

## House OKs \$3.5T spending plan after moderates assured infrastructure vote

House Democrats pushed through a \$3.5 trillion budget resolution Tuesday after a group of moderates reached a deal promising them a vote by Sept. 27 on the Senate's bipartisan infrastructure bill.

The moderates had demanded a vote on the infrastructure measure before the House took up the budget resolution, which will clear the way for a spending and tax package to be released in September.

**In the end, the moderates agreed to vote for the budget measure after a provision was added to the debate rule for the resolution calling for holding the infrastructure vote by Sept. 27. The House passed the budget measure on a party-line, 220-212 vote.**



One of the moderates, Rep. Jim Costa, D-Calif., said ahead of the vote that he was satisfied with the deal.

**“Nine of us wanted to have a separate guaranteed vote on the bipartisan infrastructure package that we think is the largest infrastructure investment we've seen in American decades, and very much needed for our communities, whether we're talking about broadband, whether we're talking about transportation, whether we're talking about water,”** Costa told reporters.

But he suggested the moderates weren't ready to support the full \$3.5 trillion that progressives and President Joe Biden want included in the reconciliation package as part of his American Families Plan.

“We want to see it done in a common sense way that reflects the reality of what the Senate is willing to agree to and the House is willing to agree to,” Costa said.

The reconciliation package is supposed to include funding for extending an expanded child tax credit and providing new family leave, education and Medicare benefits. New clean energy incentives also will be a major part of the legislation as well as conservation spending aimed at helping farmers reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

**Two Democratic senators, Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona, have said they won't support \$3.5 trillion in new spending.**

The budget resolution provides instructions to committees to draft provisions of the upcoming reconciliation bill, which will include \$135 billion in spending for agriculture and child nutrition. Democratic leaders of the Senate and House Agriculture committees have already started work on the provisions.

The House committee, which doesn't have authority for child nutrition programs, will be dividing up \$89.1 billion for conservation, forestry, research and other priorities. The Senate committee, whose authority does include child nutrition, was assigned \$135 billion.

**Farm groups also will be closely watching the revenue provisions Democrats will propose to pay for the reconciliation package. Biden has proposed taxing capital gains at death, which would nullify the benefits of the stepped-up basis to heirs.**

The Agricultural Retailers Association issued a “call to action” urging lawmakers to preserve existing tax benefits for rural businesses, including stepped-up basis.

**“Assets in agriculture are typically held by one owner for several decades, so resetting the basis on the value of the land, buildings, and livestock on the date of the owner's death under a step-up in basis is important for surviving family members and business partners to ensure the future financial stability of the operation,” the group said.**

**Amid California's drought turmoil, lawmakers praise water board chair**

The Senate Rules Committee last week unanimously approved Gov. Gavin Newsom's reappointment of Joaquin Esquivel as chair of the State Water Resources Control Board. Esquivel fielded questions from senators covering a range of contentious issues the administration has been grappling with across two presidential administrations and an extreme drought.

**“We have 19th century laws, 20th century infrastructure and 21st century challenges,” said Esquivel during the hearing. “The decisions we're making now are setting us on a path for the next 50 years.”**

Esquivel described how the regulatory system for water quality and water rights established under California's Porter-Cologne Act more than 50 years ago has not kept pace with the emerging climate crisis.

**“We're going to need to see a real generational shift in our thinking, let alone a generational reinvestment in the systems themselves,” he added.**

Esquivel took the helm as chair during one of the board's most contentious periods. Under the leadership of Felicia Marcus, the board in late 2018 approved the first phase of its Bay-Delta Plan, which would dedicate up to 50% of the water flowing into the tributaries of the lower San Joaquin River as unimpaired flows for supporting ecosystem conservation. The proposed second phase promised up to 60% from other tributaries. The California Farm Bureau filed a lawsuit the following February challenging the plan and anticipated a lengthy court battle ahead.

Newsom took office in January 2019 and in his State of the State speech pledged to remove Marcus from the board and commit to pursuing voluntary agreements in place of the plan. Two years into his tenure on the board, Esquivel became chair.

At the hearing Wednesday, Esquivel renewed that pledge to support the agreements, calling them critical to “the enormity of the work and tasks that we all have in our watersheds to address the climate crisis, to ensure that our communities can thrive into the future.” He explained this approach will require local leadership and expertise to “own this challenge” and present solutions to the board, warning those agreements must “have something to aim toward” and meet the standards the board put in place with the Bay-Delta Plan.

Esquivel called it a false dichotomy to say the regulatory work and voluntary actions are at opposite ends.

“It's really a continuum of effort between the two,” he explained. “It's about the outcomes.”



State water board Chair Joaquin Esquivel (photo: Brad Hooker)

**He acknowledged the classic tension of “fish versus farm,” but was optimistic for finding pathways to resolving those differences, though that would require “us all to just be very honest with the challenges we're facing.” This means reconciling the fact that investments are needed to adapt to a reduced snowpack, increasing and longer droughts, “flashier” floods and rising seas.**

“Oftentimes, some are still clinging to a status quo that, regrettably, is no longer here,” he added.

The hearing came just weeks after the board approved an emergency regulation granting the agency new authority to curtail senior water rights in the Sacramento-San Joaquin Delta—only the second time in recent history the board has taken this action, following a similar order in June for the Russian River watershed. Esquivel said the board otherwise takes “a light touch” to water rights administration. In a Friday press conference, Erik Ekdahl, deputy director of the Division of Water Rights, explained that only the Legislature has the power to alter the state's water rights system.

“It was obvious that the board was needing to act. We need to be able to preserve as much water now as we can in our reservoirs in anticipation of a continued dry year,” Esquivel told the committee. “The reality is that we need to be ensuring the water rights system is working. We need to be curtailing in times of drought, because that's how we protect all of ourselves collectively—our communities and the water rights system itself.”

**He spurned media coverage depicting the curtailment issue as black and white, that the board “did something that was very grievous” to farmers, and noted that several**

**agricultural interests, including state water contractors and growers, were supportive of the board's action. Senator John Laird of Santa Cruz, who led the California Natural Resources Agency under the Jerry Brown administration, agreed.**

“One of the surprises to me was when I heard that my close friend Tom Birmingham [general manager of the Westlands Water District] supported what the board did, which you would not get from the newspaper accounts,” said Laird.

**Yet Republican Sen. Shannon Grove of Bakersfield raised concerns from her constituents over a possible disruption to the food supply from the curtailments.**

“If the board didn't curtail, it would mean that we would continue to see people pulling water out of the system that they don't have a real legal right to,” responded Esquivel, as he referred to an onslaught of illegal Delta diversions the order was targeting for enforcement. “We do need to see support for the ag community to weather this drought. But importantly, we need to continue to talk about the long term.”

The state must be aware of the economic consequences and respond to them, he explained, adding that California has met its physical limits and curtailments are the best way to manage through such difficult times.

Grove compared the problem farmers are facing as putting \$100 down for groceries at the store and walking out with nothing.

**“Even though the water has over the last few years been cut back, [farmers] still have to pay for that water,” said Grove. “Are there any discussions going on to reduce the price our water users or end users are paying?”**

Esquivel said he was aware of the issue, as it has been part of a larger discussion around managing water in the state, but he deferred to the State Water Project and Central Valley Project operators for water contract costs.

Grove also brought up the specter of the 2019 biological opinions for Delta fish that then-President Donald Trump signed into law, which set off an avalanche of lawsuits filed by and against the state and federal administrations. While the water board has not been a part of those discussions, Esquivel noted the opinions “are still up for discussion.”

**“The Endangered Species Act is an emergency room approach to our challenges,” he said. “We need really a whole-system, watershed-wide approach to the challenges that our species and ecosystems are facing.”**

He called it an oversimplification to just focus on what the projects are doing at the pumps and felt this has inhibited progress in protecting the rest of the watershed.

Esquivel gained praise from several lawmakers for the board's attention to safe and affordable drinking water. The agency assumed leadership of the state's drinking water program about five years ago from the California Department of Public Health.

“I'm proud of the work that we've been able to do to make more accountable the drinking water program, but importantly, begin to really close the gap that we know exists in our communities, that is too often based off of race,” said Esquivel, noting that the board has appropriated the first \$200 million of the \$1.3 billion the Legislature and governor agreed to as a drinking water and wastewater infrastructure package.

Esquivel also described the board’s ongoing effort to establish a racial equity initiative, which will have clean water and access to sanitation at its core.

“It’s taken us a year to actually draft it, because we’ve needed to ourselves have conversations about the issue,” he said. “Some may not see it as an issue.”

Esquivel pointed out that the Porter-Cologne Act, the Clean Water Act, the Safe Drinking Water Act and the Endangered Species Act coincided with the passage of the Civil Rights Act.

Along with the approval of all five senators on the committee, the board chair gained support from environmental and social justice groups, along with the Association of California Water Agencies, which appreciated the federal experience he has brought to the board. Esquivel had worked alongside Laird in the Natural Resources Agency, heading its federal water policy branch in Washington, D.C.

## **Recall candidates hope to rescind Newsom’s mandates, roll back labor laws**

Republicans looking to defeat Gov. Gavin Newsom in the September 14 recall election are pledging to minimize the state government’s role relating to the pandemic, drought, labor protections and forest management for wildfires, while leaning on local leaders and industry to fill in the space.

**“Imagine a California where we have an abundance of water, you have an abundance of electricity,” said San Diego businessman John Cox during a debate last week in Sacramento. “Imagine a California that doesn’t have crime waves and isn’t threatened by wildfires.”**

Along with Assemblymember Kevin Kiley of Rocklin, former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer and conservative talk radio host Larry Elder, Cox would immediately rescind vaccination mandates for COVID-19, arguing this one-size-fits-all approach erodes trust in government.



Former San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer answers questions after a debate in Sacramento. (photo: Hector Amezcua, Sacramento Press Club)

**The candidates agreed on reviving the timber industry to thin forests to reduce wildfires. But they offered few details on how they would help logging mills remain competitive under the state’s many regulatory requirements.**

Cox said he would divert funding from high-speed rail—much of which is federal dollars—to spend on more firefighting planes. Faulconer would issue a state of emergency for “treating forests” as wildfire prevention.

**The candidates have also promised to build more water storage to prepare the state for future droughts, but were unclear on how they would override the California Water Commission’s role in delineating state water bond dollars for infrastructure projects.**



“We're going to audit every single agency in this government,” Cox said at the debate. “We're going to audit every board and commission to determine if it should stay.”

**Kiley similarly called for “a systematic review of every regulation that needlessly makes it so difficult to do business in California.” The candidates would have one year to implement the proposals before the next gubernatorial election.**

Elder, in an interview with CalMatters, blamed environmental extremists for filing lawsuits to block new construction. He shared concerns gathered at a recent Kern County visit that water was draining into the ocean rather than being stored.

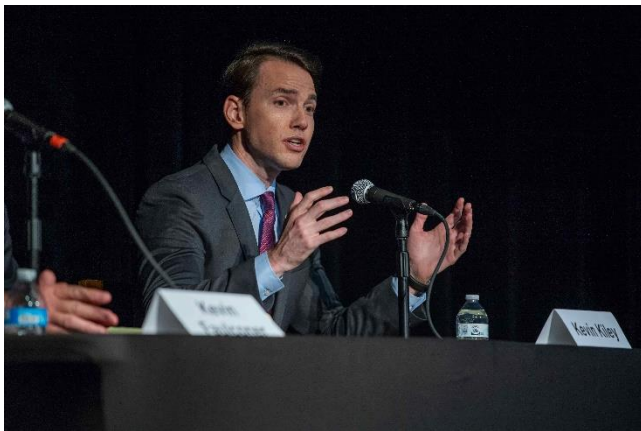
Cox said his business background would define his administration’s response to drought.

“We haven't prepared for this moment, and that's what a businessman does. He prepares for the moment well before it happens,” he told *Agri-Pulse*. “Gavin Newsom was lieutenant governor for eight years and did nothing about this problem, and now he's been governor for three years. ... This should not have happened—and it wouldn't have happened—if we had a businessman as governor, instead of a bunch of politicians.”

The candidates offered to reduce tax burdens for businesses as incentive for staying in California. Cox has pushed for a 25% tax reduction across the board.

Kiley argued taxes have not helped with the state’s longstanding infrastructure issues.

“Gavin Newsom just signed a \$267 billion budget, the largest in state history. It's doubled in just the last decade,” said Kiley. “And do you look around and say, ‘Wow, look at these beautiful dams and reservoirs. Look at these perfectly paved roads. Look at our sterling public education system?’” Of course not.”



Asm. Kevin Kiley, R-Rocklin (photo: Hector Amezcua, Sacramento Press Club)

In response to the deepening drought, Newsom said last week that he may mandate water restrictions for residential users statewide after the recall election. When he previously called for a voluntary 15% cutback, the governor hinted a mandate could come next. *Agri-Pulse* asked Cox if he would issue a mandate and the candidate responded that “sadly we may have to do some cutbacks.”

Kiley strongly opposed a mandate, saying his approach would be diametrically different from Newsom’s. He added that he “absolutely would not have supported” the

State Water Resources Control Board’s emergency regulation curtailing water rights in the Delta region approved in early August.

“We know we have more than enough water that comes to us by the grace of God,” he said. “We shouldn't have to live with an environment of scarcity and rationing and cutbacks. These are political choices.”

*Agri-Pulse* asked Kiley how he would build more water storage and avoid years of litigation that could stall the permitting process.

**“Part of my plan is putting in place actions for litigation,” he said. “It's one of the reasons we haven't meaningfully expanded our capacity since the State Water Project in the 1960s.”**

Also causing problems in California, he argued, was the Agricultural Labor Relations Board (ALRB), which he called “one of our worst bureaucracies.”

As an attorney, Kiley represented a corporate client in an ALRB case involving United Farm Workers and a union election at the company. He said the ALRB stopped the vote to decertify the union, a decision overturned years later by the California Supreme Court.

“That is the sort of state agency that is causing a lot of problems in California in a way that serves special interests rather than serving California workers or just Californians in general,” he said.

Kiley and other candidates also took aim at AB 5, the state’s independent contractor law, which has already survived multiple court battles. The Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals rejected a lawsuit by the California Trucking Association in April, and last week a California judge ruled unconstitutional the Proposition 22 ballot measure approved by voters in 2020 that exempted ride hailing services from the law. Kiley introduced a bill last year that would have repealed AB 5 but failed to gain a committee hearing.

“To the extent that I could reverse AB 5, I would do that,” pledged Elder.

***Agri-Pulse* asked Elder if he would prevent California’s agricultural overtime law from taking full effect in January or add an exemption for ranchers working on grazing projects that reduce fuel loads for wildfires. Elder declined to comment, deferring instead to Republican Rep. Doug LaMalfa, who represents parts of the Sacramento Valley and was supporting Elder on his press call on wildfire management.**

The candidates have largely focused arguments on Newsom’s track record and lean heavily on the emergency executive powers of the governor’s office to enact their policy goals.

**The Democratic-controlled Legislature has enough seats to override any veto from a Republican governor. Elder, who has been the primary target of the Newsom recall campaign and leads in polls among the 46 contenders, acknowledged this possibility, but reasoned that lawmakers have not deployed the tactic in more than 40 years, including when Republican Arnold Schwarzenegger held the office.**

“I have a lot more power than I thought I did, even dealing with a hostile Legislature,” said Elder.

He added that he would advise Democratic leaders to take Republican feedback into consideration when crafting measures and would appoint new members to the California Coastal Commission, the California Public Utilities Commission and other regulatory bodies “to make things far more sensible, to restrict some of the burdens that make life unlivable for Californians.” Those positions would require legislative approval.

Faulconer, a moderate Republican, said he would seek common ground with Democratic lawmakers.

**“If you treat people with dignity and respect, even if you disagree, you can usually find the solutions that are going to work,” he said.**

He cited his experience as mayor working with a Democratic super majority in the city council.

**“When you phrase things in terms of common sense, in terms of helping people, and people see the actual results, then you gain that support,” he said.**

While the California Republican party chose not to endorse any of the candidates to avoid infighting, Faulconer last week took a strong stance against Elder following allegations the radio personality brandished a gun against his former fiancé.

“It’s bullshit,” said Faulconer. “He doesn’t want to defend this. It’s indefensible.”

Kiley, however, hoped the party would act as a team. If a Republican wins the recall race, he added, the political dynamic in the Legislature would change completely.

“The one thing that our state’s legislators respond to is political pressure,” he said. “This recall is going to create political pressure like they have never seen.”

Fearing for their jobs with the upcoming 2022 election, he argued, Democrats would be incentivized to work with a Republican governor, “or face the same fate as Gavin Newsom.”

Kiley also claims to be the only elected official at the state level who refuses all funding from lobbyists and special interests.

“I’m 100% citizen backed, and that is the kind of cultural change in our capital that we need if we’re going to turn California around,” he said at a subsequent debate last week.

## **Water trading platform offers open-source option for managers, users**

A new water trading and accounting platform aimed at easily matching those who need water with those who have it would also give Groundwater Sustainability Agencies near real-time data for maintaining accurate water accounting and that, in turn, would help them comply with the Sustainable Groundwater Management Act.



Christina Babbitt, EDF

That’s what presenters from the Environmental Defense Fund and the California Water Data Consortium told the California Water Commission when they previewed their Water Accounting Platform last week.

**The open-source groundwater budgeting tool allows managers to see where water is being used and how much is available, said EDF’s Christina Babbitt. Landowners, she said, “can check their water budget very much like they would check an online bank account.”**

Water managers and users in the Rosedale-Rio Bravo Water Storage District, which SGMA classifies as one of the severely over-drafted basins in Kern County, worked with EDF and the California Water Data Consortium to develop the system. Babbitt said, “landowners wanted something straightforward and easy to use,” which led to the uncluttered design.



One view shows total allocation by type in a table side-by-side with a graph showing average use and current year-to-date use. Other screens show water trading activity. Maps let users see how a trade would impact the specific parcels that would lose or gain water.

A water district provides supply information while a third-party, OpenET, uses satellite data to estimate use. Together, they are used to calculate a water budget, which is then adjusted anytime a trade is transacted. The budget tracking includes noting where residential wells are and which areas are considered disadvantaged communities so managers can prevent unintended consequences from changes in water use.

Commissioner Samantha Arthur of Sacramento asked whether managers could use the platform to see, “oh, no, we let too much trading happen here, and now we have an impact to a disadvantaged community.” Babbitt said a scenario planning part of the platform aims to allow managers to anticipate trades and their impacts so they aren’t caught in that type of situation.

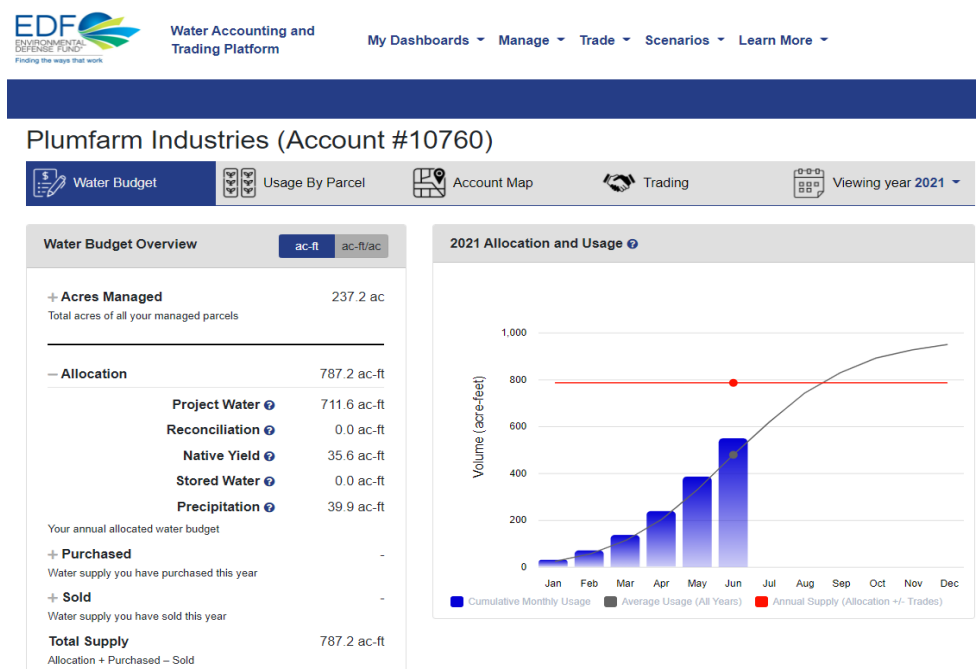
**“The accounting side can't just be what ag needs,” Babbitt said, “and that's why it's such a political, complex process right now.” She said community and environmental needs are part of the overall allocation and they have to be accounted for “before you even allocate for water that can be traded.”**

She said the scenario planning tool will offer visualizations to help managers see the multiple impacts of certain allocation decisions. For example, she said lower groundwater levels or a “sensitive groundwater-dependent ecosystem” could require “more stringent trading rules in that area.”

The pilot project in Rosedale does not support the actual exchange of money for water trades because managers there didn’t want that as part of the platform, Babbitt said, but that functionality could be added for a different district that chooses it.

**Tara Moran of the California Water Data Consortium said it will be critical for GSAs to build trust with landowners as they establish local water trading rules. Then the platform can be tailored for a specific basin’s rules and needs.**

Justin Fredrickson of the California Farm Bureau attended the virtual commission meeting and raised the question of user privacy.



The landowner dashboard shows the water budget. (Courtesy EDF)

**“There's trepidation about trading and lots of questions that need to be worked through,” he said, but noted that with successful outreach and the built-in flexibility the tool offers it has a lot of potential to meet the needs of different users. “We’re supportive in concept,” he said.**

In the Rosedale-Rio Bravo district, Babbitt said, water managers can see landowner accounts, but individual landowners would only be able to see their own. She added that districts could choose to include additional publicly available data in the platform and make that visible to all.

Commissioner Kimberly Gallagher of Davis emphasized that while the presentation showed the usefulness of the tool, the “linchpin of all this is good data and confidence in the data.” She asked whether surface water, in addition to groundwater, would be part of the data in the water budget.

Moran said as this first phase of the project progresses, integrating more data sets including surface water is part of the plan, along with increased functionality and accessibility of the platform. The hope is to identify and work with pilot basins during the rest of this year and the start of 2022.

Phase 2, in 2022, will include pilot projects, more scenario planning and “tailoring the platform to meet other needs,” Moran said, for the pilot basins and GSAs more broadly. By late 2022 or 2023, the platform should be able to support water trading as well as other local management actions and it could also expand to include additional hydrological models.

While continuing to develop the tool itself, EDF and the Water Data Consortium will be holding public meetings and engaging additional partners in outreach so communities are comfortable with the tool and prepared to customize it for themselves when it’s ready for more general rollout.

“We really see this as a collaborative and iterative process,” Moran said.

## **Pork producers’ latest Prop 12 challenge tossed out**

A federal judge in Iowa has turned aside hog producers’ latest attempt to block California from enforcing its animal welfare requirements on pork sold in the state.

U.S. District Judge C.J. Williams ruled that the producers failed to prove that their lawsuit should be heard in Iowa or that California voters intended to harm Iowa’s pork producers when they voted for Proposition 12, the 2018 initiative that will require sows to be given at least 24 square feet of space.

**The regulations are set to take effect Jan. 1 and will apply to all pork sold in the state regardless of whether the hogs are raised.**

“Proposition 12 applies generally to pork production without regard to the state of origin and the fact that Iowa produces the most pork in the country is merely fortuitous,” Williams said in his ruling dated Monday.



The lawsuit Williams dismissed was filed against California state officials by the Iowa Pork Producers Association and some individual producers in Iowa.

**A three-judge panel of the San Francisco-based 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals earlier ruled against a Prop 12 challenge by the National Pork Producers Council and the American Farm Bureau Federation.**

The regulations also apply to egg-laying hens and calves produced for veal.

“The pork industry is in a sad state: it wastes producer money filing multiple losing lawsuits just to continue its cruel abuse of locking mother pigs in cages barely larger than their own bodies, unable to even turn around,” said Rebecca Cary, senior staff attorney at the Humane Society of the United States

“These are intelligent, social animals who are forced to endure years of suffering and pain. We applaud the many farmers who are treating animals better and are already in compliance with Proposition 12’s modest standards.”

IPPA had no comment; NPPC spokesman Jim Monroe said the group was still considering its options in the 9th Circuit case.

“We also continue to engage California on the development of final regulations. Our formal comments on proposed regulations included a request to delay implementation of Prop 12 for at least two years,” Monroe said.

**“The fallout from this flawed law includes higher food prices, less choice and pork industry consolidation as smaller producers struggle with compliance costs,” he said.**

According to a recent Rabobank report, only 4% of U.S. sow operations currently comply with the space requirements. Other producers who sell into California will have to either reduce the number of sows or build additional housing. Many sow barns currently provide about 16 to 20 square feet per animal.

## **USDA offers coronavirus aid to contract producers, liberalizes rules for specialty crops**

A broad array of contract livestock and poultry producers will be eligible for coronavirus relief from the Agriculture Department, and payment rules for specialty crop growers are being liberalized.

Congress provided \$1 billion for payments to contract producers. Producers of broilers, pullets, layers, chicken eggs, turkeys, hogs and pigs, ducks, geese, pheasants and quail all may be eligible for aid, and contract producers of breeding stock also may qualify. Payments will be based on 80% of the difference in the producers' revenue between Jan. 1-Dec. 27, 2020 and the same period in 2019 or 2018.

“We listened to feedback and concerns from producers and stakeholders about the gaps in pandemic assistance, and these adjustments to CFAP 2 help address unique circumstances, provide flexibility and make the program more equitable for all producers,” Farm Service Agency Administrator Zach Ducheneaux said Tuesday.

USDA is changing rules under the second round of the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program to allow growers of fruits, vegetables and other specialty crops to claim payments based on their 2018 sales rather than only 2019 data. Contract producers also will be allowed to use 2018 or 2019 data to qualify for payments. Allowing 2018 sales to be used in lieu of 2019 data will help both contract producers and specialty crop growers whose sales were reduced in 2019. The 2018

revenue figures can include payments the growers received through USDA's Noninsured Disaster Assistance Program and Wildfire and Hurricane Indemnity Program Plus. New and modified CFAP 2 applications must be filed by Oct. 12.

## **News Briefs:**

**Audit blasts California for water and transportation infrastructure.** In a new report to the governor and Legislature, the California State Auditor found a number of issues that pose a high risk to the state. Of the seven issues and five agencies cited in the report, aging water infrastructure continues to threaten public safety and water availability. The office continues to be concerned about the state's ability to maintain reliable access to water, given that the \$16 billion Delta Conveyance Project is still several years from being completed. The administration has touted the project as protecting Delta water deliveries from sea level rise and earthquakes. "The project will likely face challenges related to funding and the timeline for completion," concludes the report. More than 100 dams are in less than satisfactory condition and 89 of those have significant hazard ratings. The annual audit has also kept the transportation department on the list for the need to improve the state highway system. While Caltrans has made progress in recent years, the report warns the program has limited funding and must stay the course for another six years to meet its goals.

**Biome Makers gets \$15 million boost.** West-Sacramento-based Biome Makers Inc. announced a \$15M Series B round led by Prosus Ventures, with the participation of Seaya Ventures, Viking Global Investors, JME Ventures and Pymwymic. Founded in 2015 by Adrian Ferrero and Dr. Alberto Acedo, Biome Makers has spent the last few years building its BeCrop and Gheom proprietary products to promote sustainable farming practices using soil biology standard analytics. In parallel, they developed artificial intelligence-based tools to determine the most sustainable solutions for crops going forward. The new funds will go towards the company's next phase of growth, accelerating the global expansion of BeCrop, which allows soil samples to be tested for microbial makeup; and Gheom, an independent assessment program, measuring the impact of crop inputs and farming practices to support personalized agriculture. "We are on a mission to restore the health and fertility of the soil and develop a more sustainable and respectful way to do agriculture," says Adrian Ferrero, Co-Founder and CEO of Biome Makers. "After building strong relationships with our customers and expanding the operation to Europe and Central America, we recognize the need to scale as we grow, increasing access to our unique tools for the agriculture industry. We're excited to partner with top-tier investors who share our vision for building a sustainable farming future." This announcement comes on the heels of Biome Makers' announcing the first AI virtual assistant for sustainable farming in partnership with Bayer Crop Science. This technology employs data analytics to forecast the outcome of products prior to application, helping farmers and agronomists identify what their soil needs to improve its health and sustainably promote crop yield.

**CARB seeks input on zero-emission forklifts.** The Air Resources Board (CARB) is drafting a regulatory proposal to accelerate the deployment of zero-emission forklifts throughout California. The mandate would allow only a few exceptions, raising concerns among ag groups. "Our operations only run a few months out of the year, and we simply cannot pass along the costs to our buyers like other operations that run year-round," said Priscilla Rodriguez, director of regulatory affairs for the Western Agricultural Processors Association (WAPA), during a stakeholder workshop last week. Rodriguez argued that charging costs would be at least double CARB's estimates. WAPA also disagreed with reporting and record keeping requirements and pushed for more incentive funding. "There is very limited funding available for the conversion of propane to electric forklifts," said WAPA President and CEO Roger Isom. "Incentive programs

need to be an integral part of this process.” CARB is taking comments and plans for an October 7 workshop on the proposal and board consideration in 2022. [More information is available here.](#)

## Farm Hands West: Ledford joins US Wheat Associates

**Tyllor Ledford** has joined the U.S. Wheat Associates as the assistant director of the West Coast office located in Portland, Ore. She succeeds **Michael Anderson** who was promoted to market analyst earlier this year. Ledford most recently completed her master’s degree in agricultural and applied economics from Texas Tech University, where she also earned a bachelor’s degree in the same concentration.



Tyllor Ledford

Gov. **Gavin Newsom** appointed **Joel Ledesma** of Sacramento as the deputy director for statewide water and energy at the California Department of Water Resources. Ledesma previously served as assistant general manager at Northern California Power Agency since 2019. He has held several positions at the California Department of Water Resources from 1991 to 2019.

Newsom also appointed **Lisa Lien-Mager** as senior adviser for strategic communications at the California Natural Resources Agency. Lien-Mager has served as the deputy secretary for communications at the California Natural Resources Agency since 2017. In addition, the governor reappointed **Kevin Chan** as special assistant to the State Fire Marshal at the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. He has served in this position since 2017.

Conterra Ag Capital, an ag lending firm, has added **Jon Reiter** to its board of directors. Reiter is the owner of McConnell Farms, which grows almonds, blueberries and pistachios in California's San Joaquin Valley. He also started Cavalrei, a consulting firm offering services in the



Jon Reiter

agriculture, finance, solar and water/water storage industries. Reiter previously served as the CEO of Maricopa Orchards, and before that, he was a finance attorney for Milbank.

**Marie Baldassarre** is the new communications director for Rep. **Ro Khanna**, D-Calif. She previously worked for Sen. **Sheldon Whitehouse**, D-R.I., as his digital director and press adviser.

**Ken Paglione** has joined Mucci Farms as sales account manager in its Kingsville, Ontario office. Paglione brings 15 years of experience in greenhouse produce.

**Amélie Gaudin**, associate professor at the University of California, Davis, has been appointed as the holder of the Endowed Professorship in Agroecology. Gaudin joined the UC Davis staff in 2015 and before that was a lecturer and postdoctoral fellow at the University of Guelph.



**Randy Abhold** has announced he will retire as president of Rainier Fruit Company, effective Aug. 31. **Mark Zirkle**, current CEO, will reassume the position of president following Abhold's retirement. In his first four years at Rainier Fruit, Abhold became the domestic sales manager, helping lead the company into one of the largest tree fruit sales groups.

**Chris Alpers** of RedPath Orchards in Michigan has been tapped to be the new board chairman of the U.S. Apple Association. Alpers succeeds **Mike Preacher**, marketing director of Domex Superfresh Growers in Washington. Other members elected to the board includes: **Brenda Briggs** of Pennsylvania as vice chair, **Steve Clement** of Washington as secretary, and **Craig Hinkle**, of Pennsylvania as treasurer.



*Amélie Gaudin*

**Best regards,**

**Sara Wyant**  
**Editor**

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