

California models climate-smart agriculture for COP26 crowd

Newsom administration officials are heading this week to Glasgow, Scotland, for the United Nations Climate Change Conference, known as COP26.

While California is the world's fifth largest economy, it is not a country and will not participate in the policy negotiations at the center of the conference. The focus will instead be on side events and meetings with delegates, as state officials share the nuts and bolts of implementing a \$1.1 billion sustainable agriculture package over the next two years, along with a \$15 billion climate package.

“It blows people's minds that we have tens of millions of dollars actually going into these practices for natural and working lands,” said Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot in describing the incentives grants to reporters last week.

He countered the stereotype that California is arrogant for its size and argued the conference will be an opportunity to bring ideas back to the state as well.

Jared Blumenfeld, secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency, said the administration will be focused on “highlighting the power of collaboration” with other subnational jurisdictions. He explained that the conference traditionally focused exclusively on sovereign nations like the U.S. and United Kingdom, but that has changed thanks to the work of Gov. Gavin Newsom’s climate advisor, Lauren Sanchez, and others who worked on the 2016 Paris Climate Accords.



California Natural Resources Secretary Wade Crowfoot (photo: DWR)

“President Biden came out with our top-level goal of reducing emissions. It's up to us to help implement that at the subnational level,” said Blumenfeld. **“Because, as we can see around the world, nations often aren’t the first to act, aren’t the quickest to act, and California has really been a leader in that.”**

Crowfoot added that reaching the UN’s ambitious climate targets must be demonstrated at the state and city level.

Sanchez expected 140 heads of state to attend the conference, though Blumenfeld acknowledged “it’s not a very coherent or well-organized” event for interacting with those delegates or the thousands of other officials descending on the city.

One of the top priorities in those interactions for the administration will be elevating the role of nature-based solutions. The state’s investment in climate-smart agriculture has helped to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from farms and ranches while drawing down carbon into soils, according to CDFA Secretary Karen Ross, in espousing the benefits of the administration’s incentives grants for healthy soils, irrigation efficiency, nutrient management and methane reduction in the livestock sector.

Blumenfeld also touted the state’s efforts to reduce short-lived climate pollutants.



California Air Resources Board Chair Liane Randolph

“We’re taking huge steps to reduce methane emissions from the solid waste sector,” he said. “Looking at how we reduce methane and other super pollutants really is our best bet for slowing warming in the near term.”

Ross said the rapidly growing world population requires climate resiliency to maintain the food supply for years to come “and not take away from future generations’ ability to continue to be food producers” and to meet food security needs.

“How do we scale up these proven practices and technologies that are still appropriate?” she asked. “How do we make more happen faster, so that every acre can be under these kinds of practices?”

Ross will also be pushing for ways to bolster research to keep new ideas coming out of the pipeline and applied to the land.

Crowfoot plans to highlight nature-based solutions as well during his speaking engagements and discussions.

“That’s really a missing piece of the climate movement,” he said. “We talk a lot about technology, renewable energy, electrification of vehicles, building decarbonization. That’s all important, but we have to help nature help us actually combat climate change.”

Crowfoot will lift up the governor’s 30x30 commitment for preserving 30% of the state’s land and coastal waters by 2030 and the agency’s draft Natural and Working Lands Climate Smart Strategy.

The top priority for the secretary, as well as Blumenfeld and Air Resources Board Chair Liane Randolph, is to promote California’s work in phasing out fossil fuels, since “very few [countries] have actually talked publicly about stopping the extraction of fossil fuels,” said Crowfoot. The officials emphasized the need to ensure that low-income communities and communities of color see the benefits first from the transition to zero-emission vehicles.

Randolph explained that this particularly pertains to medium- and heavy-duty trucks and impacts communities close to ports and corridors for goods movement. Board member Dean Florez will also attend the conference.

Crowfoot's third objective in Glasgow is to bring more attention to climate resilience.

“Historically, in this Conference of Parties, there's been almost a singular focus on climate mitigation,” he said. “There hasn't been enough discussion around climate adaptation.”

This includes “a heavy focus on water” as California and other regions face a “shifting pendulum” between extreme floods and droughts with increasing climate change.

Days after announcing the administration's plans for participating in the conference, Newsom dropped out from attending, citing family obligations. In his place will be Lieutenant Governor Eleni Kounalakis, an elected official not within the governor's administration. Kounalakis, who proudly calls herself “a farm girl,” chairs the governor's trade committee and served as the U.S. ambassador to Hungary under the Obama administration.

Air board calls for bold climate action, more funding and more science on dairy digesters

Ahead of the United Nations Climate Change Conference, the California Air Resources Board (CARB) took stock of how far the state has come in reducing climate emissions. Several members took to heart the “code red for humanity” alert recently issued by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and said California must do more to lead the charge, particularly with reducing diesel and methane emissions.

“The intensity of this changing behavior will continue to affect livelihoods, agriculture, water systems and sensitive ecosystems,” said Nehzat Motallebi, an atmospheric scientist in CARB's research division, during a 10-hour hearing Thursday. “The multibillion-dollar agricultural industry, which is one of the cornerstones of California, will be hard hit by extended drought and extreme weather events, which puts them in high risk.”

Motallebi warned to expect extreme droughts to continue throughout the 21st century, with less precipitation outside of atmospheric rivers and a long-term decline in groundwater levels affecting growers in the San Joaquin Valley as well as the Sierra Nevada and ecosystems that rely on the snow reserve for water. The IPCC report highlighted new research showing that forests devastated by drought lose the ability to store carbon over a much longer period than previously thought.



Dairy cows feed on the Central Coast. (Photo: DWR)

Globally, 20% of the greenhouse gas emissions come from the natural and working lands sector, due mainly to deforestation, land use change and agricultural emissions, according to Motallebi. To that end, California loses about 50,000 acres of farmland per year, mostly to urbanization, as the Newsom administration's Strategic Growth Council discovered in 2019. When those lands are lost, the carbon stored in the soil and plant biomass is degraded or emitted as carbon dioxide.

This led CARB to include in its Climate Scoping Plan a goal for protecting agricultural lands from conversion, directing growth instead to existing communities while fostering more compact urban development that reduces vehicle miles traveled. CARB staff noted this effort in the proposed revisions for the Mobile Source Strategy, which the agency plans to update next summer.

In a discussion the same day on that strategy for vehicle emissions, board members recognized more needs to be done in reducing diesel pollutants.

“This is absolutely a public health crisis,” said Senator Connie Leyva of Chino, a newly appointed nonvoting member of the board, as she donned a t-shirt that read “Be Bold.” “We have to say ‘No’ to all of these pollutants. We have to be more aggressive.”

Leyva, a former labor leader in the hospitality industry, argued that more should be done to curb trucking pollution. Board member John Balmes, a physician studying the impacts of exposure to airborne pollutants, agreed, but raised concerns about investments in the infrastructure for the number of charging stations needed to fulfil the state’s new clean vehicle mandates. A recent report by the California Energy Commission found the state needs nearly 1.2 million charging stations by 2030 to meet passenger vehicle fueling demands and 157,000 chargers for support medium- and heavy-duty trucks.



Sen. Connie Leyva, D-Chino

“How are we going to do all the charging for these heavy-duty, light-duty and medium-duty trucks that we need to get on the road?” asked Balmes. He also called for requiring older diesel trucks to be retired early to accelerate the transition to zero emissions.

“But I don't even think that's enough. We have to figure out how to get the current diesel fleet cleaner,” he said. “As a board, as a state, we need to come to terms with the fact that it's going to take major investment, which I don't see yet.”

One battle over investment funding for methane reduction spilled over from legislative budget hearings into the CARB discussion. **According to the nonpartisan Legislative Analyst’s Office, the state’s most cost-effective tactic yet for reducing greenhouse gas emissions has been deploying incentives grants for constructing dairy digesters, facilities that are also included in California’s Low Carbon Fuel Standard (LCFS) program.**

Separately, a 2019 CDFA report stated that the use of dairy digesters, along with other methods, helped cut down about 25% of total 2013 dairy and livestock manure methane emissions, as part of the state's efforts to reduce methane by 40%. Another recent UC-Davis report suggests beef and dairy sectors can be climate neutral by 2050 by reducing methane emissions 18-32% and that new manure management techniques like anaerobic biogas digesters can play a critical role.

Yet a coalition of environmental justice groups took aim at dairy digesters last week when submitting a petition to CARB to remove them from the LCFS.

“CARB has inflated the greenhouse gas reductions associated with that,” asserted Brent Newell, an attorney with the group Public Justice, during the hearing. “This creates the illusion that factory farmed gas achieves negative emissions reductions.”

Newell argued the reductions would have happened anyway through incentives grants and funding from a settlement agreement over the Aliso Canyon natural gas leak. Newell and other advocates claimed the digesters generate harmful pollution for economically disadvantaged communities within the San Joaquin Valley.

“Dairies, especially those of the scale required to even generate or produce fuels, crowd thousands—sometimes more than 10,000 animals—in a single facility,” said Shayda Azamian, a policy advocate for the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability. “This concentration of livestock has a massive and demonstrated impact on nearby residents, ranging from polluted air, water unfit for human consumption, and odor and flies so potent that residents often cannot leave their homes.”

The petition urges CARB to cease all credits for digesters and not authorize the natural gas generated from the facilities as an eligible fuel source for powering electric vehicles or gas-powered heavy-duty trucks.

Government affairs representatives for bioenergy and dairy trade groups called the accusations inaccurate and misleading, and urged the board to instead double down on grants for anaerobic digestion facilities.

“Reducing short-lived climate pollutants is the last lever we have left to avoid catastrophic climate change,” said Julia Levin, executive director of the Bioenergy Association of California. “Not only would that [petition] fly in the face of the science, which only underscores the urgency of reducing dairy methane and other methane sources, but it would contradict the plain language of SB 1383, the state’s short-lived climate pollution law.”

Levin pointed out that the Biden administration and the European Union issued a joint statement in September recognizing that cutting methane emissions is “the single most effective strategy to reduce global warming in the near term and keep the goal of limiting warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius within reach.”

Dairy Cares Executive Director Michael Boccadoro added that California is now the world leader in reducing dairy methane emissions, after the state invested \$700 million into the effort, with a 2-to-1 match from the industry that has brought the total investment to nearly \$2 billion.

“[California] goes beyond the 30% global methane pledge signed by our own nation and the European Union and a number of other countries,” said Boccadoro. “Other states are looking to California leadership and beginning to follow our lead in developing programs of their own, including LCFS programs.”

In her presentation, Motallebi noted that six other states are also working to adopt California’s regulations on heavy-duty trucks, which would more than double the reductions. She said conversations like this drive down infrastructure and financing costs, and provide market certainty for reducing combustion engine sales.

Boccadoro argued the petition is asking CARB to ignore that opportunity for combating climate change and “abandon market-based approaches that are clearly working.” Without the LCFS credits, he said, dairies would not implement the projects, the industry would further consolidate after losing the added revenue source, and global livestock emissions would increase as production shifts to other regions of the country and world—in some places leading to further deforestation to make room for more livestock and feed production.

According to board member Dean Florez, the hearing's debates over digesters and charging stations portrayed an uncomfortable level of uncertainty over the technologies the agency has been depending on to "make these very large leaps" in reducing emissions.

"We make big bets here. But it feels like we always have something to rely on, in terms of the science," said Florez. "I'm not sure we have that today."

Farmers: Pesticide notifications could 'collapse' California agriculture

During a webinar Tuesday, the Department of Pesticide Regulation (DPR) solicited ideas for a new statewide system to notify residents ahead of pesticide applications. The department plans to launch the program in 2024 through a \$10 million state budget allocation. Many details have yet to be resolved, leading to escalating conflicts between agricultural interests and environmental groups as well as county agricultural commissioners and DPR.

To guide the process going forward, DPR released five principles that aim to protect public health, improve equity and transparency, complement existing regulations, prioritize by health impacts and encourage communication.

Environmental justice advocates called for the immediate launch of a system that would be available to the broad public through a web portal and with a minimum of 72-hour notice. Jane Sellen, who directs Californians for Pesticide Reform, referenced a study published in June by researchers at the University of California, Los Angeles. The study found 667 cases of childhood central nervous system tumors and 123,158 controls among children due to potential exposure in pregnant mothers between 1998 and 2011. Sellen and several other advocates say they are worried DPR and public health agencies are not adequately tracking such cumulative impacts of pesticide exposure.

But the study did not seem to separate out any other risk factors such as air quality, in-home pesticide use or other environmental factors. In two separate studies, one of the UCLA study's researchers found that pregnant women exposed to high levels of ultrafine particles from jet airplane exhaust are 14% more likely to have a preterm birth than those exposed to lower levels. And globally, air pollution contributed to the deaths of almost half a million babies under one month old in 2019.

Some of the most acerbic criticism of the administration's pursuit of a notification system came from San Diego County Farm Bureau Executive Director Hannah Gbeh, who said it unfairly targets family farmers and would further collapse agriculture in the state.

"California farmers do not manufacture these pesticides," said Gbeh. "Yet our California government is now telling our industry that farmers are responsible to the public to explain why and how these products are used."

Gbeh described San Diego County as the poster child of issues in the urban-agriculture interface, driving farms out of business and leading to the loss of 10,000 acres, or 4%, of production in one



A pesticide applicator spray crops according to state and federal regulations, but few consumers understand what is going on and why it's important to protect crops. (Photo: USDA)

year. She shared accounts of neighbors calling the authorities on farmers when they see dirt from tilling or normal dust.

“The general public does not understand the complexities of the agriculture industry,” she said. “This notification system is going to further confuse the public.”

Instead of “picking on farmers” with a notification system, Gbeh requested DPR put the funding to public education efforts to communicate the rigorous review, testing and permitting processes for determining safety in the state. **She argued that California has the strictest regulations in the nation, but also one of the fastest collapsing agricultural economies in the world due to “greenwashing policy proposals” that exacerbate the climate and food crises through overregulation.**

Others raised concerns over the potential for notification fatigue, adding more compliance burdens for farmers, liability on growers that could lead to economic losses and reducing flexibility for pesticide applications.

One commenter, who introduced herself as a pesticide safety educator and researcher, worried the requirement for advanced notice would push applicators toward preventative spraying and away from waiting until absolutely necessary, which would disincentivize integrated pest management practices. Residents would be notified but also potentially exposed to more pesticides.

Julie Henderson, DPR’s new acting director, did not respond to the concerns several farm groups and growers raised, but did recognize the frustration from environmental advocates about the pace the department has been proceeding with the system.

“There are multiple factors that we want to make sure that we’re thoughtfully considering so that the system that we put in place is effective and serves the purpose being able to provide people with information that they can take to protect their health,” explained Henderson.

She stressed that the system must be consistent across the state and that DPR needs a stable partnership with county agricultural commissioners to implement the program, since it will rely on the information they provide.

DPR is holding a second listening session Wednesday evening and plans to host more public workshops in early 2022 to inform the design of the system.

Additional funding for climate smart ag presents new opportunities

With the new budget providing additional funding to some of California’s climate-smart ag programs, the state’s Food and Ag board heard from experts Tuesday about how to ensure the money strengthens and expands the impacts of funded projects.

One major effort that could pay dividends over the long term would be to incorporate data from what will soon become thousands of projects into the state’s cost of production studies. Jeff Dlott, the COO of LandScan, a soil ag tech start-up, and a member of the CDFA Science Advisory Panel, said California’s cost of production studies are among the best in the country. **They already incorporate different farming practices so “why not develop a whole series of climate smart related cost of production studies?”** The data would come from the projects on the ground and the studies would be available to everyone. He pointed out that ag tech researchers often turn to those studies and their value would increase if information such as

reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and carbon sequestration could be included. He acknowledged such data has been hard to come by.

Glott also put in a plug for the potential for soil ag tech to “change the climate market” and the way that carbon is calculated, which is something that has gained a lot of attention in recent months, in part because accurate quantification remains elusive.

Glenda Humiston, vice president of UC Agricultural and Natural Resources, celebrated many of the existing collaborations among universities, government and the private sector but said the additional projects on the horizon call for even more leveraging of partnerships.

“We have really got to find more and better collaborations of our government, our university and our industry sectors.” She said federal and state government partners are important but not to overlook county and local government potential. Industry partners often engage, but she pointed out that California’s ag diversity means it’s not always at the top of the investment list for a major company like Syngenta or John Deere, which can impact thousands of acres in the Midwest with one decision.



Glenda Humiston, vice president of UC Agricultural and Natural Resources, called for more collaborations between government, universities and the private sector to advance new innovations in agriculture and climate smart opportunities.

But Humiston said she often tells people in Silicon Valley that while “we know we need better technology, mechanization, robots, drones, etc.” those things will only work when paired with plants that have been adopted for them. “To get that done, it takes a lot of money,” she said.

During public comment, a farmer in his 30s discussed the challenge of getting familiar with the grant application process and echoed another of Glott’s points when he said farmers are busy being farmers not grant writers. Offering them practical support to access the funding is important. **This grower also said more demonstration or model projects will help farmers see what their neighbors are doing, which, he said, can be a big motivator for trying something new or different.**

And another public commenter requested that CDFA consider how to use some of its organic transition funding to help farmers during the years when they are no longer using conventional growing systems (pesticides, etc.) but are not yet eligible for organic certification and the premium pricing it brings.

Board member Joy Sterling expressed confidence that expanding broadband to more communities would help narrow the digital divide that can be part of the challenge for farmers trying to join the programs. And she applauded the climate smart programs for their potential impact on ag’s future.

“Saving the planet through agriculture could be exactly the perfect lure for getting young people engaged in agriculture,” she said.

Supply chain difficulties threaten long-term harm to ag exporters

Farmers are having problems getting their products to international buyers, costing them sales and lost profits and threatening to sever precious relationships with foreign customers.

Whether it's a container of milk powder, chicken, almonds, walnuts or oranges, shipments are getting stuck in warehouses or sitting at ports for extended periods of time when they should be cruising to buyers in places like Jakarta, Tokyo or Seoul. And it's not just the added expense that has farmers and shippers upset — it's also the fear that overseas frustration will lead foreign buyers to look elsewhere for more reliable supplies.

“It is at a boiling point,” says Sara Arsenault, director for federal policy at the California Farm Bureau Federation, who stressed that almond and citrus farmers are going to extraordinary lengths to get their crops in containers and on vessels.

“Companies here in the United States are truly having a very difficult time maintaining customers, and it is clear that overseas customers are putting the U.S. on notice about future business, and that if we don't correct the supply chain issues here, you're going to see lower demand for U.S. products,” said U.S. Dairy Export Council Executive Vice President Jaime Castaneda. **“This is international customers telling U.S. companies that they have to do something about the supply chain, otherwise they're going to have to go with someone else.”**

USDEC is keeping a log of complaints from members and shared some with *Agri-Pulse*, although company names were withheld out of concern for retaliation by shippers.

In one case, an American dairy exporter complained of losing Chinese contracts to New Zealand suppliers because “shipping from New Zealand is more reliable than from the United States.”

In another case, an exporter said a shipment of anhydrous milk fat to Malaysia was delayed for five months, spurring the customer to go elsewhere and pay more for the product.

Another exasperated exporter said, “We have a shipment of product on the West Coast that has been rolled so many times it ended up booked to go on the next voyage of original vessel it was booked on weeks ago. So, the boat has circumnavigated Asia and come back to get its original cargo. Unbelievable.”



Jaime Castaneda, USDEC

California's specialty crop producers are suffering, says Arsenault.

“For some of our members down in the Central Valley, they're having to drive their export items out to either Oakland or Long Beach and they just can't get any clarity around a time to export product,” she said.

One member, she noted, was forced to make 12 separate trips to the port before a shipment could be loaded.

“Some members get less than 24 hours’ notice to come load their goods, which is just not enough time.”

The backlog of ships waiting to get into ports and the phenomenon of ships unloading Chinese goods and then returning with empty containers is the most prominent at Los Angeles and Long Beach in California, but the situation at the Port of Savannah is also bad and it’s hurting U.S. chicken exporters, says Jim Sumner, president of the U.S. Poultry and Egg Export Council.

“We polled our members and found that between 10-and-20% of our exports are being limited by the port situations,” said Sumner, who stressed that Savannah is the largest U.S. port for poultry shipments. **“It’s a combination of many factors. It’s a perfect storm. Of course, the ships are charging astronomical rates and by the time some of our goods get to their destinations, they’re beyond affordability levels.”**

Chinese exporters are paying to have carriers return containers empty to cut the time it takes to get their goods to the U.S. — a tactic that is enraging U.S. ag exporters who need to get their rice, dairy, tree nuts, pork and poultry to Asian buyers — but another factor is that companies like Home Depot and Walmart just can’t get their imported goods out of the ports fast enough to make room for outgoing poultry, said Sumner.

That’s an issue already being addressed by the Biden administration, which earlier this month announced agreements with ports, dockworkers, railroads, trucking companies, labor unions and retailers to increase hours of operation to ease distribution bottlenecks.

But the Biden administration is still focused primarily on supply chain jams that are delaying the availability of imported goods and not on the ability of U.S. producers to get their products overseas, says Arsenault.



Jim Sumner, USAPEEC

“That’s the big thing,” she said. **“We’re all focused on saving Christmas and we’re forgetting about the huge issue of exporting American goods and ag products specifically.”**

It’s one of the reasons she arrived in Washington Monday. Arsenault is helping lead a fly-in of members who will be meeting with more than a dozen lawmakers this week. The difficulties at the ports will be a topic in most of those discussions, she said.

But Congress has gotten the message. **The House Agriculture Committee is convening Wednesday for a hearing entitled “The Immediate Challenges to our Nation’s Food Supply Chain.”** Jon Schwalls, executive officer of Southern Valley Fruit and Vegetable; Ed Cinco, director of purchasing for Schwebel’s Baking Company; George Ferrara, president and CEO of the National Grocers Association; Mike Durkin, president and CEO of Leprino Foods Company; Rod Wells, chief supply chain officer for GROWMARK, and Jon Samson, executive director of the Agricultural & Food Transporters Conference of the American Trucking Association, will all be testifying on different challenges to the supply chain.

But Arsenault says she and others are putting a lot of hope in legislation unveiled this summer by Reps. John Garamendi, D-Calif., and Dusty Johnson, R-S.D. The bill, the Ocean Shipping

Reform Act of 2021. The bill would stop shipping companies from blocking the ability of U.S. exporters to get their commodities on vessels as well as protect against excessive port fees. **Arsenault says she's hopeful that the bill will get a markup this year, and a Garamendi spokesperson said that's possible. Garamendi's office is talking to several senators about a companion bill on the other side of Capitol Hill, and a markup could happen as soon as November or December, the aide said.**

The International Dairy Foods Association is also a big supporter of the bill by Garamendi and Johnson.

“Our supply chain is hurting and it's going to take an all-hands-on-deck approach to fix it,” said IDFA President and CEO Michael Dykes in a statement provided to *Agri-Pulse*. **“At any given moment in recent weeks, between 70 to 90 cargo ships were anchored outside the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach waiting to unload thousands of containers, and yet two-thirds of those containers will go back empty to Asia and other lucrative markets. Right now, the United States is unable to fulfill 22% of agricultural foreign sales due to a host of issues while prices for everything from semiconductors to salt continue to rise.”**

Union reps warn USDA about impacts of federal COVID-19 vaccine mandate

The Biden administration's COVID-19 vaccination mandate for the federal workforce could leave some areas of the Agriculture Department short-handed, but it's still too early to tell.

The department said it has no data to share on vaccination rates because the deadline to provide proof of vaccination is Nov. 8, with the vaccination requirement kicking in Nov. 22. **A spokesperson also declined to answer questions about how many employees have asked for “reasonable accommodations” to avoid the shots for medical or religious reasons.**



Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack testifies before the House Ag Committee in October.

Ag Secretary Tom Vilsack has said farmers will not see a reduced level of service because of the mandate. At an Oct. 7 House Agriculture Committee hearing, he told Rep. Vicky Hartzler, R-Mo., that USDA would do what it has to do to keep offices open. **“I don't anticipate we will see a significant number of closed offices,” he said.**

But some in Congress are questioning the administration's assumptions about the mandate's impacts. In a letter to the heads of the Office of Personnel Management, General Services Administration and Office of Management and Budget, Republican members of the House

Committee on Oversight and Reform said OPM, OMB and GSA officials did not provide evidence at a recent briefing of their belief that “there will be minimal employee attrition due to these mandates.”

“If they are wrong about attrition from either [employees or contractors], they risk significant disruption of agency missions, major adverse consequences for workers, families and businesses, and the breach of an untold number of federal contracts,” Reps. James Comer, R-Ky., and Jody Hice, R-Ga., said.

A representative of the National Association of FSA County Office Employees said “NASCOE has informed USDA that while we support COVID-19 safety protocol, we believe the federal mandate will have a negative impact on our workforce.” The representative also said she did not know how many people have asked to be excused from the requirements on religious or medical grounds.

"NASCOE has heard from some members who have indicated they would retire or otherwise leave federal service as a result of the vaccine mandate, but does not have any estimated totals," the rep said.

FSA employees recently asked that they be allowed to undergo regular COVID testing in place of the shots, but FSA Administrator Zach Ducheneaux turned them down.

And a major union, the American Federation of Government Employees, sued the federal government in federal court in Florida Oct. 30, claiming constitutional violations on behalf of federal prison employees who are bargaining unit members.

Mike Randall, president of the National Association of Agriculture Employees, which represents Plant Protection and Quarantine personnel in the Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, told *Agri-Pulse* the department is facing “several thousand” requests for religious or medical accommodations. USDA has nearly 100,000 employees, according to its website.

“The workforce is going to take a huge hit,” said Paula Schelling-Soldner, who was recently elected as chair of the National Joint Council of Food Inspection Locals, which represents about 6,400 meat and poultry inspectors. “I think the attrition rate through all of this is going to be at an all-time high.”

Schelling-Soldner said the Food Safety and Inspection Service usually processes about 500 disciplinary actions per year, but that it expects to process that many just because of the vaccine mandate.

“I believe that there have already been some people that have handed in their retirement or resignation papers, just because they don't want to have to deal with it,” she said, with still others allowing themselves to be fired.

Workforce issues may extend to hiring, she said, mentioning conversations she has had with potential recruits at FSIS events. The situation is “just miserable,” she said, in part because of sign-on bonuses being offered by meat companies to attract workers during the current labor shortage.

To compete, FSIS recently approved a \$5,000 signing bonus, though Schelling-Soldner said she’s not sure whether that will sway someone with strong convictions about not getting a vaccine.

Randall said he is concerned about the loss of some temporary or seasonal employees and that managers are currently examining which areas might end up short-staffed.

If there are shortages, however, management has the authority to “TDY” employees, Randall said, using the government shorthand for “temporary duty.”

Agencies can begin progressive disciplinary action on Nov. 9 for unvaccinated employees, but if an employee has asked for an exemption, that process won't begin until after the reasonable accommodation request has been considered.

The National Federation of Federal Employees, which mostly represents firefighters and Forest Service employees among its 20,000-25,000 USDA members, says it doesn't know how many will leave federal service.

But NFFE spokesperson Matt Dorsey said "the Safer Federal Workforce Task Force has asked USDA leadership to identify key areas within the agency, and employees in those areas may receive additional accommodations to ensure the mission of USDA continues to be fulfilled. For example, certain firefighters may fall into this category, as their positions are vital to the agency's ability to manage and combat wildfires."

NFFE says it believes no one should be fired for refusing to get a vaccine. "We recommend that all employees receive the vaccine to promote workplace safety, but we do not believe employees should lose their jobs for not complying," he said. "We would like the USDA to retain all of its employees for their expertise, knowledge, and experience, but we understand this may not happen."

USDA, like other agencies in the federal government, may suspend an employee who does not get a COVID-19 vaccine. Punishment can ultimately include dismissal from government service; even if the disciplinary process has begun, just getting a vaccination will bring that to an end.

OPM guidance says, "employees generally should not be placed on administrative leave while the agency pursues disciplinary action for refusal to be vaccinated but will be required to follow safety protocols for employees who are not fully vaccinated when reporting to (their) agency."

USDA spokesperson Kate Waters said the first step for employees who do not comply by the deadline "is a period of education and counseling."

Waters also said the department has conducted numerous activities to persuade employees to get vaccinated, including "several agency-wide town halls, and an all-USDA town hall on workplace safety and wellness," featuring Vilsack and Deputy Ag Secretary Jewel Bronaugh.

In addition, employees have received "frequent email reminders" from Vilsack and Bronaugh. Employees who have not responded to a proof of vaccination survey also have received targeted emails.

Vilsack made a plea on Twitter on Oct. 27, noting that his sister had died of the flu and that when his granddaughter was born with a respiratory infection, he did not hesitate to get a flu shot to protect her.

"As you consider whether to get the COVID vaccination or not, I implore you to think about the most vulnerable people in your community — the elderly, the children, and those with compromised immune systems," he said. "Our Nation can overcome anything, but we need to do it together."

Ag sectors welcome cover crop payments, but will they be enough?

A provision of congressional Democrats' Build Back Better Act that would pay producers \$25 per acre to plant cover crops is getting serious attention from sectors in the agriculture industry

with ambitious climate goals, though others are unsure of how effective the measure will be in comparison to existing programs.

The provision would provide payments for up to 1,000 acres per producer. Non-operating landowners could get payments of \$5 per acre to encourage them to let farmers grow cover crops on rented acreage. The Congressional Budget Office hasn't provided an official score of the program's cost, but a congressional source says the legislation has the potential to triple the nation's current cover crop acreage.

Adam Smith, an Iowa farmer who plants cover crops and also works for Beck's seed company, said \$25 is a good start. The money could cover the price of some low-cost seeds, but producers might still have to pay for more expensive varieties.

"I think it would definitely cover your seed costs, depending on what mix you're putting on there," he said. "If you're doing just a straight rye or oats or something, those are the cheaper ones. You start getting into the radishes and turnips and blends, those get a little bit higher."



Rye seed was drilled into corn stover after harvest in southeastern Iowa last month. The cover crop was just starting to emerge before frost hit this week. Photo: Sara Wyant

Sources inside the dairy industry say the payments could help producers reduce their greenhouse gas emissions by reducing the carbon footprint of the corn and soybeans used for livestock feed. The dairy industry has pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050.

"My sense is an increase in cover crops would be helpful to advancing our sustainability goals," the industry source said. "Since cover crops address the loss of nitrogen from fields during non-growing seasons, they can lower fertilizer needs by increasing soil fertility. That, in turn, will help to reduce commercial applications, which, in turn, can lower nitrous oxide losses."

The ethanol industry believes the use of cover crops and other conservation practices may help reduce the fuel's carbon footprint and open up new markets.

The American Coalition for Ethanol recently was awarded USDA funding to test the use of those practices; the group believes farmers could get a 40-cent-per-bushel premium for ethanol marketed in California or similar premiums in other states with a low carbon fuel standard.

The BBB provision was written in a way to give the USDA flexibility to determine how best to carry out the program, including what types of crops qualify as cover crops, the congressional source said.

According to a 2021 USDA Economic Research Service report, median per-acre payments through USDA's EQIP program can range from \$29 to \$62 depending on the state and which cover crops are planted, while median per-acre payments for the Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) range from \$7.96 to \$14.65. However, EQIP is meant to encourage trial adoption of cover crops for up to five years, and producers are only eligible on fields where they have not planted cover crops, in addition to not being able to harvest their cover crop for grain or seed.

CSP is geared more toward improving existing practices, and farmers enrolled in the program sign a five-year contract to engage in conservation activities that may include diversifying their cover crop mixes.

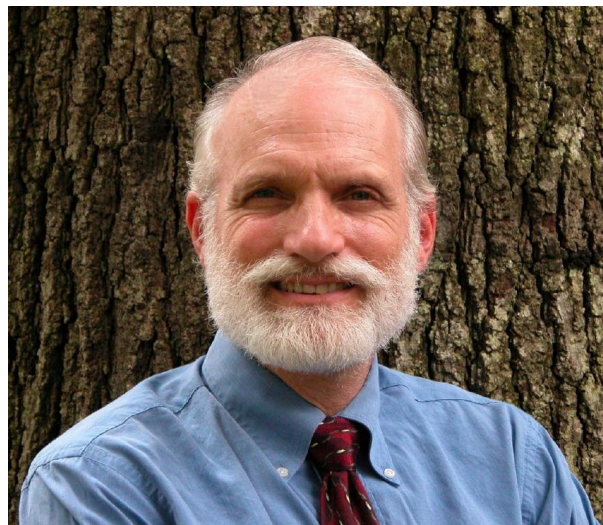
Compared to some high-paying state programs, the payments may not seem like much, which may impact the number of participants. **Maryland, which has a high concentration of taxpayers relative to the amount of farmland in the state, provides base payments of \$45 per acre, which University of Maryland agronomy professor Ray Weil says is a very good incentive for farmers.**

Still, Weil said \$25 per acre is "nothing to sneeze at." He pointed out it makes more sense for covering areas with fewer taxpayers per acre than Maryland. But he also said that Maryland had to bump up payments to get more people interested in planting cover crops.

"Paying farmers to plant cover crops will get their attention," he said. "We've learned that. When we paid them \$25 an acre, it didn't produce enough participation, so we jacked it up slowly during the 2000s. Well, we got up to about \$45, and \$45 was pretty much enough to get everybody interested."

According to a 2019-2020 survey conducted by Sustainable Agriculture Research and Education (SARE), which compiles information on conservation practices like cover crops, 47.6% of the producers surveyed paid between \$11 and \$20 per acre for seeds. Just over 15% paid only \$6 to \$10 per acre, 15.9% paid \$21 to \$25, and 9.6% paid \$26 to \$30. On the higher end of the spectrum, 17.8% said they paid \$31 or more for seed.

Some experts are a little more skeptical on how far the program will go in incentivizing more producers to use cover crops. Naveen Adusumilli, an associate professor of agricultural economics and agribusiness at Louisiana State University, said it's still too early to tell if this program will be effective because it's unclear how USDA will implement it.



Ray Weil, University of Maryland

Adusumilli said he believes it may be more effective to use the money to establish insurance premium rebate programs that reduce insurance premiums for cash crops based on the number of cover crop acres a farmer plants. The Biden administration has created the temporary Pandemic Cover Crop Program that is giving producers a \$5-per-acre rebate per acre of cover crops on their crop insurance premiums. Iowa, Indiana and Illinois offer something similar at the state level.

“There are several programs that this \$25 per acre and/or this additional \$5 per acre payment could supplement those existing programs,” Adusumilli said. “There's not just one way here, we have about two or three ways to get creative in encouraging farmers to put that practice on the ground.”

Jesse Womack, a policy specialist for the National Sustainable Agriculture Coalition, also thought the funding could have been used differently. He would have preferred to see the money put toward CSP, which requires producers to enter contracts to use practices over a long-term period.

“We could see guys give it a try and not have an experience they love and go five more years without playing around with cover crops again,” he said. “This is supposed to be climate legislation. We can't have that happening. We need really quick action to claim a climate victory.”

The cover crop payments are among \$90 billion in ag provisions in the Build Back Better Act:

- \$22 billion is provided for farm bill conservation programs, including \$9 billion for EQIP, \$4.1 billion for CSP, \$7.5 billion for the Regional Conservation Partnership Program and \$1.7 billion for conservation easements.
- \$2 billion for agricultural research.
- \$27 billion for forestry, including \$10 billion for hazardous fuels reduction in regions where wild and urban areas interface.
- \$18.3 billion for rural development, including \$9.7 billion for grants and loans to rural electric cooperatives to purchase renewable energy or renewable energy systems. Nearly \$1 billion also would be earmarked for biofuel infrastructure.
- \$6 billion in new funding for debt relief to farmers who hold USDA direct and guaranteed loans.
- \$10 billion for child nutrition assistance.

Democratic climate package could expand biofuels, spur methane capture

The \$1.75 trillion Build Back Better bill that congressional Democrats are struggling to get across the finish line offers new incentives to expand the production of biofuels while encouraging livestock operations to capture and sell biogas.

But the way the bill is currently written, government agencies would have to fill in some critical details if the measure becomes law. That's the case, for example, with some eligibility rules for a new “clean fuel” tax credit the legislation would create.

The biofuel and bioenergy provisions are important pieces of the bill's climate components, which are aimed at helping decarbonize the energy and agriculture sectors.

Some details of the bill itself are still subject to change as lawmakers try to finalize a version that can pass both the House and Senate. But under a version of the legislation that the House released last week, the bill also would provide \$960 million for biofuel infrastructure, such as storage tanks and blender pumps, and there is funding for climate-smart farming practices, such as cover crops, that could help biofuel producers claim a lower carbon footprint for their products.

The dairy industry and other livestock sectors would benefit from the bill's incentives for capturing methane emissions from manure.

The bill would create a new investment tax credit for biogas, which is indirectly eligible for a tax incentive currently because of an existing credit for renewable electricity. The new tax credit could apply to biogas for additional uses beyond electricity, including compressed natural gas.

The bill includes more than \$22 billion in new spending for farm bill conservation programs, and one of the priorities for the funding is to "capture or sequester greenhouse gas emissions."

Other provisions of the bill would extend the existing \$1-a-gallon tax credit for biodiesel and renewable diesel through 2026 and create a separate but temporary tax credit for sustainable aviation fuel, or SAF, that would also expire at the end of 2026.

Starting in 2027, both credits would be replaced with the clean fuel production credit, which would vary according to the carbon intensity of the fuel.

"We've done a lot of work to be in the bill," said Kurt Kovarik, vice president of federal affairs for the National Biodiesel Board. To have "some level of incentive for 10 years is really unbelievable when you think about the fact that our tax incentive has been on-again, off-again, for one, two or three years at a time."



Kurt Kovarik, NBB

The new credit is aimed at increasing biofuel usage in hard-to-electrify sectors such as trucking and aviation while also creating incentives to drive down the carbon intensity of the fuels, through production methods and feedstocks that result in fewer greenhouse gas emissions.

Conventional corn ethanol also could potentially qualify if the carbon dioxide the ethanol plants produce is captured and piped underground, as some facilities plan to do. The bill also expands the 45Q tax credit for carbon capture and sequestration to \$85 a ton, up from the current limit of \$50 a ton; ethanol plants could qualify for either the 45Q credit or clean fuel credit, but not both.

For biodiesel and renewable diesel, the clean fuel production credit would be less valuable than the existing \$1-a-gallon credit, which is scheduled to expire at the end of 2022, said Kovarik.

The amount of the credit would depend on the type of feedstock that's used. In 2027, the new credit would likely be worth 70 to 75 cents a gallon for biodiesel or renewable diesel made from used cooking oil, animal fats or the corn oil that is a byproduct of ethanol production. Fuel produced from soybean or canola oil would qualify for a credit of 40 to 50 cents a gallon, said Kovarik.

Soybean and canola oil are rated as having higher greenhouse gas emissions in part because of their indirect impact on land use.

The value of the clean fuel credit would be phased down proportionately over time as the carbon intensity benchmarks tighten.

The Treasury Department would be required to annually publish emissions rates for fuels that are produced using similar feedstocks. The emissions rates would be used to determine the value of the credit.

It's less clear what feedstocks would qualify for use in making sustainable aviation fuel. For both the temporary SAF credit and the clean fuel credit that takes effect in 2027, fuels would be graded on carbon intensity according to rules developed by the International Civil Aviation Organization, or similar methodology.

Most agricultural commodities could not qualify under the ICAO rules, experts say. The Department of Transportation could create an alternative methodology that is “consistent” with the ICAO model but “may nevertheless have very different outcomes,” said Nikita Pavlenko, a senior researcher for the International Council on Clean Transportation, an environmental group.

He noted that a separate SAF grant program that would be authorized for the Transportation Department also allows for use of a less stringent methodology than ICAO's.

United Airlines CEO Scott Kirby said Tuesday the SAF tax credit was needed to help make the biofuel more affordable to carriers. He compared it to the federal tax incentives that the government has long provided to wind and solar energy.

“Those credits for wind and solar were some of the biggest paybacks of any government program ever, and the same thing can happen” with sustainable aviation fuel, he said on a Politico webinar.

Senate panel warned nutrition programs on ‘a path to disaster’

The federal government's current approach to addressing hunger and nutrition shortcomings is failing the recipients of federal nutrition assistance and the taxpayer, witnesses said at a Senate Ag subcommittee hearing Tuesday.

The panel's Food and Nutrition, Specialty Crops, Organics and Research Subcommittee convened Tuesday for a hearing on the state of American nutrition, where a series of academics and nutrition leaders offered a blistering critique of the current approach the federal government takes to providing nutritious food to the hungry.

Dariush Mozaffarian, dean of the Tufts University Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, said the fact that three of four adults in America are classified as overweight or obese – and the healthcare costs stemming from that statistic – should be a rallying call for policymakers.

“We are on a path to disaster,” he said. “If three in four houses in our country were on fire and all we did was build more firehouses and hire more fireman, that would not be sensible. And yet, that's what we're doing with health.



Dariush Mozaffarian, Tufts University

“The majority of Americans are sick, and all we're doing are building systems to treat the downstream causes,” Mozaffarian added. “With most houses in the country on fire, we need to

figure out what's causing the fires and put them out rather than only focusing on the downstream treatment.”

Mozaffarian and several other witnesses offered a handful of suggestions to address the glut of spending on obesity-related illnesses; as subcommittee Chair Cory Booker, D-N.J., put it, \$1 of every \$3 in the federal budget goes to for healthcare, 80% of which is spent on the treatment of preventable diseases.

One of the most popular suggestions is greater involvement by the medical community in nutrition education and understanding.

Mozaffarian suggested increasing the required nutrition education for doctors and tweaking the testing for licensing to include more nutrition-based questioning. “If we change the tests, we’ll change medical education overnight,” he said.

For his part, Patrick Stover, the Texas A&M dean and vice chancellor for agriculture and life sciences, suggested a greater level of coordination between production and consumption needs if the general nutrition of the nation is to be improved.



Sen. Cory Booker, D-N.J.

“There is a disconnect right now – a major disconnect – between food production and our expectations around consumer health,” he said. “We have to address this across the entire food system.”

He said extension systems across the country are also underutilized, and underfunded, nutrition education resources. He says Texas A&M is also working on an academic paper to encourage the combined programs of nursing and dietetics.

“It’s nurses who are the frontline healthcare workers who see every patient, especially in our disadvantaged communities,” Stover said. “We need to have those frontline workers have that nutrition education because there simply aren’t enough dietitians in these healthcare facilities to educate about nutrition.”

While a greater level of thought given to the medical nutrition approach was roundly welcomed among witnesses and senators at the hearing, there’s also the matter of what to do with existing efforts like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. American Enterprise Institute Senior Fellow Angela Rachidi suggested restricting purchases of things like sugary beverages but rewarding the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables could be a pathway to a healthier SNAP recipient.

The hearing comes as Congress is set to begin its update of the 2018 farm bill, which is set to expire in 2023. The nutrition title makes up the bulk of the outlays for that legislation, a fact reflected in the amount of the Department of Agriculture’s budget spent on SNAP and other nutrition programs. But Booker suggested the current approach to the programs – and the kinds of foods purchased using SNAP funds or private consumer dollars – is due for a thorough evaluation.

“It is a food system where everyone is losing,” Booker said after discussing nutrition issues as well as the diminishing share of the food dollar going to producers. “We are as a government using our tax dollars to incentivize behaviors that are driving pandemic-like conditions and driving unhealth. ... Let’s not be fooled, this is not a free market right now; we are investing dramatically in our own death.”

News Briefs:

Simplot, PSI announce plan for first commercially gene edited strawberry. The J.R. Simplot Company and Plant Sciences Inc., have announced a strategic partnership to bring the first commercially gene-edited strawberry to supermarkets. The alliance plans to leverage the gene editing techniques from Simplot and proprietary strawberry germplasm and growth expertise of PSI. Approximately 35% of fresh strawberries are discarded by consumers each year because of waste created from poor storage or short shelf life. Simplot and PSI have been collaborating since 2011 and plan to employ new breeding techniques, like CRISPR-Cas9, which can be used to introduce modest changes to a plant’s genome. Simplot first entered a joint intellectual property licensing agreement in 2018 for CRISPR-Cas9 genetic technologies, later bringing to market the Innate branded potato varieties, which through genetic engineering reduced black spots, lowered sugars, and helped protect varieties from late blight pathogens. PSI has been a leader in the strawberry industry by helping adapt select strawberry cultivars to various growing regions throughout the world. The company use traditional crossing techniques and works to bring improvements in production, resistance to pests and disease, and a desirable growing season. “We are highly motivated to build on our learnings with the J.R. Simplot Company and fully expect to make a profound impact on the strawberry industry by offering better varieties with qualities that both growers and consumers will celebrate,” said Steve Nelson, president and CEO of PSI.

New estimates predict climate change is coming for crops sooner than expected.

The impacts of changing climate conditions on the world’s wheat, corn, soybean and rice production are likely to be seen sooner than previously estimated. And of those crops, only wheat is expected to see increases in yield. These are among the conclusions of a new paper in the journal Nature Food from an international research team led by Jonas Jägermeyr of NASA's Goddard Institute of Space Studies and Columbia University. The paper uses improved crop and climate models to update estimates from 2014 and concludes “major shifts in global crop productivity due to climate change are projected to occur within the next 20 [years].” That’s decades sooner than previous estimates. The results show corn, soybeans and rice can expect warmer climates to bring reduced productivity in most regions where they are currently grown. Wheat, conversely, may see some improvements in yield, particularly at higher latitudes. Reduced corn productivity could emerge at the global level in 2032. By the end of the 21st century, the estimates show at least 10% and as much as 74% of current corn-growing regions will see reductions in yield. Areas likely to see the impact the soonest are in Central Asia, the Middle East, southern Europe, the western U.S. and tropical South America. Wheat could begin seeing increased yields within the next few years in some areas, and most will see the changes in the next two decades, according to the models. There are some places where wheat yields may decline by midcentury, including in South Asia, the southern U.S., Mexico and parts of South America. Globally, “soybean and rice productivity peak midcentury and decline towards the end of the century.” Changes in management practices, crop varieties or crop type all could reduce the impacts, but using current and historical data in models for both climate and agricultural risk, the researchers found “current food production systems will soon face fundamentally changed risk profiles.” The authors acknowledge that “large uncertainties remain,” but conclude nonetheless these new “projections spotlight the need for targeted food system adaptation and risk management across the main producer regions in the coming decades.”

New partnership created to expand genome mapping in grapevines. Breeding Insight, a USDA project that provides resources to specialty crop breeding programs, and *VitisGen2*, a multi-institute research project, have partnered together to fund an effort to map the genomes of two grapevine germplasm collections. Curated by the USDA’s Agriculture Research Service, the goal of the partnership is to make the data available to public and private plant breeders in an effort to help make the U.S. grape industry more resilient. The two samples of the grapevine germplasm will be collected at Cornell AgriTech, located in Geneva, N.Y., and at the University of California, Davis. Launched in 2018, the Breeding Insight initiative was created to provide opportunities for specialty breeders in assimilating tools, technologies, and methods to catalyze the routine and accessible use of genomic insights. *VitisGen2* developed the rhAmpSeq marker panel, which is a method to help identify new genetic markers across multiple crops and breeding programs. Using the rhAmpSeq platform, each sample collected in the study will have 2,000 DNA markers spanning all 19 grapevine chromosomes, allowing more detailed comparisons of genetic traits. “In the end, we will have the most detailed genotypic dataset for grapevine ever created,” said Moira Sheehan, Breeding Insight project director. Lance Cadle-Davidson, *VitisGen2* project co-leader and a USDA-ARS geneticist based at Cornell AgriTech, also cited benefits to characterizing the germplasm collections. “One of the reasons to do this is to discover what genetic diversity in *Vitis* exists out there,” Cadle-Davidson said. “If we can capture all that genetic diversity, it will actually speed up our analysis of breeding lines and help us identify the genetic basis of desirable traits.” “It’s akin to Google going out and scraping words from all the websites so that they can run their search algorithms faster,” he said. *VitisGen2* is funded by USDA National Institute of Food and Agriculture’s specialty crops research initiative. Breeding Insight is funded by USDA-ARS through a grant to Cornell.

Ag groups ask court to reverse fertilizer tariffs. Five major U.S. ag groups are imploring the U.S. Court of International Trade to overturn a decision this year by the U.S. International Trade Commission to allow steep tariffs to be placed on phosphate fertilizer imports from Morocco and Russia. The Moroccan fertilizer producer OCP is appealing the ITC decision and the National Corn Growers Association, American Soybean Association, National Cotton Council, National Sorghum Producers and the Agricultural Retailers Association filed the legal brief in support of that appeal, an NCGA spokesman said. The U.S. imported about \$730 million worth of phosphate fertilizer from Morocco and \$300 million from Russia in 2019, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. “Farmers are feeling the pain from these tariffs,” said Iowa farmer and NCGA President Chris Edgington. “We’re facing severe cost hikes on our fertilizers, and we are worried about fertilizer shortages next year. We desperately need the U.S. Court of International Trade to remedy this situation.”

Farm Hands West: Wirz to lead San Benito County Farm Bureau

Donald Wirz will become the new president of the San Benito County Farm Bureau, effective Nov. 13. He will succeed outgoing president is **Mary Lou Coffelt**. Wirz makes wines for Delicate Family Wines, a business where he has worked for the past 5 years.

The California Manufacturers and Technology Association has brought on **Robert Spiegel** as senior policy director. Spiegel brings 15 years of advocacy and regulatory experience from the California Farm Bureau Federation where he most recently served as policy advocate. Before that, he was a principal consultant for the California Assembly



Robert Spiegel

Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee, Assembly Committee on Agriculture and the Resources Budget Sub Committee.

Denise Junqueiro has been promoted to vice president of marketing and communications at Mission Produce. She previously served as senior director of marketing and communications. Junqueiro started at Mission in 2016 as a customer marketing manager. Junqueiro has previously worked at the California Olive Committee, California Tree Fruit Agreement, and the California Fig Advisory Board.

Chuck Magro has been tapped to serve as the new CEO at Corteva. Magro most recently served as president and CEO of Nutrien. Prior to that, for four years he served as President and Chief Executive Officer of Agrium, which merged with PotashCorp to create Nutrien. Magro succeeds **Jim Collins**, who plans to retire at the end of the year.



Chuck Magro

Hormel Foods Corporation has announced the retirement of **Jim Sheehan**, executive vice president and chief financial officer, after 43 years with the company. **Jacinth Smiley**, group vice president of corporate strategy, has been named Sheehan's successor.

President **Joe Biden** announced his intent to nominate **Monde Muyangwa** as the nominee for the assistant administrator for the Bureau of Africa at the United States Agency for International Development. Muyangwa currently serves as the director of the Africa Program at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, a position that she has held since 2014.

The U.S. Grains Council has tapped **Manuel Sanchez** to serve as director of the USGC's office in Beijing, effective Nov. 1. He succeeds **Bryan Lohmar** who is departing later in November to enter academia. Sanchez previously served as regional director for Southeast Asia. He joined the Council in 2014. Before joining the Council, Sanchez worked at Cargill, serving as a grain marketing advisor and a trade execution supervisor. **Caleb Wurth**, the assistant regional director in Southeast Asia, has been selected to become the regional director of the office.

The National FFA Organization has announced the six students elected to serve on the 2021-22 national officer team. The six officers were selected from 37 candidates competing for the honor. **Cole Baerlocher**, representing the state of Washington, was elected national president. He attends Oregon State University and is an agricultural education major. **Jackson Sylvester**, hailing from the state of Delaware, was elected national secretary. He attends the University of Delaware as an agriculture major. **Cortney Zimmerman**, representing the state of Wisconsin, was elected central region vice president. She attends South Dakota State University, majoring in agricultural communications. **Erik Robinson Jr.**, from the state of Georgia, was elected southern region vice president. He attends the University of Georgia and is a criminal justice major. **Josiah Cruikshank**, from the state of Oregon, was elected western region vice president. He attends Oregon State University, majoring in business administration and mechanical engineering. **Mallory White**, representing the state of Kentucky, was elected eastern region vice president. She attends Murray State University in Kentucky and majors in agronomy.



Brian Kuehl has been selected to serve as the executive director of the newly created Agriculture Trade Education Council. The ATEC was created to be used as a resource for education on the value of agricultural trade policies, practices, and structures. Kuehl works for KCoe Isom as the director of government and public affairs. ATEC also announced its board of directors: **Michael Anderson**, Corn Refiners Association, **Melissa Kessler**, U.S. Grains Council, **Lance Jungmeyer**, Fresh Produce Association of America, **Becky Rasdall**, International Dairy Foods Association, **Derek Sandison**, director of the Washington State Department of Agriculture, and **Michael Schumpp**, North American Meat Institute.

The National Chicken Council has installed **Mark Kaminsky** as the 2021-2022 chairman of the board. This is Kaminsky's second time serving as NCC chairman, previously serving from 2018-2019. Kaminsky is the chief operating officer at Koch Foods. Other officers include: **Kevin Garland**, CEO of Mountaire Farms, will serve as vice chairman; Perdue Farms CEO **Randy Day**, will serve as secretary-treasurer; and **Mike Brown** was elected to an eleventh term as president of NCC.

Patrick Atagi has been named the new president and CEO of the National Industrial Hemp Council. Atagi currently serves on the Agricultural Technical Advisory Committee (ATAC) on Cotton, Tobacco, Hemp and Peanuts at USDA. Atagi previously served as the vice president of advocacy and external affairs at the National Wooden Pallet and Container Association.

USDA has announced the appointment of members to serve on the National Agricultural Research, Extension, Education, and Economics (NAREEE) Advisory Board. Each member will serve a 1-3-year term: **Dana Allen-Tully**, Gar-Lin Dairy; **Edmund Buckner**, Alcorn State University; **Lisabeth 'Liz' Hobart**, GROWMARK; **V.M. 'Bala' Balasubramaniam**, Ohio State University; **Mario Ferruzzi**, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences; **Kenrett Jefferson-Moore**, North Carolina A&T State University; **Mark Lawrence**, Mississippi State University; **Michael Oltrogge**, Nebraska Indian Community College; **Ariel Ortiz-Bobea**, Cornell University; **Donnell Brown**, National Grape Research Alliance; **Richard De Los Santos**, Texas Department of Agriculture; **Marguerite Green**, SPROUT; **Jane Kolodinsky**, University of Vermont; **Tambra Raye Stevenson**, WANDA: Women Advancing Nutrition Dietetics and Agriculture.

Committee/Subcommittee members are listed below. Each member will serve a 1-3-year term:

Citrus Disease Subcommittee: **Christopher Boisseranc**, Southwest Ag Consulting; **Thomas Kirschner**, Cooperative Producers Inc., Ranch One Cooperative, Cooperative Three and Gulf Harvesting; **Wayne Simmons**, LaBelle Fruit Company.

National Genetic Resources Advisory Council: **Paul Gepts**, University of California, Davis; **James McFerson**, Washington State University (Re-appointed); Dr. Terrence Tiersch, Louisiana State University Agricultural Center; **Sarada Krishnan**, Denver Botanic Gardens.

Specialty Crop Committee: **Gregory Goins**, North Carolina A&T State University; **Carlos Iglesias**, North Carolina State University; **Nikki Lynn Rothwell**, Northwest Michigan Horticulture Research Center, Michigan State University; **Shawn Peebles**, Shawn Peebles Organic Farm; **Jim Tuinier**, Post Gardens of Battle Creek Michigan.



Craig Morris

The Director of the USDA Agricultural Research Service Western Wheat and Pulse Quality Laboratory in Pullman, Wash., for 32 years, **Craig Morris** passed away on Oct. 25 at his home in Pullman. He was 64. Morris was widely recognized for his ability to improve the quality of wheat in the Pacific Northwest.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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