

Did Newsom benefit from his pesticide policies? State law says no

Gov. Gavin Newsom shared his most recent tax filings with reporters on Friday. While running for governor and serving as lieutenant governor, Newsom's wine company and related hospitality businesses helped him earn \$1.2 million, maintaining his longstanding status as a millionaire.

As governor, Newsom is now on the other side, enacting policies with the potential to benefit his wineries, or hurt them.

While the many policy decisions that could eventually impact the companies are too numerous to count, the agriculture industry has been paying close attention to how the Newsom administration has been adding new restrictions to conventional pesticides, some of which are used in winegrape growing. At the same time, Newsom's wineries have been shifting away from chemical pesticide products.



Gov. Gavin Newsom

Yet ethics experts and the administration are quick to point out that Newsom set up a blind trust before taking office, adding a degree of separation from business decisions and any potential conflicts of interest, though he still benefits from the assets.

According to his 2018 tax filings, Newsom made almost \$600,000 from Airelle Wines Inc., which runs PlumpJack wineries in Napa County, according to CalMatters.

Newsom founded PlumpJack in 1992 and the group now runs four wineries. The Odette Estate Winery is certified organic, while the CADE Winery has been working toward organic status.

When CADE opened in 2009, General Manager John Conover was optimistic about the market value for organic and sustainable brands.

“Once guests experience CADE, we are confident that they will become just as passionate as we are about these world-class estate wines produced using strictly organic, sustainable farming practices,” he said.

According to 2018 pesticide use reports obtained by *Agri-Pulse*, the flagship PlumpJack Estate Winery in Oakville is not organic but does lean towards sustainable certification. The vineyard manager, David Pirio, is using “a very basic powdery mildew fungicide program” but no herbicides or insecticides, which is likely part of an integrated pest management strategy recommended by researchers at the University of California, according to a pest control advisor who reviewed the reports.



The decision by the PlumpJack corporation not to use insecticides dovetails with the administration’s decision last year to ban an insecticide – the first cancellation of a pesticide registration in the state’s history. While the use of chlorpyrifos (known as Lorsban) had been dropping in recent years as stricter state regulations took effect, data from the Department of Pesticide Regulations shows that winegrape growers – other than those under PlumpJack – did apply the insecticide 339 times in 2017 (the most recent DPR report) on about 26,000 acres of vineyards, with about 49,000 pounds in

total.

The administration is also planning to set stricter regulations on the use of 1,3-D (Telone) than any state or federal regulators have before. DPR Director Val Dolcini said recently he has been “personally involved” in adopting localized restrictions on 1,3-D in three Central Valley farming communities.

DPR’s pesticide use reports show winegrape growers applying the fungicide 39 times in 2017, on about 1,200 acres with about 383,000 pounds in total. Notably, the PlumpJack Estate Winery was using a different fungicide.

The decision to use fewer synthetic inputs, however, follows a much larger trend throughout California and in Napa and Sonoma especially, driven by consumer and retailer demands.

The number of vineyards certified as organic has been growing each year. In 2019, that included more than 15,000 acres nationwide, a 50% growth since 2010, according to California Certified Organic Farmers. California wine production accounts for more than 80 percent of the U.S. total. Even the nation’s organic acreage as a whole, however, remains less than 3% of the total acreage in California.

When factoring in sustainable certification, more than 85% of California’s wine production meets the standard, covering 29% of the total acreage, according to a [recent report](#) by the California Sustainable Winegrowing Alliance. In Sonoma County, [99% of the vineyards](#) are now certified sustainable. The certification does not prohibit synthetic pesticides, but encourages growers to reduce chemical inputs through a broader IPM strategy. The process for a wine to gain the certified sustainable label involves third-party audits to ensure growing practices protect soil health, water quality, habitats and other environmental factors.

With that in mind, Bob Stern, who once served as general counsel for California’s Fair Political Practices Commission, cautioned that Newsom’s business would have to be the only one to benefit over its competitors in order for the state’s conflict of interest laws to be violated.

“There’s an exception for the industry generally,” explained Stern in an interview. “But (Newsom) still has to disclose his interest until he sells them... The disqualification provisions still apply to the blind trust until they get rid of the assets.”

Stern added that Newsom himself would have to be the one making the policy as well. While the governor endorsed the decision, the chlorpyrifos cancellation last year came from Jared Blumenfeld, the secretary of the California Environmental Protection Agency. Similarly, the decisions to add further restrictions to the use of 1,3-D are also coming from CalEPA.

Disqualifying himself as governor is also much more challenging than it would be for a state legislator who may be faced with a single bill that presents potential conflicts. Last year, the Legislature sent hundreds of bills to the governor to sign, including a state budget of \$215 billion brimming with new regulatory actions impacting businesses.

This year, the Legislature is just beginning the process of deciding which of the thousands of bills will be sent to the governor’s desk by October.

Three questions for Anja Raudabaugh: A leader in dairy policy



Western United Dairies CEO Anja Raudabaugh knows her way around the state and federal policy arenas.

“I have been able to really blend a lot of my background in policy work with private sector experience in my current job,” she told *Agri-Pulse* in an interview this week.

Raudabaugh spent nearly a decade in Washington, D.C., working for a Sacramento-based congressman, then the House

Agriculture Committee and the Office of Management and Budget for both Presidents Bush and Obama, while covering several farm bills. Returning to California, she delved into environmental policy, specializing in the California Environmental Quality Act, and was active in litigation related to ag lands seized for the high-speed rail project, before joining Western United Dairies (WUD).

WUD represents 860 of the 1,100 dairies left in California, encompassing a broad range of dairy sizes and production practices. Raudabaugh said the trade association engages heavily in environmental policy, milk pricing and pooling policies, while focusing its messaging with lawmakers on the nutritional qualities of dairy.

Raudabaugh also explained the benefit of being the first ag group to endorse Newsom and WUD's current work with the first partner on school nutrition programs.

The conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity.

1. How has WUD engaged with the Newsom administration?

When I came to (WUD) in late 2015, agriculture in general was not very receptive – at least in my point of view – to the viewpoints of California consumers. We often reflected and misinterpreted the signals coming out of the capital as a judgment of our business practice, when in fact it reflects the values of the California electorate.

After a very brief stint fighting some of the progressive policies in California related to the elimination of ag overtime, I was able to convince the board that we needed to do things differently. We needed to really look at where voters were evaluating their priorities.

We came up with three areas, mostly by tested polling, surveying and focus grouping. Voters, particularly in 2016 and 2018, were primarily concerned with three issue areas: One was housing. Two was healthcare. Three was the environment.

I went back to my board in early 2017 and said, “Here are the issues a vast majority of Californians are going to the polls to vote on. Whether we hold them in high regard is a different conversation. They're going to vote on these issues.”

The policy focus needed to shift towards things we're good at. We can't delve into the housing space much. We could influence them on the health quality and nutrition access part. But we particularly sit in the issue of environment, related to water quality, air quality and methane. We had made tremendous steps as an industry then – and more so now, just two years later.

We are the highest spending agricultural (political action committee, or PAC), other than (the California) Farm Bureau, and we're the highest spending livestock PAC in the state. We have the most amount of dairy farmer memberships, as the largest membership-based organization of just dairy farmers in the U.S.

What could we do with our money that would make the biggest amount of change? We decided in 2017, before the primary even, that we would back Gavin Newsom. We have a political strategist to this day that we'd hired, who looked at the polling and that was his advice.

We were the first agricultural organization to stand behind Newsom. We've stayed very consistent in our support over the years. We brought in the California Cattlemen Association and have a strong cow coalition around the governor. I continue to work with him to enhance his vision for California. It's not easy.

One thing I look towards on the science side, in terms of our success, is Newsom's first policy priority – and our first priority at the time – to provide access to clean drinking water to the rural

and disadvantaged communities we serve. Our dairies farm and drink the same water these disadvantaged communities do. We all have the same concerns about different contaminants throughout the valley. For years up to that point, Western United Dairies had pushed pieces of legislation very hard to maintain that access to drinking water. We thought it was a moral prerogative. Plus, we want our communities to be healthy.

We talked to him a lot about the need for more water, particularly south of Merced. That resulted in a lot of cohesion on changing the guard at the State Water Resources Control Board. When he opted to change the leadership there, that was a huge signal to us that he was ready to collaborate.

2. How do you engage with lawmakers in Sacramento?

We work hard to make sure our partnerships matter. We want to make sure we are enhancing people's knowledge about dairy farm production practices and enhancing people's point of view in the Legislature, particularly about who we are and who we're not. That's very difficult to do in agriculture, because the capital views us as a monolithic industry. We are not. We're very different.

When we engage with lawmakers, we typically try to express our values in the dairy industry. We have a breadth of minority-owned or women businesses in the dairy industry. Most of the dairies right now in California are run by women. We have blossoming gay and Jewish populations in the dairy industry.



Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon, D-Lakewood

Farmers are really not that good at expressing the personal sides of their lives. We shy away from it. That's why we like to be in the country and don't like to talk to people.

But it's become apparent the message about who disadvantaged communities are and who's at the center of bringing those communities together is essentially being spun for us.

As we engage with lawmakers, it's important to me if a high population of their communities might be using the school lunch program, for example.

Right now, (Assembly Speaker Anthony Rendon's Los Angeles district) has one of the highest consumptions of fluid milk in the United States, because a lot of his kids utilize the school lunch program. Those are areas where we try to focus our commonalities – particularly in the realm of nutrition access, because one in five kids in California is nutrition insecure.

We try to make sure we're well-aligned with Speaker Rendon and Senate Pro Tem Toni Atkins. They're important to us. We want to make sure that if there are people, particularly newer members of their caucus, they feel we need to reach out to, we do.

We're in it for the long haul and hope that we can be beneficial partners.

3. Are there any bills that you're watching closely this year?

A lot of spot bills were dropped on the deadline of February 21 that my government affairs team is still helping me go through. The policy meat is starting to come together.

I can see the nature of how these things are going to go. The bill numbers are going to change, and we don't have some sexy issue like AB 5.

Many of the bills are going to be blended into some big nutrition packages.

The governor's first partner, Jennifer Siebel Newsom, has released a school lunch funding program that's emphasizing a whole range of tools that school districts don't have right now. Essentially, it's the ability to modernize their cafeterias and maybe offer salad bars or fresher lunch options. There are some schools in California that are severely behind on modernization. Her package does that, and we're excited about it.

Usually, with fresh options, comes fresh dairy options, like cheese, butter and particularly on the milk side. These are really critical things for kids that need to learn: calcium and protein.

Everybody looks at these massive, sweeping policy changes when they say “farm-to-fork” or “farm-to-school.” But there are concerns that we're going to make this all-organic or a massive effort at pushing plant-based products.

We're watching that with intense interest. It presents a tremendous amount of opportunities for our farmers. But it also means a lot of people have their own plans about how it's going to go. As usual in policy work, it's going to be a combination of wins.

Last year, we beat back several proposals with the assistance of the American Diabetes Association and the American Heart Association. We've been partnering with coalitions like that because those are folks who can elevate that message in a way I can't.

It is budget season until the May revise and the eventual June budget comes through. We're going to be hot and heavy on methane reduction funding. Since 2017, we have been supporters of the cap-and-trade program, along with most of agriculture. In exchange for support, ag has been given lots of programs around reductions and incentivizing reductions in emissions.

In 2016, the dairy industry was regulated for methane. We're 25% of the 40% reduction goal as of this year, according to CDFA. We're making good progress. But we're concerned that each year there's been quite a bit less funding. There's a combination of factors associated with that. We're going to continue to push for some modest increases.

Amid coronavirus outbreak: USDA braces for staff disruptions, considers ways to provide more food aid

Federal agencies are cutting travel and preparing to operate with staff disruptions because of the coronavirus outbreak, and Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue signaled that he's open to expanding feeding programs if Congress gives him the legal authority.

The Food and Drug Administration informed employees that it is canceling official agency travel through April “except mission-critical and COVID-19 response-related travel and will reassess on an ongoing basis for future months,” according to a memo obtained by *Agri-Pulse*. FDA also is postponing all foreign inspections until April.

In an Agriculture Department memo authored by Deputy Secretary Steve Censky and obtained by *Agri-Pulse*, agencies were told to rethink all nonessential travel and to consider teleconferencing for meetings.



Ag Secretary Sonny Perdue and Rep. Sanford Bishop greet each other, without shaking hands, ahead of a congressional hearing where the coronavirus was heavily discussed.

“Agencies should review their Continuity of Operations Plans (COOP) to ensure that telework is fully incorporated and that employees are telework capable and telework ready,” the memo says.

Perdue told the House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee on Tuesday that the department has tested its information technology systems to see if they could handle large-scale teleworking by staff.

"We have a lot of people who depend on USDA on a daily basis, from farmers and ranchers to consumers out here, and we have to carry on the work," he said.

He said the department is allowing employees in Washington state to telework but denied a teleworking request by some Forest Service employees who were not affected by the outbreak. He didn't say where they were located.

But Perdue told the subcommittee the department needed broader legal authority to address potential needs for food assistance in cases of school closures and job losses.

A special version of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program for addressing food aid needs during a pandemic was implemented during the H1N1 virus scare in 2009, but its authorization has long expired. “There might be a need for something like that now,” he said.

Another special SNAP program, known as D-SNAP, is limited to natural disasters and could not be used for an outbreak, he said. Recipients may qualify for D-SNAP based on the cost of disaster-related repairs, shelter and evacuation expenses or disaster-related injuries or funeral expenses.

Perdue declined to block implementation of a new rule that makes it harder for states to get waivers from SNAP work requirements for able-bodied adults without dependents. He said states can waive the work requirements on their own for “good cause,” which would include SNAP beneficiaries who are unable to work because of the outbreak. The rule takes effect in April.

USDA is struggling with how to feed children when schools are closed. For schools where more than 50% of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals, USDA is offering waivers so that all of the kids in those schools can be offered bagged lunches to pick up. Normally, they would be required to eat at school.

Perdue said the department lacks clear legal authority to address the needs of kids in schools where fewer than 50% of students are low income, although he said they could be served at other sites.

“It would be helpful to have blanket authority” to address the needs of all low-income children, he said.



Rep. Sanford Bishop, D-Ga.

Such changes to USDA's legal authority or expansions of SNAP benefits could potentially be included with an economic stimulus package that President Donald Trump is pushing Congress to consider. "As we craft this bill, we want to put together everything that will be needed to provide the needed relief," the chairman of the Ag Appropriations Subcommittee, Rep. Sanford Bishop, told reporters after the hearing.

Bishop, D-Ga., and panel member Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., appealed to Perdue in a letter Tuesday to work with the Education Department to “develop plans that detail how students will receive access to child nutrition programs *before* a school shuts down.” The lawmakers also asked him to suspend new rules that would reduce SNAP eligibility or benefits.

A 2018 report by the Food Research and Action Center warned that a pandemic would make it harder for poor people to get food.

"Measures to reduce the spread of the flu by decreasing the interactions between individuals — known collectively as “social distancing” — could quickly have other effects that interfere with food supplies, including children missing school meals, workers losing pay, and access to health care and other basic necessities being cut off.”

The report went on, “Preparation methods that the federal government has proposed for individual households — such as the stockpiling of food and water — pose a significant hardship for populations already struggling to afford the basic necessities.”

Brazil intensifies drive for US trade pact

President Jair Bolsonaro did last week what many well-to-do Brazilians do. He went to Florida. But unlike most tourists, he stopped at Mar-a-Lago for a friendly meeting with President Donald Trump.

The strengthening ties between Trump and Bolsonaro are spurring Brazilian efforts to push harder for a free-trade pact that would bring the two world agricultural powerhouses closer than ever, with major benefits for U.S. farmers and farm equipment companies.

Judging by the encouraging reception that Bolsonaro got in Mar-a-Lago, the latest thrust for a trade pact — initiated by the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency — appears to be working.

“As leaders of the two largest economies in the hemisphere, President Trump and President Bolsonaro noted the potential benefits to American and Brazilian workers and businesses of growing the bilateral economic relationship,” the White House said in a statement released Saturday. “To this end, they instructed their trade officials to deepen discussions for a bilateral trade package this year, with a view towards intensifying the economic partnership between their two countries.”

But time may be of the essence during the final year of Trump’s first and possibly only term, so officials like Sergio Segovia, president of the Brazilian Trade and Investment Promotion Agency, also known as ApexBrasil, want to strike while the iron’s hot.

Trump, standing beside Bolsonaro Saturday, gushed that the U.S.-Brazil “friendship is probably stronger now than it's ever been.”

Not strong enough for Trump to rule out new steel and aluminum tariffs on the country — Trump said he couldn’t rule that out — but he was full of praise for Bolsonaro before the two dined at Mar-a-Lago.

“Throughout 2020, the United States and Brazil have the chance to focus on key, practical, short-term wins that could pave the way for steps toward a comprehensive long-term agreement,” says Jason Marczak, director of the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center.

Trump may be re-elected in November, but he could also lose to a Democrat who won’t be so inclined to working with the right-wing leader dubbed the “Trump of the Tropics.”

So, Apex-Brasil worked with the Atlantic Council to put together a 36-page report on why the two countries should unite under a free-trade agreement and released it publicly a day before Bolsonaro landed in Miami. Before that, though, the report — U.S.-Brazil Trade and FDAI: Enhancing the Bilateral Economic Relationship — made it to the desks of Trump administration officials like Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross.

“It feels like there is momentum behind this bilateral relationship and I look forward to leveraging this report as a focusing document to move the relationship forward,” said Joe Semsar, the acting undersecretary for international trade at the Commerce Department, who spoke last week at an unveiling event for the report.

An FTA, the report said, would boost national income in the U.S. by \$30 billion. Agriculture wasn’t mentioned directly, but groups like the U.S. Wheat Associates see major benefits to a pact with Brazil.

While it’s true that Brazil is the largest U.S. competitor to supply the world with soybeans, the South American country is also a major customer for U.S. farm goods and equipment, and there’s plenty of room for that trade to increase under better conditions that a free-trade agreement could provide.

One commodity that Brazilian millers can't seem to get enough of is U.S. wheat. On Jan. 1, Brazil opened a long-promised 750,000 metric-ton tariff rate quota for wheat outside its Mercosur trading partners and that is expected to benefit mostly U.S. exporters.

The U.S. has already sold 40,000 tons to Brazil under the TRQ in the first two months and the country is expected to buy much more in the summer months after the Brazilian and Argentine crops have been sold.

The TRQ is appreciated, says Dalton Henry, a vice president at the U.S. Wheat Associates, but the U.S. could sell more under better circumstances that could be negotiated in an FTA.

“Anytime we can be on a level playing field with Argentina, we’re going to be better off,” Henry told *Agri-Pulse*. “If things were to get to a point where we could talk about a free-trade agreement, we would expect treatment to be equal to that of Argentina, which gets duty-free access year-round.”

Other Brazilian impediments to U.S. wheat include a restriction that it can only be shipped out of the Gulf Coast and a merchant marine tax that doesn't apply to Argentine exporters.



Dalton Henry, U.S. Wheat Associates

Brazil is also a major buyer of U.S. ethanol, and U.S. exporters and producers are still clamoring for better trade conditions, even after Brazil's Congress recently increased the amount of duty-free ethanol that can be imported from 600 million liters per year to 750 million.

While Brazil increased the quota, it also implemented a seasonal block to imports so they would not compete with domestic product, and that has groups like Growth Energy and the U.S. Grains Council demanding more reform.

The U.S. exported 151.2 million gallons of ethanol in January (a 15-month high) and more than a third of it is being shipped to Brazil, according to data maintained by the Renewable Fuels Association. Brazil purchased 58.2 million gallons of U.S. ethanol. That was about twice as much as it bought in December.

But it's not just products that come from U.S. farms that would benefit from an FTA with Brazil. It's also the farm equipment manufactured in the U.S.

Brazil's agriculture sector continues to expand and U.S. companies like Caterpillar and John Deere are helping make that happen, says Rep. Darin LaHood, R-Ill.

“If we eventually reach this trade agreement and the tax reform that needs to be done in Brazil ... that's going to help American businesses to continue to sell more product,” said LaHood, who is planning to lead a delegation to Brazil later this year.

Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee wrapping up deliberations

Groups that have been engaged in the process of developing the updated Dietary Guidelines for Americans are trying to get the ear of Agriculture Secretary Sonny Perdue and Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar before the last meeting of the Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee.

The DGAC meets Thursday and Friday, the last time it will convene before holding a webinar in May to present its draft report. The meeting this week will not be held at USDA, as originally planned, but will be webcast because of the COVID-19 outbreak.

The move to an online-only meeting was made “out of an abundance of caution due to various employer travel restrictions and to ensure a quorum can be reached,” USDA and HHS said.

Meanwhile, more than 40 groups and individuals have written to Azar and Perdue asking that the final DGA for 2020 “acknowledge and incorporate the body of scientific literature linking dietary patterns, sustainability, and food security.”

“A rapidly expanding body of research shows that the average U.S. diet contributes to environmental impacts such as biodiversity loss, climate change, soil erosion, and water pollution that may threaten the availability of a healthy food supply in the future, putting healthy diets further out of reach for many populations,” says the letter, signed by the Union of Concerned Scientists, Natural Resources Defense Council, Center for Science in the Public Interest, and others.

Sustainability was discussed at meetings to come up with the 2015-2020 DGA and eventually included in the DGAC's report to USDA and HHS, but not included in the guidelines later released by the agencies. Tom Vilsack, the ag secretary at the time, said in 2015 the DGAC report “informs our work, but certainly does not and should not dictate it.” Livestock and meat groups were furious at the discussion of the issue as well as conflicting recommendations on lean meat during the 2015 deliberation process.

Sarah Reinhardt, lead food systems and health analyst for UCS's food and environment program, said “we're not necessarily expecting they'll be able to address sustainability” because of the amount of work the committee has had to do over the last year — and the work still in front of it as it scrambles to finish the draft report.

“We have gotten a sense they're a bit pressed for time on everything,” said Jessi Silverman, a policy fellow at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. Neither Silverman nor Reinhardt said they expected any surprises coming from DGAC's deliberations.

Reinhardt said she expected the committee to “reaffirm the risk of” added sugars and dietary fats in its draft report.

But some groups are pushing for reconsideration of the current guidelines' recommendation that people limit their saturated fat consumption to 10% of their daily calories.

The International Dairy Foods Association, for example, highlighted a letter from nutrition scientists to Perdue and Azar that said scientific evidence does not support limits on saturated fats.

“Numerous recent meta-analyses of both controlled randomized trials and observational studies have found no significant evidence for effects of saturated fat consumption on cardiovascular or 2 total mortality,” the scientists said.

Report: Consumers need better understanding of gene editing

A nationwide survey supported by top ag and food groups released Tuesday shows over 50% of consumers haven’t heard of gene editing but are willing to pay premium prices once they understand its benefits to animal welfare and the environment.

The FMI Foundation, an organization supporting food retailers, partnered with the American Farm Bureau Federation, American Seed Trade Association, and Farm Foundation to commission a study conducted by Michigan State University and Purdue University.

That survey of nearly 4,487 grocery shoppers looked at how they choose between animal and vegetable products depicted to be organic, non-GMO, bioengineered, conventional, or gene edited including spinach, tomatoes, and pork products.

When it comes to choice, regardless of food product, presence of processing, or information, consumers were more willing to pay for organic products over other food labels because consumers thought organic was better for animal welfare and the environment.

“Information plays a big role in consumer acceptance of new food technology,” Vincenzina Caputo, assistant economics professor at MSU said during a Farm Foundation panel Tuesday.

She said more than 50% of respondents have poor knowledge about gene editing technology. Caputo said this is quite different when comparing the level of knowledge and understanding to GMOs.

Some 46 to 62% indicated they have a limited awareness of GMOs with 11 to 15% claiming to know a lot. In contrast, some 49 to 53% had never heard of gene editing, according to the report.

Breaking down even further on knowledge of gene editing, 38% of respondents considered themselves very unknowledgeable, 25% somewhat unknowledgeable, 21% neither unknowledgeable nor knowledgeable, 12% knowledgeable, and 4% very knowledgeable.

When respondents also answered word association tasks, the study found the term “gene editing” drove negative connotations like the word GMOs. When consumers were asked to use word association with the term organic reactions were more positive.



Left to Right: Dustin Madison, Virginia farmer; Lance Atwater, Nebraska farmer; Courtney Weber, associate professor at Cornell University; Vincenzina Caputo, assistant professor at Michigan State University, David Fikes, executive director at FMI Foundation

Reliving the GMO education battle brings back bad memories among food retailers and the ag community, but they argue the government can help by giving their stamp of approval for gene editing.

“Consumers ... want the information, but they want the agencies because they trust the agencies and they want to hear it from them,” FMI Foundation Executive Director David Fikes told *Agri-Pulse*.

Despite negative perceptions of gene editing the report found consumers are more willing to pay a price-premium for gene-edited products depending on the type of information provided to consumers.

“Again, informing consumers about the benefits implied by the technology, affects their willingness to pay for gene-edited food products,” Caputo said.

Consumers are more willing to purchase gene-edited foods when they know the specific benefits to the environment and animal health.

When provided with the environmental benefits of gene editing, respondents were placed in to three categories. Risk loving (a person willing to take more risks), risk neutral (people insensitive to risk), or risk adverse (someone who does not want to take more risks).

Almost 33% of respondents were grouped into the risk loving category compared to 16% in the risk adverse category when told about the environmental benefits of gene editing.

The risk loving number was even higher than 22.5% of respondents who said they would purchase gene-edited product because they benefited farmers.

Nebraska farmer Lance Atwater said consumers often forget farmers are consumers too and want the same environmental benefits as they do.

“We want what’s best for the environment. We want safe affordable food. We want to make sure no one goes hungry. We just have to do a better job of making sure we’re sharing that; we share the same values,” Atwater said.

Leslie Sarasin, president and CEO of FMI, the Food Industry Association, said gene editing in plants and animal breeding was a “relatively new food technology” so the organizations wanted to establish a baseline for consumer understanding.

Fikes said there are currently no gene-edited food products in grocery stores. Last year, the Food and Drug Administration approved AquaBounty, genetically engineered salmon, for sale in the U.S. after approving its production in 2018. The first U.S. harvest is expected to take place this fall.

News Briefs

China takes new steps in lifting US ag trade barriers. China is continuing to follow through on promises to remove non-tariff barriers to U.S. farm commodities, according to a new compilation of goals that China agreed to in the “phase one” agreement that went into effect last

month. First off, China completed an update of U.S. facilities that are approved to export dairy products to the country. China's failure to update the list has been a major irritant to the U.S. industry, officials tell *Agri-Pulse*. Secondly, China has signed a protocol that effectively lifts the country's ban on fresh nectarines from California. And third, China has lifted its ban on U.S. beef from cattle over 30 months old at the time of slaughter. The age restriction — a safeguard against mad cow disease — has been a major impediment for U.S. beef for nearly over a decade, but more needs to happen for U.S. shipments can begin. China has also promised to lift its zero tolerance on growth hormone residue and the USDA still has to finish protocols on certifying U.S. exports.

Farm Hands West: Roy joins Tanimura & Antle

Matt Roy has joined Tanimura & Antle in the role of vice president of business development CEA (controlled environment agriculture). He will report to **Scott Grabau**, chief executive officer and president. Roy brings over 20 years of industry experience, holding positions with Harold Crawford Co. Inc., as president, US Foods as senior director of produce, and produce buyer for Associated Wholesale Grocers.

Fresh Market, Inc., has tapped **Jason Potter** as the new CEO. He succeeds **Larry Appel** who resigned. Potter brings over 30 years of experience in the grocery industry. He previously worked for Sobeys Inc., one of the largest food retailers in North America, in many senior executive positions, most recently as executive vice president of operations.

Greg Hoover has joined the Rabo AgriFinance team as general manager of input finance. He previously worked for John Deere Financial for the past 24 years, leading the agribusiness account management and strategic customer relationship teams.

Agriculture Future of America has elected **Manda Tweten**, Archer Daniels Midland Company; **Marc Mears**, Cargill Inc.; **Julie Anna Potts**, The North American Meat Institute; and **Chandra Reddy**, Tennessee State University, to the AFA board of directors. Retiring from the board are **Jay Akridge**, Purdue University; **Daren Coppock**, Agricultural Retailers Association; and **Ruth Kimmelshue**, Cargill, Inc.

Jake McCurdy has joined the staff on the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee under Sen. **Lisa Murkowski**, R-Alaska, as a professional staff member. He previously worked for the Department of Energy as a senior adviser.

Michelle Lane has left the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee where she served as a professional staff member. She has joined the National Park Foundation as the vice president of government relations.

Bart Massey now works as the legislative director for Sen. **Mike Enzi**, R-Wyo. He covers the portfolio for appropriations and taxation.



Greg Hoover

Cari Fike has been promoted to deputy chief of staff for Rep. Gary Palmer, R-Ala. She covers appropriations, immigration, and small business issues.

Bread for the World, a Christian anti-hunger and poverty group, has tapped **Eugene Cho** to serve as the organization's president. Cho will succeed **David Beckmann**, who has served as president since 1991. Cho is the founder of One Day's Wages, a grassroots movement of people, stories, and actions to alleviate extreme global poverty.

Sysco promoted **Eve McFadden** to senior vice president of legal, general counsel and corporate secretary. **Chris Jasper** has been promoted to the newly created role of senior vice president and president of U.S. broadband. He previously was the market president for Sysco's Midwest region.

Seth Goldman has stepped down as the executive chair of Beyond Meat. He has become a founder of PLNT Burger with his wife **Julie Farkas**, his son **Jonah Goldman** and **Margarita Herdocia**.

Mike LaGrande, from Colusa County, Calif., passed away at the age of 76. LaGrande was one of the founders of California Pacific Rice Mill, Foothill Warehouse, and in 1999, he and his son, Ken, created the Sun Valley Rice Company. He served as a past chair of the USA Rice Millers' Association from 2005-07, and served on several RMA committees and on the USA Rice Federation board from 2005-09.

Best regards,

Sara Wyant
Editor

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