pet food that contains beef and poultry.

AFIA had been fighting for years to get Chinese inspectors out to audit production facilities owned by the group’s members. Those audits were necessary for producers to export to China, but they weren’t happening.

“For more than 10 years we were in this limbo and could not get access to the Chinese market for a vast majority of feed ingredients, additives and finished products,” AFIA CEO Constance Cullman told *Agri-Pulse*.

The “phase one” deal, known officially as the Economic and Trade Agreement Between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the People’s Republic of China, contains provisions that addressed those problems. The Chinese agreed to accept audits conducted by the Food and Drug Administration on U.S. production facilities.

But the tariffs are still a problem, says Cullman. The U.S. continues to levy tariffs on Chinese goods like vitamins that U.S. feed companies need to import, and the Chinese continue to tax imports of U.S. feed products.

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative chooses which Chinese products it will exclude from import taxes, but even the minority of exclusions that were granted expired last year.

It's a situation highlighted in the US-China Business Council letter to Tai and Yellen. The letter was signed by the Farm Bureau, US Apple, AFIA, the North American Meat Institute, National Council of Farmer Cooperatives, American Soybean Association, Biotechnology Innovation Organization and others.

The letter urges the Biden administration "to retroactively restore product exclusions that expired in 2020; reinstate a new, fair, and transparent tariff exclusion process; and continue negotiations with China to remove both nations' counterproductive tariffs as soon as possible. These steps are sorely needed to mitigate the tariffs' significant and ongoing harm to the U.S. economy, U.S. workers, and U.S. national competitiveness."

"We're paying a lot more for those Chinese products that are subject to these tariffs and that is raising our manufacturing costs and then the costs to farmers," Cullman said.

U.S. importers pay 20.5% in tariffs for vitamin K and 30% in tariffs on inositol, a naturally occurring type of sugar in plants that is valued as a food or feed supplement.

"We really want a new exclusion process in place so we can at least make our case (to the USTR) for those products that we have to import from China," Cullman says.

On the other side of the equation, Cullman says the Chinese are generally not excluding feed additives and other products from their retaliatory tariffs, costing them share of a massive market.

Before the trade war, technical barriers were keeping U.S. exports out of China, she said. Now it's the Chinese tariffs.

"We've got competitors moving into that space, and the longer we wait to deal with this, the more our competitors are in there negotiating," she said.

But the Biden administration has made it clear in recent months that it is still doing a top-to-bottom review of the trading relationship with China as the U.S. seeks allies in countries like the UK and Japan to confront China over unfair trading practices.

"I hope they get back to the table," said Cullman. "The allied approach is great, but there's also room for bilateral talks."



Constance Cullman, AFIA

Wolf fight erupts in Idaho over new law allowing unlimited hunting, trapping

Ranchers and gray wolf advocates are at odds over the practice of killing wolves to reduce conflicts with livestock, which, if numbers get low enough, could force the Fish and Wildlife Service to put the animals back on the endangered species list.

Nowhere is the fight more evident than in Idaho, where new legislation allows for hunting, trapping and baiting of wolves on private land year-round, and expanded hunting methods starting in November “in areas with a history of chronic livestock depredation, or where elk herds are below management objectives.”

The two sides don't agree on much. Advocates say the percentage of cattle killed by wolves is minuscule, making the legislature's action overkill, and that non-lethal methods should be widely employed. Suzanne Asha Stone, who founded a group to help sheep herders use non-lethal methods to deter wolves, says the percentage of cattle killed in the state by wolves is one-tenth of 1%.

Ranchers counter that the number of cattle killed by wolves is surely higher and that the tiny percentage encompasses all cattle, including dairy cows. On the range, it's difficult to determine precisely how an animal died because its carcass deteriorates quickly, they say.

“You're not going to find all the cattle consumed or depredated on by wolves,” says Cameron Mulrony, executive vice president of the Idaho Cattle Association, adding that despite what the numbers might show, “If it affects you, it's a lot higher than that.”



Mulrony says ranchers need the wolf control program because the predators are smart and become more dangerous to herds once “they've acquired a taste for beef cattle.”

One point of contention involves the language of the legislation itself, signed by Gov. Brad Little in May. Wolf advocates say it would allow the killing of up to 90% of the state's wolves, which the latest count shows are at about 1,500 in the state.

They say the legislation is aimed at reducing wolves to the bare minimum of 15 packs (or about 150 wolves) allowed for by the state's 2002 wolf management plan.

To Stone, the legislation's authorization to kill wolves amounts to “an eradication effort. This is not a hunt. It's killing wolf pups in dens and nursing moms and doing it year-round without limits.”

The Idaho Department of Fish and Game insists, however, that the legislation does not rely on the 2002 plan and that the state has no plans to reduce wolf populations by 90%. “We're trying to reduce conflict, not trying to reduce wolf populations,” IDFG spokesman Roger Phillips says. Harvest of wolves in the state has ranged in the past from about 300 to 600 wolves annually, which has allowed the population to rebound, he says.

Phillips acknowledges that the legislation sets no limits on the number of wolves an individual can take, but adds, “Basically, what we’ve seen over time when we’ve liberalized hunting and trapping, we’ve never seen a big dramatic spike in harvest.”

“If we ever got to the point where we were concerned, we’d know about it well in advance” and could take action, he said.

In delisting wolves in the northern Rockies in 2011, FWS said Montana, Wyoming and Idaho needed to maintain a minimum of 15 breeding pairs and 150 wolves to avoid having FWS “relist” the wolves as threatened or endangered.

“One way or another, 150 wolves is the floor where the FWS has said relisting would become a real prospect, and the State of Idaho recognizes that (as does the State of Wyoming, as evidenced by its policy to manage for 160 wolves),” said Talasi Brooks, an attorney with Western Watersheds Project. “But the FWS never really thought the wolf population would fall as low as 450 in the Northern Rockies. In light of these brutal new state laws aiming to kill hundreds of wolves in Idaho and Montana, combined with Wyoming’s already-inadequate wolf management objectives, it’s clear the species needs federal protection.”



Cameron Mulrony, Idaho Cattlemen's Association

Mulrony, however, agreed with IDFG that the legislation does not use the 2002 management plan as a benchmark. Even so, says Mulrony, “We’re not going to get to that number.” He adds that “these wolves are prolific. They’re smart. They are well-positioned to expand even with this legislation.”

Stone and Brian Bean, an Idaho sheep rancher, say non-lethal controls — including foxlights, noisemakers and having someone with the animals at all times during grazing — have been shown to reduce wolf-sheep conflicts. Stone founded the Wood River Wolf Project, Bean is a member of the steering committee for the group, which focuses on reducing sheep-wolf conflicts in the Ketchum Ranger District, which does not have cattle allotments.

Bean said in the last five to eight years, much more has been learned about how to avoid those fatal interactions between cattle and not just wolves, but other predators such as coyotes and bears. “It’s true that some non-lethal techniques will work for cattle, but there’s more work to be done,” he says.

In the end, he says he’d rather keep his herd alive rather than ask for a lethal control permit after an animal has been killed.

“Working collaboratively and using non-lethal deterrents works,” Bean says. “I’d much rather keep my animals alive.”

Stone points to research conducted by the group showing that non-lethal controls result in much lower levels of predation than where they are not employed. Over a seven-year period, “sheep depredation losses to wolves were 3.5 times higher” in the area where non-lethal controls were not used, their paper, in the Journal of Mammalogy, says.

Bean also says the cost of killing wolves can be as much as \$8,000 per wolf, and that the amount of livestock lost to wolf predation does not come close to justifying the expense. But Mulrony says that only takes into account market value, not the potential future value of a female or a bull to be sold for breeding.



Suzanne Asha Stone

Mulrony says “nonlethal methods can be effective in the short term” but that once wolves learn they really have nothing to fear, they become less effective.

Western Watersheds and dozens of other groups petitioned FWS July 29 to list wolves in the western U.S. as endangered. They are seeking protection for wolves in Idaho, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, Oregon, Washington, Colorado, California, Nevada, and northern Arizona.

“The re-listing of these wolves as a Distinct Population Segment should be a priority for prompt action because new laws in Idaho and Montana, and longstanding wolf management in Wyoming, are intended to reduce gray wolf populations in the core wolf recovery zone by 85 to 90 percent by incentivizing wolf killing and authorizing use of new methods to kill wolves. This decimation could happen in a very short span of time, several years or less,” the petition says.

Another lawsuit is proceeding in California seeking listing of wolves throughout the U.S. The American Farm Bureau Federation and National Cattlemen’s Beef Association sought to intervene in the case to defend the delisting, announced last year, but their request was denied by the judge in the case.

Kaitlynn Glover, NCBA natural resources executive director and Public Lands Council executive director, said the delisting was “based on sound science and a wildly successful recovery effort.”

However, “Since the motions were filed, gray wolves continue to pose a threat to ranchers and their livestock, which is why it is so crucial that the delisting stands and states are able to manage wolves where conflicts occur. Gray wolves are recovered, populations are robust, and Endangered Species Act protections are unnecessary. No court should undermine this historic recovery effort. NCBA, PLC, and our partners will continue to support the science-based delisting rule so that ranchers and rural communities can rely on wolf management based in science and law.”

News Briefs:

Citrus greening detected in San Diego County. The California Department of Food and Agriculture (CDFA) has established a quarantine in the city of Oceanside in north San Diego County following the detection of the citrus disease Huanglongbing (HLB), known as citrus greening. There is no cure once a tree is infected, and it leads to bitter, misshaped fruit and tree death within a few years. The disease was detected in two residential citrus trees and has not

impacted residential groves. Staff are removing the trees and surveying others within a 250-meter radius. “By taking this action, a critical reservoir of the disease and its vectors will be removed, which is essential to protect surrounding citrus from this deadly disease,” according to a CDFA statement. CDFA is working with USDA and the San Diego County agriculture commissioner to maintain a 60-mile quarantine to restrict movement of citrus fruit, trees and related plant material. The department is urging residents to not move plants, leaves or foliage outside of the area and to cooperate with officials placing traps, inspecting trees and treating for the pest. HLB quarantine areas already exist in parts of Orange, Los Angeles, Riverside and San Bernardino counties, where more than 2,400 trees have tested positive for the disease and been removed. Commercially cleaned and packed citrus fruit are exempt from the provisions.

ARS study finds targeted grazing slows wildfires. The USDA’s Agricultural Research Service announced that targeted cattle grazing successfully contained three rangeland wildfires in the Great Basin over a four year period, most recently on July 18, when the Welch fire near Elko, Nev., was successfully stopped when it began burning an area where targeted grazing had been carried out. The targeted grazing took place as part of a large study ARS is conducting, which aims to use cattle grazing to create fuel breaks to slow wildfires without causing grazing-related harm to the rangelands. Targeted grazing takes place in early spring, when the cattle consume large strips of highly flammable cheatgrass, cutting it down to 1 or 2 inches, in strategic areas. The goal is that when small rangeland fires begin, the reduced fuel loads will slow their growth and reduce their size. “These fuel breaks are intended to slow a fire's rate of spread, make it less intense, and provide time and space for firefighters to arrive and more safely attack and contain the fire,” said Pat Clark, an ARS rangeland scientist who oversaw the study. “That’s just what appears to have happened for the Welch fire.” The ARS study is being conducted at nine sites throughout the northern Great Basin in Idaho, Oregon, and Nevada. Though all the sites are at high risk of fire, Nevada’s fuel breaks are the only sites to be directly tested by wildfires.

JBS expands to aquaculture with \$313M acquisition. JBS, the largest meat producer in the world, is venturing into seafood with the purchase of Huon Aquaculture, an Australian salmon farming company, for \$313 million, according to a press release from the companies. The board of Huon unanimously recommended selling the company to JBS, which plans to acquire 100% of Huon’s shares at a 61% premium over the closing price when it was last publicly traded in February. Huon, the second largest salmon producer in Australia, has invested around \$250 million in its operational infrastructure and sustainability over the last five years. “Our acquisition of Huon enables us to further grow our Australian protein business and strengthen our presence with consumers and customers,” said JBS Australia’s President and CEO, Brent Eastwood. “We look forward to continue growing on the leading salmon business Huon has created and working with its employees, customers and stakeholders to help the company realize this next phase of growth.”. The acquisition should be completed by the end of the year, following the necessary court, regulatory, and shareholder approvals.

Farm Hands West: Licata joins the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement

Alyssa Licata has been hired to replace **Jonathan Field** as compliance officer for the California Leafy Greens Marketing Agreement. Field is retiring this month after serving in the role since LGMA was first established in 2007. Licata most recently was a lab manager for Seed Dynamics, Inc. Before that, she worked as a food safety specialist for Markon Cooperative.

Raina Nelson has been tapped to lead Westfalia Fruit as the new president of US operations. Nelson comes to Westfalia Fruit from Calavo Growers where she was executive vice president of



Raina Nelson

business development. She currently serves as the vice chairperson for the Southeast Produce Council and also serves on the executive committee of the United Fresh Produce Association.

Mary Hamilton has been appointed section manager for the Central Coast Water Board. She previously served as the program manager for the board's total maximum daily load, basin planning, and non-point source programs since 2018. Before that, she coordinated the implementation of Central Coast Water's regionally-scaled surface water quality monitoring program.

Santa Fe Farms, based in New Mexico, has hired **Hunter Buffington**, Hemp Feed Coalition executive director and federal policy expert, as the new products division vice president and director of policy and advocacy. Buffington will split her time between Santa Fe Farms in her new role and as a policy consultant for the Hemp Feed Coalition.

Ivory W. Lyles has been tapped to be Oregon State University's new vice provost for extension and engagement and director of the OSU Extension Service, effective Sept. 30. He succeeds **Anita Azarenko**, who served for more than two years in an interim role following the retirement of **Scott Reed** in 2019. Azarenko is retiring after 35 years of service at OSU in a variety of roles.

Andrew Hess now serves as an assistant professor at the University of Nevada-Reno's Department of Agriculture, Veterinary and Rangeland Sciences. In this role, he will work with sheep and beef cattle and was also hired as part of the university's investment in the Great Basin Research and Extension Center. Hess spent the last four years in New Zealand working for AgResearch.

The Department of Agriculture has announced key staff positions located in the DC office:

John Rapp has been named director of the office of budget and program analysis. He was previously working in the role in an acting capacity while simultaneously serving as the budget officer, chief risk officer, chief evaluation officer, and performance improvement officer. Before that, he served as the director of strategic planning, budget and accountability for the Forest Service.



John Rapp

Brooke Jamison has been appointed to associate administrator of the Foreign Agricultural Service. She brings 23 years of experience working on agriculture and international development policy for government, non-profit and private entities. She previously handled the agriculture and trade policy portfolio for two Senators and a Member of

Congress and most recently served as Sen. **Kirsten Gillibrand**'s, D-N.Y., legislative director.

Regina Black was hired to be the chief of staff for Trade and Foreign Agricultural Affairs. She most recently was the director of the executive office at the U.S. Dairy Export Council. **Caryn Compton** was appointed chief of staff for Rural Utilities Services. Most recently, she served as the chief of staff for Sen. **Bernie Sanders**, I-Vermont. **Mia Mayberry** was selected to be the deputy director of intergovernmental affairs in the Office of Congressional Relations. Mayberry most recently served as the director of outreach for Sen. Amy Klobuchar, D-Minn. **Dr. Marty Matlock** will serve as the senior adviser for Food Systems Resiliency with Marketing and Regulatory Programs. He was the founding executive director of the University of Arkansas Resiliency Center and is a professor in the Biological and Agricultural Engineering Department.

The Association of Equipment Manufacturers announced Dennis Slater will retire as the president of the organization and senior vice president Megan Tanel will succeed him early next year. Slater joined AEM's predecessor, the Construction Industry Manufacturers Association, in 1982, later becoming president of CIMA in 1998 and president of the newly formed AEM in 2002 after a merger between CIMA and the Equipment Manufacturers Institute. Tanel joined AEM in 1995 as an intern and become a full-time employee later that year.

The U.S. Grains Council has hired **Emily Sutton** to be the new manager of communications. Sutton most recently worked at Prim Marketing Group as a creative lead.



Emily Sutton

The American Seed Trade Association has hired **Jordan Gregory** as the new manager of membership engagement. Gregory previously worked at the Texas Department of Agriculture as a policy specialist.

Grace Burton has left the Chicago Council on Global Affairs and is headed to USAID to work on the Bureau for Resilience and Food Security's communications and outreach team. Burton was with the Chicago Council for the past seven years, most recently as the director of government relations. **Gloria Dabek** is taking over Burton's responsibilities at the Chicago Council. She has been at the organization since the beginning of 2020.

Impossible Foods brought on **Leilani Gayles** to be the new chief people officer and have promoted **David Borecky** to be the new chief finance officer. Gayles comes to Impossible Foods from San Francisco Giants where she was the chief people officer. Borecky first joined the company in 2019 as the chief accounting officer.

Jennifer Nealon has joined the National Cattlemen's Beef Association as the senior vice president of global marketing and research, located in the Denver office. Nealon brings 25 years of experience to the job, most recently serving as CEO of EMERGE Strategy, a consulting practice focused on growth strategies for middle-market companies.

The board of directors for the American Feed Industry Association have elected **Mike Gauss**, president of Kent Nutrition Group, to be the new board chair-elect of the organization. Gauss will succeed current board chair **Mike Schuster**, vice president of sales at Laidig Systems, in May 2022. Gauss joined the Kent team in 2005 as a division engineer with Grain Processing Corporation. In 2013, he transitioned to the Kent Nutrition Group and was later promoted to vice president of operations in 2015. He was promoted to president in 2019.

Casey MacLean now works in the personal office for Rep. **Jared Huffman**, D-Calif., as a legislative assistant covering the public lands and natural resources portfolio. She previously was a policy aide for Huffman on the Water, Oceans, and Wildlife Subcommittee for the House Natural Resources Committee.

Andrew Scibetta has joined the staff of Rep. **Carolyn Bourdeaux**, D-Ga., as her new communications director. Scibetta most recently served as the communications director for Rep. **Lou Correa**, D-Calif.

Mariana Perera has been promoted to scheduler for Rep. **Eric Swalwell**, D-Calif. She previously served as a staff assistant and deputy scheduler.



Mike Gauss

Brad Hiranaga has left General Mills where he was the company's chief brand officer. In the interim, **Doug Martin**, disruptive growth officer, is stepping in and expanding his role to include Hiranaga's responsibilities. Hiranaga was with General Mills for 20 years.

Retired U.S. Wheat Associates country director **Ron Lu** passed away July 23 in Taipei, Taiwan. He was 73. Lu served 33 years with USW, joining in 1983 as a technical specialist and then was appointed to country director in 2004, and later retired in 2017. From 2007 to 2009, Lu served as the chairman of the China Grain Products Research and Development Institute. Throughout his career, Lu worked directly with end users and importers to help them strengthen commercial links with U.S. export companies.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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